



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

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A Best Practice: It Happens at Home

Faith growth happens everywhere! We know that; it's not just at opportunities, gatherings, worship, etc. that are scheduled at the parish (important as those are).

Much happens in the daily life of the households of the parish, probably much that we are not aware of. People – of all ages and types – are serious and creative about ways to continue to grow in faith.

They are also looking for new ways, ways for themselves, and ways to connect to other people in prayer. They look to their parishes for guidance, ideas, and new practices.

The best practice described here does just that!

St. George Unplugged

For the past several years, St. George Parish in Worcester, MA has encouraged and enabled “St. George Unplugged: A Community Prayer Hour at Home” on the Wednesday of Holy Week. All parishioners are invited to set aside the hour of 7:00 – 8:00 PM for prayer at home on that evening.

The brochure that is created for all parishioners says:

“An ‘Unplugged Hour’

As part of our parish community’s annual preparation for the great feast of Easter we invite each household in our parish to set aside one hour of quiet reflection and prayer at home from 7 to 8 PM on Wednesday of Holy Week. Imagine how wonderful it could be for all of our 1400 households to join together in prayer at this same time!”

Invitation to Participate

Everyone in the parish is invited to participate – through a prayer-aid that is mailed to each household, given out at Sunday liturgy and through faith formation sessions.

Within this invitation, parishioners are reminded that, even though they are not physically together, they are united with each other, praying together, as they participate at the same time.

For where two or three are gathered together
in my name,
there am I in the midst of them.

- Matthew 18: 20

Preparing for Prayer

Each household was encouraged to prepare a Sacred Space:

- Dim the lights.
- Turn off or “unplug” the TV.
- Shut down the computer.
- Turn off the radio, all phones, CD players, computers, iPads and iPods.
- Arrange a comfortable place to sit. Weather permitting: outside might be an option.
- Add what you will need: perhaps a Bible or prayer journal, pencil or paper.

Beginning of the Prayer Hour

The prayer-aid invites everyone at 7 PM to begin with the following prayer, with the awareness that many others in the parish are praying this prayer at the same time:

God of Wonder
We gather together
In the quiet of this night
Calling upon your Spirit of love to light our way
Let us be aware of your presence
In silence and in trust.

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Reflection Time

During the following forty-five minutes, each household chooses and plans their prayer time. The prayer-aid that was given to each household includes several suggestions for the hour, with the reminder: “Of course, what is important is that you do what you think will make this hour matter most to you.”

- Sit in the quiet stillness for a while.
- Light a candle or simply listen to the quiet.
- Share with others or write a list of things for which you are grateful.
- Share with your loved ones or write about something that has been especially significant to you.
- Write about or draw a picture of something that gives you hope.
- Hold a photo of a loved one while you pray for or speak to this person.
- Recall a special memory - share or write about it.
- Read from Scripture, poetry or a religious book.

How to pray? This is a simple matter.
I would say:
Pray any way you like, so long as you do pray.

- St. John Paul II

Conclusion of the Prayer Hour

The prayer-aid invites everyone throughout the parish to close the hour together in prayer: “In prayer now, together let us ask the Lord to refresh and renew us.

For peace among all nations, peoples and faiths, and for Pope Francis we pray....
Lord, refresh and renew us in your Spirit.

For the healing of hurts and the grace to forgive, we pray....
Lord, refresh and renew us in your Spirit.

For health and wholeness in body, mind and spirit, we pray...
Lord, refresh and renew us in your Spirit.

For the comfort and joy of Christ’s Presence in us, we pray....
Lord, refresh and renew us in your Spirit.

We pray together the Lord’s Prayer.

Each year’s format and suggestions

The basic format for “St. George Unplugged: A Community Prayer Hour at Home” is the same each year, but is tweaked and changed according to the parish theme/focus for that Lent.

Community Connection

Even though the Prayer Hour took place in individual homes, parishioners were invited – in another way – to connect with others: “Please take a moment to consider how you might share the experience of this hour with others in our parish community.

- Could you write a few words about what this time was like for you and email it to the parish office?
- Perhaps share a thought, a poem, or a bible verse and what it meant to you?
- Were you joined to us in thought – from your living room, a hospital room, an airplane, or from a car en route home?”

“Prayer makes us Church

Prayer is not just words - it’s how we live in the mystery of God’s plan for us.

- Were you praying alone tonight or joined by family or friends?
- Were you a family eating together in silent prayer?
- Were you a new parent whose prayer was the feeding and caring for a crying baby?

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- Were you out working during this hour and was that labor your prayer?

The priests and people of St. George look forward to sharing this experience with you. Let's mention it to one another! You might want to e-mail your reflection to us..."

Prayer continues into action

Our lives of discipleship, of course, do not end with prayer. Prayer calls us to, supports and enables our caring service. The closing of the prayer-aid prays: "May our Lenten Prayer call us to continue reaching out to others in need:

- Consider bringing food for the hungry to church with you. The collection area is at the foot of the Parking lot side entrance. The need is great!
- Add a donation to purchase food for Mustard Seed Meals with your Easter Offering. The next meal is on May 16, 2014.
- Start a new habit this Easter Season: help to prevent homelessness by buying HFH Grocery Gift Cards after Mass.
- Donate used clothing to the St. Vincent DePaul Society; bins are in the lower church parking lot.
- Would you be interested in helping to serve at the Interfaith Hospitality Network Shelter this summer? With enough volunteers to donate \$350 worth of Food Cards and to cover the 5:30 PM to 7:30 AM shifts we can commit to another week.
- The annual Anointing of the Sick will take place on the Feast of St. George, April 23 at 11:00 AM. If you would like to attend or to help with the luncheon that follows, please call the Parish Office."

What do you think drew people to participate?

Ann Doyle, Outreach Coordinator at St. George Parish, and Eileen Charbonneau, a parishioner involved in various parish ministries, reflected on this question:

- "The feedback has been tremendous. People love it! This surprised us at first because we weren't sure people would even pay attention to it, but obviously this is something people are looking for. It gave people a reason to pray together as a family."
- "People also feel drawn to the reality of being united with others, praying together, each in their homes."

Individual praying is like straw scattered over a field.
If you set a straw alight, the flame is small.

But if you gather up all the bits of straw
the flame fills out,
rising high up in the sky,
and it's the same with communal prayer.

- St. John Vianney

What are some of the most common comments heard from parishioners?

- "We were traveling at this time, but were still able to participate in this (even though we weren't there physically to be present for church services)."
- "It was wonderful to be able to comfortably pray in our home."
- "We liked the ideas because we now use them at home on other occasions."

The feedback from many of the parishioners who are homebound was especially poignant. They reported feeling a closeness to the rest of the parish community that they don't normally feel.

Some Wondering GEMS

- How might you design this opportunity for your parishioners?
- Are you thinking: “Oh, our families/households would feel uncomfortable doing this?” Reiterate with your households/families that they are not doing it alone. Many, many families throughout the parish – including their best friends’ families – are doing this at the same time.
- Timing: Are there other seasons/occasions during the year around which a similar evening at home can be planned? If you used this practice during various seasons, would that be a vehicle for helping parishioners appreciate the various liturgical seasons?
- “St. George Unplugged: A Community Prayer Hour at Home” suggested an hour. As you plan for your parish, would a different (lesser) time frame be more realistic (especially for the first time)?
- Focus: This practice revolved around prayer at home. Are there other opportunities which might be done in a similar format? Such as:
 - reading an article (or a book) by everyone in the parish
 - providing reflection and conversation questions
 - inviting people to share their thoughts and reflections through a blog, a Facebook group, a chat room, etc.



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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 at:

- <http://www.ecatechist.com/ebooks/> Scroll down for *40 Tips: Getting Started in Adult Faith Formation*
- www.pastoralplanning.com Go to Adult Formation: *Nuts & Bolts: Planning and Best Practices for Adult Formation.*

God shapes the world by prayer.

The more prayer there is in the world,
the better the world will be ...

- E. M. Bounds