

THE POWER OF CHURCH INTERCESSION

Prayer Ministry in the Local Church

Introduction

Throughout the world, churches are discovering that they are only as strong as their prayers. This renewed emphasis on prayer has brought exciting things to the Christian community. Large and small, denominational and non-denominational, many congregations are moving into regular intercession and thereby discovering the joy of prayer.

In this turn toward intercession, churches are emulating first-century Christianity that centered on prayer. When the early church got together and lifted up its voice in agreement the power of God came. “And when they prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31, NKJV).

This booklet is intended to help your church establish and maintain a vibrant prayer life through intercessory prayer ministry.



Establish a Prayer Group

Each church congregation must determine, through prayer, what type of intercession program will work best for them. Some find individual, around-the-clock prayer is the way to go; others use corporate prayer. There are many ways to establish intercessory prayer within your church, and this booklet addresses some of them.

Persons interested in establishing intercessory prayer within their church should meet and pray about the need and determine how they might best implement a program.

The following people should be involved in establishment of an intercessory prayer ministry:

- The minister or pastor
- The board or governing bodies
- Individuals who will take on the initial responsibility.

Establishing the Focus

Once the need and desire have been established, those who will be active in the intercessory prayer group should make firm decisions as to the prayer focus. Questions to consider in helping to make these decisions are:

- Will the intercessory prayer group focus on only church needs, or will worldwide and national issues be included?
- Will individual church members be encouraged to submit prayer requests? If so, what can be done to insure confidentiality?
- Will the pastor/minister be involved in counseling should the need arise?
- How will emergency prayer needs be handled?
- Is a round-the-clock emergency prayer line feasible in your church? If so, who will handle emergencies?
- Will there be a prayer chain or a telephone at church manned to handle requests? Will requests be handled strictly in a prayer meeting?
 - How will the recording of requests and answered prayer be handled?



Establish a Plan of Operation

After the initial group called to intercession has prayed for guidance and direction from the Lord, it may be time to announce your plans. Whether interested in learning more about prayer, or veteran intercessors,

everyone should be invited to be involved. Here are some questions regarding operation that should be addressed before beginning:

- How will the intercessory prayer group receive the prayer requests? (Will they be placed in the offering basket, come in by phone, or will there be a prayer box in the church foyer? Is a fax line or e-mail available?)
- Will the work be anonymous? (In other words, will you use only first names, or no names, to protect the individual requesting prayer?)
- Who will keep records, coordinate the program, etc.?
- Will there be established time periods of prayer (Once a week? Around the clock? When needed? All day?)
- How often or for how many days will the request be prayed for? (In setting a time period, be sure the person requesting prayer knows that he or she can resubmit requests.)
- Will individual intercessors be addressing certain needs or will the entire group take on all the needs?
- How often will you get together? How long will each meeting be? Will a telephone chain do any of the work?

At this meeting the importance of confidentiality must be discussed. It is sad but true that sometimes needs come up within a church that soon becomes gossip and judgment, rather than simple prayer. Each person in the intercessory prayer group must agree that what is heard and discussed within the group is private and should go no further than the group itself and the Lord. Otherwise the group's purpose is defeated. Members of the church should be assured that they may approach a leader of the prayer team and request prayer that will not be shared with others in the group. Every prayer request should be addressed as a sacred trust to be brought before the Lord.

A simple pledge may be signed, such as the following, to give people the extra realization of the seriousness of the work they are about to begin.

Oath of Confidentiality

I, _____, agree and understand that what I hear and learn as part of my intercessory prayer ministry will go no further than myself and my God; that I will conduct myself in such a manner as to be honorable to God and that I will neither participate in nor perpetuate gossip of any kind.

Signed _____.

The Commitment to Pray

In Acts 1:14 we read that the early church "continually" devoted themselves to prayer. The enemy of Christ and His church seeks to have us lose interest in prayer. As a group, and individually ask God to increase your commitment and zeal for prayer, and to keep you faithful to this great calling.

Prayer Partners

Within your intercessory prayer group, there may be a need for prayer partners. Prayer partnerships can be as simple as two people coming together to agree in prayer on any one issue to a relationship that lasts through many years. Within a church, prayer partnerships can be especially valuable with a particular private or delicate matter that for some reason should not come up to the entire group. Prayer partners can also be an excellent source of mutual support.

It may well be that those in the intercessory prayer group will especially need prayer (see *Spiritual Warfare*). Prayer partners encourage each other in their times of need and sustain each other through prayer at all times. This special relationship should provide unconditional love, be non-judgemental, and is not a forum for giving advice.

Prayer partnerships require dedication, creativity, and discipline. Each partner must agree upon a prayer period and should pray for the other daily. Actual communication between partners need not be daily. A good supporting scripture for prayer partners is Galatians 6:2: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (NIV).

Confidentiality is, of course, crucial to the relationship of prayer partners. As with all other prayer needs and questions, the Bible must be the source of any answers or the leading of the Holy Spirit as confirmed in the Word of God.

There is not only an enormous under girding of strength in prayer partners, but also great power. We are promised that often in the Bible (Matthew 18:19). Prayer partnerships also serve as an excellent way to be restored spiritually before beginning to pray for others. "Confess to one another therefore your faults (your slips, your false steps, your offenses, your sins) and pray [also] for one another, that you may be healed and restored [to a spiritual tone of mind and heart]. The earnest [heartfelt, continued] prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available [dynamic in its working]" (James 5:16, Amplified Bible).

Scriptural guidelines for prayer partners and the intercessory prayer group as a whole can be found in 1 Thessalonians 5:11-24.

Intercession for Church Needs

Churches have special needs that can range from needing new pews to calling a new pastor. There should always be willingness to pray for troubled and hurting parishioners.

Whenever there is a serious issue at board or vestry meetings it should become an item for prayer by the intercessors of the church. And there should, of course, be agreement on the part of the intercessors regarding that issue, if the agreement is only to leave it in the hands of the Lord. Never consider it a "cop-out" to leave an issue in the hands of God, for when we are dogmatic

as to the answer to a situation, we can tie God's hands. Regarding all issues, the group should pray for agreement, for wisdom, for an obedient spirit, and for the Will of God to prevail.

Among those church matters that require prayer are:

- Visitation or other special assignments by the pastor
- Special meetings, projects or activities of the church
- For the presence of the Holy Spirit in all things the church undertakes



Individual Needs

Sometimes there may be reticence on the part of parishioners to reveal particular personal problems. No one should be badgered to reveal private aspects of their lives, but rather encouraged to leave the problem(s) at the feet of the Lord and allow the intercessory prayer group to pray in general.

Jesus prayed eloquently for all of us on the night before His execution (John 17: 20-26). He said nothing personal about our lives but everything necessary and important. Intercessors can turn this prayer into a great lesson on "How to."

Other scriptural "blessings" may be bestowed by praying the psalms and inserting the names of those in need. Example: Praying the Psalms for a prayer requester, using Psalm 23:

The Lord is _____'s Shepherd; he shall not want. He makes _____ lie down in green pastures; He leads _____ beside the still waters. He restores _____ soul. He leads _____ in the paths of righteousness, for His name's sake. Yea, though _____ walks through the valley of the shadow of death he will fear no evil; For You are with _____. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort _____. You prepare a table before _____ in the presence of his enemies. You anoint _____'s head with oil. _____'s cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow _____ all the days of his life; And _____ will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Spiritual Warfare

Like Daniel, intercessors soon learn about spiritual warfare. It is important to remember the words spoken to Daniel that helped him realize that the warfare is not against flesh and blood (see Daniel 10:2-13).

Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:10-13 (Amplified Bible):

“In conclusion, be strong in the Lord- be empowered through your union with Him; draw your strength from him- that strength which His [boundless] might provides. Put on God’s whole armor- the armor of a heavy-armed soldier, which God supplies- that you may be able successfully to stand up against all the strategies and the deceits of the devil.

For we are not wrestling with flesh and blood- contending only with physical opponents- but against [the master spirits who are] the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spirit forces of wickedness in the heavenly [supernatural] sphere.

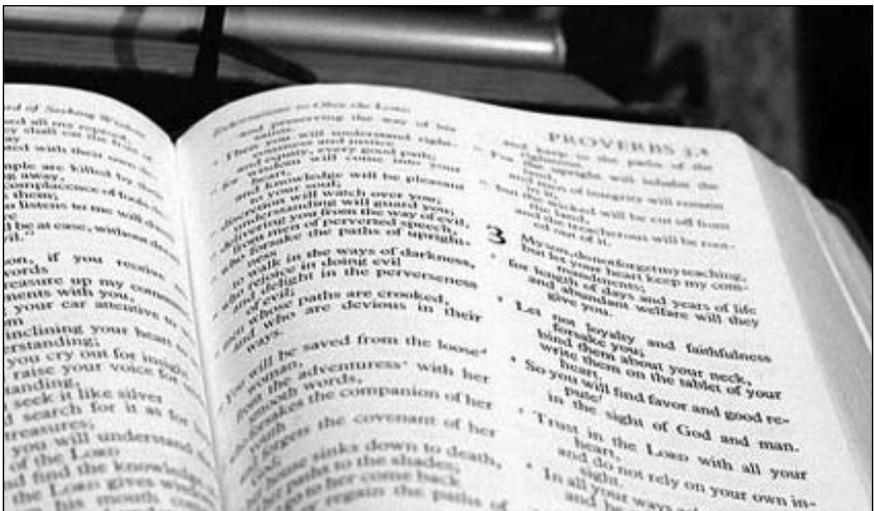
Therefore put on God’s complete armor, that you may be able to resist and stand your ground in the evil day [of danger] and having done all [the crisis demands], to stand [firmly in your place].”

When you feel yourself in spiritual warfare take the authority God has given us (Luke 10:19), grasp firmly the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17), and wield it against the particular stronghold. God has given His people the power and authority to battle dark forces. Prayer warriors should never hesitate to use this power.

When you take hold of the sword of the Spirit in this way, expect amazing things to happen. Your faith will be strengthened, Satan will flee, and there will be astonishing results in others’ lives and situations. (See also 2 Chronicles 20:6, James 4:7 and 2 Corinthians 1:20 and 10:4, 5.)

Problems

Whether your church is large or small (and your intercessory prayer group will probably correspond in size), there are likely to be problems that arise either through disagreements or through a member “falling from grace.” There



are scriptures to cover such problems, such as 1 Corinthians 8:2 and Matthew 18:17.

Where there is confusion or disagreement as to how to pray for any issue, prayer for harmony and God's will is in order. Adding scripture readings during the group prayer time can aid in bringing agreement. Also, praying the Lord's Prayer together brings solidarity many times.

Remember that God can and will bring order out of any chaos if we will only let Him.

Remember, too, that we are to love one another (Romans 13:8) and forgive one another always (Colossians 3:13). Be no less willing to forgive a truly repentant heart than God is.

Issue-Oriented Intercession

Any time your church takes a position on community, local, state, or national issues and the decision to do so should be preceded by prayer and even fasting by those who are led to do so. Remember how important it is that everyone be in agreement on the issue. (Matthew 18:19, Acts 1:14, 2:1, 46).

Should your church intercessors desire to pray for issues of national interest, a newsletter subscription from Intercessors for America (P. O. Box 915, Purcellville, Virginia 20134) would be a good way to keep current on what is happening in this country regarding national issues. IFA can also be reached at 1-800-USA-PRAY or www.ifapray.org.

Capitol Hill Prayer Partners (CHPP) focuses on our nation's Capitol and prayer for situations affecting our country from around the world. CHPP sends weekly updates on prayer needs. To learn more visit chpp@patriot.net.

Emergency Requests

It is not unusual for people these days to have so much pressure that they feel they cannot handle it. Unfortunately, we hear of this happening more and more. When a church intercession group receives word that a person is considering suicide or another extreme situation, there is often an additional responsibility to take action. Not everyone is equipped to do this. Many who are called to intercession are to do just that - pray. Others, however, may feel they must act.

The intercessory prayer group should have determined guidelines in advance so that in the chaos of a dire emergency there is some code to follow.

Your church, your community, your intercessory prayer group must make these crucial decisions. Never feel that prayer alone is not enough - but never feel that pray-ers should not also walk into a situation to intervene at times. Jesus did not pray the money-changers out of the Temple, though no doubt He could have.

An Attitude for Prayer

Praise and thanksgiving open our hearts to God and opens His heart towards us, and should be a key component to our prayer time. Colossians 4:2 encourages us to “continue in prayer” with an attitude of thanksgiving. Psalm 100:4 instructs us to enter His presence with thanksgiving and praise.

Another important part of prayer is found in Acts 1:14 which tells us to “continue, with one accord (unity) in prayer.” (KJV) Other scriptures confirming the necessity of unity include Acts 6:4, Ephesians 6:18, and Romans 12:12.)

How To's

- We speak the word, and then pray for the church services, any special events, and for the leadership of the church.
- We hold a weekly prayer meeting in the evening. It is open to all members of our church.
- We pray especially for church missionaries, individual church members, and any issues that are laid upon our hearts by the Holy Spirit. You may want to assign one team member to interact with the Missions Committee and bring specific needs to the meeting.
- We have designated “families of the week.” During the designated week, we focus prayer on that particular family. When a family is selected from a rotating list to be prayed for, it is amazing how often those prayers come at a time of particular need.
- We ask the person with a need, or someone who is willing to stand in for that person, to sit in the center of our prayer circle while we lay hands on him or her and pray.
- We have a telephone/e-mail coordinator who passes the requests on to the editor of the church newsletter. Both requests and answers are published.
- We regularly publish a short item in our church bulletin, which invites people to contact us if they face a personal crisis or a joyous milestone in their lives.
- Our church has a visiting ministry within the intercessory group. These are people who weekly visit hospitals and shut-ins to pray with them.
- We pray daily at our homes for our clergy and all the groups within our church family.
- Each week we have healing services for laying on of hands for special needs.
- We rotate team members to arrive 15 to 30 minutes before church services begin to pray in the sanctuary.
- We help organize with church leadership an annual church-wide prayer training, or prayer vigil for special needs like Pastor search, new music Director, or a family in crisis.



How Intercessors Ignite a Church

(Testimonies from church intercessory prayer groups)

“At first I thought a church prayer group would be just another thing to organize,” a pastor of a medium-sized church admitted candidly. “Now I would never assume a pastor position where there was not an active intercessory prayer group going on for the life of the church as well as the individual needs of our parishioners.”

This pastor noted that since the intercessory groups began, problems that plagued the church have broken up. “People come out of those prayer meetings with a real glow on their faces. It has made the difference between night and day in this church.”

Eight different intercessory groups operate in another church with daily early morning prayer being predominate. These times range from 5:00 a.m. to 8:00 in the evening.

“I realize that the only way I can operate as pastor to the church is to pray. It is where I get valid answers to my questions to the Lord,” the pastor of this church of 400 commented.

The results: “A constant flow of miracles and healings of body and soul; a constant flow of people being born again and brought into the church; obstacles being overcome in the church without damage to the foundational structures of the church; and a good spirit of unity among the leadership.”

“My greatest challenge,” continued the pastor, “is to delegate more of the duties that take me from the Word of God and prayer. I know that a pastor must be personally committed to prayer in order to lead his people. The rest of my life must be built on prayer.”

“Prayer is the foundation of all church life,” agreed a pastor of a non-denominational fellowship. “Apart from prayer we can’t see how God is moving in the church and we can’t hear from the Holy Spirit.”

This congregation encourages each member to set aside one day a week for personal prayer and fasting. Each is to seek the Lord for himself and his family.

Also, this fellowship joins the First Friday of each month as a day of fasting and prayer for our nation.

“We set aside two 40-day periods each year for corporate fasting and prayer, usually in February and March and again in September and October. Each person takes four or five days within the 40 days to focus on prayer concerns of the church so that a number of people are praying over the 40 day period in unity of purpose for the church. We pray for healing, for church goals, outreach and national concerns,” the pastor shared.

There are a number of prayer groups, which meet in homes and offices throughout the week in this congregation, and time is taken in each Sunday service for prayer.

“Prayer keeps us all humble,” added one of the church leaders. “In this world of self-sufficiency, through prayer we are saying, ‘God, we need help!’ Another result this church sees is Body unity because as church members pray together they come to understand the principle of praying in one accord.”

“We see come to pass many things we have prayed about together each year and we get excited and say, ‘This is what God has done.’ We have found that the rewards of prayer come to us as we seek God.”



“The Scriptures command us to pray, but more than that, we pray as a church body because we experience a heart-felt dependence on God in prayer,” contributed a pastor overseeing prayer and outreach in his congregation of almost 500. “Above all we emphasize to our people that in order to pray effectively as a church, each person must cultivate a discipline of personal devotion, a time of solitude and intimacy with the Lord.”

This church has weekly early morning Saturday intercession, monthly Friday night corporate prayer, and praise meetings and publishes a monthly prayer needs up-date which is included in the first Sunday of the month bulletin.

Small home groups are central to this church’s outreach program and much prayer for those in each group and prayers for families of group members are paramount in small group prayer time.

“For almost five years we prayed for the Gospel to be received by members of families in our small group,” the pastor said. “What rejoicing we had when a Moslem spouse of one in our group went forward to receive the Lord at a Sunday service. After that, brothers, in-laws, and a whole array of other family members became believers and many are still in our church today.”

About Breakthrough Intercessors

Breakthrough is an international, non-profit, non-denominational, evangelical intercessory prayer ministry born through a vision of Catherine Marshall to bring together (anonymously) those who need prayer with those willing to intercede. Every prayer request that arrives at Breakthrough is sent to six intercessors for three weeks of prayer. We do not pray over stacks of mail; our intercessors pray for individuals and their specific needs. This is what makes Breakthrough unique.

Breakthrough believes and teaches that, through Jesus Christ, God hears and answers prayers offered on behalf of others. Anyone may request prayer from Breakthrough intercessors. If your church would like to include Breakthrough prayer request forms as a part of your intercession ministry, we will be glad to supply them. The forms should be used for personal needs. The intercession group of your church should address corporate church needs.

Breakthrough publishes a quarterly magazine (*The Breakthrough Intercessor*) and leads prayer workshops geared toward specific church needs. Breakthrough also challenges, equips, and encourages believers to become intercessors. If there are those within your church who would like to join the nearly 4000 Breakthrough intercessors worldwide, they should contact this ministry through the information listed on the back of this booklet.