

Powerful Praying Churches—2

by *Ellen Livingood*

“How important is intercessory prayer in a local church’s engagement in global missions?”

Most of us identify intercession as **a** key, if not **the** key, contribution a church can make to the missions enterprise. Yet many seem hard-pressed to name 21st century congregations demonstrating high-impact, church-wide intercession.

[Last month’s Postings](#) presented two church models and some practical suggestions. This issue features two more models, an illustration of personal mentoring of global intercession, and a list of key resources.

We continue to welcome your input about praying churches.



Model #3 – Image Church Dumfries, Virginia



Image is a five-year-old congregation birthed out of the young-adult ministry of their mother church in nearby Alexandria, VA. The prayer ministry at Image has been spearheaded by Lake Smith, a young mom who has become passionate about missional prayer.

Lake grew up in a Christian home, but looking back, she realizes she developed unsatisfying habits of repetitive prayers as a young person. When a course on prayer and spiritual warfare was offered at her Bible college, she jumped at the opportunity, and it changed her life. Her first prayer effort at Image, then a brand-new church plant, was in fulfillment of a class assignment. For the congregation, it was their first foray into corporate, missional prayer, and they liked it.

“My goal for our church in regards to prayer,” Lake says, “is that we would be passionate about praying missionally, to be focused more on the gospel’s spread rather than our personal needs.” Since she collects the church’s prayer requests, she attempts to measure how they are moving toward a missional mindset. Progress is encouraging.

“As requests come in to me, I do my best to word them in a way that makes people think about praying missionally and for God’s glory, and not just asking for temporal answers or

for God to shape circumstances as we desire. I structure these according to the Lord’s prayer, so that those who use our prayer list pray according to the structure Christ presented His disciples: praising God, the advancement of His Kingdom, and then focusing on our needs in relation to God’s glory, repentance, guidance, and praise.”

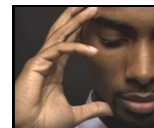
The prayer team meets for planning every few months during the time set aside for the church’s leadership meetings. The team incorporates people with different gifts and encourages creativity. In brainstorming sessions, members throw out ideas, and people follow up according to their gifting and passions. Two major components make up the core of the prayer ministry: Prayer Duty and Concerts of Prayer.

Prayer Duty is a small but steadily growing team of people who meet during each service to engage in spiritual warfare, pray for each class

that is meeting, for the worship being led, the person speaking, and the work of the Holy Spirit over believers and unbelievers in attendance. Prayer Duty embodies the responsibility of keeping watch over the church in prayer, constantly asking God to glorify Himself in the church.

Concerts of Prayer are held every two to three months, and families are encouraged to bring their children. Planning includes not only the prayer team but also the worship pas-

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tor and sometimes the elder overseeing missions. In an attempt to keep people focused and ready to learn prayer, the prayer team creates an environment that is always changing, inspiring, and intimate. Variety is the key ingredient.

“We try to make sure that it is never routine—so people can’t go on autopilot,” Lake explains. “Some Concerts of Prayer have a lot of visual elements going on, and some are very basic. At its core, the prayer times are thoughtfully planned out and governed by Scripture. Every detail and every visual is meant to enhance our time spent thoughtfully praying over certain topics. For example, a pitcher of water is used to wash one’s hands after a time of repentance, or a ring is worn as a visual of Christ’s bride being deposited with the Holy Spirit as she waits for her bridegroom to return.

“We remove all of the chairs because we feel chairs push people apart and make them feel like observers rather than participants,” Lake continues. “Our music is acoustical rather than our usual full band because we feel it creates a more intimate environment conducive to prayer. Each session begins with an explanation of the purpose of this time of intercession. The evening then consists of distinct prayer times enhanced by worship music specifically chosen to complement that time of prayer.”

One session focused on prayer for a country where public worship is forbidden and believers are persecuted. In order to create an environment to stimulate honest, heartfelt prayer, the session was held in an empty warehouse without heat. Lighting consisted of a solitary construction lamp in the center. Each person copied some Scripture from a poster on the wall to identify with those who have no Bibles. Because food there is scarce, they asked people to fast on the day of the Concert of Prayer and come hungry to share the physical feelings of those for whom they were interceding. Prayer was simple but focused. A small

booklet had been prepared that each person could take home to encourage them to continue to pray in a biblically guided manner for this country.

Image has seen powerful response to these Concerts of Prayer. Following an evening focused on a particular needy nation, giving for endeavors towards that mission has in-

creased, and people have expressed a desire to serve at least short term in this specific country. There are plans to send a team in the coming year.

“We have come a long way,” Lake reports with joy, “but we have a long way to go. Some things work better than others, so each Concert of Prayer is a learning experience. As we plan, we ask God to lay on our hearts what we should be praying for. We pray over everything from the space in which we will be

meeting to the people who will be coming and ask God to keep our prayer time honest and centered on His glory.

We find that people crave guided, intentional prayer, but they sometimes don’t know how to do that in their personal lives. So each session is an opportunity to stretch our church and teach them how to pray differently and to think about how they will go home and incorporate it into their own lives.

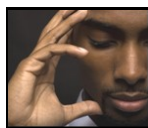
“I have a list of things I hope we will accomplish in our prayer ministry,” she adds. “But I’m glad that God started it small and is helping us learn as it grows. It’s encouraging to see people learning to pray missionally. Prayer changes the person who

is praying and it accomplishes His Kingdom work. I’m praying for a prayer movement, and for sending more missionaries from within our church. I know that as we are obedient, He will let us be a part of accomplishing great things for His glory.”



A warehouse setting lit only with one construction light set the tone for the session focused on a country where public worship is forbidden (above). Many Concerts of Prayer involve the arts or physical expression (left and upper left).

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Model #4 — Walnut Hill Community Church campuses in Bethel and Waterbury, Connecticut

Walnut Hill was founded 28 years ago with a global focus as part of its DNA, but its more recently developed prayer culture has powerfully leveraged that global passion. People have begun to learn how to pray as a body and learned what it means to intercede for one another—to stand in the gap for others locally and around the world.

Walnut Hill's prayer passion was ignited about half a dozen years ago with a challenge for leaders to become prayer servants. The new emphasis was underscored by the introduction of a prayer coordinator role on the board of elders—a position filled by AJ Picard, then just 30 and a relatively new elder.



"If you can get your elders involved in prayer, you can see a church move in prayer," AJ asserts. "I remember the day that we as an elder board committed to pray each Thursday morning from 6:00-7:00 a.m. Something changed forever in the life of the church when we did that. You don't have to attempt 24-7 prayer [recruiting people to pray for one-hour slots around the clock each week], but there is something about committing to prayer in regular rhythm." Approximately a year ago AJ became the pastor of prayer at Walnut Hill—a part-time position that emphasizes Walnut Hill's serious commitment to intercession and which AJ combines with his ongoing career as a fine artist.

A prayer leadership team works with AJ to provide direction, vision, support, and feedback. To connect the church's intercessory ministry to the world, AJ works very closely with the church's pastor of evangelism and outreach, Vicky Calver. "We are learning more



and more to collaborate to see this prayer movement take place," they emphasize.

A 24-7 prayer goal is one, still-in-process aspect of Walnut Hill's intercessory ministry. A Prayer Room has been set aside as a "sacred space" where people can learn and expand their vision of what prayer is, as well as enjoy a dedicated prayer ministry environment. There are two separate

strands of 24-7 prayer opportunities—people can commit to weekly hour-long prayer slots either "wherever you are" or in the church's Prayer Room. Some of the 24-7 participants on the "wherever you are" strand are Walnut Hill's missionaries—a great way for them to stay in contact with what God is doing at the church and contribute to its intercessory work.



A "prayer hut" is a fun, creative space in the Prayer Room dedicated to those whom Walnut Hill supports locally and globally. It creates a focus where, on a rotating basis, various partners are featured for prayer. Specific requests for that worker are posted, and there is opportunity to write a note of encouragement as well as

intercede for specific needs. The requests are circulated to all 24-7 prayer partners.

The church had been producing multiple prayer guides, but this year they published [one consolidated guide](#) with a focus on evangelism and a distinct flavor of worship, thanksgiving, and intercession for the nation and the world. The goal is to pool prayer resources to break

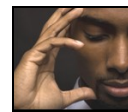
down barriers for what God wants to do locally and globally.

One emphasis is praying for local areas with much lower numbers of believers. As part of the "workbook" section of the guide, people were given the option to receive the name of a community leader in one of these areas, so that they could pray specifically for that leader. Updates are provided throughout the year.

And these updates intentionally "push" people back to use the prayer guide as an ongoing resource.

A "2:00 PM Pause for Prayer" email has been another effort. Here, the church's prayer warriors (and anyone in the congregation who requests it) are challenged to stop at 2:00 p.m. each day to pray. That email includes general requests

For the average American Christian, missions is impersonal, so passionate intercession is a non-issue. I want them to know that the entry-level commitment to missions is to pray for a missionary.



from members, but also relevant local and global prayer requests from church partners and missionaries.

Communicating requests in multiple ways is one of the church's key strategies. But the amount and quality of prayer depend on receiving timely, specific requests from the field. Walnut Hill tries to encourage those workers who seem to struggle with communicating regularly.

For the congregation, Prayer Servant Training is offered quarterly, and everyone at Walnut Hill is encouraged to take it, whether or not they join the prayer servant ministry. Each class produces a "fresh crop" of passionate intercessors.

All church groups—women's ministries, men's ministries, Sunday morning classes, discipleship ministries—are encouraged to incorporate various courses on prayer. A Monday morning intercession group meets in the Prayer Room and is open to all. The group is advertised as a place to flex

your prayer muscles and learn by doing. Another prayer opportunity occurs at a nearby outreach ministry, where a Walnut Hill church member regularly leads a two-hour intercessory time.

"Leverage your church's gifts," AJ recommends. "We have a lot of artists and musicians, so we can capture and cultivate prayer using the arts here. Engage creative means to leverage who you are. People think about prayer in old ruts, but God is still speaking today. Be adventurous! Share testimonies of how God is moving as you have prayed. That is huge!"

"We are a work in progress," Vicky adds. "One of the things we are trying to move forward on is bringing together mission, evangelism, and prayer. We know that action without prayer will never be effective. We must pave the way in prayer, and then step out in action."

Infectious Global Intercession

After I had been at SEPAL [the Latin American division of OC International] a few weeks, Keith [an American missionary there] asked me to stay at the office after closing time one Wednesday evening.... He simply wanted to pray with me.

That first Wednesday night he prayed for me and my family, then my church and all the elders by name. I was amazed at how informed he was, since he didn't attend our church. It was exciting to hear him pour out his heart, imploring, "Oh, God, bless these men for Your service and Your glory!" It made me want to pray, too, so I did.

The next week, Keith brought a map of the city and pin-pointed the 15 or 16 local churches of the Brethren movement. Then he prayed for each church, literally one by one, by name and address and for the key leaders if he knew them. It was as if we had taken a trip around the city on our knees.

He just prayed out his soul, teaching me what intercessory prayer was all about. It was thrilling. We got into the habit of

praying conversationally, back and forth, and often he paced the room as he talked to the Lord.

The next Wednesday his map of the city included churches of all denominations. He prayed for each one, incredibly knowing the pastor's name, in most cases. By doing that, he confirmed something I had felt for years. I had always wondered why, when we were taught about unity in Christ, that oneness shouldn't include devout Christians of other denominations. Now I was being taught the oneness of the Church....

As the weeks went by, Keith's map got bigger, first encompassing the province, the nation, then other nations, until finally we had prayed for the whole world.

Those prayer meetings in Keith's office revolutionized my life. My vision for those who needed Christ became international, geographical, global.



From Luis Palau in Calling America and the Nations to Christ, Thomas Nelson publishers. © 1994. Pages 53-54

Prayer Resources

Many organizations have prayer guides of various types, bookmarks, maps, etc., to encourage intercession for their ministry and missionaries. Below we have listed more generic resources and several sites focused on stimulating prayer for the world.

WEBSITES

❖ 24-7 Prayer

www.24-7prayer.com

A great introduction to the concept of 24-7 prayer with great

videos. For example, the "What is 24-7 prayer?" video is an attractive youth-oriented presentation. Also introduces the [boiler room communities](#) and how they function.

❖ Operation World

www.operationworld.org

With the October 2010 release of the updated book, *Operation World* is a source of an incredible amount of fresh prayer fuel. However, the book can be overwhelming, and most church attendees will need someone to dispense the content in small pieces. The *Operation World DVD* is a re-

source to help you do that. Note the prayercasts for many different nations offered on this site are available for download on www.prayercast.com (see below).

❖ WayMakers

www.waymakers.org

Here are practical resources for prayer walking and for 10 days of prayer leading up to the global day of prayer, and other general prayer resources. Their goal? A prayed-for planet!

❖ The 30-Days Prayer Network

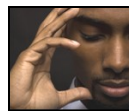
www.30-days.net/

Celebrating the 20th year of this annual prayer focus on the Muslim world during Ramadan, the 30-day prayer guide is available in English and many other languages, and a special edition is published for children. The prayer requests are available online at this site, and print copies can be ordered in bulk for your church. Ramadan begins this year on August 1.

❖ The Scripture Prayer Guide

www.byprayer.org

A wealth of downloadable sheets published by SIM which outline biblical prayer guidelines for various types of people and needs. Also available in [print](#).



“The man who mobilizes the Christian church to pray will make the greatest contribution to world evangelization in history.”

Andrew Murray

*missions leader at Queens (NY) Herald Church; Chris Ruge, director of prayercasts at **onewayministries**; and David Shive, mid-Atlantic co-director of ACMC.*

VIDEOS

❖ Prayercast/One Way Ministries

www.prayercast.com

Over 60 country videos are already available and more are on the way. Watch video footage of each nation while you join with a national believer as he/she beseeches God to work in their land. The prayercast videos can be downloaded here on low- and high-resolution. More video resources on prayer coming, so watch this site.

❖ 6 Ways to Reach God's World

www.6waystoreach.org

www.omf.org/omf/us/

[get involved 1/6 ways to reach god s world/pray video](#)

(note that the above link wraps)

This excellent new series by OMF International includes a short video on challenging people to pray.

Response ideas and resource suggestions came from the people already mentioned in the articles as well as Mark and Kim Beazley, PIONEERS missionaries and coordinator of intercessory prayer at Christ Community Church, West Chester, PA; Steve Hawthorne, general director of WayMakers; Alice Mok, a

BOOKS/DOWNLOADS

❖ Prayer Journeys: A Leader's How-To Manual

[Download](#) from PIONEERS / \$4.99

Focused on prayer walking in the 10/40 window among unreached peoples, this practical guide can help your church prepare a team for pioneering intercession.

❖ Red Moon Rising: How 24-7 Prayer is Awakening a Generation

Grieg and Roberts

The title is descriptive; the content ignites vision.

❖ Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire

Jim Cymbala

This story of the Brooklyn Tabernacle demonstrates the power of prayer in the life of a congregation.

❖ Unreached People Prayer Guides

The Long View www.justinlong.org/pray

A recently launched compilation of prayer guides targeting specific UPGs. Find resources for various peoples or add a prayer guide not yet listed here.

Interchange Postings

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