



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#223 – October 1, 2024

A Best Practice: Prayer throughout the Parish during an Election Time

This best practice was first published in February 2015 (**GEMS #50**). It triggered similar ideas for several parishes. One parish in Michigan utilized this process to invite their households to join in prayer together prior to the 2016 national election.

As we approach this year's election, parishes and (arch)dioceses might want to consider adopting this practice – inviting all parishioners (or members of a diocese) to spend time in prayer together from their own homes.

This updated issue describes the process and provides some resources. **(The original idea {published in 2015} is found here in purple; the suggestions for a prayer for this 2024 year are in black.)**

This practice is built on the reality that faith growth happens everywhere! We know that; it doesn't happen only during gatherings 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 always 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 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, computers, and iPads
- Arrange a comfortable place to sit. Weather permitting; outside might be an option.

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- 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.

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.

Some Suggestions for Scripture at the time of an election:

- Proverbs 29:2 - This verse speaks about righteous leadership bringing joy to people.
- Romans 13:1-7 - This passage discusses the relationship between citizens and governing authorities.
- Romans 12:18 - Unity and peace within communities
- 1 Timothy 2:1-4 - These verses encourage prayers for leaders and those in authority.
- Micah 6:8 - This verse speaks about doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly.
- Psalm 72 - This psalm is about praying for just and righteous leadership.
- Proverbs 31:8-9 - These verses encourage speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves.
- Proverbs 21:5 - Seeking wisdom in decision-making.
- Proverbs 11:14 - The value of wise counsel
- Mark 10:42-45 - Ethical leadership and service
- Matthew 22:15-22 - This passage includes Jesus' teaching on giving to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

Some Suggestions for Music at the time of an election:

- "We Are Called"
- "Let There Be Peace on Earth"
- "City of God"
- "Dona Nobis Pacem"
- "They'll Know We Are Christians"
- "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace"
- "Ubi Caritas" (Where Charity and Love Prevail)
- "Here I Am, Lord"
- "Sing a New Church"

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- "All Are Welcome"
- "Christ, Be Our Light"

- "For the Healing of the Nations"
- "God of Day and God of Darkness"

- "The Summons"
- "Gather Us In"
- "We Are Many Parts"

- "Heal Our Land"
- "O God, Our Help in Ages Past"

- "For the Healing of the Nations"
- "The Prayer"

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."

Some Suggestions for General Intercession during an election time:

- For wisdom and discernment among voters as they consider their choices.
- For integrity and honesty among all candidates and their campaign teams.

- For peaceful and fair election processes, free from corruption or intimidation.

- For unity and reconciliation in our community/nation after the election, regardless of the outcome.

- For the well-being and safety of election workers and volunteers.
- For clear and accurate reporting by the media throughout the election period.

- For elected officials, that they may serve with dedication and put the needs of the people first.
- For those who feel disenfranchised or unheard in the political process,

- For an increased spirit of civic engagement and participation among all citizens.

- For protection against foreign interference or manipulation in our electoral system.

How to pray?
This is a simple matter.

I would say:
Pray anyway you like, so long as you do pray.

~ St. John Paul II

Conclusion of the Prayer Hour

The prayer-aid from St. George Parish 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.

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Some Prayer Suggestion during an election time:

Divine Creator, as we approach this important election, we come before You with humble hearts and open minds. We seek your guidance and wisdom in this time of decision-making that will shape the future of our community and nation. We pray for:

Wisdom for Voters: Grant us discernment to look beyond rhetoric and partisan divisions. Help us to evaluate candidates and issues thoughtfully, considering the common good and the well-being of all people.

Integrity of the Process: We ask for Your protection over the electoral process. May it be fair, transparent, and accessible to all eligible voters. Shield us from corruption, manipulation, and deceit.

Candidates and Leaders: Bless those who have stepped forward to serve. Give them strength, courage, and integrity. May they be motivated by a genuine desire to serve rather than by personal gain or power.

Unity Amidst Diversity: In a time that often highlights our differences, remind us of our shared humanity and common aspirations. Help us to listen to one another with empathy and respect, even when we disagree.

Peace and Civility: As tensions may rise, grant us the patience and grace to engage in civil discourse. Protect us from violence and unrest and guide us toward peaceful resolutions of our differences.

The Marginalized and Vulnerable: We pray for those whose voices are often unheard. May this election process consider the needs of the poor, the sick, the elderly, and all who are vulnerable in our society.

Our Shared Future: Whatever the outcome, give us the strength to come together as a community and nation. Help us to work constructively with those elected, always striving for justice, compassion, and the common good.

Grant us, O Lord, the courage to be active participants in our democracy, the wisdom to choose wisely, and the faith to trust in your guiding hand through all of life's challenges. In your name, we pray. Amen.

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Give us, O God,
leaders whose hearts are large enough
to match the breadth of our own souls
and give us souls strong enough
to follow leaders of vision and wisdom.

In seeking a leader, let us seek
more than development for ourselves—
though development we hope for—
more than security for our own land—
though security we need—
more than satisfaction for our wants—
though many things we desire.

Give us the hearts to choose
the leader who will work with other leaders
to bring safety to the whole world.

Give us leaders
who lead this nation to virtue
without seeking to impose
our kind of virtue
on the virtue of others.

Give us a government
that provides for the advancement
of this country
without taking resources from others
to achieve it.

Give us insight enough ourselves
to choose as leaders those who can tell
strength from power,
growth from greed,
leadership from dominance,
and real greatness
from the trappings of grandiosity.

We trust you, Great God,
to open our hearts to learn
from those to whom you speak

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in different tongues
and to respect the life and words
of those to whom you entrusted
the good of other parts of this globe.

We beg you, Great God,
give us the vision as a people
to know where global leadership truly lies,
to pursue it diligently,
to require it to protect human rights
for everyone everywhere.

We ask these things, Great God,
with minds open to your word
and hearts that trust in your eternal care.
Amen.

(This prayer by Joan Chittister is available as a FREE download online
through the store at joanchittister.org.)

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We praise you, O God of all creation. Quicken in us a resolve to protect your
handiwork. You are the source of every blessing that graces our lives and our
nation.

We pray that you help us to truly understand and answer the sacred call of
citizenship. We are a nation composed of every people and culture, united not
by ties of blood, but by the profound aspirations of life, freedom, justice, and
unbound hope. These aspirations are why our forebears saw America as a
beacon of hope. And, with your steady guidance, Lord, may we remain so
today.

In every generation, we are called to renew these aspirations, to re-weave the
fabric of America. We do so when we live out the virtue that dwell in our
hearts, but also when we confront our failures to root out ongoing injustices in
our national life, especially those created by moral blindness and fear of the
other.

We pray for peace, especially for people suffering the senselessness of war. But
as we pray, we must also act, for building up the common good takes work. It
takes love.

And so we pray. May our nation become more fully a builder of peace in our
wounded world with the courage to imagine and pursue a loving future
together. And may we as individual Americans become more fully the
instruments of God's peace.

Guide us, Lord, in taking up our responsibility to forge this new chapter of our
nation's history. Let it be rooted in the recognition that for us, as for every
generation, unity triumphing over division is what advances human dignity and
liberty.

Let it be propelled by the women and men elected to serve in public life, who
know that service is the mark of true leadership.

And let this new chapter of our nation's history be filled with overwhelming
hope, a hope that refuses to narrow our national vision, but rather, as Pope
Francis has said, "to dream dreams and see visions" of what by your grace our
world can become.

We ask all of this, trusting in your ever provident care for us. Amen.

Cardinal Cupich
August 19, 2024

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Some other prayers can be found at:

[7 Unifying Prayers to Pray for Americans Right Now](#)

Another resource for this time: [Election season is the perfect time to pray
the Examen](#)

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

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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?”
- 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?
- 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.”

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.”

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- “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:

- *Deepening Faith: Adult Faith Formation in the Parish*
<https://www.litpress.org/Products/4652/Deepening-Faith>
- *Guided by the Directory for Catechesis: Transforming the Vision and Practice of Parish Catechesis*: <https://twentythirdpublications.com/products/guided-by-the-directory-for-catechesis>
- Lifelong Faith Training: <https://www.lifelongfaithtraining.com/>
- Lifelong Faith: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/>
- Lifelong Faith Studio: <https://www.lifelongfaithstudio.com/>
- Seasons of Adult Faith website: <http://adultfaith.weebly.com/>
- The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation:
 - <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/books.html>
 - https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_aff_-_journal_special_issue.pdf