



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#35 – November 2013

A Best Practice: A Video-Based Series

Locally Developed ... For a Specific Need

Have you ever hoped for a resource that would:

- be uniquely designed to meet the needs of the people in your parish, your region?
- address a theme or topic that was currently of interest for your participants?
- invite participation by modeling it?
- provide sound theological and spiritual formation linked to everyday life questions?
- include many methods and techniques of learning: media, small group conversations, etc.?
- bring together many people – even from a wide geographic area – so that all could be united in the same formation?

This month's best practice, from the diocese of Baton Rouge, LA, does all that (and more). As you enjoy reading about their efforts, keep these questions in mind:

- This process/program is a diocesan effort. How could your (arch)diocese do it, but also: could one parish with a surrounding group of parishes accomplish it? Might one parish be able to duplicate it, given all the resources within the parishioners and local community?
- This resource grew out of and centered around the theme of the Year of Faith. Is there a theme, a topic, an observance in your parish, your area, your (arch)diocese which calls for a similar approach to adult faith formation?

Where/How Did this Endeavor Originate?

About seven years ago St. Jean Vianney Parish, Baton Rouge developed an Adult Faith Formation Committee. The first year they studied *Our Hearts are Burning Within Us* which then resulted in a parish survey. There were several areas in the survey, at which time the committee chose two of the areas most requested by the survey participants and two of the least interest to the participants.

A plan was developed for adult faith formation in the parish based on these four areas:

- Scripture
- Prayer
- Mission of the Church
- Evangelization

With the introduction of the *New Roman Missal*, the parish plan was interrupted to focus on preparing the parish for the language changes in the liturgy. After focusing on the liturgy for a year, the Adult Faith Formation Committee decided to alter the overall plan to continue the formation emphasis on the Mass. The Committee decided to develop the theme "Living a Eucharistic Life."

In preparing for that topic, the Committee read some articles on **integrating life with faith**. The committee then took an extra step to develop these themes by bringing together several parishioners, requesting their thoughts about the topic by asking "What does living a Eucharistic Life mean?" This discussion with the group of parishioners led to even further questions such as:

- Why do I have to go to Mass?
- Where is God in my everyday life?
- Does God have a plan for my life?
- Why would I want to live a Eucharistic life?
- How can I live a Eucharistic life when I can't go to communion?
- How can I integrate all aspects of my life with faith?

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

As a result of these discussions with parishioners, the Adult Faith Formation Committee developed several topics based on the above “**life questions**,” outlining the main ideas it wanted to share with parishioners.

In the meantime, Pope Benedict XVI announced the Year of Faith for the universal church. Rhonda Parenton, Director of the Office of Evangelization & Catechesis for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, gathered the diocesan Adult Faith Formation Committee (representatives from throughout the diocese) to make plans regarding what the diocese might offer for the Year of Faith.

The ideas from this diocesan committee were extremely diverse. The committee for the Year of Faith was struggling to reach some consensus on an overall approach.

Darryl Ducote, a member of the St. John Vianney Parish Adult Faith Formation Committee, proposed that the diocese use the themes that their parish committee had developed since these topics actually seemed to align very well with the Year of Faith. The diocesan committee agreed, simply renaming the series *Living a Faith-filled Life*.

What, then, did this program entail?

Each of the seven themes was developed into a **video presentation** (by the diocese) with a proven catechetical format that served as a structure for **parish gatherings and/or home study**. The format included the following elements:

- The host introduced the session theme.
- Reflection on “life questions” and life experiences related to the theme. (Personal reflection from parish participants was invited, followed by recorded insights from interviews with parishioners throughout the diocese.)
- A presenter – via the video – offered some thoughts and insights on the session theme, flowing from Scripture, Tradition, and theology with a connection to the “life questions.”

- Application Reflection: The host suggested follow-up questions for parishioners to discuss in small groups, again followed by insights – via the video - which had been recorded from interviews with parishioners throughout the diocese.)
- The host summarized the theme and key learnings/applications.

Adult Learning

The development of the themes follows two principles of adult learning:

Dealing with issues that relate to real life concerns of adults (life questions)

Active involvement by adults in the learning process (personal reflections and group sharing)

- Proposal for diocesan series, *Living a Faith-Filled Life*

As the program was designed, what were the goals, the vision, the dreams and hopes of the planning committee?

The main goal of the Year of Faith Committee was to offer opportunities for parishioners throughout the diocese to grow in their faith and their relationship with God.

The vision was to reach as many people in the diocese as possible by having all the parishes focusing on the same themes at the same time.

The objective was to do this as creatively as possible **to meet everyone’s circumstances**. The diocese of Baton Rouge is fortunate to have its own television studio. Because Darryl had worked with the diocesan television station on another project, he shared his experience with

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

the group and it seemed to be a natural fit for what this project hoped to accomplish – evangelization, catechesis and outreach easily accessed by everyone and flexible so that it could be used in a variety of ways.

Therefore, this video format, which could invite parishioners to actually “walk through” each theme, with the help of a parish facilitator, seemed the ideal way to go.

How did each parish in the diocese obtain the videos?

The videos (and accompanying materials) were developed over a year-long time schedule and were made available to the parishes one-by-one, as soon as each video was completed.

The video for the first session was **sent to all the parishes** of the diocese. Parishes were then asked to subscribe to receive the videos for the remaining sessions. There was no charge to the parishes for the videos; parishes could also obtain extra copies if they wished at no cost.

The videos are also available on the diocesan website, www.diobr.org in the button for the Year of Faith to download.

Are there other materials/aides to accompany the videos?

A simple **Leader’s Guide** with suggestions for opening and closing prayers related to the topic as well as the reflection and discussion questions for each theme is included with every video. Other helps, suggestions, and pertinent information for The Year of Faith are on **the diocesan website**.

The “Life Questions” seem to be an important part of the process. Where did these come from?

These questions probably were the biggest challenge for the group! A diocesan workshop on adult faith formation which explored the importance of planning programs around people’s life questions was very much a part of trying to determine the questions to ask in the videos.

There was much discussion, some debate, and some question about the appropriateness of the questions. The diocesan Adult Faith Formation Committee **invited input and suggestions** from an additional group of individuals regarding the whole series; they were especially consulted about the Life Questions.

Several times during the Adult Faith Formation Committee discussion of the videos, the questions were discussed. The questions evolved from the Adult Faith Formation Committee very much honoring the invited participants’ ideas for “Life Questions.”

“Conversation is given the same amount of time as the presentation.

It is when adults talk with other adults about the significance of faith for their real lives that real growth in faith happens.

Pay attention to time. If you start late, the discussion is usually where time is made up.

Make clear in the way you introduce the conversation time that you understand this part of the session to be of key importance.

Be sure that the groups are small enough for genuine conversation – usually six or seven is a good size.”

- *Toward Effective Adult Faith Formation: Top 10 Guidelines & Top 10 Pitfalls for Adult Faith Formation;*

www.loyolapress.com/toward-effective-adult-faith-formation.htm

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

The videos feature people from throughout the diocese? Are there different groups in each video? How were they chosen?

The groups were very intentionally selected with **the diversity of the diocese** in mind:

- location (urban/rural/suburban)
- ethnic groups
- age groups, etc.

It was requested that the group consist of four or five people and recommended that they have been together or part of a small Christian community or prayer group.

- Group One was from a rural parish which is rapidly becoming a suburb to Baton Rouge.
- The second group was from St. John Vianney Parish, where the seeds of the idea began.
- Group Three was from a rural black parish.
- A group of young adults is featured in the fourth video.

What are some of the ways the video program is being used?

Since the videos are being made available every two months, there are different ways parishes are using them:

- Some are using them in the time-line as they are produced with small Christian community and prayer groups
- Parish staffs are using them for spiritual development
- Parishes are using them for parents and participate while their children are in session during parish faith formation times.
- One parish is scheduling them so that a different ministry in the parish hosts the video for the parish as a gathering.

- Some parishes are waiting for all of the videos to be completed and will use them as a seven week series.
- One parish used the videos as part of their RCIA sessions.

“Be respectful of the way adults learn and grow in their faith.

Allow time for questions and discussion, provide a process that encourages fellowship, and send home materials to be used at home. Respect different learning styles and needs of participants.

Treat adults like adults, respecting their experiences and actively involving them in the learning process.”

- Faith Formation Update,
www.americancatholic.org/e-News/FFU/ffu010906.asp

What have parish staffs said about Living a Faith-Filled Life?

- The first comment is usually about **the quality of the video** presentations since they are surprised that the diocese is able to produce such a series locally.
- They like that local groups are being used for the faith sharing. They feel that this provides **a sense of affiliation**.
- Two surveys (to receive more responses from parishes) have been designed: one for those parishes who have been utilizing the videos. Another survey will be sent to the pastors not requesting the videos to ask for their feedback.

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

Parishioners from around the diocese participated in the filming of the videos. What has been their experience?

All of the small groups who have participated in the video series have described it as a moving experience.

- First, they feel **honored** to have been chosen to participate and see their involvement as a service to the diocese.
- Secondly, they are **surprised** that they are able to enter into such an in-depth discussion in the setting of a television studio with cameras, lights, microphones, etc.
- Thirdly, since they do not know in advance what the topic would be, they have been experiencing the questions and presentations just as the parish participants would experience them; they have found the sessions **touching and thought provoking**.
- All the participants commented that the experience was both **challenging and rewarding**.

What have been the experiences/comments from the parishioners in home groups or in groups at the parish?

- The most consistent comments have been to praise the **quality of the video presentations**.
- Many people seemed to enjoy the **small group discussions** and said that they benefited from the experience.
- Participants also seemed to appreciate the **insights from the small groups** on the video.
 - Since the groups on the video were groups that had been sharing as small faith groups prior to the filming, they often shared more in-depth insights than those in the parish who were formed into small groups for the first time at the presentation.

Did the planning committee learn or discover anything through this process?

Since the reason for this series/these videos was to provide formation during the Year of Faith, producing and spreading the videos out over the year had been determined to be the most effective way to organize the program.

The planning committee is now thinking that, perhaps, it was not the most effective way to present them. By doing them every other month there was no opportunity to build the collective attention of people. Some parishes that have said they are waiting until all of them are completed to begin using them. Others have decided to wait and use them next year as a Lenten series. Some are using them as part of their RCIA process.

A wondering, then, from the planning committee: Would it have been better to wait until all of the videos were completed and introduced as a series?

Was the planning committee surprised by anything?

One of the surprises has been the **variety of ways the videos are being used**: RCIA, staff study, high school Religion classes, etc.

How much effort this project entailed was another surprise! At the same time, there seemed to be positive consensus that the structure and format of the program works well, especially allowing for **small group sharing** both before and after the presentations.

Rhonda and the planning committee say that they would do more of these series in the future, but as mentioned above, not in the same type of time schedule. They would probably complete all the videos first, or at least more than half of them, before introducing them.

This first attempt has given them the confidence to do more of their own productions and are eager to do more. They, as leaders of this endeavor, have learned much!

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

Have you seen any changes/effects in parish or diocesan life because of people's participation in this program?

Many parishes have made a special effort to invite all those involved in some area of ministry to participate in the sessions. The response was largely favorable.

The main effect that has been noticed seemed to be that after experiencing several of these sessions, people are developing a **growing awareness of the importance and relevance of on-going adult formation.**

Has anyone (*the planning committee, the diocesan staff, the parish staffs, the parishioners*) remarked about the advantages of everyone in the diocese being engaged in the same Adult Faith Formation program at the same time?

Since the series has been "scattered" (spread out over a long period; parishes using it in vastly different ways, etc.), the committee feels that, at this point, it has been hard to determine the effect on the diocese as a whole. They are interested to see if it will have more momentum during this coming Lent.

Wondering GEMS

- How might you do something similar in your parish, your group of neighboring parishes, your (arch)diocese?
- Could you do your own videos, post them to FaceBook or YouTube and create an online discussion group?
 - Might this help in reaching the various cultures within your parish: creating your own videos, with the various cultural groups within your parish, will help people identify with their realities?
- Have you video-streamed your adult faith formation offerings, posted them to your website, and created online discussion groups?
- Might you do a Lenten retreat (or Advent experience, etc.) by providing parish-produced videos to home discussion groups? The

video might also be posted on the parish website and/or the parish YouTube channel.

- In addition to creating your own videos, there are many resources online which can be utilized for home discussion groups, for online conversations.
- Have you begun a media/technology committee – parishioners with skills in various aspects of communication technologies – to brainstorm and plan ways to utilize today's technology and media for adult faith formation? Have you invited your young people to be involved in this committee, to whom this is second nature?



Janet Schaeffler, OP
www.janetschaeffler.com
jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org

Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at www.janetschaeffler.com.

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation Planning and Best Practices can be found at:

- <http://www.ecatechist.com> Click on e-books for: *40 Tips: Getting Started in Adult Faith Formation.*
- www.pastoralplanning.com. Go to Adult Formation: *Nuts & Bolts: Planning and Best Practices for Adult Formation.*