

“Don’t be afraid. Don’t short-change your youth – they can do this. 30 Hour Famine is a convicting and moving experience.”

30 Hour Famine at St. John’s

At St. John’s Episcopal Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, [30 Hour Famine](#) is more than a youth program – it’s a parish institution. An annual event for 17 years, the 30 Hour Famine invites participants to experience hunger, and to raise money for hunger relief.

Building Faith recently interviewed Jillianne Booth, the youth minister at St. John’s. On February 26th, she will once again lead about 75 teenagers and 30 adults in the 30 Hour Famine.

How would you describe the 30 Hour Famine?

30 Hour Famine is an event to raise awareness for hunger and homelessness. It is actually a nation-wide (and world-wide) program, which you can learn more about at 30hourfamine.org.

The event allows youth (middle school and high school) to fast for 30 straight hours – starting on Friday and continuing until Saturday evening. During the fast, we are all together here at the church. We worship, play games, and do service projects off campus. For many students,

the most powerful part is building cardboard shelters to sleep in on Friday night. All the shelters on the front lawn of the church create a 'cardboard village.'





What is the primary goal?

There are several goals of the 30 Hour Famine. Certainly to raise awareness for hunger worldwide, and to help our youth experience a short period of hunger. Additionally, students raise money for hunger relief by obtaining sponsorships from family and friends. The opportunity to raise money is something our church takes seriously. In 16 years we have raised over 1 million dollars – this will be year 17, and so we’re starting on the next million!

Overall, an important aspect of 30 Hour Famine is encouraging our youth to reach out to the circles of people around them. The students write personal letters to request sponsorships, and this itself is a powerful experience. Students see that can make a positive difference. Another example is that because students begin their fast on Friday during school hours, they

often need to explain to their peers why they are not eating.

What ages does it work best for?

At our church, 30 Hour Famine is for grades 6-12. And I can tell you that the sixth graders handle it amazingly well. As the students get older, they can do the event every year. Some of the high school students even do a 40 Hour Famine, in which they start fasting at 2 a.m. Friday morning. In total, we have 75 to 100 students, along with 25-30 adults participating.

Around Saturday afternoon, the students do get really hungry. Of course, health and safety are priorities. We have many adult volunteers who provide support, as well as drinks, etc. We do provide some food, usually rice and beans, if students need it. But overall, they really begin to identify with those people who lack sufficient food. Throughout the event, we give our kids tools and statistics to understand hunger. We also have children's profiles from World Vision that we show on the screen in the hall.

How do you break the fast?

We break our fast with Eucharist on Saturday evening. St John's has a regular 5 p.m. Saturday service - so we all go to that service and the youth serve as readers, ushers, intercessors, and chalice bearers. The theme of our famine is worked into the service in various ways. After worship we have a big meal in the parish hall, with many volunteers from the church providing food and hospitality.



How do you involve the whole church community?

This is a signature event, and it has really become part of the DNA of the parish. Everyone knows about 30 Hour Famine, and we publicize it well in advance. For example, there is big sign on the church lawn with a countdown to the event. We have parish volunteers to set up, break down, cook food, and help lead service projects such as creating small bags to distribute to the homeless. We also have our night watch team that stays up on the front lawn on Friday.

Can you describe a student for whom it was a powerful experience?

We have a student who is in the 9th grade this year. He discovered that he could promote the 30 Hour Famine if he showed up at every church service and met people outside to talk about it. Even the early 7:30 a.m. service! He is there every Sunday, telling people about the Famine. To see his dedication, brought out by this event, is really moving.

Do you recommend the materials from 30hourfamine.org?

Yes, absolutely. We get the kit each year, which is free. When you sign up to do the famine, they send you materials which include lots of practical advice and planning tools. Because we have such a large event, however, we have many additional planning teams and committees (worship, food, etc). We make our own theme each year.



Any other tips and tricks?

- Get the support and buy-in from the leadership of your church.
- Then seek support and buy-in from the entire church community.
- Brainstorm with a planning team.
- Know that there are MANY little details. For example, where are we going to get the cardboard?!
- Consider a volunteer coordinator. This has been a life saver for me!

Do you have advice for someone thinking of running this program?

Just do it! Don't be afraid. Don't short-change your youth – they can do this. 30 Hour Famine is a convicting and moving experience; you will be glad you brought this powerful event to your church.

Jillianne Booth is the Youth Minister at St. John's Episcopal Church in Charlotte, NC. She has a Master's in Christian Education from Pfeiffer University. Jillianne's two beautiful children keep her busy and on her toes; she loves being a mom. In her spare time she tries to be like Rachael Ray and if she could have any other job in the world other than youth minister, it would be Rachael's! Her other loves are Mexican food and flip flops.

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