



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

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A Best Practice: Beauty and Adult Faith Formation (Part 3: Beauty in Nature)

When Richard Louv's (the author of *Lost Child in the Woods*) son was four years old, he asked his dad, "Are God and Mother Nature married, or just good friends?" In the simple words of a youngster, this was his attempt to try to figure out the relationship of how nature, God's ever-surprising and awe-inspiring creation, always leads us back, brings us closer to the Creator.

Often when we think of beauty, our first thoughts are of creation and nature.

- How is creation/the natural world part of our spirituality?
- How are we incorporating creation/the natural world into our adult faith formation settings and programming?

Beauty surrounds us,
but usually we need to be walking in a garden to know it.

~ Rumi

There is no end of beauty for the person who is aware. Even the cracks between the sidewalk contain geometric patterns of amazing beauty. If we take pictures of them and blow up the photographs, we realize we walk on beauty every day, even when things seem might seem chaotic and menacing around us.

Before we explore some ways incorporating creation/the natural world into our adult faith formation settings and programming, let us pray with this Navajo Prayer called "The Beauty Way."

Today I will walk out, today everything evil will leave me,
I will be as I was before, I will have a cool breeze over my body.
I will have a light body, I will be happy forever,
nothing will hinder me.

I walk with beauty before me. I walk with beauty behind me.
I walk with beauty below me. I walk with beauty above me.
I walk with beauty around me. My words will be beautiful.
In beauty all day long may I walk.

Through the returning seasons, may I walk.
On the trail marked with pollen may I walk.
With dew about my feet, may I walk.



With beauty before me may I walk.
With beauty behind me may I walk.
With beauty below me may I walk.
With beauty above me may I walk.
With beauty all around me may I walk.

In old age wandering on a trail of beauty,
lively, may I walk.
In old age wandering on a trail of beauty,
living again, may I walk.

My words will be beautiful.

-- from the Anasazi Museum at Chaco Canyon in New Mexico

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Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth
find reserves of strength
that will endure as long as life lasts.

~ Rachel Carson

Incorporating creation/the natural world into our adult faith formation settings and programming

Incorporating nature into adult faith formation classes can be a powerful way to deepen participants' spirituality and foster a greater connection with the natural world. Here are some creative and meaningful ways to do so:

- ❖ **Outdoor Retreats:** Organize retreats or workshops in natural settings such as parks, forests, or near bodies of water. Use the beauty and serenity of nature as a backdrop for reflection, meditation, and discussions on spiritual themes.
 - See “Scripture by the Sound” - [GEMS #10](#)
- ❖ **Nature Walks:** Organize contemplative nature walks or meditations in local parks, nature reserves, or even around the parish grounds where participants can observe and appreciate the natural world around them. Encourage them to notice the intricate details of creation and draw parallels to their spiritual journey. At the same time, encourage them to observe and reflect on the complexity of the natural world, seeing it as a reflection of God's creation.
- ❖ **Creation-Centered Prayers:** Integrate creation-centered prayers and meditations into your sessions. Invite participants to pray outdoors, incorporating elements like the sound of the wind, the rustling of leaves, or the beauty of a sunset.

When you can't go outside, use nature-inspired imagery and prompts to encourage deeper contemplation.

- ❖ **Creation Scripture Study:** Conduct a Scripture study series exploring scriptures that celebrate creation, such as Genesis 1-2, Psalms praising God's creation, and passages from the Book of Job that marvel at nature's wonders.
- ❖ **Guest Speakers:** Invite scientists, environmentalists, or nature enthusiasts to speak about their experiences and how their understanding of nature aligns with their faith. They can share insights on environmental stewardship and the connection between science and spirituality.
- ❖ **Movie or Documentary Screenings:** Show documentaries or movies that focus on environmental issues and the beauty of nature, followed by thoughtful discussions on the themes presented.
- ❖ **Environmental Stewardship:** Incorporate discussions on environmental stewardship and the responsibility to care for the Earth as part of one's faith journey. Discuss how religious values can motivate environmental actions and sustainability efforts.
 - See [GEMS #68](#) and [#69](#)
- ❖ **Nature Journaling:** Encourage participants to keep nature journals, where they can record their thoughts, observations, and reflections while spending time in natural settings. This practice fosters mindfulness and spiritual connection with the world around them.
- ❖ **Scripture and Nature:** Explore Scripture and other sacred texts that reference nature and its significance in life, our faith. Relate these passages to contemporary ecological and spiritual concerns.
- ❖ **Garden Projects:** Engage participants in community garden projects or native plant restoration initiatives. Start your own parish garden where participants can come together to nurture plants and experience the joy of cultivating the earth. Hands-on experiences like these can deepen their understanding of nature's interconnectedness, their role in caring for the environment, and sharing food and beauty with others.
 - See [GEMS #86-88](#).

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- ❖ **Seasonal Celebrations:** Celebrate the changing seasons in nature and connect them to the cycles of faith and the liturgical year. Acknowledge the symbolism of renewal, growth, and transformation found in both nature and spirituality.
- ❖ **Mindful Nature Eating:** Organize gatherings where participants practice mindful eating outdoors, savoring the flavors and acknowledging the source of their food. Discuss the spiritual aspects of gratitude and sustenance from the Earth.
- ❖ **Eco-Theology Discussions:** Study and discuss eco-theology, which explores the relationship between our religious beliefs and the natural world. This can deepen participants' understanding of the interconnectedness of faith and nature.
- ❖ **Green Living Workshops:** Offer practical workshops on sustainable living practices, including tips for reducing waste, conserving resources, and making environmentally conscious choices.
- ❖ **Art and Creativity:** Host workshops where participants can express their appreciation for creation through various art forms, such as painting, photography, or poetry.
 - See [GEMS #49](#) and [#82](#).
- ❖ **Environmental Service Projects:** Engage in environmental service projects, such as cleaning up local parks, participating in tree-planting initiatives, or supporting local conservation initiatives. This practical involvement reinforces the idea of stewardship and putting faith into action.
 - See [GEMS #89](#)
- ❖ **Nature-based Art and Music:** Encourage participants to express their spirituality through nature-inspired art, photography, or music. Creative expression can serve as a form of worship and reflection on the beauty of creation.



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

- *Deepening Faith: Adult Faith Formation in the Parish*
<https://www.litpress.org/Products/4652/Deepening-Faith>
- Lifelong Faith Training: <https://www.lifelongfaithtraining.com/>
- Lifelong Faith: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/>
- Lifelong Faith Studio: <https://www.lifelongfaithstudio.com/>
- The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation:
 - <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/books.html>
 - https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_faith_journal_special_issue.pdf