

***24 Hours for the Lord***  
**An All Ages Experience - March 2016**  
Barbara Dane  
St. Elizabeth of Hungary & St. Isidore Parishes  
Apple Valley Catholic Community, Acton and Stow, MA

Our *24 Hours for the Lord Project* started well over a year ago. When Pope Francis announced that 2016 would be an Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, our intergenerational faith formation program, Growing in Faith Together (GIFT), decided to make this our faith focus for the year. We planned monthly formation and events around the Opening of the Holy Doors, the Acts of Mercy, Jesus as the Visible Face of the Father's Mercy, and the Prodigal Son.

The *24 Hours for the Lord Project* seemed to demand more than our usual planning. In September 2015 we invited the GIFT planning team, the liturgy teams, and the youth ministry teams from both parishes in our collaborative to come together to talk about what they thought this might look like. What started as an informal conversation became a yearlong planning process with the goal of no less than providing a variety of opportunities for everyone—people of all ages and with a variety of spiritual interests and needs—to have a deep personal encounter with the Lord. This was a daunting and ambitious goal.

At first, we struggled with what this was going to look like. We knew we wanted to offer Reconciliation and Adoration, but we kind of got stuck on what else to do. Then in November 2015, our staff participated in a Vibrant Faith Conference titled “Do What Matters.” There we learned to stretch our definition of church and were challenged to look at opportunities for faith experiences that extend beyond the boundaries of the church walls—actually and virtually. This helped us to broaden our thinking and to look at the possibilities for the 24 Hours in new and innovative ways. Pretty soon we had more ideas than we could handle and we had to work hard to select the experiences that we felt best offered the opportunity for a personal encounter with the Lord. With that as our guideline, decisions were made and we were able to put together a schedule that included the following elements over the 24 hours, beginning with supper and ending with Sunday Eucharist:

1. Simple Supper (Friday)
2. Liturgy of the Hours: Evening Prayer
3. Sacrament of Reconciliation
4. Taize Prayer
5. Adoration
6. Benediction
7. Liturgy of the Hours: Night Prayer
8. Overnight Vigils
9. Serving Breakfast at the Cor Unum Meal Center in Lawrence
10. “Emmaus Walk” through Nature
11. Breakfast
12. Liturgy of the Hours: Morning Prayer

13. Stations of the Cross (for Families, and for Teens and Adults)
14. Adult Faith Reflection and Sharing
15. Sorting and Delivering Personal Care Items to the Stow Food Pantry
16. Liturgy of the Hours: Midday Prayer
17. Lent Food Drive and Delivery for the Acton Food Pantry and St. Martha's Food Pantry
18. Sacrament of Reconciliation
19. Sunday Eucharist (Saturday and Sunday)

(Download the "Guide" on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Catholic Evangelization website for all of the details.)

In our February GIFT intergenerational sessions, we prepared for the event by breaking open the Gospel for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent—the Gospel reading for the weekend of the **24 Hours for the Lord Project**. The Prodigal Son/Merciful Father reading provided the invitation for everyone to experience God's mercy. We then reviewed and practiced the prayers and rituals of Reconciliation, Adoration, and Liturgy of the Hours, so that people would feel comfortable participating fully. We encouraged households to make a personal plan for the event, selecting at least one experience that they were familiar with and trying at least one thing that was new.

The Church offers many beautiful traditional prayers and sacraments which invite us into this kind of relationship with the Lord. So we started by honoring those traditions. The liturgy, music, and environment teams did an outstanding job putting together the Liturgy of the Hours, Taize Prayer, Reconciliation, Stations of the Cross, and Adoration.

We then offered all night vigils in both churches that allowed people to have less formal occasions to spend time with Jesus. Some of that time was spent in silence, but we also tailored the time to meet the needs of people who came. We offered music, rosary, and shared prayer.

On Saturday, we ventured into the community with an Emmaus walk through area conservation land, to experience God's presence in nature. We also did three service projects in three separate towns for those who most readily encounter Jesus through serving others. Hospitality was another gracious example of how Jesus' love and care came alive in the community. Staff and volunteers served Friday night dinner and Saturday morning breakfasts, as well as providing an all-night café for those who participated in the Vigils. And, finally, we offered an opportunity for parishioners who were unable to attend the event, but who wanted to be in prayerful solidarity with those who did.

At the end of the **24 Hours for the Lord Project** we were exhausted, but it was well worth the effort. It was intense and at times, a little crazy. But we are so grateful that Pope Francis invited us into this experience. As we gathered to debrief the **24 Hours for the Lord Project**, we began in prayer and reflected on what stood out for us in the experience. Answers varied along the lines of...

*I never realized how beautiful Taize prayer really was.*

*It was amazing to see so many people celebrate Reconciliation.*

*I didn't think anybody would come in the middle of the night, but they did.*

*I was stunned by how many people came to Stations of the Cross.*

*People really seemed to enjoy doing the Emmaus Walk—so many showed up even though it was only 18 degrees out that early in the morning!*

*Our pastor even said that in 50 years of being a priest, he had never seen anything like it!*

Our staff learned that there are many ways to encounter Christ's mercy. We learned that we are so much more than the sum of our various parts. When we truly work together, we are capable of great things! Our two parish communities learned that we have much to offer to each other as we work together in collaboration.

I shared that now I really know what it means when we tell people, "with God nothing is impossible."

**Barbara Dane** is Director of Faith Formation for St. Elizabeth of Hungary & St. Isidore Parishes (Apple Valley Catholic Community, Acton and Stow, MA) and coordinator of the GIFT intergenerational program.