



## **Prayer and Evangelism**

An Important Partnership  
*A Travel Free Learning Article*

By

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A young church planter was visiting a newly married couple and discussing the possibility of them connecting with his fledgling congregation. He knew this couple as spiritual searchers. They were looking for a church and had been visiting many houses of worship in their quest. He knew his church did not have the buildings, programs, and staff some places they were considering could offer. Yet he genuinely believed they needed to find the right place.

As he was getting ready to leave he said, "I want you to find the church that will feed you spiritually. I want you to be in a church that will bring you closer to Christ. Please know that I will be praying for your search. In the meantime, if you need a pastor, don't hesitate to call me."

Fast forward a couple of decades. The church planter is now the established founding pastor of a thriving community of faith. And that attitude of prayer to support people in their search for faith is one of the hallmarks of the congregation's life. It is manifested in myriad ways. The congregation has been through periods of rapid growth and periods of stability. It has had good times financially and it has struggled. It has had many different staff people and tried out many different programs. It has gone from one worship service to multiple services with different styles of worship. But it is the network of prayer that provides the spiritual stability for a place that is always changing.

### **Prayer for Searching**

Those on the calling team offer to support people in their spiritual search. Visitors/guests receive a letter from the Senior Minister with language almost identical to the comment first used so many years before. "I'll be praying for you. If you need a pastor while you are searching for a church, don't hesitate to call." When people return for a second visit, they receive another letter welcoming them back and reinforcing the message.

### **Prayer for Petitions**

The congregation has multiple prayer groups that meet throughout the week. In worship, people are encouraged to write prayer requests on the back of an attendance card found in the pews (traditional worship) or chairs (casual worship). Groups receive these requests and, in their prayer time, respond to them. A typical format is the weekly men's prayer breakfast. After a simple breakfast, during which a Bible study is shared, the participants receive prayer requests that have been submitted through the worship pew cards or online. By tables, they pray for their stack of petitions. Then they write letters to those for whom they have prayed.

Everyone attending signs the letters and they are mailed that day by the church office. A few days later, the women's prayer breakfast follows a similar model, as do the elders and the pastoral staff. Someone is

in prayer for those petitions every day of the week. Prayers are lifted up for church members, for friends and family of members, for visitors, and for anyone who happens onto the website to leave a prayer request.

The impact of all this prayer is overwhelming. First, it is transformative for the congregation. Members of these groups assume a spiritual responsibility and create a lasting connection with those for whom they pray. Second, visitors and strangers alike are gathered into the congregation's heart immediately. They become a part of the spiritual fabric of the place.

## **Prayer for Seasons**

Sentence prayers are sent by e-mail daily during Advent and Lent. They are also posted on Facebook and Twitter. Members forward, repost, and retweet the daily prayers and encourage those in their social networks to do the same. One member attending a business meeting saw that day's sentence prayer scrolling across someone's laptop. The owner of the laptop, not a church member, said "My buddy sends me these. I like to keep them handy. I guess I should visit that church some day."

## **Special Lenten Pastoral Prayers**

During Lent, the Senior Pastor, as part of his own Lenten discipline, prays for every family in the church, including participants and visitors. A few weeks before Lent, people receive a letter from the pastor saying "On (date), I will be praying for you and your family. Please complete the enclosed questionnaire about what is going on in your life, so that I can lift up those issues specifically." This is communicated by hard copy or via email, based on the person's preferred form of communication. On the appointed day, the pastor prays for the family and writes a personal note describing the prayer. Due to the growth of the congregation, this now means 50 prayer letters a day, every day, for the whole Lenten season.

The impact cannot be underestimated. A family who had been visiting for a few weeks told the pastor "We were looking for a sign that this was the right place for us. Then we got your letter that you were setting aside a special time to pray for us! If that's not a sign, we don't know what is." A side benefit to this practice, of course, is the invaluable pastoral information that is provided by those who complete the letters.

## **Youth Prayer Wall**

One wall in the youth wing of the church is dedicated for the youth's prayer petitions. Written prayers and requests for prayer are posted regularly. Youth scan the board every week, praying for their friends and posting new thoughts and prayers. It is a constantly moving, changing, evolving petition of care.

## **The Evangelism Connection**

So why is this article about a congregation's prayer life also an article about evangelism? Here are a few reasons.

1. The congregation and the pastoral staff are dedicated to giving spiritual seekers permission to find the right place for them. This provides an atmosphere of freedom that is refreshing to people who have been pressured by other groups or felt like someone was trying to hurry them into a Christ-centered faith decision. Instead, people feel a sense of authentic care and support for their spiritual quest. This makes them more likely to stick around to be embraced by the love of Christ by the people of Christ.

2. The continual emphasis on prayer petitions for anyone helps the congregational leaders keep a sense of openness to the Christ-centered faith journey of new people. The leaders are fully engaged in wrapping members, visitors and strangers in the caring arms of Christ via prayer. This helps guard against an ingrown or provincial attitude towards the stranger.

3. Every visitor who comes through the door learns immediately that this is a community that cares for one another, and that they can immediately receive that care. There is no waiting period for prayer. Their spiritual journey is of immediate concern and that is communicated clearly in worship as people are invited to submit prayer requests.

Of course, very few of these practices are unique. Taken together, however, they offer a strength that has leant itself to steady, continual membership growth. Prayer and evangelism go hand-in-hand. How does your congregation support its evangelism efforts with a consistent prayer ministry?

And that young couple described at the beginning of the article? They joined the following Sunday.

### **Important Things to Know**



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