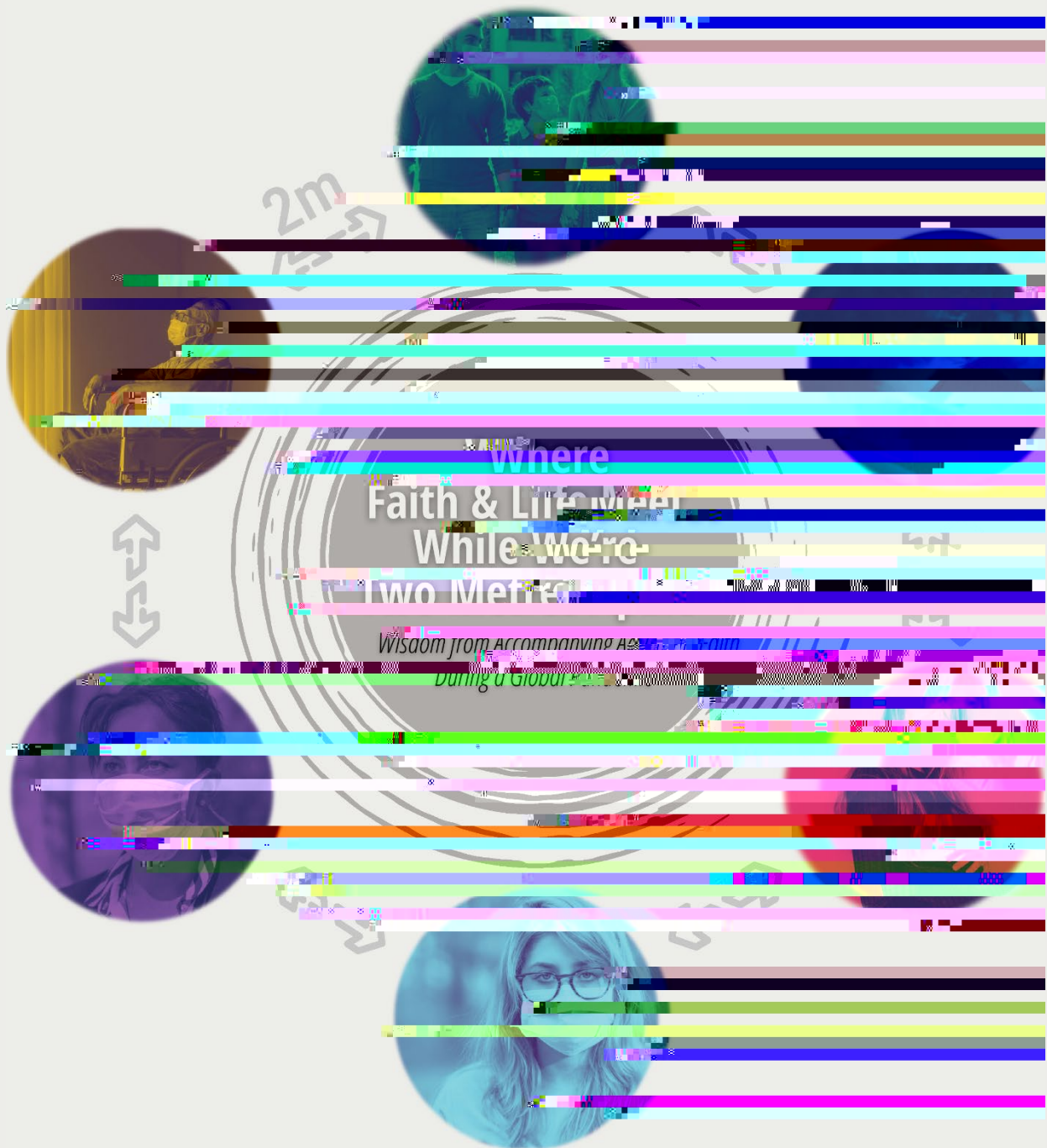


The Centre for Religious Education and Catechesis



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Centre for Religious Education and Catechesis, Saint Paul University, Ottawa
June 2021

In addition to our deep gratitude to the six practitioners in adult faith education/accompaniment who joined our research team for Phase II, we would like to express our appreciation to the 20 leaders in adult faith education/accompaniment who along with our Phase II research team participated in semi-structured interviews about what we are learning about accompanying adults in faith during this time of pandemic. These conversation partners who are leaders from across the country working as national and diocesan directors, chairs of religious education associations, spiritual directors, and pastors and pastoral associates in a variety of i2l

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	2. Might some of us – pastoral leaders, practitioners of adult faith education and other members of the Church – hold assumptions about adult catechesis/faith education that contribute to the gap between faith and life by failing to recognize the nature and role it plays to intentionally meet people where they are and help them make meaning in all of their life experiences?	
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6. The pandemic allows us to see – with even greater clarity than usual – that hunger for connection and meaning-making is always at the heart of adult faith education/accompaniment
7. The leader of faith education is not apart from but rather a member of the learning community
8. The pivoting that the pandemic is asking of us as practitioners – to be able to meet people where they are in this time of crisis – is the pivoting practitioners always need to be equipped for when accompanying adults in faith
9. Effective adult faith education/accompaniment helps the learner to recognize the importance of context and identify their interior assumptions and world

I. Where Faith and Life Meet While We're Two Metres Apart: Sharing the Wisdom as a Community of Practice

Welcome!

Welcome to this resource, which explores the wisdom we are gaining from practising adult faith education/accompaniment ¹ during a time of global pandemic. One of our research team members has captured the spirit of this resource very well:

I always knew that I was strengthened and supported by the wisdom of other leaders in faith education – I crave opportunities for engaging conversations that build and

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while we're two metres apart? Through these pages and by engaging in subsequent learning and sharing opportunities we can – together – continue to add to our wisdom and strengthen our practice. Please joinus!

II. Little Did We Know... Phase II Takes an Unexpected Turn

We gathered our new research team members – practitioners in adult faith education/accompaniment from across the country -- to begin Phase II of our Awareness-Based Action Research² project with an onsite session in February 2020 at Saint Paul University. We were building on the findings of Phase I published in the Fall 2019 document *Five Promising Practices and Other Practical Wisdom: A Resource for All Who Accompany Adult Faith*.³ This marked the beginning of a new process in action research of observing, reflecting, planning, and acting in our particular contexts of adult faith education/accompaniment. We continued with the principles for practice in mind that surfaced in our Phase I findings as a focal point (see “Five Promising Practices” in Figure 1 below). Little did we know as we gathered in Ottawa from across the country, how privileged we were to be together in the same room to do this beginning work. This intensive on-site research session in February 2020 was the last time we would be able to meet in person for Phase II.



Phase II Research Team (back row, l-r): Ms. Catherine Potter, CREC Assistant; Ms. Debbie Aker, Catechetical Coordinator, Diocese of Antigonish, NS; Dr. Carol Kuzmochka, lead researcher; Dr. Miriam < Xadmin, % Áac > researcher; Fr. Daryold Winkler, Pastor/Parish Priest, Archdiocese of Ottawa, ON; Ms. Lucieeduc, Director, Star of the North Retreat Centre, St. Albert, AB; Ms. Wendy Aitken, Faith Formation Team, Archdiocese of Montreal, QC; Ms Gabrielle Dupuis, Program Coordinator. (front row; l-r) Ms. Karen deKonin k, Btoral Associate fo Faith Formation, Diocese of St. Jean Longueuil, QC; Ms. Koreen Hrizai, Catechetical Leader, Archdiocese of Saint Boniface, MB, and current chair, Western Conference of Catholic Religious Educators.

“The best laid plans...,”⁵ Robert Burns’ famous 18th-century poem reminds us, often go awry. March 2020 found our research team experiencing exactly that as – along with the whole planet – life and plans as we knew them were fundamentally changed by the arrival of a global pandemic.

² Awareness-Based Action Research combines Otto Scharmer’s Theory U with action research. This methodology engages Theory U listening as a method for a community of practice – the researcher(s) – to overcome blind spots by being truly present and engaged in the generative conversation, and the processes that accompany it allows wisdom to surface that can lead to transformative change. To learn more about this research methodology, visit <http://methods.sagepub.com/book/the-sage-handbook-of-action-research-361535.xml>.

³ The digital copy of this resource is available at <https://www.wii-j.com/2020/02/01/>

⁴ These are the four steps of the learning spirals that underpin all action research methodology.

⁵ An allusion to Robert Burns’ poem “To a Mouse,” 1785

III. Pivoting for the Pandemic, a Key Learning and an Important Question from the Start of Phase II

Within a few short weeks of our on-site gathering, the pandemic was upon us. Our team of eight gathered for a Zoom meeting to discuss what we ought to do in the face of the lockdown. Perhaps we should step away from the project for a time until the worst was over?

In the midst of our uncertainty, one of our research team members offered a wise, clarifying perspective that touched us all and reframed our context: “If this is not a time to meet people where they are and help them find meaning in the midst of this crisis, then I don’t know when that time is.”

This perspective instantly shifted our relationship to our work and was the first wisdom we gained from accompanying adult faith during the pandemic. The statement to follow captures this learning and clearly articulates an essential insight that had been slowly taking shape over the course of our research project as we gathered data and

reflected on our findings. It builds on the

IV. The Pivot Continues: Our Common Intention for the Project Remains the Same,
Another Research Question Is Added and Three Additional Findings Emerge

While our common intention for the project – to deepen and expand our understanding of

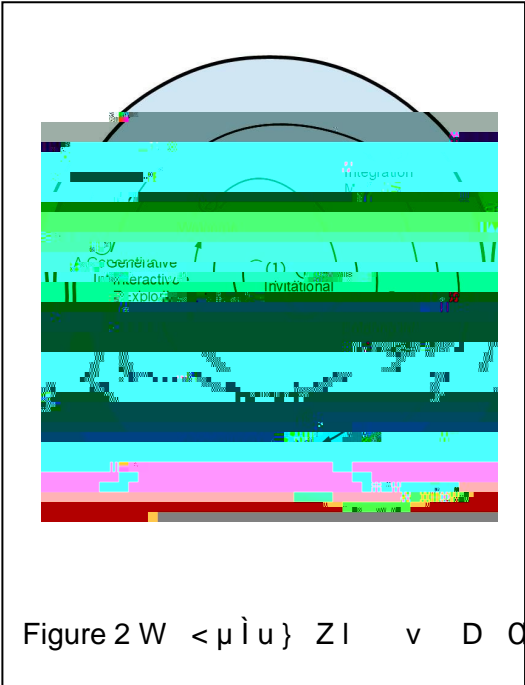
and open will to the observations and experiences happening in the field of study. ⁶
Being present in this way sheds light, allowing blind spots to be identified. This way
of perceiving opens the path for insight to emerge, leading the way forward.

We discovered in Phase I, and again as we moved throu (w)8ei[5 (.)-1 0 Tc d[(t)-6Ts movonovønd 1REM



For Your Reflectn

- 5. Our faith education processes must themselves embody and promote the profound coherence between faith and life that we are trying to facilitate for those we accompany.



in this time. Several practitioners noted that people are searching for meaning and trying to

A pastor on our research team expanded this insight for us. As we began Phase II, he decided to explore what it means for a pastor to intentionally

For Your Reflection:

1. How are you experiencing the hunger for connection and meaning-making in your context?
2. In what ways might considering yourself a “lead learner” impact your learning and teaching practices?

Our engagement with this pressing reality and evocative question has caused another insight to arise as a result of practising adult faith education/accompaniment during the pandemic:

10. It is essential for adult faith education/accompaniment to educate for the human maturity that is integral to Christian maturity and that discourages polarization

Our discussions of this important question led us to reflect on the inseparable relationship between faith maturity and human maturity. ¹⁸ A mature, integral faith is always asking, “Where is the call and how are we to respond? What is God asking of us in this time and place?”

- i) The capacity to hold the tensions of paradox is a characteristic of human maturity that

11. An invitation to consider new perspectives on “real presence” and online gathering spaces

For us as the Christian community, for whom “real presence” holds so many essential layers of meaning, perhaps the most immediate, impactful and enduring aspect of the pandemic is the challenge it presents to our understanding of what it means to gather and be prese(r)-1 dunde o

person?” an interview participant asked. Certainly, being able to physically gather in the same place together is essential. Our semi-structured interviews and other research conversations indicate that our real physical presence matters.

ii) The new normal will mean embracing virtual ways of being present

One semi-structured interview participant frequently expressed her eagerness for things to “return to normal.” But we wonder if there is any “normal” anymore, and if any future

her frustration with those leaders in faith education/accompaniment who are not willing to try to lead gatherings online.

Several people are discovering that certain aspects of Zoom events may even be superior to in-person gatherings. The break-out rooms, for example, allow for excellent small-group discussions. Screen sharing opens up many possibilities for engaging with images, information and music. And the ability to gather people from many locations who could not otherwise be together in the same place – even without a pandemic – can be advantageous.

We went so far as to identify those without adequate internet services as “the new marginalized.”

VII. Continuing the Conversation and Toward an Emerging Future

It is our hope that we will be able to gather (virtually and, hopefully, in person before too long) to continue to share and discuss all of the wisdom we are acquiring about where faith and life meet while we're two metres apart. We are eager to pursue the pressing questions and issues that are arising during this challenging time, and we trust that the wisdom we are gaining together will help us toward an emerging future in adult faith education filled with hope. Please join us.

