



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#63 - March 2016

A Best Practice: *Body and Soul*

In this issue we explore a best practice that embodies many of the principles and guidelines for meaningful adult faith formation:

- Paying attention to both physical and spiritual needs (which are really all one)
- Making time for building community, relationships among people
- Offering hospitality as foundational
- Utilizing various ways of gathering, varied ways of learning
- Recognizing that prayer is integral
- Realizing that practices/programs need to evolve over time because of changing needs

What is *Body and Soul*?

Body and Soul is an opportunity for women of all ages at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish, Temperance, MI, planned to tend to their various needs

- within a community of support
- with the continual aim of helping them deepen their experience with our loving God

How did it begin?

Sharon Koenigseker, the coordinator of *Body and Soul*, relates that many years ago she heard an interview about the book, *Apples of Gold* by Betty Huizenga (David C. Cook, 2000). The book describes a program – that can be done in parishes/churches – for older women to mentor younger women.

- The first hour is spent in the kitchen, while one woman, the cooking mentor, fixes a pre-planned meal.
- The second hour is a Bible study, facilitated by one of six mentors each week.
- The third hour is spent eating the meal, talking about the theme of the Bible study, and getting to know each other.

This process stirred Sharon's heart, but, at the time, there was no opportunity to do something like this at her parish.

Fast forward to 2007. Sharon was involved in a conversation with the Education Commission of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish about ways of

inviting people to become more involved in the life of the parish. Sharon remarked that first their hearts need to be touched, to be changed. Thus, in March 2007 the pastor of the parish challenged her to do something.

Sharon's thought was to do something for women modeled on the program described in *Apples of Gold*. At first, it seemed doomed since the person who was going to do the cooking section for *Body and Soul* backed out at the last minute.

Undaunted, Sharon decided to switch the beginning of the session from "cooking" to "exercise." Within two weeks, everyone and everything was in place for *Body and Soul*: a program to focus on the whole person, all our needs.

Mission Statement

We encourage women to draw closer to the Lord and each other by nourishing their body and soul through prayer, spiritual reading, faith-sharing and exercise.

When does *Body and Soul* take place?

There are two sessions throughout the year:

- The fall session, which is usually eight weeks, beginning in October
- The spring session, often lasting six to eight weeks, ending at Easter

What is the "agenda" for the gatherings?

The evening is divided into half-hour segments.

- During the first half-hour, one of the women leads the participants in exercise to Christian music.

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

- The second half hour is begun with a prayer written by Corinne Liebnau, one of the participants, and prayed at each gathering time. This half hour then consists of a presentation, exploring one chapter of the current book being used for study and reflection.

Body and Soul Prayer

Dear Lord,
You lovingly created me
with a body and soul.
Graciously help me, Lord,
to use both
for my spiritual growth.
Draw me closer to you.
Teach me to be devoted and true.
Nourish me, Lord, with your word.
Then use me to spread all that I've heard
to bring others to you.
Thank you, Lord,
for this day,
and bringing us all together to pray.
Please bless us.
Amen.

- During the last half hour the women form small groups (six people each) with a discussion leader. The discussion is guided by questions in the book or leader-generated questions.
- The evening ends as all come together in one circle to pray: prayers of thanks and prayers of intercession for the needs of each woman gathered.

Who leads the half-hour presentation on one of the chapters of the book?

There is a different woman for each chapter, most frequently one of the women from the group, or a person who has a connection or expertise with

the message of the chapter. For instance, during the session on *Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love* the session and discussion was led by a Benedictine priest and two Chaldean women who are a regular part of the group.

The role of the presenter is to personalize the chapter for those in the group, drawing from their personal experiences.

Which books have been used by *Body and Soul*?

In addition to *What Every Mom Needs*, the group has read and reflectively discussed:

- *Slightly Bad Girls of the Bible: Flawed Women Loved by a Flawless God* by Liz Curtis Higgs (WaterBrook Press, 2007)
- *Becoming a Praying Person (Six Weeks with the Bible)* by Kevin Perrotta (Loyola Press, 2005)
- *Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love* by Lonni Collins Pratt and Fr. Daniel Homan (Paraclete Press, 2011)
- *Authentic Devotion: A Modern Interpretation of Introduction to the Devout Life by Francis de Sales* edited by Bernard Bangle (Shaw Books, 2002)
- *Clare of Assisi: The Letters to Agnes* by Joan Mueller (Michael Glazier, 2003)
- *Poverty and Joy: The Franciscan Tradition* by William J. Short (Orbis Books, 1999)
- *The Girl's Still Got It: Take a Walk with Ruth and the God who Rocked Her World* by Liz Curtis Higgs (WaterBrook Press, 2012)
- *Calm My Anxious Heart: A Woman's Guide to Finding Contentment* by Linda Dillow (NavPress, 2007)
- *Made to Crave: Satisfying Your Deepest Desire for God, Not Food* by Lysa Terkeurst (Zondervan, 2010)

Who is the audience?

This is one area which has seen change and evolution.

The original *Body and Soul* was planned for moms. With a four-week schedule, the group used the book, *What Every Mom Needs* by Elisa Morgan and Carol Kuykendall of MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) International.

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

For the following year, the focus and marketing changed to: Calling All Women. Thus, over the years, the group meets the needs of all women.

- The ages range from the 30's to the 80's.
- They are single, widowed, married, working, retired, moms who work in and outside the home, empty-nesters, etc.
- Although many are from Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish, some are from other parishes, some are from other denominations. Some are not church-goers; for some of them it has been a way back to church participation.

Why do the women come? What is their motivation?

In asking this question of several of the table discussion leaders, various reasons surfaced:

- To learn more about God, Scripture, themselves and others
- To enjoy the company and support of other women and share ideas
- To exercise
- To pray
- For friendship and interaction with other women
- For a place where they feel they are accepted just the way they are; thoughts are welcomed and respected
- For comfort in knowing everyone is there for the same reasons
- For a deeper connection with God and in need of Christian friends

What else happens in addition to the two sessions of gatherings?

In the beginning days, a potluck was usually held at the end of each "semester" (fall and spring). Recently the timing changed for the spring session with the potluck occurring at the beginning. This offered new people an opportunity to become better acquainted with women who had started in the fall. Since spring usually ended in or near Holy Week, it also seemed more appropriate.

The potluck evenings (often with a theme: Mardi Gras; a Tea Party – because it went along with the theme of the book; hot pink – part of the *Body and Soul* logo, etc.) are predominantly a chance to get to know each other

more. Prayer is always a part and, at times, (especially in the beginning) there was a short presentation by a speaker (not connected with the book that was/would be used).

During the months that *Body and Soul* is not in session (April-October), there are now monthly get-together potlucks in different women's homes so that they can keep the friendships going, continuing to get to know one another – their hopes and dreams, wonderings and questions, their sorrows and joys.

What is the cost for participation in this opportunity?

There is none! Free babysitting is offered. The women can even choose not to purchase the book; they receive enough from the speaker to participate in the discussion.

Christ learned about his mission while he
was cutting wood and making chairs, beds,
and cabinets.

He came as a carpenter to show us that
– no matter what we do –
everything can lead us to the experience of
God's love.

- Paulo Coelho

How is *Body and Soul* advertised?

- The parish Sunday bulletin
- Flyers inserted in the Sunday bulletin
- Signs in the church and school buildings
- Flyers sent home with children/youth in the faith formation program
- Flyers placed in the neighboring YMCA
- Announcements at Sunday liturgy
- Announcements at parents meetings and other parish gatherings
- Phone calls and e-mails to former and present members
- Word of mouth by those who are participating

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

Have things changed over its seven-year history?

In addition to the changes that have already been mentioned:

- A few years ago, after one of the presenters ended her presentation inviting the women to pray the rosary in church, some women desired this to continue. As an optional piece now, some women choose to gather before the beginning of *Body and Soul* to pray the rosary together.
- The type of exercise also keeps changing over the sessions. Lately, some women have been reluctant about the exercise; thus, now there are two options for that time frame:
 - Exercise
 - Discussion flowing from a book on healthy eating
- Group activities are increasing from just the potluck dinners to a game night, a trip to a religious movie, attending a charity fundraiser, and their first retreat at a retreat center.
- In reading the books and becoming more interested in the topics/themes therein, field trips related to the books have sparked:
 - While reading *Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love*, the women realized that the author, Fr. Daniel Homan, was from Michigan. They traveled to St. Benedict Monastery, Oxford, MI, where Fr. Homan founded and directed Subiaco Retreat House for thirty-six years.
 - During the discussion of *Clare of Assisi: The Letters to Agnes*, the women visited Lourdes College, Sylvania, OH where there is a replica of "Porziuncola," the tiny church in Assisi, Italy that was rebuilt and restored by St. Francis in 1209. (Two of the women from *Body and Soul* have become Third Order Franciscans.)
 - After reading *Authentic Devotion: A Modern Interpretation of Introduction to the Devout Life by Francis de Sales*, the women traveled to [Visitation Monastery](#) in Toledo, OH.

- While reading *Poverty and Joy: The Franciscan Tradition*, the women visited [the Solanus Casey Center](#), Detroit, MI, where Fr. Solanus is buried.

- Another feature that has evolved over the past few years is a card ministry: sending cards to people who are ill.

Everybody needs beauty as well as bread,
places to play in and pray in where
nature may heal and cheer and give strength
to the body and soul.

- John Muir

What do the participants say about their experiences in *Body and Soul*?

- "I can share my experiences and not feel alone."
- "*Body and Soul* exercises my body and nourishes my soul with Scripture, spiritual books, speakers and true friends ('sisters') in Christ."
- "I've gone through some hard times. I've been able to share this, especially with the small group at my table."
- "This is a safe place."
- "The genuine acceptance from everyone is such a gift."
- "I am continually surprised at the out-pouring of concern and support for each other."
- "I now pray more."
- "I never feel intimidated or pressured to respond. I can be myself."
- "I enjoy being with the other women and the friends I have made."
- "I read the Bible more and have a better understanding of what I read."

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

- “The prayer, reading and group discussion create an opportunity for contemplation and opens my heart to receive the Word of God.”
- “I have learned so much about being a better person by listening to the other women.”
- “Every meeting ends with a feeling of being uplifted and more contented.”
- “We are always treated with respect and inclusion, e.g. asked our thoughts for the next book selection.”
- “We can take Scripture and the lessons learned back to our families, friends and work places.”
- “Because of this experience, I’m trying to make this world a better place to live for everyone.”

Claiming your own blessedness
always leads to a deep desire to bless others.

- Henri Nouwen

What are your dreams for the future of Body and Soul?

Sharon Koenigseker, the coordinator of *Body and Soul*, has definite dreams, hopes, and expectations:

- “In the beginning seniors in high school came and brought their mothers, because of Zumba (rather than the usual occurrence of moms bringing their daughters). Now most of the participants are between the ages of 50 and 85. My dream for the future is that mature women would mentor younger women in faith and life. It would be wonderful if we had half younger and half older women.”
- “My prayer is that God will draw us all to deeper holiness so that we can reach out and minister to others as a group and individually.”
- “My hope and expectation is that we always let God lead *Body and Soul*.”



Golden Nuggets from You

“What a beautiful and creative way to lead people deeper into prayer through the Stations of the Cross! ([GEMS #37](#)) Thanks for sharing this, Janet!”

- Joanie McKeown,
parish catechetical leader, Webster, WI

(We welcome your comments, thoughts, suggestions, ideas, etc. Your views and practices continually support and encourage others. Email them to jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org any time.)



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:

- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*
http://www.lifelongfaith.com/store/p25/The_Seasons_of_Adult_Faith_Formation.html
- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation website*
<http://www.lifelongfaith.com/2015-adult-faith-formation-symposium.html>
- *40 Tips: Getting Started in Adult Faith Formation*
<http://www.ecatechist.com/ebooks/> (scroll down)
- *Parish Leadership for Improved Adult Catechesis*
<http://store.pastoralplanning.com/iboplbeprfor.html>