



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

#53 - May 2015

## A Best Practice: Prayer Forms (Part II)

Knowing that there is much going on in our parishes and (arch)dioceses to walk with people on the journey of prayer, I invited several people to share some of their experiences with us:

- How and when people pray together at the parish
- How have parishes and (arch)dioceses helped adults to learn more about prayer, to experience different forms of prayer

In September 2014 the [GEMS #45](#) issue began exploring some of the many ideas shared; this issue continues that survey of these various methods and experiences. **Future issues will continue this journey.** If you have an experience, a program or process from your parish (or diocese) to share, email [jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org](mailto:jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org).



Claire Smith, Director of Adult Faith Formation at the Church of St. Clare, Staten Island, tells us about their experiences: “In cooperation with a local Jesuit retreat house, a few years ago we presented a program on **prayer in the tradition of the Spiritual Exercises** of St. Ignatius. We then offered this five-session program a few more times, altering it slightly each time. For example, we met in the fall one year and all of the music, poetry, reflection, etc. had an autumnal theme. Another time we met during the Easter season with the theme of resurrection. So although the program was structured the same way (gathering prayer, music, scripture, reflection and sharing, poem), it always had a new feel to it.

We also tried a different approach to scheduling. The first time was on a Tuesday morning to reach those who participated in morning liturgy, mothers who dropped their children off at school and retirees. We advertised on our website and our bulletin, attracting people from other parishes as well.

One time the program was presented at night to reach working people. Another time it was offered on a Thursday and repeated on Saturday morning.

Each time there was a good response with many "regulars" who came whenever it was offered.

The original presenter was a lay preacher connected to Mount Manresa Jesuit Retreat House on Staten Island. Since the beginning of this program, the retreat house has closed but the lay preachers (now referred to as the Manresa Companions who minister under the auspices of the Jesuit Collaborative) have continued their ministry of bringing Ignatian spirituality to the parishes.

The last time the program was offered, we worked with neighboring parishes to acquaint them with the program and the presenters (there are now 2 lay preachers doing the program) and to network with them.

From that we have formed a very dedicated group from various parishes who meet regularly on the first Saturday of each month. All have grown in their prayer life and are very committed to each other - although many were strangers when this began. Some have expressed a desire to train to become lay preachers.

We recently met with the presenters to discuss the possibility of offering new programs including a retreat.

The success of this endeavor is due in large part to the presenters, the hospitality, flexibility of scheduling and the openness of the participants to share their faith.”



Many parishes who offer **intergenerational faith formation** frequently include an exploration of prayer within their yearly schedules. One example is Our Lady of Fatima Parish, Delanson, NY. Angela Caraher describes their GIFT (Growing in Faith Together) program which, during the 2013 year explored various forms of prayer: the Examen of Consciousness, praying for others, the rosary, and adoration.

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Mary Ann Keiner, Director of Adult Formation at Our Lady of Grace Parish, Noblesville, IN, shared two of their intentional endeavors. “One thing we do is have **Evening Prayer** every night at 7:00. All groups that are meeting that night are strongly encouraged to use Evening Prayer as the opening prayer for their meeting. On Thursdays during Lent and Advent, Evening Prayer is sung and one Thursday during each season, Taize prayer is used.

For a women's Lenten retreat, one morning breakout session centered on how our image of God impacts our relationship with God. The afternoon breakouts included: Praying with Scripture, Praying with beads, Praying with our bodies, Praying through writing, Praying with art and Praying with music. These sessions were each led by people who pray with these various forms.



Tony Merenda, from St. Mary Parish, Grafton, MA, shares a practice that is meaningful and helpful for many: “We have a prayer service the first week of each month. This prayer service is an extension of a **Prayer Line Ministry** in which prayer intentions are collected through our specifically-designated website, from emails, or verbal requests received from parishioners. The ministry is 40 people strong. As prayer intentions are received, they are published for everyone in the ministry. It is sent out as an email; people who do not have internet access are called with the intentions requesting them to pray for those on the list. ([www.theessentialmission.com/PrayerLine.html](http://www.theessentialmission.com/PrayerLine.html))

The prayer service itself revolves around the Liturgy of the Hours, having been adapted to include three to four songs throughout the service. The songs change from month to month, based on the saint of the day or celebration of the liturgical year (e.g. Marian songs during the month of May).

The service is always evolving and has included Taize music, a reflection based on the reading found within the Liturgy of the Hours or time for quiet reflection. What does remain constant is:

- the Liturgy of the Hours
- Songs of praise
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- A reading of the prayer intentions during the ‘Intercession section of the Liturgy of Hours’
- ‘Time for participants to add their own intentions’



Tom Sauline, religious education consultant in the diocese of Youngstown Office of Religious Education, shared his experience of praying *Lectio Divina* with about 60 people, mostly young adults in their 20's, in Theology on Tap sessions, a McDonald's restaurant, as well as in parish adult faith formation sessions, and a campus ministry session. Tom's experience was that participants responded favorably to the prayer experience indicating that *Lectio Divina* can have a positive impact on spirituality, Christian discipleship, participation in Eucharist, and Catholic identity.

- One participant related that she felt like Jesus was talking directly to her through the Scripture passage.
- Another commented that *Lectio Divina* enriches her experience of the readings at liturgy.

Tom designed a personal and communal guide for praying the Bible with *Lectio Divina*. It can be found at [www.janetschaeffler.com](http://www.janetschaeffler.com) (click on AFF Helps).



Several years ago Bob and Kathy Ovies gave the main address, “The Blessings of Couple Prayer,” at a diocesan dinner honoring married couples. The response to that talk was so positive that they spent several months with interested couples to learn why some husbands and wives feel awkward in praying together and why other couples were comfortable praying together. Bob and Kathy then developed a six-week series, **Couple Prayer Series**, that was well received in many parishes in the archdiocese of Detroit.

Word quickly spread throughout the country. All of the suggestions and directions for facilitators to host the program within a parish as well as a

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Home/Small Faith Support Group package can be found at [www.coupleprayer.org](http://www.coupleprayer.org).



St. John Fisher Parish, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA have immersed prayer into parish life with **“The First 15.”** They give the first fifteen minutes of every meeting at the parish to prayer and reflection on one of the coming Sunday readings. After everyone has had an opportunity to share their thoughts, they conclude with intercessions – the needs on each person’s mind, followed by praying the Our Father. The sharing of Scripture reflections – as well as prayer for each person’s intentions and concerns – draws people together as a community.

The Leader’s Guide that has been developed and used by/at the parish can be found at [www.janetschaeffler.com](http://www.janetschaeffler.com) (click on AFF Helps).



Christ the King Parish, Commack, NY provides several opportunities for prayer for their parishioners:

- **Taize prayer:** Suzanne Richards explains that this prayer experience ([http://www.taize.fr/en\\_rubrique12.html](http://www.taize.fr/en_rubrique12.html)) is offered three times throughout the year as well as in the evening on Good Friday. (For another idea with Taize prayer see [GEMS #37](#).)
- **Morning Prayer:** This is offered during Advent and Lent. A team of parishioners are trained to lead this prayer from the church’s Liturgy of the Hours. They include music (the parish organist records the hymns which are then able to be “pressed and played” on the organ). Morning Prayer is prayed prior to the 9am daily Mass. The chairs are set up “choir to choir” so the people experience the complete feel of Morning Prayer.
- **Praying with...series:** This seven-day “retreat” used some of the books from [Companions for the Journey Series](#), “Praying with...” Participants register and are given the book the weekend before with the specific reading assignments. The group then meets for five days (Monday to Friday) after the 9am Mass for thirty minutes.

- Monday: the participants will have read the Introduction, Days 1 and 2.
- Tuesday through Thursday: they read only one day
- Friday: the participants read Day 6 and Day 7

The thirty minutes together were used to listen to what surfaced for the participants as they prayed with the saint each day. The group size is limited to twenty. They have prayed with St. Dominic, St. Joan of Arc, St. John Paul II, St. Catherine of Siena, Thomas Merton and Jessica Powers. This has provided an introductory experience of being on retreat, especially with the reflections questions that are offered each day.



On a parish survey, adults indicated that they were looking to deepen their faith but not necessarily through a lecture or novena type setting. They were looking more for the “whys,” the experiences and the benefits of prayer.

With this in mind, Donna Trudell from St. Mel Parish, Dearborn Heights, MI and Susan Campbell from St. Sebastian Parish, Dearborn Heights, MI prepared a **four-week presentation encompassing history, practicalities and experiences of prayer.** (The program was created and facilitated by Donna and Susan together; it was offered in both parishes.)

The foundation of the program was: “Prayer draws every human being toward himself, and every human being desires communion with God. Prayer is the basis and expression of the vital and personal relationship of a human person with the living and true God: ‘God tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer.’” (NDC 5.34)

The goal of the program was to meet people where they are at and help them to express their prayer from the person they are. The program introduced several ways of prayer over four weeks during Lent, encouraging the participants to engage and experience the many different approaches of communicating with God.

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The four sessions included:

- **Praying thru Color:** Talking to God through the visual arts of mandalas, water colors, and beads. The participants were encouraged to let the world of color express their inner thoughts and prayer. Some beautiful art work was created, displaying many inner thoughts that couldn't be expressed in words until the colors spoke the message. (The book *Praying in Color* by Sybil MacBeth {Paraclete Press} was used.)
- **Praying from the Heart:** Finding God's Holy Ground within Ourselves. The participants were introduced to different practices of prayer, some from our rich tradition. The simple prayer, the "Jesus Prayer," began the session. This helped the participants to focus on their breathing, finding God's holy ground within. The session also explored Centering Prayer, walking a labyrinth and one-minute meditations. Donna says, "It was a little slow helping them to quiet themselves but once they were able to relax and focus on their breathing and connect the breath of life to the experiences at hand they were able to take their prayer capability a little deeper." (One of the resources used was *The Lenten Labyrinth* by Edward Hays.)
- **Prayer through Scripture:** Basking in the Word and Letting it Transform Us. This week was the one that most amazed the parish leaders. Most participants were regular participants in liturgy but the idea of sharing through *Lectio Divina*, Liturgy of the Hours, Proverbs, Visual Scripture and Scripture through motion connected them in a new way to the Living Word. The practice of placing themselves in the story or taking on one of the characters helped them to see how the Word is forever rich and alive.
- **Wrapped in Prayer:** This week was designed to help participants feel the embrace of God, warming their spirits and those for whom they pray. The reflection centered on the many types of prayer which help people to feel the closeness of God and the call to pray and serve others. Prayer Blankets were created, recalling to mind and prayer someone who needed comfort and prayer.

One of the parishes then began a Quilters Prayer Group, distributing the blankets made to fellow parishioners in need. "This blanket was

made just for you to bring comfort. To know you are loved, to share in your joy. This blanket is to wrap you when you are cold, when you are hurting, when you need to snuggle. This blanket was made with blessings, with love and in prayer. God Bless You."

Those who participated in this four-week program continually commented on how much they enjoyed:

- the refreshing and deepening of their faith
- the friendship
- and the pure joy of just being in the presence of Christ in such a deep, personal and peaceful way



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Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at [www.janetschaeffler.com](http://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*
- <http://store.pastoralplanning.com/iboplbeprfor.html>  
for *Parish Leadership for Improved Adult Catechesis*