



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

#219 – August 1, 2024

## A Best Practice: Beauty and Adult Faith Formation (Part 4: The Arts in Adult Faith Formation)

On the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Johannes Sebastian Bach's birthday, a renowned magazine celebrated the German composer's birth by featuring an interview with a Japanese man whose life was radically changed by Bach's music. When asked how Bach's music had inspired him to become a Christian, he responded, "I had to know the God who inspired such beauty."

The arts – all kinds and types of artistic endeavors – accompany our faith journey by giving us strong images for contemplation, for reflecting on life's defining mysteries, and for educating ourselves so we can live them out more creatively.

Before we look at some ways to incorporate the arts into adult faith formation, we hear some of Pope Benedict XVI's thoughts about beauty and spirituality:

- Art and beauty are "something bigger, something that speaks, capable of touching the heart, of communicating a message, of elevating the soul. How many times, then, can artistic expressions be occasions to remind us of God, to help our prayer or the conversion of the heart."
- Works of art "open the door to the infinite, to a beauty and a truth that goes beyond the ordinary. A work of art can open the eyes of the mind and heart. Perhaps sometimes, before a sculpture, a painting, a few verses of a poem or a song, you have experienced deep within an intimate emotion, a sense of joy, that is to have clearly perceived that in front of you there was not only matter, a piece of marble or bronze, a painted canvas, a series of letters or a combination of sounds, but something bigger, something that speaks, capable of touching the heart, of communicating a message; elevating the soul."
- "The work of art is the fruit of human creativity, which questions the visible reality, trying to discover its deep meaning and to communicate it through the language of shapes, colors, sounds. [It] is an open door on the infinite [which] opens the eyes of the mind, of the heart. One example of this is when we visit a Gothic cathedral; we are enraptured

- by the vertical lines that shoot up towards the sky and draw our eyes and our spirits upwards, while at the same time, we feel small, and yet eager for fullness."
- "How many times have paintings or frescoes, the fruit of the faith of the artist, in their forms, their colors, in their light, encouraged us to direct our thoughts to God and nourish in us the desire to draw from the source of all beauty. What a great artist, Marc Chagall, wrote remains true, that for centuries painters have dipped their paintbrush in that colored alphabet that is the Bible. How many times then can artistic expressions be occasions to remind us of God, to help our prayer or for the conversion of the heart!"

We should all hear a little music, read a little poetry,  
and see a fine picture every day of our life,  
in order that worldly cares may not obliterate  
the sense of the beautiful  
which God has implanted in the human soul.

~ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

## Incorporating the arts into adult faith formation

Incorporating the arts into adult faith formation can enhance the overall learning experience, enrich our faith and spirituality, foster creativity, and deepen our union with God, "Beauty Ever Ancient, Ever New." You might try some of these effective ways:

**Liturgical Art:** Integrate visual art, such as paintings, sculptures, or banners, into the environment during liturgical seasons or special celebrations. These art pieces can reflect the themes of the session or the liturgical year and inspire contemplation and prayer.

# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

**Visual Arts:** Use paintings, sculptures, or other visual art pieces that represent religious themes or stories. Display these artworks around the session area and encourage participants to reflect on how the artwork connects with their faith and beliefs.

**Architecture and Sacred Spaces:** When possible, hold faith formation sessions in a church, chapel, shrine, or other religiously significant space. The architecture and atmosphere of such places can have a profound impact on participants' engagement with their learning.

- See [GEMS #29](#)

**Reflective Spaces:** Create spaces within the session area that encourage personal reflection and contemplation. This could be a designated area with comfortable seating or cushions where participants can spend time in quiet reflection and prayer.

**Sacred Objects:** Display sacred objects or artifacts related to the theme/topic being studied. These objects can serve as points of focus for reflection and discussion.

- See [GEMS #153](#)
- See [GEMS #155](#)
- See [GEMS #195](#)

**Sacred Music:** Use the church's music or spiritually meaningful music during faith formation sessions, incorporating singing, chants, or meditative listening to create a more engaging and inspiring atmosphere. Consider having live performances or inviting participants to share songs that are personally significant to them.

**Rituals and Symbolism:** Integrate rituals and symbolic actions into the sessions. Rituals can help participants experience a deeper connection to the material and the community. Examples include lighting candles, using incense, or performing traditional gestures of prayer and liturgy.

- See [GEMS #37](#)
- See [GEMS #133](#)

**Drama and Skits:** Use drama and skits to act out biblical stories or parables, allowing participants to connect with the narratives on a deeper emotional level. This approach can make the stories more relatable and memorable.

**Creating Poetry and Reflections:** Encourage participants to express their thoughts, reflections, and prayers through poetry or the written word. This creative form of expression can help individuals process their faith experiences and share them with others.

- See [GEMS #36](#)
- See [GEMS #62](#)
- See [GEMS #77](#)

**Appreciating Poetry and Literature:** Share religious texts, poems, or spiritually themed literature during the sessions. Encourage participants to discuss the meanings and relevance of these texts in their lives.

**Multimedia Presentations:** Incorporate multimedia elements such as videos or short films that explore religious themes or showcase religious practices from different cultures.

**Visual Arts Workshops:** Organize workshops on various art forms such as painting, drawing, pottery, or calligraphy, with themes centered around faith and spirituality. This allows participants to explore their creativity while connecting with their faith.

**Guest Artists or Speakers:** Invite artists, musicians, or scholars with expertise in religious aesthetics to share their insights and experiences during the sessions.

**Creative Expression:** Invite parishioners to express their understanding of faith through creative means. This could involve icon writing, art projects, writing exercises, or other forms of self-expression.

- See [GEMS #82](#)
- See [GEMS #74](#)
- See [GEMS #125](#)
- See [GEMS #149](#)

**Photography Contemplation:** Utilize photography projects that prompt participants to capture images related to their faith journey or spiritual insights. This activity can help individuals observe their surroundings with a more attentive and contemplative mindset.

# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

**Meditative Coloring:** Provide participants with faith-themed coloring sheets or mandalas to color during quiet reflection times. Coloring can be meditative and can help individuals focus on specific aspects of their faith.

**Art-Based Prayer Stations:** Set up prayer stations with different artistic activities related to prayer and spirituality. For example, a station could include writing prayers on colorful paper or creating collages that express gratitude.

- See [GEMS #159](#)
- See [GEMS #45](#)
- See [GEMS #53](#)
- See [GEMS #71](#)
- See [GEMS #72](#)

**Art Exhibitions:** Organize art exhibitions featuring works created by members of the faith community. These exhibitions can be accompanied by discussions or reflections on how the art pieces relate to faith and personal journeys.

- See [GEMS #82](#)
- See [GEMS #49](#)

**Art and Scripture Study:** Combine art analysis with scripture study. Examine famous religious artworks and discuss the theological and spiritual messages they convey. This approach can deepen participants' understanding of biblical narratives.

**Journaling and Art Integration:** Encourage participants to combine journaling with artistic elements. They can create illustrated journals where they write reflections and draw or paint their responses to specific scriptures or faith-related questions.

- See [GEMS #84](#)
- See [GEMS #97](#)

**Storytelling Through Art:** Invite individuals to create artwork that tells a story from their faith journey. This could be a significant moment, a personal revelation, or a life-changing experience.

“Looking at things is never time wasted.  
If your children want to stand and stare, let them.  
When I was marveling at the beauty of a painting  
or enjoying a great view it did not occur to me that the experience,  
however intense, would be of value many years later.

But there it has remained,  
tucked away in hidden bits of my mind and now it comes,  
shouldering aside even the most passionate love affairs.”

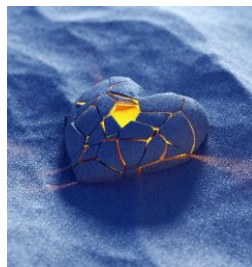
~ Diana Athill

**When approaching a work of art/music from a faith-based perspective, these reflection questions may help your faith formation participants to deepen their understanding and connection.**

- ✚ What emotions does the artwork evoke in you? How do these emotions relate to your faith or spiritual journey?
- ✚ What themes or symbols in the artwork resonate with your spirituality? Are there any Scriptural or spiritual references you can identify?
- ✚ How does the artwork depict concepts of divinity, transcendence, or the sacred? Does it inspire feelings of awe or reverence?
- ✚ In what ways does the artwork reflect the human experience and the struggles of life? How do these reflections align with your understanding of faith and purpose?
- ✚ Consider the use of light and darkness in the artwork. How might these elements symbolize spiritual aspects like enlightenment, hope, or challenges?
- ✚ Does the artwork offer any messages of hope, redemption, or salvation? How do these messages connect with your faith?

# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

- ✦ Are there any parallels between the artwork and religious stories or parables? How do these connections add to your appreciation of the art piece?
- ✦ How does the artwork represent concepts of love, compassion, forgiveness, or other virtues celebrated in our faith?
- ✦ Does the artwork provoke any spiritual questions or reflections? How does it challenge or affirm your beliefs?
- ✦ Consider the craftsmanship and skill involved in creating the artwork. How might the artist's dedication and creativity reflect the divine nature of creation?
- ✦ If the artwork depicts religious figures or events, how does it offer new insights or perspectives on familiar stories?
- ✦ Consider the historical context of the artwork's creation. How might the cultural and religious influences of that time be reflected in the piece?
- ✦ How does the artwork inspire you to express your faith in new ways? Does it encourage you to pray, meditate, or contemplate on faith matters?



<https://pixabay.com/illustrations/heart-sand-art-design-shape-7004820/>

- ✦ If the artwork is abstract or open to interpretation, how can you relate it to your personal faith journey? What personal meanings or connections can you find?
- ✦ Consider the overall message or impression you take away from the artwork. How might it influence your actions, attitudes, or spiritual growth going forward?

Everyone needs beauty as well as bread,  
places to play and pray,  
where nature heals  
and gives strength to body and soul alike.

~ John Muir

## Some Resources

- [The Importance of Art in Catechesis](#)
- *Visio Divina*
  - [Seeing the Word](#)
  - [Visio Divina](#)
  - [Contemplative Prayer: The Five Steps of Visio Divina](#)
  - [Praying With Your Eyes: How to Get Started With Visio Divina](#)
  - [Praying With Our Eyes: The Practice of Visio Divina](#)
  - [Praying with Art – Visio Divina](#)
  - [Visio Divina art gallery](#)
  - [Visio Divina: An invitation to wonder](#)
  - [Spiritual Practices: Visio Divina](#)
  - [Use Lectio Divina & Visio Divina](#)

# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

- Music
  - [For the Beauty of the Earth](#)
  - [What a Wonderful World](#)
  
  - [Morning Has Broken](#)
  - [Creation Calls](#)
  
  - [All Creatures Of Our God And King](#)
  - [Brother Sun](#)
  
  - [Canticle of Creation](#)
  - [Grateful: A Love Song to the World](#)
  
  - [Mother Earth](#)
  - [Let All Things Now Living](#)
  
  - [The Creation Song](#)
  - [All Things Bright and Beautiful](#)



Janet Schaeffler, OP  
[www.janetschaeffler.com](http://www.janetschaeffler.com)  
[jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org](mailto:jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org)

Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at [www.janetschaeffler.com](http://www.janetschaeffler.com)

“We do not want merely to see beauty ...  
We want something else which can hardly be put into words —  
to be united with the beauty we see,  
to pass into it,  
to receive it into ourselves,  
to bathe in it,  
to become part of it.”

~ C.S. Lewis

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](https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_faith_journal_special_issue.pdf)