



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#10 - June – July 2011

A Best Practice: Scripture by the Sound

Soon we will return to our theme of welcoming and hospitality, exploring the specific focus of hospitality in adult faith formation.

But before we do, let's look at some actual best practices of adult faith formation which have surfaced in our survey.

In her February 2010 best practices survey, Suzanne Richards, Director of Adult Faith Formation at Christ the King Catholic Church, Commack, New York (Diocese of Rockville Centre), shared a program/process which was a collaborative effort with three other parishes in the deanery.

What is it?

People gather for the four Tuesdays before Memorial Day Weekend and the four Tuesdays after Labor Day Weekend at 10:30 am at Sunken Meadow Park (a state park) by the boardwalk (which overlooks Long Island Sound) for **Scripture by the Sound**.

The people gather to:

- listen to the Scripture readings of the day
- hear a brief reflection by one of the four facilitators (each parish's faith formation staff person is represented)
- participate in faith sharing
- enjoy time for large group sharing
- end the time with a closing prayer

The participants are invited to remain and walk on the boardwalk after the "formal" portion of the program is completed. Some of the people arrive earlier, enjoying the setting and walk before the session.

Who is the audience?

When it was envisioned and first planned, Suzanne thought that, because of the time of day, **Scripture by the Sound** would draw a large retired crowd. In actuality, the participants tend to be two-thirds retired/seniors and one-third forty-something stay-at-home moms, who bring their children in strollers (children not in school yet).



How is it organized?

Suzanne oversees most of the organizational details of the program:

- procuring park permit (no fee is charged)
- scheduling presenter for each day

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- printing a prayer booklet with the readings for the day as well as any events happening in the collaborating parishes
- people are not required to register; no fee to enter the park (scheduled before fees are begun)
- if there is inclement weather it is cancelled and not rescheduled

What do you think motivated people?

Suzanne responded to this question by saying that she wanted to do something where people were already gathered. She had been hearing from some of the parishioners how they would walk on the boardwalk, finding it a time of prayer and meditation.

As a highly sensitive Director of Adult Faith Formation, hearing that caused her to wonder: what would it be like to “piggy-back” on that and offer a structured time of prayer, learning and conversation?

Participants’ comments

Just a few of the many observations from the participants tell of the impact that this faith-growth opportunity has provided:

- “As you know, our faith is still pretty weak. Sometimes in church, we are tempted to walk out, but at **Scripture by the Sound**, we feel a little more comfortable - and take to heart your reminders that: “We are there because we are supposed to be...”
- “In less than 45 minutes we ‘escape’ to a serene setting where we hear the days’ readings and listen to a reflection....This time is refreshing and spiritual.”
- “Just a wondrous experience and way to share one’s faith! The feeling of closeness to nature, reflecting on God’s wonder and self reflection was great. Time to spend a quiet moment in thanksgiving, yet time to share ones feelings and thoughts. Everyone was warm and friendly though I am from out of town. I felt very comfortable with the group.”

- “The reading from Jonah was explained so vividly ... This morning’s presenter also linked the Martha/Mary Gospel in a way that enriched both of these readings.”
- “The beautiful outdoor setting is an ideal location to share with others God’s Word.”
- “The waves of the Sound were only enhanced by the waves of love emanating from the ‘flock’ that was drawn to this weekly session of prayer, fellowship and understanding.”
- “The holiness, the humor, the scholarship, the devotion to the Lord – all these were evident in the weekly presentations of **Scripture by the Sound**, led by Suzanne, Sister Eileen, Kathleen and Judy at Sunken Meadow Beach.
- “At the end we are able to walk along the boardwalk with our new friends.”



What are some of the effects of this initiative?

In addition to the obvious effects (evident in the people's comments above) of

- increased understanding and appreciation of Scripture
- hospitality and fellowship
- meeting new friends
- the reality that prayer and formation can happen / should happen any place, every place

Suzanne also commented that another important effect is that the participants have changed in that they feel freer to attend other workshops/opportunities being offered in one of the collaborating parishes, because now they know someone there.

The parishes themselves have changed, in the reality that there exists a more collegial environment, in which they are not duplicating workshops in adult faith formation.

What are the factors that made this initiative successful?

Suzanne and the planners of this endeavor had some insights:

- As in all successful endeavors, the spirit of openness that is alive and well among the four collaborating parishes.
- The reality that the participants did not have to register. Suzanne commented: "I believe we are in a day and age where people don't want to commit because they're waiting to see if they get a better offer, so whoever shows up are the ones meant to be there on that given day.
- There are no fees (the park doesn't charge and the sponsoring parishes don't charge).
- Participants are free to attend any of the four sessions. Each session are is stand-alone piece; the flexibility to attend one, two, three or all four sessions provides the participants less stress (they don't worry about "what happens if I miss a session").

How have you evaluated the results of this opportunity?

- Through people's on-going feedback: all has been favorable. The major request is to speak louder, since we do not use any microphone system.
- People coming from other parishes in addition to the four collaborating parishes. We have had attendees from Florida!
- The number of newcomers who join us because someone from the group invited them. We average fifty people in our spring session and forty-five in our fall session.
- The reality that other parishes have sat in on the sessions so they can replicate it in their locations. (Suzanne has assisted them, especially in suggesting names for their endeavors:
 - Bible at the Beach
 - Parables in the Park, etc.)
- Last year Suzanne was invited by the Diocese of Rockville Centre to do two **Scripture by the Sound** programs for their Pastoral Formation Institute Alumni Association.

These two offerings were also held at Sunken Meadow Park - one in July and one in August on Wednesday evenings at 6 pm. The sessions were designed for one hour, since the participants were traveling from all parts of Long Island.

As one of the participants said:
"Scripture by the Sound has proven to be an invaluable tool to helping parishioners from so many local parishes understand and appreciate all the Lord has done for us.

The program should become part of every Church's agenda."



Congratulations

During this year's Annual NCCL (*National Conference for Catechetical Leadership*) Conference just five days ago, May 22-26, 2011, Suzanne received the New Wineskins Award for **Scripture by the Sound**.

This award was initiated last year to highlight and celebrate extraordinary achievement occurring in parishes in the ministries of evangelization and catechesis.

Wondering Nugget:

Not every parish has an ocean or sound to pull Adult Faith Formation out of its usual setting. What **creative endeavors / locations** has your parish used to break through the everyday routine to entice/invite adults to engage in on-going adult faith formation, to share the Gospel message in today's world?

For instance,

- At the end of the year, one diocesan catechetical office hosted days of reflection, rest, respite and repast for their parish catechetical leaders in various local parks.
- A Moms Group took their children to the beach for prayer.
- An RCIA Retreat Day which included a scavenger hunt.

What endeavors/locations have you tried? Send them to jansch@juno.com and we will share them in future issues of GEMS.



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

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation Best Practices can be found at www.pastoralplanning.com. Go to Adult Formation: *Nuts & Bolts: Planning and Best Practices for Adult Formation*.