



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#45 - September 2014

A Best Practice: Prayer Forms

We know that everything that we do teaches. In the words of *Our Hearts Were Burning within Us*: "The parish is the curriculum...the success of such efforts (intentional programs) rests very much on the quality of the liturgies, the extent of shared decision making, the priorities in the parish budget, the degree of commitment to social justice..." (#118).

How and when we pray is paramount in the list of all that forms us.

The title of this issue (*Prayer Forms*) could mean two things:

- A look at the many forms (methods, types, and approaches) to prayer
- The reality that prayer influences, shapes and forms us; we are formed, changed and deepened by the way we pray

We realize that the main "purpose" for prayer is certainly to praise God, to deepen our union with God. At the same time, how we pray, the environment, everything about prayer is formative.

- Who we are is how we pray
- How we pray is who we are

Some past issues of **GEMS** have explored experiences of prayer within the parish setting:

- [GEMS #20](#) (Retreat by parishioners)
- [GEMS #25](#) (A Lenten Evening of Prayer)
- [GEMS #36](#) (One Word)
- [GEMS #37](#) (Stations of the Cross)

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 do 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

This **GEMS** issue begins to share some of these ideas, methods and

experiences. They will be continued in future issues. If you have an experience, a program or process to share, email jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org.



Deb Richards, from St. Mary of Nazareth Parish, Des Moines, Iowa, shares that several groups at the parish have participated in a six-week program based on [Catching Fire, Becoming Flame](#) by Fr. Albert Haase, OFM (Paraclete Press).

The thirty-minute segments on the DVD (and discussion guide) include:

1. Spiritual Journey as a Process of Transformation
2. Your Image of God
3. The Examen of Consciousness
4. The 7 Principles of Prayer
5. The Challenge of Forgiveness
6. God's will

Deb supplemented each session with various experiences of prayer: *Lectio Divina*, Centering Prayer, Play (spirituality as play), etc.

After one session, about ten of the participants asked to continue. Thus, once a month Deb sends them readings on a topic. The group (calling themselves "Going Deeper") then meets to pray and discuss the readings.

The readings for a recent month were from [The Sacred Gaze: Contemplation and the Healing of the Self](#) by Susan Pitchford (Liturgical Press) concerning how we would pray differently if we were convinced of God's deep love for us. (E.g. petition, praise, thanksgiving, etc. would all look and sound different). After the prayer and discussion the group prayerfully walked through a nearby labyrinth, an experience none of them had previously had.



A Taste of Spirituality Day was held at St. Francis Xavier Parish, Wilmette, IL. Scheduled on a Saturday, it included hour blocks of time with breaks in between, enabling parishioners to

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come and experience various prayer and spirituality practices: *Lectio Divina*, Centering Prayer, a dream presentation, a wisdom circle, a men's spirituality ritual experience, and a labyrinth walk. Lunch was provided with mindful eating; the day concluded with an integration sessions that included an art expression.

Joyce Shanabarger, OSF explained that parishioners could come for an hour, the whole day or anything in between. In some of the hour blocks, multiple offerings were provided, giving the participants a choice.



Heather Kinney shared that in 2012 the theme of the annual Lenten Lecture Series at St. Matthew's Cathedral, Washington DC was "Pray *All-Ways*." The series consisted of five evenings:

- Prayer in the Christian Life (the place and value of prayer in our lives)
- Praying Together (communal and liturgical prayer)
- Praying Alone (contemplative prayer and teachings of the Christian mystics)
- Personality and Prayer (personality theory, primarily Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and its application to prayer practices)
- Praying Better (overcoming obstacles to prayer and trusting in God's presence and voice in our lives)

A written thank you note to Heather conveys the feelings of many of the participants: "This presentation on prayer was very dynamic and vibrant! Certainly recognizing who one is and accepting and being grateful for how God has created us will make our prayers more meaningful."



Another Lenten experience included various types of prayer experiences woven within a larger program. Mary Morian from Holy Name Parish in Birmingham, MI explained that parishioners were invited to gather each Lenten Sunday at 4:00 pm for an hour presentation on the Lenten Gospels, under the over-all theme of "The Divine Way of Being Human ... The Human Way of Being Divine."

A corresponding program for children occurred at the same time as the adult exploration. At 5:00 pm everyone gathered, engaging each week in a different type of prayer experience: Vespers, the Way of the Cross, etc. A simple dinner – provided by the parish – followed.

Mary and the parish staff found that that a time for adult learning, children's needs, prayer and food appealed to a wide variety of people.



Because of people's desire to deepen their prayer life and to grow in their journey of faith, Mary Robinson, OSU from St. Mary MacKillop Parish, Birkdale, in the diocese of Brisbane, Australia designed a seven week retreat process (offered several times) which included:

- Some input on the week's theme
- A contemplative type of meditation
- Some group work

The participants also committed themselves to ongoing meditations on Scripture (related to the week's theme) at home in between the sessions. Some of the various themes that were touched upon included:

- Sacraments
- Various prayer forms
- Spirituality, including a look at indigenous spirituality
- Ecology
- Fear and anxiety
- Suffering and death
- The dyings and risings in everyday life experience

Mary relates that "Afternoon tea followed the sessions, and the group joined with an activities group which was already having afternoon tea in the centre."



Sr. Joan Vlaun from St. John the Evangelist Parish, Schenectady, NY tells of an experience which prepared her to then lead parishioners in a prayer experience. Sr. Joan attended

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[Praying with Imagination: A Retreat with the St. John's Bible](#) at [Saint John's School of Theology-Seminary](#), Collegeville, MN.

This retreat engages church ministers, artists, and others seeking an intense experience integrating imagination and prayer through art. Through prayer and artistic expression, the retreat deepens a sense of creativity and wonder in the participants' work and ministries.

Much of the retreat was spent sharing Visio Divina ("divine seeing"), in this instance using the pictures which accompany texts from [The Saint John's Bible](#).

[Seeing The Word - Visio Divina with The Saint John's Bible](#) provides all the materials needed for individuals and/or groups to pray *Visio Divina* with St. John's Bible. During the Lenten season, Sr. Joan has used these materials with a small group.



Sr. Joan shared another opportunity for prayer, one which occurred within a book group. While using *The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind* by Cynthia Bourgeault, the participants encountered various forms of prayer:

- Centering Prayer (chapter 12)
- *Lectio Divina* (chapter 13)
- Chanting and Psalmody (chapter 14)

In addition to a discussion on the book, the participants of the book group took time to engage in each of these prayer practices.

Plans are underway for the group to read *Prayer: Our Deepest Longing* by Fr. Ron Rolheiser (Franciscan Media). Even though a short book, it is divided into five sections:

- Why pray?
- Why is it so hard?
- What is prayer?
- Sticking with it when it gets hard
- Mysticism

This [Study Guide](#) for *Prayer: Our Deepest Longing* is available online.



Susan Dazey from St. Patrick Parish in Dubuque, IA comments: "Prayer is something I try to include every once in a while with parents and other adults who attend weekly sessions during the time of faith formation sessions."

One semester various presenters helped the adults look at the various ways and methods of prayer. (These sessions were recorded so that others might view them later.) Some of the approaches and themes explored were:

- Prayers Rising Like Incense
- The Our Father
- How Mary's prayer is also a way for us to say yes to God
- How singing is prayer and its many benefits for us
- *Lectio Divina*
- Praying with our whole beings
- The connection of prayer and service: our words become actions; our actions become words.

During another semester the "history" or stories behind familiar prayers was explored; e.g. the Creeds, Marian prayers, the Liturgy of the Hours, etc.. This included a look at the Rosary; each week the participants prayed one or more decades of the Scriptural Rosary.

Some of the themes that have been helpful to people were:

- How prayer fits into our everyday life, 24/7/365
- Ways to incorporate prayer into all these everyday moments
- Prayer can be/is simple
- Our own (spontaneous) prayers are important. There also might be times when words fail us in overwhelming circumstances; then our voices add to many others with our learned prayers.



Barbara Haynes from St. Paul the Apostle Parish in Baton Rouge, LA shares that for the last three years their Bible Study has sponsored a five-six week study during Lent as well as an Adult Vacation Bible Study which included participants from their parish and the community, including people from other religious traditions.

These Scripture studies include a study of prayer in Scripture as well as

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various prayer experiences. Some of the prayer studies have been:

- He's Calling You: Stop and Listen; Can You Hear Him? (Genesis 16: 1-16)
- Constant Prayer (Ephesians 6:18-20)
- When God's People Pray: What a Time! What a Time! What a Time! (Matthew 6: 5-15)

Barbara has shared two resources with us:

- Prayer Ideas within Scripture Study
- The Power of Prayer in the New Testament

To access these resources, go to www.janetschaeffler.com. Click on AFF Helps.



Arlene Bowyer from St. Mary Parish in Frankfort, Indiana recounts that one of their most memorable adult programs was a Scriptural study of prayer in the life of key Biblical figures. Although it was a “Bible study,” the primary goal was to offer an introduction to and encourage an ongoing practice of *Lectio Divina*. The eight-week program offered an opportunity for participants to learn about Biblical figures as pray-ers with the goal of deepening their own prayer life and helping form community.

The program began with an introduction to the practice of *Lectio Divina*. Each week focused on one Biblical figure, with the last week focused on Christ. The participants came together to discuss what they learned about the person they studied and prayed with the previous week. Each session then closed with a group *Lectio Divina* prayer exercise, led by various members of the group, sing Scripture they found most meaningful the previous week with a focused closing prayer for the intentions of the person sitting directly to their right.

The process of *Lectio* was new to most participants; in the evaluations people mentioned that

- this new form was very useful for their prayer lives
- the opportunity for faith-sharing and prayer together and for one another in the group was a powerful community-forming process

Because the program was only linked to the previous meeting times by the process itself, not a knowledge-base, those who could not come every week or

had to miss a session or two could still participate and not feel they had “missed” anything.



Chari Rosales from St. Thomas the Apostle in Naperville, IL relates that one year the second Monday of each month featured a session on the *School of Prayer*. The parish staff and Adult Faith Formation Committee found many of the parishioners “hungry” for prayer, but experiencing little beyond reading prayers and perhaps the Rosary.

These 90-minute sessions were designed as “try-its” to open the rich treasury of prayer practices both ancient and modern, ranging from the Liturgy of the Hours and *Lectio Divina* to guided imagery and prayer thru art and in nature. Prayer “guides” would outline the practice and then lead participants through the practice for first-hand experiences. People were encouraged to sample all the sessions to find prayer style(s) that resonated with them.



Anne Comeaux, former director of the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis for the archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, share and process used within their archdiocese, which might spark ideas for others.

Their three semester theological component for ministry formation includes one day of reflection (9:00 – 4:00) per semester. One topic is *The Our Father*, the other two are based on pastoral letters written by the bishops of their archdiocese:

- One is on welcoming all people and is entitled, *Many Members, One Body*
- The other is based on the celebration of the Eucharist and is entitled, *Sunday, the Original Feast*

Anne recommends: “If other dioceses have letters written by their bishops (or perhaps they could use something from the USCCB) which would lend themselves to days of reflection it gives the people a day of reflecting on – and praying with - the local church.”

Each participant is given a copy of the document before the day of reflection so they can be familiar with the basis for the day.

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A powerful experience – for herself and other parishioners – is related by Anne Dunn from St. Aloysius, Baton Rouge, LA. The parish hosted the *Engaging Spirituality* program from [JustFaith Ministries](#). This process focuses on personal spirituality in a social justice context.

Anne says, “The experience of learning meditative prayer and the entire program was probably the most significant spiritual development experience of my life. I cannot recommend it enough.”

Three of the four in the group along with seven others from another group then participated in the JustFaith New Wineskins program.

Flowing from that experience, the participants have now formed an intentional community to support each other in spiritual growth and in social justice activities.

Anne recommends: “Whether or not someone goes on beyond *Engaging Spirituality*, the prayer experiences of that program are life changing.”



Kris Rooney, pastoral associate for adult faith formation at St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish, Schenectady, NY, shared that: “We try to offer various ways of praying at our parish, since everyone does it in their own way.”

- This year the parish sponsored an evening of reflection entitled *Fill My Cup, Lord*. Everyone was encouraged to bring a cup from home to use in their prayer. The evening had short reflections based on *The Cup of Our Life* by Joyce Rupp with scripture, song and time for journaling. During the fellowship that followed, everyone used their own cup.

- The parish also provides experience of Taize Prayer and Tenebrae.

- Frequently prayer cards are printed on card stock for people to take home. One was provided with one with Pope Francis' 5 Finger prayer; it went like hotcakes.

- The parish has created a prayer path in their backyard that the Boy Scouts maintain. It's a short path (and wide to make it handicap accessible)

with a bench at the end. When the prayer path first opened, the pastor blessed it. Pictures and an invitation to use the path were carried in the diocesan newspaper.

The path contains 7 posts along the way where prayers are posted. Often the prayers are divided into smaller sections which people can pray along the way.

Often the prayers are focused on creation, but not always. One prayer that has been used is by Fyodor Dostoevsky:



Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it.
Love every leaf, every ray of God's light.
Love the animals. love the plants, love everything.
If you love everything, you will receive the divine mystery in things.
When you are left alone, pray.
Love to throw yourself on the earth and kiss it.
Kiss the earth and love it with an unceasing, consuming love.

- Kris often posts prayers on the parish Facebook page, especially coinciding with various feasts and holidays, etc., which receive numerous “likes.” Kris has plans to begin a Pinterest page for the parish, a good place to pin prayers.

- In the fall, there are plans to begin a monthly theological reflection group. Folks will be asked to think of a situation they are in, see where God is in it and perhaps find a similar situation in scripture about it. During the gatherings, people will share and pray together about these experiences.

- Kris is available to parishioners for spiritual direction. Kris comments: “This is mainly what we talk about there: their relationship with God and experiences of/in prayer. I am always amazed. Meeting to discuss prayer one-on-one is such a profound experience.”

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St. Therese of Lisieux Parish, Sanford, Maine offered a three-part program in January 2014. Diana L'Herueux outlines the three sessions.

- The beginning was a generic introduction to personal prayer (i.e. what is prayer; prayer points and tips, e.g. finding time for prayer; different kinds of prayer: from the Our Father to Contemplative Prayer, etc).
- The second session featured the rosary and Marian prayers.
- The concluding week looked at charismatic prayer.

The two-hour sessions were held on Sunday afternoons, each with:

- a presentation from one of their adult faith formation hosts
- small group sharing
- prayer practice
- resources



Thank you once again to so many for sharing your experiences and programs.

And there's many more to come. Soon there will be a second and third issue, describing more approaches and programs.

There's always room for more. If you have examples of:

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

send them to jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org so that they might be shared and spark ideas for everyone.



Golden Nuggets from You

“WOW! This ([GEMS #33](#)) is outstanding! Thank you, SO much!

- Nancy Mason Bordley, Pastoral Associate,
St. John Fisher Chapel University Parish, Auburn Hills, MI

“Thank you, Sister Janet. I'll make copies ([GEMS #34](#)) for my regional meeting with DREs.”

- Cris Villapando, Director of Faith Formation,
Diocese of Charlotte, NC

“What an amazing concept ([GEMS #36](#)). Thanks for sharing it. I'm anxious to put it into practice for me...and share it with some of the groups I work with. As always, thanks.

- Nancy Clancy, (now retired) Director of Family Ministries,
Christ the Redeemer Parish, Lake Orion, MI



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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*.