



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#225 – November 1, 2024

A Best Practice:

At first glance this best practice might seem that it is an experience of outreach and service. It is! Yet, as we know, everything is formative. We learn – we change – we grow – because of all our experiences.

Thus, as you read about this best practice:

- What do the recipients experience? What do they learn? How might they be changed?
- What might the givers experience? Do they learn about/reflect on something in their own lives? (We'll see the experience of one woman. What might be other learnings, other growths for the givers?)

A second consideration as we reflect on this best practice: often one idea sparks ideas for a related reflection, ideas for additional, complimentary practices. As you read about this best practice:

- Does it surface for you any thoughts about your experiences?
- What other opportunities for outreach to those in need might this idea spark?

The Project: NICU Quilts

In various places groups of people have formed together to be a quilting group to make quilts for NICU units. A NICU quilt, also known as a neonatal intensive care unit quilt, is a small, soft, and lightweight quilt specifically designed for premature or sick infants who require care in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).

The size of a NICU quilt can vary, but it is generally smaller than a standard baby quilt. The dimensions commonly range from 24 inches by 24 inches to 36 inches by 36 inches. The smaller size allows the quilt to fit comfortably within the limited



space and equipment surrounding the baby in the NICU.

Usually, parents sleep with the blankets before placing them on the babies precious so their scent is on the blanket when it is then provided and lovingly placed onto the baby in the NICU incubator by a nurse -- and the baby can receive both warm from the blanket and the parents even though they cannot yet be with her or him.

One Particular Endeavor

In Nebraska, the Cottonwood Quilters Club have been creating quilts for NICU families at Women's and Children's Methodist Hospital in Omaha since 2021. (<http://www.cottonwoodquilters.org/nicu-quilt-project.html>)

The club estimates it has donated around 600 quilts. Each one, on average, takes about eight hours to make. One of the quilters shares that she gives back to Methodist because her three grandsons are NICU graduates. It is her way of paying it forward to other families.

Another group in Omaha joined this endeavor because the need was great: the Servants of Mary Sisters and Associates (<https://osms.org/>).

Some of the sisters and associates gather together at the Motherhouse quilting/sewing rooms to make the quilts. Others, who don't live near Omaha, make them on their own. One of the associates, Arlene Anderson, says that she makes them in her "happy place," working on them on a pretty regular basis.



Arlene echoes the feelings of many quilters when she reflects on why she does this: "I feel quilting is a gift given me by God and in return it is a gift I can give to others. I look upon it as my charism, compassionate service through the Blessed Mother."

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One Quilter's Story

We learn more about Arlene's gift of quilting and giving in a reflection she wrote for the Servite sisters and associates in May 2024. Arlene graciously shares it with us:

"Recently I learned of a way to be mindful of God every minute of every day. It is a simple exercise of Ask, Offer, Accept, and Gratitude. Throughout the day, no matter what I'm doing – washing dishes, beginning my morning prayers, tending to my chickens, checking the internet, etc.

- I ASK God to be with me during this time (Sacrament).
- I OFFER what I am doing for God that it may glorify God (Sacrifice).
- I ACCEPT whatever God wishes to give me during this time (Faith).
- And finally, I express GRATITUDE to God for this time together (Thanksgiving).

This is a simple way of praying ALWAYS! I used this simple prayer exercise (Ask, Offer, Accept, Gratitude) as I worked on the quilt project for the NICU that Pat Gedbaw asked me last summer to help with for one of the hospitals in Omaha.

I had the best intentions of starting my quilting, but for some reason I kept putting it off, telling myself I would begin another day. But that is as far as it got...until March of this year. I decided since I was going to the Motherhouse in Omaha at the end of April to visit Sr. Doris Durant, I could bring the baby quilts with me then.

So, I gave myself a month to make as many quilts as I could. I searched online for patterns and began. Wouldn't you know that I have never enjoyed making quilts as much as I had making them?



While searching for different patterns, I came across the Baby Alma quilt. It features a multicolored heart on a white background. It also has another name – a Rainbow Quilt. It is to be given to parents who have had a still-born baby or a baby that died shortly after birth.



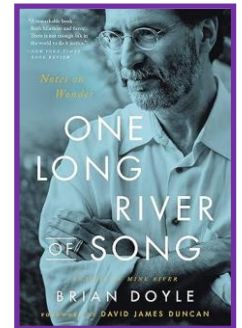
At first, I wasn't sure if giving this quilt would bring comfort or pain to the parents. My hope is that it would be a prayerful reminder of the blessed gift of their child – "a Child Who Was and Isn't but Is" (*One Long River of Song: Notes on Wonder* by Brian Doyle) - a blessed gift returned to Him.

Since quilting gave me lots of time to reflect and pray and simply enjoy the process, it gave me time to think about my dear sister, Jeanne, whom I lost to cancer in December of 2023. It was a long journey of over a year and a half, but sharing that with her brought me even closer to God. God reminded me to be grateful for the gifts God has given me and to cherish each moment, holding them close to my heart. For just as quickly as gifts appear, they can be taken away - not a cruel fate but a blessing...even the loss is blessed.

Do I dare consider the gift lost as a gift returned from me to God? My Sister Who Was and Isn't but Is.... just like the blessed gift of the babies for the Rainbow Quilt. Ask, Offer, Accept, Gratitude..."

What might we learn from this experience?

- Does this practice, Arlene's reflection, and Brian Doyle's words ("A Kid Who Was and Isn't but Is") lead you to reflect on an experience in your life?
- Is there someone in your life "who was and isn't but is"? How do you think about them? How do you remember them? How do you give to others because of their memory?



What might we do in our parishes/(arch)dioceses?

These NICU quilts are for preemies, for babies who are sick. The Rainbow Quilt is for parents who have had a still-born baby or a baby that died shortly after birth.

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Who else in our parishes need us to walk with them in their journey?

- Those who have had miscarriages
- Children who have a terminal illness
- Children who are experiencing their parents' divorce
- Children who are experiencing the death of a parent
- Parents of children with special needs
- Homebound parishioners
- Parents who have had a child die
- Family members whose loved ones have died through suicide
- Family members whose loved ones died a violent death; accident; murder
- Those who have been victims of a violent crime
- Widows and widowers
- Adults who are caregivers
- All those who are grieving

Many of these people, of course, need something different than a quilt. What do they need? How might we respond?

Some Explanations/Resources for NICU Quilts

- <https://opquilt.com/2015/03/29/neonatalpreemie-quilts-with-a-free-pattern/>
- <https://www.knotsoflove.org/nicu-blanket-patterns>
- <https://www.quiltallahassee.com/activities-and-projects/neonatal-quilts-and-isolette-covers/>
- <https://www.quiltneering.com/nicu-quilts-1-and-2/>
- https://www.with-heart-and-hands.com/2008/05/neo-natal-preemie-quilts_04.html
- <https://www.cincinnatiimg.com/nicuquilts>
- <https://www.treecityquiltguild.com/post/nicu-quilts>



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

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>
- *Guided by the Directory for Catechesis: Transforming the Vision and Practice of Parish Catechesis*: <https://twentythirdpublications.com/products/guided-by-the-directory-for-catechesis>
- Lifelong Faith Training: <https://www.lifelongfaithtraining.com/>
- Lifelong Faith: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/>
- Seasons of Adult Faith website: <http://adultfaith.weebly.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_aff_-_journal_special_issue.pdf