

# Culture – Function – Structure: What does that have to do with being a House of Prayer?

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*God's purpose was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to the eternal purpose that He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. Ephesians 3:10-11.*

What is God's purpose for the Church?

Many, perhaps most, have not even considered the question. As Christians, we simply go to church from Sunday-to-Sunday, not considering the church's purpose or mission or our role in it. Nevertheless, God has an eternal purpose for each of us as well as the church. That purpose is manifest in history, out of and around the work and ministry of Jesus, the Christ. This passage, written by Paul, the apostle, reveals a cosmic purpose for the church that we have most certainly not seen in its fullness. The rulers and authorities that are destined to see God's manifold wisdom are "... *in the heavenly realms.*" This reference most likely applies to the dark Lord Lucifer and his band of rebel angels. We remember Peter's strange note, "*Even angels long to look into these things*" (1 Peter 1:12), that is, into "the gospel," resulting in the eternal salvation of sinful humans. Imagine this – the earthly church is to have such an impact that she stands down the darkness and dazzles angels. Does that sound like the church you attended last week?

We have developed an over-familiarity, a casual attitude about the church and its mission, "O yes, 'The gospel, the church' I get it," we say without passion or conviction. Such an attitude is deadly to mission.

The New Living Translation says, quite to the contrary, "*It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen.*" And the Christian Standard Bible, "*angels long to catch a glimpse of these things.*" They "*would like to know more about it*" (Contemporary English Version). The Good News

Translation says, “*These are things which even the angels would like to understand.*” The NET Bible says that they “*long to catch a glimpse of...*” God’s salvation work in the earth with and through humans.

These angels “*gaze*” in amazement at what is happening among men because of the work of the Holy Spirit out of the cross. What we cannot see; what is not evident to us, both the demonic hosts and heaven’s loyal angels watch in amazement. The Weymouth New Testament, a more literal translation, says, “*Angels long to stoop and look into these things,*” and Young’s Literal Translation pictures angelic messengers to the earth with such a desire to understand, that they “*bend [down] looking*” at what is happening in human history. The redemptive enterprise of God is not only operative in our hearts and souls, but in the earth itself. It is cosmic in nature – something narrow soul-salvation evangelicalism sometimes fails to see. Creation itself is groaning for this redemption, and the Holy Spirit has joined nature’s lament. We, too, Paul suggests, should be in travail, but sadly, we lack such passion in prayer (Romans 8:22).

We are destined to be more than friendly people who meet weekly to sing choruses and hear a soothing homily. The dark powers of the globe that drive evil on the face of the earth (Eph. 2:2) have not yet seen the glorious church. May that church be revealed in power, for redemptive purposes, and complete its missional destiny.

The Church (*ecclesia*) does not seem to know who or what she is. Precisely, it seems clueless in its prayer role. Jesus desired it to be a people of prayer forged by the Holy Spirit into a “house of prayer for the nations!” Against that measurement, the church has lost its way. It lacks prayerful dependence on God tied to an intentional missional purpose. Its current prayer effort is too often superficial, characterized by self-interested prayer, without either a transformational or missional theology. Its prayer structure is far too casual; most often, it is non-existent. As a ministry, prayer is woefully undeveloped in the typical church.

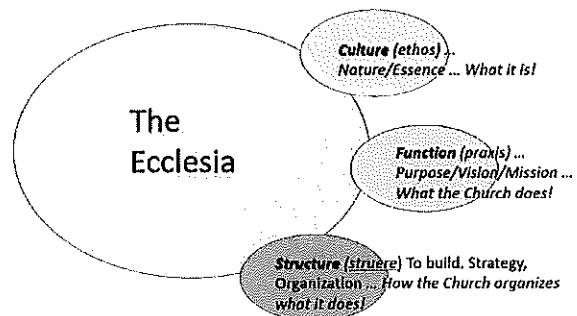
## The Church – Its Culture, Function, and Structure

These terms – culture, function, structure – seem to be secular. They cause people of prayer to disconnect, intercessors to detach, and church leaders to disengage. We’re not used to such terms. We can’t readily see how they relate to prayer and mission. Pentecostals, and some evangelicals, demand ‘free’ and unstructured prayer – and by extension, see the organization of the prayer effort as unspiritual. But these terms do relate to prayer. Our shortsighted, “Let’s just pray – and trust God to work out all the complications,” is not only unthinking but lazy! It fails to grapple with the underpinnings that sustain change and transformation.

Let’s review the ideas.

- *Culture* is what the church is.
- *Function* is what the church does.
- *Structure* is how the church organizes what it does.

Further, values dance around these ideas. We *organize* and protect, by creating structures,



whatever we value. What we do, function is done because we perceive its importance. Those functions define our culture, revealing who we are and what we are about. Generally, we measure (count) what we value. We keep a running inventory. What activities and results are you measuring? These activities and efforts, the church's schedule and people movements, affirm its cultural identity – so what are its most important events and initiatives? Measurement is an important consideration, since, function (the investment of resources in activities) is determined by form (structure).

Specifically, does the church measure prayer? In what way? By the number engaged? By the attendance at a prayer meeting? By the number of prayer groups? By the prayer depth of the congregation – and if so, how is that done? By the number of identified intercessors? By the departmental integration of prayer? So, what structures move the prayer mission forward? A prayer leader? An intercessor – or an intercessory prayer group? The staff? The elders? A prayer leadership team?

The enthroned measure of all success in the last century has been numerical – attendance, offering, baptisms, members, missionaries, etc. We count the 'services' offered by the church and the number of people who participate in those services, 'nickels and noses.' In short, we measure attendance at the church or primary and secondary events, along with commitments (salvations, baptisms, membership, income). What should we measure?

If the church is to be a house of prayer for the nations, then there are new measures we must consider. To what degree is the church engaged in prayer? How many people of different nationalities live around the church's location? And how many are on the church's prayer list? To what extent, for example, is the church praying for its nearest 100 neighbors? How many are they acquainted with and engaged? Is there a plan to meet them, to share with them, to help the first of their converts start an ethnic-linguistic church for their people group?

Is it an ambassador to neighborhood businesses or other public establishments? Are its doors open for community meetings? Has it adopted the nearest school as a good neighbor? Does it sponsor a "Good News" club in the nearby elementary school? Are its teens involved in prayer or at-school Bible study clubs? Is it aware of the demographic profile of its neighbors – levels of affluence or poverty, levels of lostness, crime, and instability?

The same questions should be put forth for the members. Are they praying for their unchurched neighbors? If there is no plan to do this (form), even if the desire is present, it will fail due to the lack of structural support. You cannot practice, not in an enduring manner, what you do not support (form/structure), and that requires staff – a prayer staff. And that brings us back to the question of what you do (function) and who you are (essence, being, *ethos*).

If the church is indeed a house of prayer for the nations (and that is its culture), then it should be praying, and doing so in missional ways (function), with a focus on the harvest, not merely itself. Prayer,

*proseuché*,<sup>1</sup> implies worshipful communion, and yet, in Matthew 2:13, it is placed in the context of mission. Mission demands that it not neglect the need for transformation and for the integrity of the lives of those who pray. Worship, *worth-ship*, places God at the center of our lives, exalting Him, and that radically alters our values. That shift is the foundation of the personal transformation that is necessary to be an effective witness in the harvest field.

Healthy prayer is at its heart *worship* and its edge *mission*, and in between, God meets our needs.

- All this demands new organization, first in our lives, and then for the church (*structure*).
- All resources and engagement plans are to be aligned with this prayerful and missional *function*,
- And they are done in a manner that achieves and sustains the *culture* of prayerful dependence and partnership with the God of mission.

More questions: Around what *function* is your organization *structured*? To what end do you and your staff devote most of their energy? What *culture* have you created, and what are you attempting to sustain? What is the nature of your congregation? Passive or active; spectator or participant; gathered or sent? What does it regard as its most important function? The production of a weekly worship event, or the formation of worshipful-missional lives? Upon what aspect of its work does it invest its energies, its staff, its money? Most probably, it is on the Sunday Morning celebration event – a praise and preaching event, with a modicum of fellowship, and perhaps, discipleship and education efforts coordinated with the gathering.

## Straight Talk – With No Desire to Offend

The majority of the congregations in the United States, and often, due to our missionary influence, around the world, are organized around a Sunday morning praise and preaching event. The *purpose*, in most cases, is to grow that event. Their focus is on more massive crowds – this is what we measure - more often than on deeper people – this is what we don't measure. Attendance, not discipleship, has become our threshold. Such a low bar of expectation signifies polluted values, and it is endangering the mission.

- The *culture* around our 'come to' events is attractational, rather than being 'go ye' and missional.
- The *function* is designed to attract and hold people, not to disciple and then release people into ministry and mission.
- Again, the form (structure) determines the function.

The central gathering currently is formed around praise and worship, with the sermon following. That form provides for little or no missional praying. The church is a house of praise – and better music draws worshippers, supposedly. It is a house of preaching – and better preaching draws crowds. That is, culturally relevant preaching, practical life-related, utilitarian preaching<sup>2</sup> draws crowds. Worship has been narrowed

<sup>1</sup> Mt. 21:13. Prayer, See Strong's: 4335. The term is used of approaching God in prayer. It is generally seen as a term of reverence, worship. Thus, worship prayer or communion with God.

<sup>2</sup> Preaching is the heralding of the gospel, without apology, without varnish – the straight prophetic truth. It is often laced with a call to repent. It is often prophetic, though, not without priestly and ameliorating grace. Teaching, in contrast, is preaching's explanation, its clarification, enlightenment – both are Biblical and are necessary to the church. However, preaching and teaching seem to have morphed in the modern church into speaking – using Biblical

to 30-minute, high-energy music sets. There is little scripture engagement, virtually no serious and solemn prayer. There is no consistent call to repentance. The love of God is set forth so preeminently that it eclipses the holiness of God. Acceptance represses conviction. Largeness is so highly prized that it skews the whole outlook. Largeness, not missional effectiveness, not the transformation of people, is then valued and measured – and sometimes these are assumed to be the same.

The success of the Sunday experience needs support programs – for youth, children, singles, men and women, families, seniors. And particular programs for Millennials, Generation Z, special needs and populations, addiction programs – and more, all of which are good. To these ends, everything is *structured*. Resources are aligned. The programs that the church creates are often perceived not as outreaches of the church into the community but as side doors into the church. Even with the outreach programs, the focus remains internal. Such programs are evaluated on whether they contribute to the numerical growth of the church, not on whether they contribute to the cause of mission by growing people in Christ and moving them toward their life purpose. People, individuals, are often lost in the ever-increasing crowd and cogs of the institution.

The *culture* of most churches is not that of a praying, missional church. Because, in the *function* of that church, prayer is subordinated to these more primary and allegedly more critical purposes – and that is a *value* issue. Prayer is not valued, not dominantly, not principally, not first. Instead, it is seen as a support for those principal *functions* of praise and preaching, and therefore, as utilitarian – and when we make prayer utilitarian, then a significant and deadly shift occurs. Defective and ill-centered values then emerge.

The *culture* in most of our churches is defined by a collage of these religious activities, though, in dying and declining churches, these activities are dwindling, and the Sunday crowds are shrinking. The activities of these thriving churches are noble. They tend to be about human talent and abilities, for example, singing and speaking, group engagement, and teaching. Such abilities, talents, and learned skills are then sprinkled with prayer. Prayer is not the spring around which all are gathered. Prayer is the water that is piped in to make the worship better and more appealing. We seem to want a wee bit of God, but not too much; a shower, but not a flood. When people have been changed and are demonstrating deep dependence on Him, their lives offer the promise of change to everyone else. Such people realize that “without Him... they can do nothing,” but with Him, “all things are possible... to anyone who believes.” They know that only with God’s help by prayer, deep reliance on God, can they, by the Spirit, discern His activity and as individuals and churches, join Him on mission. Sadly, that is not what is communicated in the typical Sunday Celebration event.

The typical church *culture* is one in which we have reduced God to the role of helper, even in the execution of our activities on His behalf. A reversal of roles is needed, one in which we take the role of helper. Having discerned God’s role, His movements, His activity in mission, we pursue Him. The typical church *culture* now resembles a show – a religious show, a wonderful and inspiring show, without room for silence, without the opportunity for earnest prayer for repentance, brokenness, and reflection. People who live at a

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ideas, imagery, examples, text, and the like. All designed to attract larger crowds and to not offend. The nation and its churches are in desperate need of ‘preaching!’

break-neck speed, with lives too busy for daily and family quiet time, will rarely engage or be engaged by God in prayer.

Rather than being counter-cultural, we have joined the culture – squeezing out prayer, reflective prayer, transformational prayer, convicting prayer, centering prayer. And we have opted for an ‘everyone-on-your-feet-and-put-your-hands-together-for-Jesus pep rally.’ It works – at least, for a few decades, it seemed to work. But now – God is calling us, seriously calling us, to reevaluate *ecclesia*. Angels are watching. Heaven is tracking the development of such an emerging church.

## What is it? The church? – *Culture*

Is the *culture* one that encourages the people of the *ecclesia* to be prayerful and missional?

Culture is created from what the people in that culture *value*. And values are what drive our lives – they are the things we do, because to us, they are important, either as essentials or as pleasures. They determine our priorities. We may say that we value prayer and that we value the command of Christ to make disciples, but that is not true if we do not pray or if we do not share our faith; and it is not a valid assertion if there is no room for either transformational or missional prayer when we, the *ecclesia*, gather. Making room for the *function* of prayer demands that we alter the *form* of our gatherings. Making disciples as a result of faith sharing also requires a supporting structure – otherwise, we may say that we value evangelism, but the evidence, the investment, the empowerment of a leadership team, deny our claim. Structures (form) are required to sustain what we say we value – worshipful transformational prayer and evangelism (function). Such structures should envision, recruit, train, and deploy.

Worship is not merely praising and preaching – you would think so in many Evangelical-Pentecostal congregations. It is seen as a weekly activity; as something we attend and check off our list. It takes place at a sacred place – the sanctuary. Worship does have a functional dimension – but the deeper concern is not, do we go to a worship event, but, are we worshippers? That is more than individual practices in worship – a bowed head, lifted hands, full-throated singing, etc. Worship, from its Anglo-Saxon roots, is a term referencing values – *worth-ship*. That’s a cultural issue. That’s who we are.

Around what does your life revolve? What is so important to you, that it drives you and ends up consistently on your calendar? You make time for it. You invest in it. Is it sports? Leisure? Some hobby? Some person? Some group or cause? Your work or career? Whatever that is, that’s what or who you *value*. The value creates, it defines and drives a *culture* of both being and doing, one you value – those people, that atmosphere, that activity, that outcome. That value then determines the *function* of our life. You desire to organize or *structure* your life around that activity, that practice, that place, that outcome.

Notice – *values* drive the *culture*, and the culture shapes the *function*, and the *organization* (structure) of one’s life is reshaped to enable and intensify the effectiveness of the function and to sustain what we value (culture). Values, again, reference worship. But in our case, in the Evangelical-Pentecostal church, worship has become prayerless. And when we do pray, it is too often self-interested prayer that fails to move us to mission, joining God in the adventure of our lives.

## Reordering the Church

How do we change our churches and our lives? How do we become praying people bound together for mission with God?

In a previous White Paper, “Back to the Future – A Call for Pentecostal Prayer,” I noted that mission is subordinated to one thing – prayer. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jesus, the anointing for mission, but he was first driven into the wilderness for forty days of *prayer*. Coming out of that time of prayer, he began his ministry, his *mission*, and gathered around him, as a Rabbi, his missional synagogue (*ecclesia*) composed of 12 disciples. (Ten men were required as quorum, a *minyan*, for a synagogue.) Watch the order – the sense of God’s call (*mission*), subordinated to *prayer* (serious prayer, fasting, and prayer, secluded prayer), followed by mission, and then by the gathering of men to join the mission of the *ecclesia*. *Prayer – Mission – Church*.

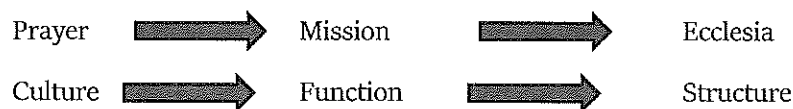
Our order is the reverse. We start a *church*, adopt various *missions*, and then realize, both the church and the mission need *prayer*. Such prayer is an afterthought. It again is utilitarian. It is not first, primal, the fountain, the spring from which everything else flows. As someone has said, “The Church does not have a mission; Mission has a church – a praying church.”

Notice the end of the life of Jesus. He gives his disciples the Great Commission (Mission) but subordinates it to prayer. First, they were to tarry in Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit. Into the prayer meeting in the Upper Room came the wind and fire, and they were thrust out into the streets speaking by the enabling of the Spirit, preaching, telling the story of Jesus, in languages they had never learned – and that day, 3000 new believers needed a church. Mission, subordinated to prayer, births the church.

Consider Acts 13. The scene is Antioch. The *ecclesia* of Antioch, planted by the apostolic ministry of Barnabas, who had been sent from Jerusalem, was led by a team of prophet-teachers. They were worshipping, praying, and unexpectedly, the Holy Spirit ordered the consecration of Barnabas and Saul for apostolic ministry beyond Antioch. Here, the cycle is being repeated. Notice, the proposed mission of these two leaders is subordinated to more prayer, and only then are they sent forth. Out of their mission comes a church planting movement. Each church plant, an *ecclesia*, is a community of prayer, designed for worship and mission.

Mission needs a church, a praying church, and a church gathered in prayer, not merely in celebration, will end up in mission. It is a culture of prayer that we must cultivate, one that gives birth to mission, and mission needs a church, one that is structured as a “house of prayer for the nations.”

Notice the two sets of triplet ideas. They are parallels to one another.



Pause for a moment and consider this pair of triplet ideas. Think about your home. The structure of the living room, where the front door is usually placed, determines its function, and the function dictates the culture of that room. Every room in your house has a different, distinct structure – the dining room, the kitchen, the hall, the bathroom, the front porch. Each is structured for a different function, and each predicts a culture – of conversation, of family time, of television viewing and entertainment, of sleeping and resting, etc. The church facility is structured, with different areas designed for a different function, and the feel of each area is somewhat different – the sanctuary and the nursery, the children’s department, and the fellowship hall. Structure predicts function. In fact, it is designed with function in mind. And function frames the culture as a listening and learning culture, a decision and discussion culture (boardroom), a work culture (office), etc. What is true, materially, is also true for intangibles. Meetings are structured as well, with an agenda, with rules, with a planned list of topics to explore, and often, with a predetermined list of decisions that must be made. The structure, the agenda, set the content of the meeting and frames its function. Depending on the relationships of those present and the content, the culture of the meeting may be cordial or tense, confrontational or cooperative, argumentative, or peaceful.

Prayer is a culture changer. Humble prayer, before the Sovereign God of Scripture, before His Holiness – that changes everything. Pride divides; humility gives birth to unity; and unity to a healthy community. Now, there is a relational construct, to sustain the function of mission, with prayerful dependence on God.

Culture/Values/Prayer > Function/Purpose/Vision-Mission > Structure/Organization/Ecclesia

We must reassess our *values* – what we say is important, and therefore who we are, who we are to be, according to scripture, “a house of prayer for the nations,” and nurture a praying-missional *culture*.

That demands a change in *function*, in activities, in giving priority to prayer, to missional prayer, to transformational prayer, to discerning prayer – to prayer that is bigger and deeper, broader than self-interested ‘prayer requests.’ What we are currently doing does not reflect our stated value, “the church as a house of prayer for the nations,” nor is it moving us to fulfill that missional purpose.

This demands that we *restructure* our organization to support the purpose of being such a “house of prayer for the nations” and creating a prayerful, missional culture.

And, in the opposite direction:

Culture ← Function ← Structure



We must evaluate, **STRUCTURE**, and at times, restructure...

To support the function of healthy prayer/mission; And increase prayer/mission activities (**FUNCTION**) ...

To create and sustain a deeper **CULTURE** of prayer in the church and its people!

Here is the thesis:

A prayerful-missional people ... (*Who* we are...)

Will naturally worship (pray) and share their faith ... (*What* we do - Function)

And organize their life around that value! (Structure/Form – *How* we organize our lives)

The goal of the *ecclesia* is the creation of a *culture* of deep, prayerful dependence on God for worship and mission.

## Function and Structure

Through prayer, in terms of *praxis*, the *function* of the church is to be a house of prayer for the nations, but that demands a praying people who live both out of gatherings for prayer (*ecclesia*) and personal-family daily times with God. The church is an *ecclesia* that gathers to hear from God and receive their marching orders from the Holy Spirit (Mission).

These worshipping (values) redeemed people have been called to mission. That mission cannot be completed by human effort and wisdom. It requires divine energy. Moreover, with the incarnation, God, in Christ, has owned the role of leading this mission, and though he is in heaven, he is still leading the mission through the ministry of the Holy Spirit who was sent to empower and lead the church in the name of and for the sake of Jesus. The church, as a partner in mission, must first pray. Mission is not only in their doing and speaking; it rises out of their being (transformation). Infused with God's Presence and endued with power, the mission moves forward. This church gathers to wait on God, to worshipfully pray, and it goes forth bearing God's glory and precious life-yielding seed. Prayer and mission need a church, and God's true Church is a praying, missional church, empowered and led by the Spirit.

All *structure* is built to drive this process. The building materials with which this church is constructed are redeemed people, lively stones fitted together as a habitation for God's presence (1 Peter 2:5). Their consecrated gifts (Romans 12:3-8) are dedicated to the church's mission. In fact, they define the church's mission. Each *ecclesia* is the unique collection of the callings and talents of its members for common

mission and purpose.<sup>3</sup> It is the amalgam of the gifts and missional anointing of its constituents, and yet, it is more than their sum. Collective mission emerges on top of personal anointing and call.

This is a very different idea of church. Our typical view is that church is a building, a place, an event, to which we gather people. Sadly, neither the members or church leaders know their spiritual gifts. That often means that we fail to develop a sense of God's mission for our life. Coming to a church service and being good is the zenith of spiritual development. The church, as an organization, as an institution, finds roles and functions for members, fitting them into its machinery needs.

If people, out of prayer, had a sense of personal mission, of God's destiny for them, and the church became the place that affirmed that mission, laying hands on them, consecrating them for that spiritual assignment and supporting them in that effort – it would be more than an institution, more than an organization. It would be the fusion of the gifts and callings of its constituents, bound together in worship and prayer, for mission. *Prayer-Mission-Church*.

Concerning prayer, there are ten values that should be embraced and used to guide the effort in building a church that is structured on the '7 Markers' of a Praying Church (See, *Transforming Your Church into a House of Prayer*). The *structure*, however, is subordinate to the *culture* issue – it must be predominate. And, the *structure* must serve the purpose and *function*.

- VALUES inform and infect the CULTURE – the *being*.
- VISION and MISSION drive the FUNCTION – the *doing*.
- STRATEGIC PROCESS/PROJECTIONS inform the STRUCTURE – the *relationships*.

Even the strategic, must be relational, deeply dependent on God, through prayer. That ensures the death of pride, and that serves to minimize the problem of fragmentation and disunity.

## THE CHURCH IS A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR THE NATIONS IF:

### CONSIDERING THE PASTOR [Marker #1]<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Diagram adapted from Koster and Wagenfeld, *Take Your Church's Pulse*; Original source, Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> The overriding philosophy of structure and vision for the transformation of the church into a house of prayer are the '7 Markers of the Praying Church.' These are the cornerstone values and priorities for the construction and reformation of the church. They are: 1. A praying pastor and trained and empowered prayer leaders; 2. Praying homes with family altars; 3. Congregational prayer – the church gathered to pray, and a proliferation of prayer groups; 4. Identified, teamed and trained, directed and debriefed intercessors, the core of the church as an intercessory community; 5. Prayer evangelism-mission; 6. Ongoing teaching and training; 7. A prayer room or center. Four of these, in pairs, are the heart of the effort: the church at prayer and the homes in prayer; and intercession partnered with prayer evangelism. Training and teaching support the effort, and a praying pastor with a prayer leadership team leads the effort around a prayer room or office or center – some place where people of prayer can connect for materials and be mobilized. The first three simple steps in this process are – start a congregational prayer meeting; look for teachable, potential leaders; and, encourage daily, personal prayer. Do these three things for a year. Lay a solid foundation.

1. **It prays** – it gathers to pray, and when it gathers, it prays. This must be intentionally structured. It must be the purpose of some gatherings – to pray, as a stand-alone value. ***Such gatherings themselves, to function effectively, must be structured with the desired culture in mind.***

THUS – IT HAS AN EVIDENT CULTURE OF PRAYER. MANIFEST BY THE FUNCTION OF PRAYER AS A PRIORITY. That demands that the church organize and *structure* its activities (*function*) to support a *culture* of prayer. It demands a prayer meeting at which the church is explicitly convened to pray – not for preaching, but prayer. This is not intercessory prayer alone, though intercession is critical, but a subordinate component. It is not a prayer-requests driven meeting, though needs should be considered. This is first, a gathering of the church over open Bibles to hear from God, to pray as individuals and as a congregation, into conformity with God's Word. It should typically follow the prayer theology of Paul in his counsel to Timothy (I Tim. 2:1). Four broad categories are noted: thanksgiving, worshipful communion (prayers), intercession (missional prayer), and petition (personal needs). This is an excellent outline that we can adapt for the corporate prayer gathering and balance in personal prayer:

1. A disposition and attitude of praise, worship, and thanks;
  2. Followed by Bible-based, worshipful, transformational prayer. This is the “It's me O Lord, needing prayer,” – yet it is not focused on the hand of God but the face of God. It is relational and transformational, occurring over open Bibles, around some Biblical promise or principle.
  3. Then, intercession, prayer for “kings and those in authority,” for nations and Unreached Peoples – faithful intercession for the lost, passionate missional praying;
  4. Without forgetting the personal needs of hurting people who have gathered to pray. For this, you may utilize prayer groups, a prayer line, elder prayer, or some *other means, but needs should not be left unaddressed.*
  5. *And finally, as it began, good prayer meetings send people out with praise on their lips.*
2. **It has a praying pastor** and staff – not merely a preaching pastor; but a pastor who is deeply dependent on God through prayer, missional in his thinking and acting, concerned for the lost sons and daughters of the flock, the neighborhood, the city, and the world. ***This means that the pastor must structure his time to give priority to prayer. He must function as the lead intercessory and worshipper. His life should exude the evidence (culture/ethos) of time with God.***

CHECKPOINT: THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IS MORE CAUGHT THAN TAUGHT. PEOPLE CATCH PRAYER FROM THE PASTOR. THE PASTOR MUST FOSTER A SPIRIT OF PRAYER AND A HUNGER FOR GOD, not merely for something from Him or about Him. The pastor infects the flock with his spirit. If he is a man of prayer or prayerless, the church will follow his life pattern. He cannot delegate the relationship with and dependence on God to a group of intercessors. There

must be a spirit of prayerful pastoral dependence on God, a disposition of quickly discerning and yielding to the Holy Spirit. You can't fake God's Presence or Christlikeness, not for long, not with effective results, except with a lukewarm congregation. Only a praying pastor can lead a church to prayer and facilitate, by God's grace, the development of a praying church. This is essence. A pastor is needed who is prayerful, and who promotes a praying culture.

## THE CHURCH IS A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR THE NATIONS IF:

### *CONSIDERING PRAYER LEADERSHIP*

3. **It has an empowered congregational prayer leadership team** – not merely a prayer team. A congregation needs more than a prayer meeting and a prayer team, especially more than an intercessory prayer team – it requires an *empowered* prayer leadership team, not merely a leader, but a team.

*INSIGHT – YOU MUST HAVE PRAYER TEAM (FUNCTION). THAT IS, THE PRAYER EFFORT MUST BE LED. IT MUST BE STEWARDED.* You need not only a prayer leader but a leadership team. The effort is too big for one person. We are after the transformation of the church into a house of prayer, not someone to lead a prayer band or even a prayer department – this is a revolution, not merely the addition of prayer to what we are already doing. ***That team must be structured into a learning team, which will engender a culture of openness and development, of humility, then into a leadership team with specific roles for the participants.***

*MINDSHIFT: UNTIL YOU EMBRACE THE IDEA OF THE CHURCH ITSELF, THE ENTIRE ENTERPRISE, AS A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR THE NATIONS, YOU WILL NOT EMPOWER A TRANSFORMATIONAL PRAYER LEADERSHIP TEAM.* Prayer will always be an addictive, the adjunct, the “O yes, and we should pray!” Or, “Isn't the prayer team taking care of that?” A prayer leader can perhaps manage prayer as a narrow segment of your effort, but not if you are calling for a reformation of the congregation into a house of prayer – and that is the admirable, Biblical goal. The culture of the church itself must change, and therefore the priority of its activities and functions, and therefore, its form and structure. New practices not currently in place are necessary. ***New structures to encourage the function of prayer and sustain a spirit of prayer (culture/ethos) are mandated.*** This involves more than identifying a group of hardy and passionate intercessors.

## THE CHURCH IS A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR THE NATIONS IF:

### *CONSIDERING HOMEBOUND ROOTS [Mark #3] <sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> This is marker #3 in the 7 Markers of a Praying Church.

*NOTE: This is the most neglected in the arena of making the church a house of prayer. However, the first blessing was on the home, and the very word, bless, in Hebrew, barak, means knee, inferring prayer. There is no blessing apart from prayer, for a promise is not a blessing. A blessing must be pronounced – and in prayer, God pronounces blessings. The root of congregational success in prayer rises out of personal, at-home, couple, and family prayer. This will be the most difficult area to recover, and simultaneously, the most fruitful. There is no praying church without praying homes.*

4. **It prays at home – personally, daily, sincerely, over an open Bible**, inviting God into one's day, consecrating oneself to God for the day, time, and resources and recalibrating sensitivity and awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence, power, and leading.

*DIGGING DEEP ROOTS: There will never be a praying church without a praying people – churches don't pray. And there will never be a prayerless church with praying people who meet God daily, over an open Bible. The practice of daily, guilt-free, grace-based prayer will be the hardest stake the church attempts to drive. And, it will yield the most significant impact, the most lasting fruit, and the most significant impact on the church's culture. The current prayerlessness of Christians, and when they pray, the practice of self-interested prayer leaves the church desperate and dry, lacking power. In such spiritual drought conditions, the people look to the church for what they can only find in a personal relationship with God, through Christ, in prayer. They lack the discipline and the learned skills to pray beyond their critical, imperative needs. They seem to lack the resolve to sit quietly, to wait before God, to allow the Holy Spirit time to make them aware of His presence. They lack the willingness to examine themselves, to repent in brokenness before God. They seek His *hand*, not his *face*, something *from* Him, not *of* Him. They are not bad; they are the victims of an apostate church. They need a wholly new way to approach God, a healthier prayer theology, the learned ability to make their Bible a prayer book, and live out if its rich meadows and streams. They, too, need a reformation. ***Even such personal prayer needs structure to function effectively, and doing so, you change the culture of homes and families.****

5. **Its couples and families pray** and foster a culture of prayer in the home – one of prayerful dependence on God.

*LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS OF PRAYER: Prayer begins at home. The church is the extension of the family; and the church altar of the family altar. Churches are gatherings of families, ordered families, spiritual families, praying families. The responsibility to recover the family altar is often placed on the back of the man. And sadly, he is typically more resistant to the idea of family prayer. If a wife is single or married to an unbeliever, she should be encouraged to pray with her children, and model family dependence on God. Lois and Eunice did so for Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5). Hannah did so with Samuel (I Samuel 1 – 2). His father was ceremonially religious, but seemed in many ways disconnected, oblivious to Hannah and insensitive – but Samuel nevertheless changed a nation. If a husband is present, a believing husband, he and his wife, out of their times of prayer together, should convene the family for prayer, Bible reading, and discipleship. Again, this is a*

structural issue. ***Develop a simple structure for such times and define the functional roles of family members. Keep it simple but make it consistent – and watch the atmosphere of the home change along with family dynamics.***

Growing godly, praying, missional kids begins in the home. The family is truly God's discipleship institution. When families pray together, they invite God into the seams of daily life. They teach a lifestyle of prayer. At first, such prayer may be awkward if there has been no family prayer. It does not have to be a long experience. In the end, the fact of such prayer will carry more impact than the formal structure and content, but structure and content matter. ***Praying together will mark the home. It invites, in an orderly and structured manner, the presence of God into the home and family. The structure functions to center the family in living faith, around Christ and his word, the Bible, and it introduces the voice and ministry of the Holy Spirit. The culture of the family and the home are then transformed.***

Formal prayer should be augmented by informal prayer – in the morning and evening, while relaxing in the house or when the family is out and about (Dt. 6). Informal times should lead to spontaneous prayer – for this need or that, this challenge or that, this expression of thanks and praise for the goodness of God and the beauty of Creation. These prayer moments can be quick, but sincere prayers, prayed with one's eyes open as you ride down some road. To anchor the family to God through prayer, use life markers – prayer at the birth of a child, the formal dedication of a child, the dedication of the house in which you live, first-day in school prayer send off and celebration, graduation prayer, puberty (coming of age prayer ceremony) and more. Find ways to mark the development of the kids with prayer moments by engaging God. Use the Biblical calendar for prayer – Christmas and Easter, Passover, and Pentecost, the fall feasts. Plan faith celebrations in the home.

***At some point, the culture of the home will shift. Prayer will no longer be foreign, but expected, even invited. Its function will be natural. Its structure will be sound but dynamic.***

Have the family adopt a missionary for prayer, a nation, an Unreached People Group – this is content, and content prescribes function. Pray for the neighbors.<sup>6</sup> Plan mission activities in which the entire family can participate – even a foreign mission trip. Go together, pray and serve together, and return changed. The goal is to produce godly, praying, serving kids. The original plan of God was that every home in Israel was to give it's firstborn to ministry (Exodus 13:2). It remains God's plan that each family raises doctors and nurses, scientists and attorneys, teachers and social workers, public servants, and yes, preachers. Luther believed that our whole life, specifically our vocation, was to be lived as worship unto God – what an excellent idea. That puts everyone into ministry.

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<sup>6</sup> Use the Bless Every Home prayer tool, it's free. Go to: [www.blesseveryhome.com](http://www.blesseveryhome.com).

*Our goal is to change the culture of the home, by practicing prayer (function), which will demand the embrace of the discipline of prayer (structure).*

6. It teaches and mentors its children in transformational prayer over open Bibles.

LIFE AT THE ALTAR OF INCENSE: Prayer cannot be merely about God-the-fixer. It must be transformational, and that means that parents must have a healthy prayer life and practice. We want to take our children, using the analogy of the tabernacle, into the Holy Place. This is, by the way, where the young child Samuel slept. There, he first heard God's voice. Eli, the high priest, didn't hear it, nor did his compromised sons – but the young Samuel heard God. Don't underestimate the prerogative of God to speak to your children – without speaking to you or even asking your permission. Jesus wanted children to come to him; he still does (Mt. 19:14). Remember, there is no Junior Holy Spirit. The same Spirit that indwells an adult believer also indwells and fills a child – and God is capable of using children in incredible ways. Every awakening has had a children's component. In some cases, children have led their separate prayer services. Around the world, it is estimated that there are millions of child intercessors.

As you engage your children in devotions, teach them not only to read a passage but to pray it. Model such prayer. Take the language of the text and rephrase it for them, with words they might use. Remember, the altar of incense in the tabernacle was the place of prayerful communion with God. It stood before the veil, and therefore, before the Ark of God's glory. But it was also between the table with the bread, representing the word of God broken for feeding, and the lampstand that used the fuel of sacred oil, the only light for the Holy Place. Thus, we pray, breaking the bread, the Word, in the light that the Holy Spirit gives. Teach your children to pray, to pray the Bible, and do so, listening to the Holy Spirit. That engages them in personal change out of prayer, by grace working in their lives. That produces children who become people of integrity, whose lives themselves are a witness of Christ – prayer and scripture are at the heart of the disciple-making process of the church. *This cultural shift comes from the devotional function, and that requires, at least, informal and relational structure.*

7. It prays at home as an intercessory unit.

MISSION AND EVANGELISM BEGIN AT HOME, OUT OF PRAYER – As noted above, we should pray for lost people, beginning with neighbors, for those who do not seem to practice their faith or evidence a belief in God. And for nations, both geopolitical and ethnic people groups. The ultimate goal is to become a missional family. *This is a matter of structure and function to achieve a culture of intercession and mission in the family.*

**THE CHURCH IS A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR THE NATIONS IF:**

***CONSIDERING PRAYER LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT***

8. **Its prayer leadership team is first a learning team, studying** how, with the pastor's leadership, along with the elders/deacons/leadership team and the staff, they can support the effort to transform the church into a house of prayer for the nations. Only the senior or point pastor can lead in this cause. While the prayer team itself cannot lead the church-wide prayer effort, it can and should develop ways and means to envision, to strategically plan and assess. It can and must help organize, as an architectural team, teach and train, and offer a structure for the prayer effort. It can lead the component parts.

*RIVER CROSSING: THE FIRST MAJOR HURDLE IS DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF LEARNING IN THE PRAYER LEADERSHIP TEAM.* Without it, the congregation itself will not change. Without it, the prayer leadership team will not have the confidence to mentor the staff and the elders/deacons. Change resistance, and older paradigms of self-interested prayer will not take us where we need to go now, in this hour, in this age. Hardened wineskins, a commitment to a single, narrow, well-known style of prayer, will not move you forward. Humility, a teachable disposition is critical in this team. And that must translate to the staff, the elders/leaders, and eventually to the congregation. There is much to learn about prayer, prayer styles, and types, prayer ministry, and prayer strategies. We have not passed this way before – we are in the early stages of the reformation of the church into a house of prayer for the nations. ***A learning culture demands the function of learning together, and that demands a structure for the time that the team spends together.***

9. **It develops from its vetted prayer learning-leadership team, a planning team.** As we have noted, every congregation needs more than a prayer leader. They need a team of leaders. In the early stages, they need a *learning* team. That learning team then becomes a *planning* team. The patience of learning together, of changing together, will pay dividends when the team begins to lead together.

*GIFTS AND TALENTS: YOU NEED A PLANNING TEAM – AND NOT EVERYONE ON THE PRAYER LEADERSHIP TEAM HAS SUCH GIFTING OR SKILLS.* The *planning* team will function by serving the church as an architectural team in the process of building the house of prayer. It takes the vision (lead pastor and leadership team) and translates that vision into a strategic plan. Vision sees. It imagines. But the architectural team organizes the vision into a structure – with all the pieces and parts laid out, scheduled out, toward building the church into a house of prayer. They may, at points, amplify the vision. They may offer changes that enhance it. But, they must always respect the vision keeper, the pastor; and the pastor must respect their role. Some members of the prayer team will want to leap quickly from vision to prayer, to skip the strategic, to take one part of the vision, a tactical piece, and run with it.

Vision is the *big picture* – and God's vision is dynamic. It changes. It grows. It adapts to its environment – it never stops developing. The strategy is the big-picture *plan*. And it is not easy to develop a strategy. By definition, a strategy is a plan of action or policy designed to achieve a major or overall aim. Tactics are the *pieces of a strategy* – and they are easier to implement and



understand. Members of your prayer leadership team, of the staff and on the board, will often be tactical, not strategic. They may be overwhelmed by a big strategic, long-term plan. Their reaction may be – “*Let’s do this little thing and see how that works!*” Yet, no tactical part of a strategic plan will fulfill the mission. We’re talking about the “reformation” of the church. You need a strategic, architectural team to develop a dynamic and coherent master plan.<sup>7</sup> This is both science and art.

Every church needs such a master plan for prayer and evangelism-mission, worship and discipleship, for the integration of prayer into each grade level and department. It must see the *big picture*. It then needs a *big-picture plan*, a plan of the proposed action, a blueprint. That plan, that blueprint, is broken down into tactical *pieces, the component parts*. They define the role of the sub-contractors who lead various components of the overall effort. ***This, too, is structure. It is a plan for operations and the functional interface of different players. It functions to define the structural context for movement forward. It demands a culture of patience, of learning, of systemic and measured change with dependence on the Holy Spirit.***

## THE CHURCH IS A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR THE NATIONS IF:

### CONSIDERING THE CHURCH<sup>8</sup>

10. It ***organizes*** to promote and maintain a culture of prayer.

***INSIGHT: YOU CANNOT SUSTAIN WHAT YOU DO NOT ORGANIZE AND STRUCTURE. IT WILL DIE WITH ATROPHY. IT WILL BE POISONED BY SELF-INTEREST. SOMEONE HAS TO KEEP IT PURE AND FOCUSED. IT MUST BE STEWARDED.*** Most churches have at least one prayer group. Perhaps, a prayer leader or a well-known intercessor is regarded, at least informally, as the prayer leader. Still, most churches are far from having a culture of prayer. Nor is there an organized effort to promote prayer by all the members of the church, to teach and train, to mobilize and support the proliferation of prayer throughout the church. ***Where there is no structure, a function is not empowered or enabled, and subsequently, the desired culture can neither be created or sustained.***

11. It is seriously addressing prayer as a priority, as the first step toward change. This demands an inventory of the true culture of the congregation and its defining, driving values. ***Where do prayer functions rank, among other congregational activities? What is the effectiveness of the prayer functions? Do they engage the congregation? Change its culture? Are they evident in the structure, the organizational bent? What function does the prayer effort primarily support? What cultural outcome?***

<sup>7</sup> Check out the unique book, *Milestones – Markers on your Journey to Become a House of Prayer*. Published by Alive Publications ([www.alivepublications.org](http://www.alivepublications.org)) in two versions, black-and-white perfect bound and color in a spiral bound form. Both are 8.5 x 11. This is a very detailed projection of the phases through which a church might pass on the journey to changing its structure and function, to the end that it shifts the culture of the church to prayerful dependence on God with mission in view.

<sup>8</sup> This is Marker #2 of the 7 Markers of a Praying Church.

*CHECKPOINT: IS PRAYER DEEPLY VALUED?*

- *DO YOU HAVE A CULTURE OF PRAYER?*
- *IF SO, THAT IS DEMONSTRATED BY PRACTICE, BY A PROLIFERATION OF CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER FUNCTIONS!*
- And the church, its staff, and resources are organized, structured, to drive and enable those functions to create and sustain that culture.

If not, you may be a house “with” prayer, but not a house “of” prayer.

12. **Its leadership teams, all of them, are willing to embrace profound congregational change through prayer.** This includes their values and culture, their function, and their structure. And then, in unity, the resolve to engage the congregation.

*UNCONCIOUS BARRIERS. EVERYONE IS FOR PRAYER, AND EVERYONE IS PROFOUNDLY AGAINST IT.* The flesh is against prayer, as is the world and the devil, along with a satisfied, lukewarm church. We are for prayer that is *for* us, about us, and on our behalf, but we are often resistant to prayer when it exposes wickedness in our hearts, evil attitudes, and wrong motives in our lives, the degree to which we are comfortably in bondage and unwilling to change – and therefore calls us to repent. No revival can come without the crossing of this unconscious barrier. In fact, the recognition of it is the beginning of a revival.

True prayer, Biblical prayer, demands humility. Pride and self-image concerns war against it, substituting pretty prayer, placid prayer, self-affirming prayer, impotent prayer – prayer that changes nothing, prayer that reinforces ego, and inflates the self, leaving it unchanged. The partners of Biblical prayer are fasting and giving (Matthew 6). When they are introduced, the flesh screams, the devil schemes and deceives seeking to hold us in his clutches, and the neon signs of the world light up, enticing us.

Fasting breaks Satan’s ability to manipulate us through fleshly desires. It consecrates the body as a visible servant of God. Giving breaks with the world and its materialistic values, its toys, and trinkets that promise what they cannot deliver – what you cannot give away owns you. Here again, is structure. It predicts the *function* of engaging God in prayer, subduing, by grace, the body and consecrating it as a visible servant of the Spirit, and then allowing God to give alms through us to others, and yet, more than a cup of water – to give grace. ***This theological and dynamic structure dictates function and creates an ethos of prayerful surrender to the Holy Spirit and the potential of God’s grace through us to others.***

Everyone is for prayer, and then, everyone will fight (or sleep through) prayer, even prayer leaders themselves. Especially those who will not repent, who will not humble themselves, who will not fast food, sex and sleep (to keep the watch), who will not reorder their values away from the things

of this world to the things of God – they will fight true prayer, Biblical prayer, transformational prayer (Matthew 6:1-18).

*A READY TO GO INDICATOR.* Three teams are critical to transformational change, and without their buy-in, their embrace of the value of prayer, the congregation will balk at such costly change. They will not be inspired by either the vision of becoming a house of prayer or the values humbly demonstrated by the congregational leadership teams.

- These teams are, first, the prayer team. Prayer teams, particularly intercessory prayer teams, often resist organization (structure), urging, “Let’s just pray!” Focused only on the aspect of intercessory prayer, they fail to value transformational prayer, the recovery of the family altar, holistic approaches to prayer. Buttressed by very real experiences in prayer, even victorious intercessors can fail to see the importance of supporting structure, not only for a broader prayer effort but even for their intercessory function and its greater effectiveness. ***Structureless prayer leadership teams fail in their function and do not foster a culture change in the church.***
- The elected or appointed congregational leadership team resist prayer as well, preferring to baptize themselves in church leadership from a ‘business’ perspective. ***They, too, need to structure prayer into their meetings, their functions, to create a culture of sensitivity to the Holy Spirit in all they do (culture).***
- The staff, overwhelmed by program and personnel needs, cannot see the value of adding a congregational prayer gathering to their schedule. Their lives are structured to drive the programs of the congregation. ***Restructuring is essentially, to achieve a new functional value of pressing a culture of prayer into the departments and seams of congregational lives.***

The pastor must lead, and around that pastor, the church leadership team (elders, deacons, council), must also lead in prayer, setting the example. The staff must lead as well, both by example and by the integration of prayer into the seams of church life. The prayer team must lead by example, and by designing structure to support a culture and the function of prayer, and identifying resources to support this change and move the congregation forward. These three teams – the pastor and the church leadership team, the prayer leadership team and the staff, must embrace the concept of the church as a house of prayer before the congregation will do so.

#### THE CHURCH IS A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR THE NATIONS IF:

##### ***CONSIDERING THE NEED TO MOBILIZE INTERCESSION [Marker #4]<sup>9</sup>***

13. It organizes an intercessory team in the context of a larger prayer structure.

<sup>9</sup> This is marker #4 among the 7 Markers of a Praying Church.

*CRITICAL INSIGHT: INTERCESSION IS A VITAL COMPONENT IN THE CONGREGATION'S PRAYER EFFORT.* You cannot have a prayer ministry without organized and healthy intercessors. Intercession is the missional reach of prayer, the uncomfortable middle, between God and the world, God and the lost. But it is not the heart of prayer; communion is the heart of prayer. It exists because there is a gap between God and a lost world. Communion in prayer celebrates the healing of that gap. Intercession is the work of prayer in the gap; communion is its worshipful center. Intercession deals with the problem of deprivation and need, of lostness, the darkness, the world and the Evil One; communion basks in the presence of God. Intercession cannot be the center of your prayer effort. ***This is a matter of theological structure that makes communion with God the necessary anchor for effective intercession. It informs the structure, and therefore the function of personal intercession – and that changes the culture of the intercessory team.*** You need more than an intercessory prayer ministry. Yet, you cannot have an effective prayer ministry without an organized intercessory, missional prayer force. And those intercessors must structure their own time with God, giving priority to communion with him. And then, out of that strength, being thrust by the Spirit into some contested middle.

*INSIGHT: ORGANIZING YOUR INTERCESSORY PRAYER EFFORT IS IMPORTANT, BUT IT NEEDS TO BE A PART OF A LARGER PRAYER STRUCTURE, ONE THAT IS PRESENCE-BASED, NOT PROBLEM FOCUSED.* Your church prayer effort is more extensive than its intercessory prayer effort. It demands more than a group of dedicated 'prayer warriors' who pray alongside the church's prayer efforts (function). You need a prayer structure on which the church itself is built, not a prayer room to the side, not an intercessory team that is seen as a support for the main effort. If the church is to be an intercessory community, you must mainstream the prayer effort, including intercession. ***The main aim must be to facilitate worshipful transformational encounters with God that change the congregation, its ethos, and impact its function, making it missional. This happens member-by-member. It demands structural changes that support the ethos and the praxis of prayer. This is not merely the organization of an intercessory team; this is reformation.***

*MANY CHURCHES SEE PRAYER MINISTRY PRIMARILY AS INTERCESSORY IN NATURE – not intercession in an evangelistic-missional sense, but intercessory prayer for one another.* They see intercessors as constituting an informal group of people who value prayer, who are known as intercessors. These people are identified by their commitment to pray but hold no official status. Sadly, in most churches, those people have never been identified, nor teamed. They have certainly not been organized and engaged systematically. They have not typically been trained – and for that reason, they have developed an ad-hoc theology of intercessory prayer, some of which may be neither Biblical nor healthy. They are not usually directed – so their prayer is heart-led and Spirit-directed, which, while good at one level, could be enhanced by direction and trusting briefings. Staff members may be informed about church issues and challenges, anticipated changes, and more, along with board members, but rarely are intercessors taken into confidence. What they

know, they know by general knowledge or spiritual intuition. *Every church should have a group of dedicated intercessors who have been identified, vetted, trained, teamed, and are regularly briefed on issues for prayer. This demands structure that clarifies function. They should be directed and then debriefed – their prayer hunches and insights should be taken seriously. Once that occurs, an ethos of prayerful dependence on God will emerge, as well as a partnership between trusted intercessors and leaders.* They should be held accountable and affirmed. However, these wonderful people are not and cannot be the prayer leadership team. Leading the broader prayer effort is more extensive than intercession and the intercessory function. More about that later.

14. **It identifies, trains, teams, directs, and debriefs vetted intercessors.**

*BENCHMARK: RECOGNIZING THE NEED TO IDENTIFY, TRAIN, DIRECT, AND DEBRIEF INTERCESSORS.* The intercessory organization effort should rise out of the work of the primary prayer leadership team. It may be unwise to attempt to do both at the same time. That is, get a planning-learning team underway, and, organize the intercessory effort. Organizing intercessory ministry is a bit like cleaning out a dynamite shack – there can be explosions, damaging explosions. It is fraught with unseen challenges. You need a leadership team in place to manage those challenges. Don't do this in the dark. Don't do this alone. Don't do this without a plan. Don't do this without key intercessors on your leadership team who now see things about intercession and intercessory ministry that they did not see before. *You need to create; first, an overall strategic team that is functioning and considers the importance of a culture of prayer that, while including and valuing intercession, is broader and deeper than intercession.*

15. **Vetting Intercessors is critical. From this group, you get spiritual intelligence. They dance with the prophetic. God reveals His secrets to such people. Most pastors do not know them, and in some cases, they do not trust them.**

*CAUTION – BEWARE! ORGANIZING INTERCESSORY PRAYER IS LIKE ORGANIZING THE DYNAMITE ROOM.* Intercessors who have trafficked in the spirit realm, are not easy to redirect. At times, you may meet an intercessor to whom God has shown significant secrets, who has battled effectively in spiritual warfare. You may discover, however, that they cannot fit into the structure of an organized intercessory ministry. They are lone agents – and sometimes headstrong and inflexible, overly confident of their insights, and overbearing about what they see as urgent actions needed by the church. They can cross the boundaries of propriety, confusing their intercessory role as a watcher and seer, with that of the elder at the gate or the pastor. They may feel so strongly about what they sense was revealed to them by the Spirit that the insight blinds them. They may feel a special calling to pray for a particular thing or person, and they may resist being placed on a team or directed. They resist a harness – they want to be 'free.' Some are crisis intercessors, motivated to pray about urgent issues and causes. Some are personal intercessors, motivated to

pray for a person. A few are strategic intercessors, called to pray for nations, kings, and international conflict. A smaller set yet, seem to understand the spiritual dynamics over cities and nations, the changing of national and international guards, God's seasons and times. Because of the unique callings of intercessors, and of their personal sense of spiritual direction, it is not always easy to commandeer them to teams. Even though the teams are virtual and intercession is done privately, sometimes intercessors prefer to be exclusively 'Spirit-directed.' Such independence is often a problem for pastors and church leaders. Intercessors may have to be sold on the importance of being anchored to intercession and the church's effort, to the pastor and the team – and that is a critical sell. You need such gifted and veteran intercessors in the prayer loop. Urging them to consider this month, the children's prayer effort, and then the youth, getting the evangelism effort on their radar screen, and sometimes, amazing insights will come. All of us need a healthy dose of humility – it is the key to unity.

Mature intercessors will value your invitation to be a trusted watcher on the wall. And they will also understand the boundaries of their role, as watchers. They will see the value of God's work in their life in reference to the church. Their maturity will set a standard for new, unvetted intercessors. Still, on occasion, you may have an intercessor who resents being directed. One who does not value being briefed or debriefed, who oddly thinks that advance information about an issue diminishes the 'spiritual' nature of what they do. They may not respect boundaries and may attempt to direct the pastor and staff with spiritual intelligence. You may have an intercessor who seems to traffic with spirits or angels, more than with God and the Holy Spirit. They may insist that their revelations and insights be acted upon and failing to do so, may meet with their wrath. They may not understand the importance of communion with God, over spiritual warfare, of fellowshiping with God, over fighting and warring with dark spirits, of God's Presence over wrestling with problems. They may lack both balance and the grace to receive counsel. You will need to offer correction.

The Evil One knows how his work is affected by healthy intercessory prayer. And, he is invested in stopping such prayer, at any cost. No part of your prayer effort has the potential of exploding, like the reorganization of the training, teaming, directing, briefing, and debriefing of intercessors. Nothing. You need a leadership team in place, and some agreement among the other leadership teams (staff and board), about the theology of prayer, the philosophy of prayer ministries and the nature of intercession itself, before you move to this segment.

Consider this. Encouraging the rebuilding of the family altar will meet resistance. Urging daily personal time with God will be called legalism. Some will object as you attempt to establish a healthy congregational prayer meeting. And especially, when you trim back self-interested prayer. All of these are *structural* and *functional* concerns, aimed at creating and sustaining a *culture* of prayer. But, organizing intercessors and refocusing intercessory prayer on the harvest, and on undergirding the missional ministries of the church – will meet with hell. ***It will require***

***restructuring the intercessory effort in terms of both theology and function to transform the culture of the church into an intercessory community. That will only happen if a core of healthy intercessors emerges who see (theological structure and function) intercession, not primarily as spiritual warfare, but as reconciliation.***

16. Its leaders understand the importance of watchers on the wall, and they are willing to confide in those watchers (intercessors), elevating them by praying with them at times, and listening to their concerns (sometimes clear and compelling signals and sometimes only a vague sense or hunch).

*A CRITICAL POINT OF MATURITY IN THE PRAYER EFFORT* is the establishment of the dialectic between the leaders (elders at the gate) and the intercessors (watchers on the wall). This is critical to the completion of mission. Adam was told to ‘watch’ in the garden (Gen. 2:15). He had two roles – to grow the garden and to guard the garden. Keeping the garden, tending it, was the key to the promise of dominion that God gave to Adam. Losing the garden, he lost the globe. Not protecting the boundaries between the fruit that gave life and that which gave mere knowledge, one permissible and the other not permissible, he lost the incredible blessing (Gen. 1:28).

The Hebrew word guard, *shamar*, occurs hundreds of times in the Old Testament. It carries with it the idea of watching, of standing guard on some wall, of seeing what God might reveal. Here, we see the interface of watching and the seer, the prophetic. Intercession is, of course, priestly, and therefore representative of humanity. In its prophetic mode, it is also representative of God’s perspective. This is the reason intercessors are often so sure of themselves and so tenacious, so prickly – and why pastors are resistant to them. The prophetic is not always pleasant. And because of this, as we enter a season of change, we must learn to dance together without crushing one another’s feet. We must cultivate gentleness and humility. We must labor to listen – to one another, and most importantly, to God through one another.

No intercessor should expect the congregational leadership teams to act on their advice, on their “seeing” into the spiritual – but such sightings of God or revelations about His actions are a call to heightened prayer and discernment. “God,” the elders and staff, should say in prayer, “as leaders, we need a confirmation of what you are saying to the intercessors.” God confirms His word in a multitude of counselors. It is arrogant for intercessors to attempt to direct the pastor or the staff. In such a scenario, they have crossed the line of their authority. Equally, it is arrogant of church leaders to assume that they are the whole body, that if God wants to speak or reveal something, He will always do so directly to or through them. This is the task of watchers on the wall – to hear and see what God might be saying to the church and about the city. God’s body-way is to use all members, for specific purposes, and at times, to elevate the perceived least to a strategic role. Some are visionaries (eyes), and others are ears (hearing), perceiving what is not and perhaps cannot yet be seen. Some are hands (doing) and others (feet), who carry the doers, who bear them by prayer.

The prominent head needs the often neglected and underappreciated foot, and the eye the ear. Each member is valuable – and sometimes intercessors who are disregarded, ignored, and underappreciated, prove to be valuable members offering gifts of sensitivity that others do not have. ***Structure a means to encourage the intercessors to function in their role and calling, and for direction and debriefing. Create a culture that respects people in the church who are given to prayer as watchers.***

17. It is more concerned, in intercession, about the ‘Saving Private Ryan’ than engaging dark powers.

***A CALL TO EVANGELISM:*** For almost thirty years, the intercessory prayer ministry has been preoccupied with the dark powers of the middle heaven where Satan has entrenched himself. According to Biblical prophecy, he, at some point, will come to the earth and anoint his own Messiah, an Anti-Christ. Until then, he operates to influence nations through individuals under this influence – that is why intercession for kings and those in authority is so important (1 Timothy 2:1). There is reason to believe that Satan attempts to enthrone himself above nations as the prince and power of the air, that he is behind malevolent winds that create spiritual and social storms on the earth, that he anoints and energizes his ground contacts and agents (Ephesians 2:2). In an attempt, a sincere attempt to deal with such malevolence, strategic warfare was introduced, and the practice of seeking out the dark powers over cities and nations ensued, with confrontational techniques, like replays of Gunsmoke or Star Wars. The dark powers were named, then bound, and then supposedly disarmed for greater ground effectiveness by the church. After so much teaching and warring, much claiming of victory and prophetic pronouncements, little evidence suggests that such tactics have accomplished much, other than give advertisement to the Evil One, and preoccupy a great deal of our time and energy. And perhaps, resulted in unnecessary casualties as a result of taunting and accusing evil powers. ***This demands restructuring and redirecting intercessory function, and the creation of a culture among intercessors that is less focused on warfare and more on reconciliation.***

As intercessory prayer ministry has matured, a shift has occurred. While it is aware of the very real demonic, it is not preoccupied with the demonic. It is not shackled by the demonic. It does not believe that dealing with the demonic is a prerequisite to victory or breakthrough, and that must be differentiated from awareness and discernment. Yet, it rejects forthrightly, the idea that intercessors must rid the city of the darkness so that God might more effectively work. What God wants to do, He will do openly, making a show of the demonic. Light does not need the darkness removed for it to manifest (Col. 2:15).

18. It understands that the most effective tactic in spiritual warfare is the salvation of men and women, their liberation from the guilt and penalty of sin, from both its condemnation and from its grip, its shackles, its debilitating and addictive rule. This liberation of men and women from the



kingdom of darkness to the light; from the body of Adam to the body of Christ – this is the greatest act of spiritual warfare.

*RECALIBRATING:* Now, it appears that most mature intercession, has returned to an understanding that the great tactic in spiritual warfare is taking away the ground game of Lucifer, by massive numbers of salvations. When his ground contacts are gone, he no longer can deflect from their lives his dark energy. His capacity to anoint and use men and women as his pawns, as human agents for wickedness, whether or not they know they are getting help from the Dark Lord, is nevertheless no longer available. They have become believers. And that changes everything. ***It affects the structure of the culture, the function of its population, and of course, the atmosphere of cities and towns.***

## THE CHURCH IS A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR THE NATIONS IF:

### *CONSIDERING THE PROLIFERATION OF PRAYER*

19. **It has a collage of praying groups in the church** – a veritable movement out of prayer. Prayer groups should exist to support every cause, and every ministry endeavor in the church (structure). Only what is done out of prayer (function) and in the spirit of deep dependence (ethos) on God will last.

*RATIONALE and BENCHMARKS: PEOPLE LEARN TO PRAY BY PRAYING – THERE IS NO OTHER WAY, AND THAT HAPPENS MOST OFTEN IN SMALL GROUPS WHERE THEY FEEL SECURE.* So, a congregation needs a proliferation of prayer groups. These groups should be organized around causes and identities. *Causes* include: Prayer for Missionaries; Prayer for UPGs; Prayer for the City; Prayer for Lost Sons and Daughters; Prayer for Local Schools; Prayer for the Congregation's Shut-ins; Prayer for certain issues, etc.; *Identity Groups* include: Moms Prayer Group; Single Men's Prayer Group; a Father-and-Sons Prayer Group; a Hiker's Prayer Group; a Senior's Prayer Group; Millennial's Prayer Group – and on and on.

There should be a congregational prayer meeting led by the senior pastor – and the goal should be to engage the entire church, gathered in prayer before God. You will see and feel the impact of this meeting when the prayer meeting attendance consistently exceeds twenty-percent or more of the Sunday morning attendance. In addition, every member should be recruited to pray for the lead pastor. Have them take a day once a month. With more than half remembering to pray for him, and the church, only once a month – again, you will begin to feel the impact of such praying. Attitudes will change. Unity will be more evident. Criticism will wane. ***The ethos of the church will change, as people consistently pray for the pastor and the church, but that will require some structural support, content and encouragement, ongoing communication.***

Prayer groups should be limited in size to about a dozen. The reason? As stated before, you want the groups to remain lean and intimate. You want them small enough that everyone is urged, if not expected, to pray aloud. You want relationships to develop that encourage and nurture prayer and

faith. The reason many are attracted to a specific prayer group will often be the organizing theme – moms or men, schools, or shut-ins, or someone in the group will recruit them. Inevitably, it will not be the cause that drives the group. They will grow and develop relationally. Though they will meet to pray about the *cause* that drew them together, the most important element will be relational. As new members pray about something that matters to them, they will learn about prayer and to pray. The depth and breadth of these groups exponentially expand the prayer effort.

Such groups should take a winter vacation around Thanksgiving and then be reorganized in early January each year. New groups should form. Older groups should be allowed to hibernate. In July, a similar summer break for two-to-three weeks might be wise. That gives you another chance to assess your prayer groups and recalibrate them. When groups explode in growth, have a plan to multiply the group (don't use the word divide), especially when the numbers are consistently in the 15-20 range. At that point, intimacy is being lost, and your critical purpose of nurturing personal prayer in the groups is in danger.

The exception to this rule is when you have decided to use prayer groups to seed the start of new congregations – then, let such groups grow and spin-off into church plants. If that is your intention, make that a part of your plan. If that is not your intention, be clear that the goal is not church planting from prayer groups, but rather, the reproduction of prayer groups themselves. Remember, your goal is not run-away success in one or two groups but measured and tempered success across all the groups. The leader of a rapidly expanding prayer group may resist allowing their group to give birth to another prayer group. Again, success in one group is not success in your overall prayer group effort. Adopt this as a general prayer group principle; consider exceptions. Make the successful prayer group leader a mentor to other leaders, particularly to any spin-off groups. Emphasize the practice of prayer by the groups – they are not merely fellowship groups. Emphasize their role as a part of a larger prayer effort and the need for loyalty to that greater effort. Emphasize Christ, not personality, as the driving force of the groups.

For every 100 in attendance, work to establish 5-7 small prayer groups of 3-to-12 participants, typically 6-8 people. Some folks might be a part of more than one group. Generally, your goal is to engage at least half of your congregation in a prayer group. For affirmation and alliance with the larger prayer effort, each group should be registered with the prayer ministry leader, their meeting times and places on the church calendar, and the leader should have gone through some prayer group leadership training. ***The cause for which they meet is a functional issue. The training should help them with prayer group structure and dynamics. The goal – an ethos of prayer and dependence on God.***

20. **Its ministries are all bathed in God's Presence and are dependent on the Holy Spirit's power. They are structured and organized to include time and space for prayer – urging participants toward personal, prayerful dependence, and daily encounters with God.**

WATERSHED: MINISTRIES MAY BE NOBLE, BUT THEY ARE THE EFFORTS OF MEN, PERHAPS, GODLY MEN AND WOMEN, BUT THEY WILL FALL SHORT IF THEY DO NOT RISE OUT OF A CULTURE OF WORSHIPFUL DEPENDENCE ON GOD.

Carnality blossoms where prayer is discouraged or abbreviated. And holiness, wholesomeness, flourishes where prayer thrives. In this sense, every ministry should welcome prayer. Micro teams of intercessors should be enlisted to support every ministry of the church. Usually, no more than 3-5 people, agree to intercede, for example, for the children's ministry, the youth, collegiate, young adults, the praise team, seniors, even the nursery. And of course, there should be a pastor's prayer team that seeks to engage the entire congregation. These prayer support teams may meet with the group for whom they pray, quietly sitting to the side or in the back. They may convene, in person or by phone, to pray for the ministry. They should receive cues for direction in prayer, be briefed and debriefed about the challenges of the ministry and those involved, workers, and participants. Imagine the impact, if every child in the children's department, had, not only a worker concerned for them but also an intercessor praying regularly for them. ***You will need to organize (structure) this, and provide some basic help with the function of prayer, and it's content. The goal is a spirit of prayer and concern for all the children in the church.***

MEASUREMENT: PERVASIVE PRAYER. Every ministry should be conducted in such a way to integrate prayer, and not merely perfunctory prayer, opening-and-closing prayer, but serious prayer. These may be special meetings, unlike the normal gatherings of these ministries. Each might designate a team member to serve as a chaplain. A ministry leader is typically concerned with the business and regular activities of the group. A chaplain would support the leader in those endeavors, but also carry a concern for the *ethos*, the spiritual climate of the group. The chaplain might, in agreement with the leader, offer from time to time, for example, in the young marrieds' ministry, a couple's prayer night; or in children's ministries, a night of family prayer, and so forth. The chaplain might introduce materials and models for couples to pray together. A teen night of prayer might be offered, and though such an event probably would not draw the same number as a recreational outing, those who came might be the spark of a youth revival. The possibilities are almost endless. ***A little structure, to support prayerful functions, begins to impact the culture of any given group.*** You are structuring to increase the function of prayerlessness in every church group, every department, toward the end of an *ethos* of prayer.

21. **Its ministries are structured with intercessory support.**

BENCHMARK: EVERY MINISTRY A PRAYING AND PRAYED FOR MINISTRY. This involves deliberate and intentional intercessory support for every ministry in the congregation – a group of identified, trained, teamed intercessors (3-5 per ministry) who commit to pray for that ministry effort, its leaders, and participants.

PROGRESS: And that means that it has identified those who presently have a calling to intercessory prayer (and that, with the whole congregation in view. In truth, all of us are called to join Jesus in his intercession. And out of such intercession, anointing and missional clarity emerge.) This is the Moravian principle: “No one works unless someone prays.” The church recognizes that the great nemesis is the Evil One who tempts us to sin, that he comes to steal, kill, and destroy, and our work is not merely humanitarian. It cannot be effective in operating on human energy alone. It needs the power of the Holy Spirit and his gifts and anointing. We dare not throw valuable money and mere human resources at spiritual problems. Men will faint, and funds will be depleted with little or no change. The new goal must be “an intercessor for every worker, and every worker an intercessor.” In the Old Testament grain/meal offering (the fruit of one’s labor), oil (the Spirit, anointing) was poured on the cake of grain, and incense (a type of prayer) was sprinkled on it. We must learn to work and pray, and pray and work, and thereby experience an anointing (oil) for and in our work.

- 22. Its prayer focus is beyond personal prayer requests. It prays not only for itself and its group members. Even though it is not a prayer ministry per se, it is conscious of the need to function as an intercessory community with a missional focus.**

A CALL TO BALANCE: Every church needs a clinic ministry – to heal its own wounded. It needs a partner ministry that calls for us to bear one another’s burdens. The first step toward such mutual sensitivity is prayer. It needs a hospital, not only for its own troops but also for those who are captured and wounded. Yet, if the church only serves as a hospital, it is reduced to a response agency for the hurting – reacting more than acting, treating victims rather than addressing the cause of their wounds. It must be more than a hospital. It must be a mission force, an outreach, strategically engaging the city’s dark corners, as well as its center to bring light and be salt. It must pull men from the fire (Jude 23).

- 23. It prays in strategic ways – for kings and those in authority – and from such prayer times, the Holy Spirit inspires vision and mission, function, and strategy for cultural impact.**

THE GREATER GOALS:

- The goal is not merely a praying church – but a prayed-for-city and a city that prays!
- The goal is the proliferation of prayer, “men and women praying everywhere, lifting holy hands, inviting God to come to the city, praying without wrath and doubting” (1 Tim. 2:8).
- The goal is the transformation of the people individually, and corporately, into worshipful dependence on God, and collective mission – for the salvation of souls, to the extent that the culture of the church impacts the community; its values not imposed, but bubbling up through the salty lives and light of its transformed converts.

**24. It is regularly teaching and training in prayer – expanding and deepening the congregation’s understanding of prayer.**

INSIGHT: There is so much to learn about prayer! Once the congregation commits to be a house of prayer for the nations, there should be teaching and training available to members in the area of prayer. At least once a quarter, plan a new course in the curriculum for prayer – personal prayer, Bible engagement in prayer, prayer evangelism, personal growth and development through prayer, devotional prayer, intercessory prayer, lament, praying the psalms, other models for prayer, couple’s prayer, the family altar – the list is endless. You will need to develop a basic course for prayer and offer it consistently to new believers and new members.

**25. It is moving toward a prayer room or center and 24-7 prayer.**

MILESTONE: In the book *Milestones: Markers on Your Journey to Be a House of Prayer*, there are 15 milestones in seven phases. No church will move through the multi-year process, in the same way, the same order – but the book is intended to be a guide for the congregation that is serious about being transformed into a house of prayer for the nations.

Milestone 15 is the creation of a prayer center. A church above one thousand might be able, with resolve, to operate a 24-7 prayer center. In such a case, it would have a physical center, a place of prayer, a place to meet to pray, a place from which prayer could be mobilized. In some cases, the sanctuary might be used as the prayer center, open during the week for prayer, when worship events are not scheduled. Open for scheduled and drop-in prayer, for prayer groups, for intercessors. It might develop prayer stations focused on various aspects of its mission in the city and the world. Its organized prayer groups might use an auxiliary space or the sanctuary itself. Soft lights and music might remain on constantly. This will make the church available for prayer seven days a week. If 24-hour access is not an option, then the church can schedule intercessors to keep the prayer fires burning during the night hours remotely. In two-hour watches, this requires 84 once-a-week prayer volunteers – it is quite an undertaking.<sup>10</sup> Such a center should not exist for the church, but for the city, for the region. It might have a call or messaging center, but its central focus should not be in praying for prayer requests. Mission Teams should be deployed to pray for the city. The center will relieve the church office by becoming the place where crisis appeals are processed. Here, intercessors are employed. The care staff is informed. If necessary, departmental pastors and leaders may respond. The office and staff could continue their support work while the center focuses on prayer support.

***With the creation of a prayer center, you have the ultimate structure for the function of personal and congregational prayer necessary to sustain a culture of prayer. Don’t get lost in***

<sup>10</sup> The book, *Transforming Your Church into a House of Prayer* has a chapter on the Prayer Center. It is available from

*the maze of function and structure as you move forward.* This is a three-to-five-year process at best. It may take a decade.

I am convinced that we are in the early stages of a reformation of the church that will be as impactful as the Protestant Reformation led by Luther five centuries ago. The great questions are simple –

- Do you have a *culture* of prayer that demonstrates our deep dependence on the leadership and power of the Spirit?
- If so, you will be able to point to how and when such dependence is evident in the *function* of the church (the calendar and rhythm of activities), its leadership and ministries. It will be measurable.
- And that will not happen unless you are intentional and *structural*, in organizing such prayerful dependence in the congregation and the homes of members, in the leadership team and the staff.
- All of this comes down to *values!*

God bless you on your journey.

Getting the church *structured* and engaged in the *function* of prayer will change the atmosphere, the *culture* of the congregation!

- Pastor's Prayer Partners - 50% of the congregation. Praying for the pastor, one day per month.
- Congregational Prayer Meeting threshold – 20%-plus.
- Prayer Groups (5-7 groups per 100 attendees) – 50% of the congregation in small, focused prayer groups with vetted and trained leaders.
- Intercessory Support Teams (3-5 prayer partners per ministry).
- Intercessory Prayer Teams - 10-15% of the congregation in virtual groups of five intercessors (people who pledge to pray) each.

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*Project Pray offers consultation and coaching to churches and movements to the end that they become houses of prayer for the nations. The movement sponsors a subscription service that provides prayer resources – the Praying Church Movement Premier Membership. Small serves the Church of God as prayer coordinator, as chair of the PCCNA Prayer Commission, and as a consultant to the Billion Soul initiative.*