

## THE FALL RIVER DIOCESE WRITES ABOUT THE 24 HOURS FOR THE LORD INITIATIVE

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In his message to us for Lent 2015, Pope Francis, in point number three of the document, states, "As individuals too, we are tempted by indifference. Flooded with news reports and troubling images of human suffering, we often feel our complete inability to help. What can we do to avoid being caught up in this spiral of distress and powerlessness? First, we can pray in communion with the Church on earth and in Heaven. Let us not underestimate the power of so many voices united in prayer! The 24 Hours for the Lord initiative, which I hope will be observed on 13-14 March throughout the Church, also at the diocesan level, is meant to be a sign of this need for prayer."

Since March 13-14 are less than a month away, now might be a good time to figure out how we can participate in this international initiative of prayer and promoting the availability of accessing the Sacrament of Reconciliation during a 24-hour period. The Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization started the "24 Hours for the Lord" initiative last year, during which Pope Francis presided at a Penance service and received the Sacrament himself in St. Peter's Basilica.

During that service, the Holy Father noted in his homily, "In the period of Lent, the Church, in the name of God, renews the call to conversion. It is the call to change one's life. Conversion is not a matter of a moment or a year, it is a commitment that lasts a lifetime. Who among us can be assumed not to be a sinner? No one."

Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller of San Antonio, Texas, wrote in *Today's Catholic* about his experience of the "24 Hours for the Lord" in 2014. "Catholics throughout the world experienced the joy of God's forgiveness as they encountered Christ in the Sacrament of Reconciliation during the '24 Hours for the Lord' proclaimed that weekend by Pope Francis. United with the Holy Father, our priests welcomed those who sought God's mercy, hearing Confessions for 24 consecutive hours at *San Francesco di Paola Church*."

So, in San Antonio the approach they took was to have priests from throughout the diocese take turns in one church offering the availability of receiving God's pardon non-stop during a 24-hour period. Other dioceses had sign-up lists for their parishes to let people know when the priests would be available to hear Confessions.

The archbishop spoke of his experience in ministering the Sacrament: "One Saturday afternoon during Lent I found myself, unplanned and unannounced, hearing Confessions at the cathedral. People were lined up throughout the courtyard and around the corner anticipating the moment when the burdens of sin in their lives would be lifted and forever forgiven by God. It was an unforgettable experience to see so many standing humbly before their Father, seeking His pardon for the smallest transgressions and the gravest sin; each walking away with the peace of Christ in his heart."

Over in Ireland, the bishops' conference of the country promoted the "24 Hours" on its website, with a listing of what the various dioceses had planned. It quoted Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare and Leighlin, who said, "I am delighted to respond to such a wonderful initiative called for by Pope Francis. Pope Francis has described the initiative as a 'celebration of forgiveness' which will happen in dioceses across the world. The Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin is offering this '24 Hours for the Lord' to the people of the diocese as a Lenten Diocesan Reach-Out gift. It is a gift which will make a profound difference in the lives of those who take up the invitation to be open to God's love and mercy. I am extending a personal invitation to parishioners across the diocese to join us and to be present for some of these 24 hours for Jesus Christ. All are welcome to this Festival of Forgiveness!"

Bishop Edward Burns of Juneau, Alaska invited the people of his diocese to participate in the "24 Hours" last year. "It is good for our cathedral, the smallest cathedral in the country, to participate in such a huge event — a universal celebration of God's mercy and forgiveness. The act of Reconciliation with our Lord through the Sacrament of Penance is the central meaning and message of Lent and it is a joy to celebrate this event at the request of our Holy Father Francis. The invitation is this — at some point within this 24-hour period we invite people to respond to the universal call by our shepherd, Pope Francis, to encounter God's healing forgiveness through the Sacrament of Confession. It is a personal invitation by Pope Francis for us to carve out a small period of time in order to embrace a monumental experience of God's compassion and love."

Last year in Colombia, Bishop Luis José Rueda Aparicio of Montelíbano promoted the "24 Hours" in every parish in his diocese. He noted how his diocese had been so affected by the violence of civil war and said that the day and night of prayer would be "for Reconciliation, life and peace, it is a call to all the violent, to all the community in general, to us the baptized, to feel the mercy of God, it is an opportunity for us to be truly reconciled, accompanying the renewal of the hearts of men and women, some of whom have been the victims and other who have been the victimizers" of the violence.

Let us take some time at the beginning of this Lent to see how we can participate in these "24 Hours for the Lord."

Courtesy of The Anchor - the official Catholic Weekly newspaper of the Fall River Diocese