CHAPTER THREE

Logistics

Having used *Growing In Faith Together*® in 3 different churches with 3 different purposes, I realize how the most overwhelming part of doing GIFT® is the logistics. There is no one way to use the program, which makes it quite flexible, but can also make it frustrating to someone who wants to use it "straight out of the box." (There is no box, of course, because there are no materials other than this book and other pieces of paper.) So, I am now going to attempt to lay out how GIFT® can be implemented in any situation, and will try not to make it so general that the layout is no help, but realize that you will have to modify for your own situation and purposes.

Gather information!
The most important part of any endeavor is knowing your "audience". So many Christian educators, myself included, have planned wonderful classes and events to which no one came. To minimize the amount of time and energy invested in your program or event, put in the upfront time of collecting information.

First, who do you want to participate in GIFT® (or any other curriculum or event)? Are the participants going to be the same as the organizers and volunteers? Are you targeting a specific group of people or do you want the whole congregation to take part?

Second, who do you need backing GIFT®? The vestry/elected lay leaders? The rector/priest/minister/rabbi? The matriarch/patriarch of the church? The chronic naysayer? Parents of young children?

Third, what do the participants want and need? Note that what people want and what they need are not always the same thing nor in alignment with each other. The answer to this question is crucial and often the hardest to pin down. Do they need time with their families? Do they need facilitated fellowship with other members of the church? Do they need to be motivated to come to church for either formation or worship? Do they need basic life-needs met (food, clothing, shelter)? Do they need to learn more about the church? Do they need to learn more about their own faith journeys? Do they need to be still and quiet? Do they need to be active and engaged?

In the first and second steps, you are mainly answering the questions yourself or with your priest. Starting in the third step, you will begin to gather other people to help with planning and brainstorming. Invite the entire congregation to brainstorming meetings. Be sure to stress that the meetings are purely for brainstorming: there will be no right or wrong answers, there will be no work assigned to anyone who attends. (Now you need more information about your congregation: when is it best to have these meetings? After church, in the evening, at lunch-time?) Most people in a congregation will not respond to an "all-call" in the bulletin or even from the priest. You will need to target people whose input is valuable and necessary. Look back at your answers for the second step. Invite those people directly. Also invite people who are not the ones who do everything in the parish and are at every meeting and on every committee. I cannot stress enough: *The more people involved with GIFT®, the more ownership the congregation has as a whole.* These meetings are critical for success in GIFT®.

GIFT® cannot be your program, it must be the congregation's program. GIFT® continues at St. Dunstan's even though I am not there because it is not my program, it is their program.

Questions to ask during the brainstorming meetings in addition to the want/need questions: How often should we do this program (weekly, monthly, etc)? For how long should we do this program (Advent, Lent, program year, summer, year-round)? When should we do this program (between services, Sunday evening, weekday evening, following the late service, etc)? Should we include a meal? If so, how involved should the meal be? Where should we have the program (parish hall, classrooms, outside, etc)? What is our main goal for the program year (fellowship, spiritual growth, knowledge growth, etc)? What responses might be fun and educational (drama, art, discussion, etc)? What Bible stories are you going to use (lectionary-based, theme-based, pastor decided)? Who might be good to ask to head up a team for the meal? Who might be good to ask to head up the facilitators? Who might be good to ask to head up the responses?

Create your own GIFT®.
Look at the data from the meetings (and from all the other information you have swimming around in your head from discussions with parishioners during coffee hour and while you're attempting to be somewhere else) and integrate it with your knowledge of people's gifts and skills in the parish. An example: Violet really, really wants to do liturgical dramas. This information is weighed against other information and you use it if other people also want to do liturgical dramas AND you have people who are gifted at drama or teaching who can lead liturgical dramas. You put Violet's suggestion on the back burner if only a few other people like the idea. You may also have to wait to use Violet's idea if you don't know of anyone to lead/direct/teach liturgical drama.

Now that you have a list of possible formats, activities, and leaders, have another meeting! Again, have it open to the congregation, but specifically invite the people from the round of brainstorming meetings and anyone that you hope will be a volunteer or leader. Present the program format and activities. Ask for people to head or participate on the various teams: breakfast, facilitator, response.

Have another round of meetings. This time, meet with the different teams individually.
- With the breakfast team: What should the sample menu be? Will food be prepared in the church or elsewhere? Do we have enough plates, bowls, utensils, mugs, etc? How will clean-up go? Should clean-up happen during the program or following? Are we opening this up to the community? In which case, with what health regulations do we need to comply? Set-up volunteer schedule or volunteer coordinator.
- With the facilitator team: Tweak the schedule. Write opening and closing prayers. Choose music and how it will be played/accompanied/etc. Set-up volunteer schedule or volunteer coordinator.
- With the response team: Look at the Bible stories for the next few months. Decide what activity will be used on which day (samples in Appendix) and who will lead/teach it.

Publicize.
Set start date and publicize. Ask people to commit to come for the first six weeks. After six weeks, if they don't like it, they don't have to come back. Six weeks will give you enough time to ingrain GIFT® in the schedule of both the church and individuals. It will also allow you time to receive feedback and make necessary changes. Stress the "many hands make light work" aspect of GIFT®. People can

volunteer to help for short, specific tasks. (Having actual job descriptions with time requirements is a good idea.) Have the priest encourage participation from the pulpit (and have priest participate in GIFT® too). Have notices in the bulletin, newsletter, website, bulletin board, and as many other places as possible.

Grow in faith together.
Be ready for the first GIFT®. Check on materials needed for breakfast, the facilitator, and the response. Check on volunteers. Decide whether you need to use a sound system or move furniture. The actual day of GIFT®, greet people as they enter and show them where to go and what to do. Encourage people to sit next to people they don't know.

Be ready for the second GIFT®. Reflect on the first GIFT®. What was positive and should be kept? What needs to be dropped or changed? What can be changed for the second GIFT® and what will take longer to get in place? (An example: We had issues with returning dirty plates. We decided we needed bus bins. I ran out to a restaurant supply store that week so that they'd be in place for the following GIFT®.)

Repeat as needed. As you move along, recruit new volunteers for the different jobs. Hope and pray for word of mouth advertising for both volunteers and participants.