



Innovations with the Whole Church

Expanding Horizons

Intergenerational Learning

Mariette Martineau
Center for Ministry Development

Resurrection Catholic Parish in Rochester, Minnesota, a parish seeking to nurture learning for all ages and learning styles, has created an amazing intergenerational learning opportunity for their parish called “Expanding Horizons.”

Expanding Horizons incorporates interactive stations that focus on a core Catholic teaching. These stations are displayed in the parish’s Great Hall for 10 days, from Friday to the second Sunday. Parishioners can come any time between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. This self-guided tour allows participants to learn at their own pace and engage in learning with a spouse, child, friend, neighbor, or individually. There are three levels of activities: adults (grade 10 and older), youth (grades 5-9), and children (grades 1-4). The stations for children are designed for parent-child learning.

On entering the Great Hall, participants sign in and pick up a guide that explains the layout and gives basic directions. Display boards prompt the reader with intriguing questions, present lists of interesting facts, or provide numbered tasks to complete the designated activity. Collages and posters are often stunningly arranged in a museum style. Short video clips and CD players play music, recite poetry, or present stories. Shadow boxes allow for viewing of precious objects. Framed religious pictures placed on easels tell a story. Journals are available to participants for jotting down questions for the pastor, making comments on what was learned, or sharing additional information with future participants.

Worksheets, word searches, flash cards, and puzzles test parishioners’ knowledge. Instructional booklets are constructed for the intrepid seeker, providing more detailed information. The display often includes computer games, board games, art displays, articles and pictures from parishioners put on display, stories, and videos by well-known Catholic speakers. There are opportunities for those who choose to interact with one another. Whatever will help people enter into the topic is used to set up and create the environment—timelines, maps, and

even converting the entire space into a home. A resource table showcases current magazines and books that address the topic. Additional handouts are available. There are even unique areas for meditation on a theological question with the opportunity for participants to express their own insights.

Expanding Horizons was developed at Resurrection in response to needs expressed in their intergenerational session evaluations. Parishioners were saying, “I don’t like sharing my faith with others because I feel I don’t know enough.” “The intergenerational session (Parish Night) did not fit with our household schedule; we need more flexibility.” “I’m uncomfortable in a large group setting.” “The intergenerational session alone does not provide enough time to adequately teach and experience the topic.”

In the first year, the parish positioned Expanding Horizons a week or two before their intergenerational learning sessions (Parish Night), to prepare the parish for the intergenerational learning session. It gave parishioners an opportunity to think ahead and ruminate on the ideas and information presented. Resurrection hoped this exposure would not only stimulate thought and prayer, but also facilitate the parishioners’ comfort level in sharing their faith experiences and insights at the other intergenerational offerings. This supposition was somewhat borne out on Parish Nights when participants would verbally refer to their Expanding Horizons experience during discussion periods.

The first year the parish’s learning focus was Prayer. The three Expanding Horizons were:

1. **The Lord’s Prayer:** Origins and liturgical development, seven petitions and trinity.
Design: poster displays and instructional materials on tables with CD for listening to the Lord’s Prayer sung by a local singer.
2. **The Rosary:** History, four mysteries, Mary’s role, and Catholic tradition.
Design: A museum environment with artwork and Scripture passages announcing the four sets of Mysteries positioned around the perimeter. Chairs

and kneelers were available for viewing and reflection. Large rosary display with descriptions of rosaries and personalized stories of their significance in the lives of parishioners.

3. **Catholic Devotions:** Saintry influences, prayer styles, and Catholic culture.

Design: Converted the space into a home layout where people explored "The Sacred in our Ordinary Life" by traveling through each room and interacting with questions. Each room and hallway focused on a specific Catholic devotion.

In the second year Resurrection's learning focus was sacraments and Expanding Horizons offered learning about the sacraments of Initiation, Healing, and Vocations. The current year of 2008-2009 focuses on The Creed and Expanding Horizons is offering learning on the need for creeds, the trinity, and four marks of the church.

Resurrection has parishioners who participate in Expanding Horizons but do not come to Parish Night (Intergenerational Learning Session) or Going Deeper (Age Specific Learning Options), but most of those attending take in one of these programs.

Parish staff cite the following advantages of this learning experience:

- Through the Expanding Horizons experience there is so much flexibility in incorporating all the different learning styles and allowing the participant to choose how they learn best as well as a determining which specific aspect of the topic that they want to delve into.
- It offers so many learning directions, with a smorgasbord of information on the chosen topic that gives people multiple topics on a core subject to choose to explore.
- It allows parishioners to learn at their own pace. There is no need to hurry and they might just browse and grab some information made available to take home with them.
- There are layers of learning: an example of a 'sound bite' would be the display boards of major titles and pictures that are on display. There are brief Scripture passages and paragraphs from the *Catechism* that relate to the topic and peak a person's interest at a little deeper level. Then there are pages of information that have been put together by the design team, and a list of books and resources that are recommended for the person attending on a specific topic.
- Time and again, people remark about the beautiful presentation. Resurrection has taken extra effort to box up some of the items that can be reused and have shared them with other groups of people within their diocese.

Participants at one of Resurrection's most recent Expanding Horizons offered these comments about their learning experience:

- Excellent displays in the Great Hall, nice that the Expanding Horizons is available for a long period of time.
- Good content.
- I like the variety of ways to learn.
- Expanding Horizons us helps to understand our faith better and leads us to search more.
- Expanding Horizons is good family time.
- As a generally ill-prepared adult Catholic, Expanding Horizons really reminds me and teaches me about the meaning of our traditions and practices.
- I appreciate the opportunity to learn about my faith in a much deeper way.
- This brings your faith alive.
- It's very rewarding, a way to get closer to God.
- This multiple approach circumvents some of the problems that occur with traditional religious education programs.

Attendance at Expanding Horizons is not as large as it is at the structured intergenerational learning events, however, and space constraints do not permit keeping the displays up for longer than a 10-day period in the Great Hall. To accommodate those who cannot attend during the 10 days, they have consolidated some of the elements of the displays into a single smaller display which is placed in a quiet but noticeable corner of the main gathering space, rotating some of the more transportable display elements to this area during the four-week period following Parish Night or until they move on to the next faith topic of the year.

Due to the time required for team catechesis, planning, design and sometimes construction which are needed to implement the learning environment the team envisions, Resurrection found that the design and implementation team (thus far 7-9 people) is only capable of creating three Expanding Horizons a year without compromising variety and quality. As you can tell from the description, this learning opportunity is a lot of work. But what isn't that is done well and has impact? As a staff member said about her own recent experience: "It was fun to just pop my head in today and see a mother with her two teenage sons playing the "I Believe" game and having a great time. That makes it all worth it!"

For More Information: Resurrection Parish

www.resurrection-catholic.org/gof/description/eh.html