



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#71 – November 2016

A Best Practice: Prayer Forms (Part III)

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; the May 2015 issue, [GEMS #53](#), continued that survey of these various methods and experiences. This issue is our third sharing of the effective ideas which were submitted – along with

- some prayer ideas and methods that might be shared with adults
- some resources that you – and your parishioners might find helpful

Our Rich Heritage of Prayer and Spiritual Practices

One of our goals, in teaching about and leading people to prayer, is to help them become more aware of the vast variety of prayer forms and methods within our tradition. For a sample listing of some possibilities for prayer and spiritual practices, see www.janetschaeffler.com. Go to “articles” and see “Forms and Methods of Prayer and Spiritual Practices” under “Prayer and Reflection” (taken from the book, *The Spirituality of the Catechist* (<http://store.pastoralplanning.com/spofcaiyosog.html>)).

Some Internet Sites

In today’s world where many people spend time on the internet, this tool can be one to connect people with various types and prayer and helps for prayer. You might want to highlight one website a week on your parish website and in your parish bulletin – or give each parishioner a laminated bookmark listing several sites.

- A Concord Pastor Comments: <http://concordpastor.blogspot.com/>
- Creighton University Online Ministries: www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/online.html

- God in All Things: <http://godinallthings.com/prayer>
- Pray as you go: www.pray-as-you-go.org
- Prayer Windows: www.prayerwindows.com
- Praying Each Day: www.prayingeachday.org
- Praying the News: <http://blog.spiritualityandpractice.com/blog/praying-the-news/all>
- Sacred Space: www.sacredspace.ie
- Three Minute Retreat: <http://www.loyolapress.com/3-minute-retreats-daily-online-prayer.htm>
- 100 Prayers: <http://www.prayingeachday.org/100Prayers.pdf>



Teri Burns, Pastoral Associate for Faith Formation, St. Robert of Newminster Parish, Ada, MI shares one of their many experiences: “For the past two years, our parish has offered a Summer Prayer Exploration. In 2013, we explored several different prayer styles, including *Lectio Divina*, Imaginative Prayer, Meditation, and the Rosary. In 2014, we had a five-week series on the Lord’s Prayer. Each week, we reflected on and explored the meaning of each phrase of the Lord’s Prayer:

1. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name.
2. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
3. Give us this day our daily bread.
4. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
5. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Each participant received a “journal” that included questions and excerpts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, and *Living the Lord’s Prayer: The Way of the Disciple* by Fr Albert Haase, OFM.

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It was a wonderful process. We had some very good – and sometimes challenging – discussions.”



Mary Morian, the former director of faith formation at St. Hugo Parish, Bloomfield Hills, MI, explained: “Our parish had a prayer workshop approach! We had different sessions running at the same time over and over. One of them centered on ways to pray to give ideas for different methods of prayer for families (but more came without families!). Another session was on *Lectio Divina*, others focused on journaling and drawing, and on the Eucharist.

Another time we expanded the workshop, offering a day prayer retreat ending with Evening Prayer together at 4:00 pm for everyone. Kindergarten through grade eight had prayerful activities, crafts and games; high school met with our Confirmation Team which helped them learn and understand the richness of different types of prayer, understanding how our prayers connect with the prayer of the Church.

The following workshops were each repeated three times:

- Centering Prayer
- *Lectio Divina*
- The Rosary
- Prayer and Art
- Music as Prayer
- Family Prayer
- About Prayer (various thoughts on prayer and questions and answers on prayer)”



Kathy Koepsell relates their parish experience: “At St. Joseph in Dexter, MI, we frequently incorporate individual petitions in our Scripture studies, Men's Groups, Book Study gatherings and other smaller types of gatherings. While the spontaneous prayer may start out slow with some, it gains traction over the course of the year and ends up being a very important part of these weekly gatherings.”



Lucy Sebastian, pastoral minister at Holy Trinity Parish, Port Huron, MI, recounts two staff experiences which then led to prayer with parishioners.

- “As a staff we journeyed to a retreat center in our area in and learned about contemplative prayer. We took the techniques back home and began implementing a few minutes of prayer before each meeting whether it was just a couple of us or a large group. We found that the meetings were less stressed and ran smoother. Also, when we come to a stalemate regarding an issue, we'd take a few minutes of silence and then returned to the issue usually in a new light and with answers.”
- The other experience was a day of prayer centering on the Nativity. Our spiritual director broke the Nativity story into four sections and guided us through a process that put us into the story. She would set the scene and then we would take time to pray and contemplate, putting ourselves in the story, either as one of the characters or fitting ourselves into the story. After some time alone, we would gather in small groups and talk about our experience followed by sharing within a large group. We had such good experiences that we decided to try the process with our RCIA Catechumens as we walked through the Scrutinies. It was very powerful!!!”



Linda Smith, Co-Director of RCIA and Co-Spiritual Director *Christ Renews His Parish* for Holy Cross Catholic Church, Atlanta, GA, shares two ideas: “My favorite prayers with groups are shared prayers where everyone contributes to the group prayer. We started this with one of our *Christ Renews His Parish* meetings. It's one thing to listen to someone else say the words and something quite different for each person to offer their own prayer.

- We stand in a circle holding hands. Someone is the leader and prays:
- the opening prayer praising God
 - the leader, then, is the first person to offer a prayer for themselves, someone else or some intention.

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We frame this in the form of our General Intercessions at liturgy, ending the prayer with “We pray to the Lord” and the group response “Lord, hear our prayer.”

As the person finishes their personal petition or thanksgiving, they squeeze the hand next to them so they know it’s their turn. Everyone in the circle participates (unless they don’t want to in which case they just squeeze the hand next to them to start the next prayer). After the last person, the leader prays closing prayer.

One of my favorite ways to do this is to set a theme for the prayers. Sometimes it will seem that there are many illnesses so we focus on illnesses. But my real favorite is thanksgiving. I think we forget to thank God for all our wonderful gifts so to listen to a group of twenty women all raise up thanks is beautiful.”

Linda’s second thought is about prayer with her granddaughters; it might give us reminders of prayer in any group: “I also just like to talk with God without any ‘standard’ language – just talk with God as I would to a friend. When I take care of my granddaughters at night we pray our evening prayers together and I follow the shared prayer format but in a little more relaxed manner. I just ask them

- What do we want to praise God for today?
- What do we want to ask God’s forgiveness about today?
- What do we thank God for today?
- What do we want to ask God’s help for today?

and I let them answer, all the while jumping around the room or walking around or lying down. Then I close with “Lord, hear our prayers.” The first time I did this, they (ages 7-10) asked when I was going to say the good night prayer; I told them we just did pray. We are talking to God when we praise God, etc. They expected me to say the standard evening prayers and when I didn’t they were surprised. But the next time we prayed like this, they became more intense in their prayers and every time we do it, they are more and more thoughtful. It has been a wonderful process to watch them grow.”



Sara T. Acevedo, co-director of adult faith formation at Most Holy Name of Jesus Parish, Perth Amboy, NJ, shares some of

the prayers used when parishioners gather for prayer: “I usually use the hymns of the Liturgy of the Hours. The Spanish translation contains beautiful poems filled with the presence of God among us and talking to us. I also use the collect of the Sunday liturgy so there is a connection between these two prayers of the church”



Peggy Casing, Director of Formation, St. Mary of the Hills Parish, Rochester Hills, MI, reiterates what many others have shared: “In our adult and intergenerational programs we often describe a specific type of prayer, and then use that prayer form for our group prayer. We, then, provide website information, handouts, etc., with resources for that type of prayer. That way, if they like it, they can try it again!”



Nancy Cunningham, Pastoral Associate for Catechesis at Simon and Jude Parish, Huntington Beach, CA, shares two endeavors at their parish:

- “Centering Prayer – We asked a person, trained by Fr. Thomas Keating to come to our parish to learn about Centering Prayer. We had about forty adults sign-up. The book *Open Mind Open Heart* by Keating was recommended reading. During the session we were able to practice Centering Prayer. Today in the parish there is a group that meets weekly (about 30 to 45 adults) and one that meets twice a month in the evening with about 12 to 18 participants.”
- “Several years ago, the parish offered a five-week workshop on different forms of prayer. About 25 people participated. We learned about and practiced: meditation, Lectio Divina, centering prayer, journaling, the rosary, novenas, Catholic prayers, and prayers from the heart. To this day I use what I learned during the workshop when teaching adults. In fact, through this hands-on approach, I came to appreciate the rosary differently. We were asked to dedicate a decade of the rosary to someone in need or some tragedy.”

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Terry Stevens, from St. Mary Parish, Pinconning, MI shared an idea of a resource she frequently uses. “One of my favorite ways to pray is with postings on YouTube. There are thousands of reflections on many scripture verses or themes. Google your scripture verse or subject and type ‘on Youtube.’ My meetings and programs usually begin and/or end with a YouTube reflection that relates to the topic we are covering that day.”



Sabina Fila, from St. Ignatius Loyola, in Manhattan, NY, explains *Meeting Christ in Prayer*, an eight-week retreat in daily life based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola, which has been offered twice a year since Lent 2011.

Participants have the opportunity to deepen their prayer using Scripture and Ignatian methods of meditation and contemplation. They are asked to make two commitments:

- Spend 20-30 minutes in daily personal prayer
- Participate in a weekly gathering with others

The weekly meeting includes faith sharing, the practice of various forms of prayer, and the presentation of the theme of the following week. Sessions are offered on Tuesday mornings and Wednesday evenings in order to accommodate a variety of schedules.

Participants report growing in their relationship with Christ and a deepened appreciation of the Scriptures. Some experience a stronger sense of being at home in the parish community; others are moved to join parish ministries or serve as facilitators.

Following the eight-week experience, several prayer groups have developed that meet regularly. Sabina initiated and guides one of the groups. She relates: “We follow a structure similar to *Meeting Christ in Prayer*: first about 20 minutes of guided meditation to review the week, then the reading of the scripture of the day. Faith-sharing follow (leaving a little bit of space between one sharing and the next), and then prayers of petition and of gratitude are expressed.”

Although Sabina often leads the initial meditation, the group is structured so that the gathering takes place no matter who is there or not there; as long as two people are in town, the group meets.

At times, especially during Advent and Lent, a booklet of daily reflections might be also used. Within the last two years, the group has also gone on a couple of week-end retreats.

A GEMS Reminder and A Help for Praying

Many of our adults are aware of the acronyms that help us remember the forms of prayer: ACTS (Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving, Supplication) or TAPS (Thanksgiving, Adoration, Petition, Sorrow).

(It’s also been said that all prayer is basically thanks, oops, gimme or wow.)

At times some people have a difficult time knowing where to start/what to say when praying in their own words. A “blueprint” which can be used is the formula used in our liturgical prayers: You – who – do – through. (This also helps adults become familiar with the format of the prayers we pray during liturgy and the sacraments.)

- You – Begin by naming God, e.g.:
 - Compassionate Father
 - God of Wonder
 - God of Mystery
- Who – Name something that God has done in the past (especially from Scripture), e.g.:
 - You give us countless gifts
 - You send your Holy Spirit as counselor and guide
 - You led your people through the desert
- Do – Pray for your current needs/request, e.g.:
 - Give us wisdom and strength
 - Empower us to be your hands in our world
 - Continue to shower your blessings upon each one of us

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- Through – We pray through Christ (using a Christological or Trinitarian formula, e.g.):
 - Through Christ our Lord. Amen.
 - We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Some Resources

- *Desires of the Heart: Prayers for Growing Faith* by Bill Huebsch, with Leisa Anslinger (Twenty-Third Publications)
- *Just One Year: A Global Treasury of Prayer and Worship* edited by Timothy Radcliffe (Orbis Books)
- *Out of the Ordinary: Prayers, Poems, and Reflections for Every Season* by Joyce Rupp (Ave Maria Press)
- *Prayer for Parish Groups: Preparing and Leading Prayer for Group Meetings* by Donal Harrington and Julie Kavanagh (St. Mary's Press)
- *Seven Sacred Pauses: Living Mindfully through the Hours of the Day* by Macrina Wiederkehr (Sorin Books)



Golden Nuggets from You

“In [GEMS #39](#) we looked at several parishes you offer a blessings of bikes. Sr. Diane Morgan, OP, shared with us that, since they are across the street from the ocean, they have, at times, celebrated blessings for surfboards.”

- Sr. Diane Morgan, OP; St. Ignatius Martyr Parish, Long Beach, NY

“Thank you. This ([GEMS #45](#)) is like a mini-Pentecost raining down rich forms of prayer.”

- Cris Villapando, Director of Faith Formation Programs,
Diocese of Charlotte, North Carolina

“Your newsletter (especially the issues on welcome and hospitality) reminds me of the 6 month customer service training experienced in one of my other lives for Corning Consumer Products Company. I am going to forward it to some friends for their use. Thank you so much!”

- Lucy Pardee, Facilitator of Centering Prayer Group,
St. John the Evangelist Parish, Waynesboro, VA

(We welcome your comments, thoughts, suggestions, ideas, etc. Your views and practices continually support and encourage others. Email them to jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org any time.)



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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:

- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*
http://www.lifelongfaith.com/store/p25/The_Seasons_of_Adult_Faith_Formation.html
- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation website*
<http://www.lifelongfaith.com/2015-adult-faith-formation-symposium.html>