

Empowering Your Church to Pray For Missions

By Andrew Wheeler

How many people in your church currently pray regularly for missions and specifically for your church's missionaries? Does the average person in your church actually pray personally for your missionaries? Or is listening to a prayer offered by someone else in a corporate worship service the closest he ever comes? Is there widespread excitement over praying for the lost around the world, or is prayer for missions seen as the special interest of a small handful of people? It has been said that the fruit seen from a missionary's work is really the harvest of seed previously sown in prayer. If that's true, what kind of harvest is your church sowing?

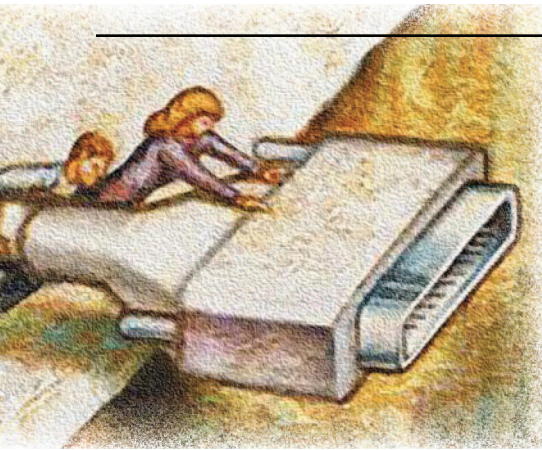
Praying for missions is hard work. Lack of experience and understanding of how to pray for missions can prevent

long-term commitment. Long periods of time with few measurable answers to prayer can cause discouragement. More immediate prayer concerns can crowd out prayer for the lost halfway around the world. In light of these and other difficulties, how can you create an environment that will foster consistent, committed prayer for missions?

At Willow Creek Community Church's McHenry County branch, by God's grace we are experiencing this sort of interest in prayer, not only for missions but for all aspects of ministry. We've found that three key factors have helped develop this interest.

We've trained groups to pray effectively together.

"I'm not comfortable praying in a group setting." "I've been in groups that prayed before; they just never really



seemed to click.” “I just hate listening to people drone on and on...I can’t keep my thoughts focused.” These may be the first thoughts that come to the minds of some as they consider praying in a group setting for missions. Creating an environment in which people are enthusiastic about praying in community for missions may require training on principles of community prayer.

Community prayer is different from private prayer. Private prayer is one-dimensional in nature, involving only the vertical relationship between the believer and God. Community prayer, however, introduces a second dimension: horizontal relationships with other believers. Community prayer can best be thought of as praying to God, with people. Like corporate worship, community prayer needs to follow certain guidelines in order to be effective (1 Cor. 14:26-40). These guidelines can be summarized as the “ABCs” of community prayer.

Agree together. Agreement is the heart of community prayer and what distinguishes it most from private prayer. Agreeing in prayer carries an extra promise of God’s answer (Mt 18:19-20) and reflects the unity Jesus prayed for in John 17. Such agreement requires group members to listen to each others’ prayers, rather than thinking about what to pray when their turn comes. Rather than jumping from topic to topic, prayer like this focuses attention on one topic at a time. Agreement like this is promoted by focusing the prayer time well (e.g., on one missionary rather than the church’s whole list of missionaries).

Be brief. The chief enemy of effective community prayer is long, winding prayers covering multiple topics. Brevity encourages the participation of many in the group, keeps people’s minds focused, and promotes agreement in prayer. For example, if a group is praying through a missionary’s prayer letter, have each person pray briefly about one topic in the letter, rather than one individual praying

through the entire letter. Assuring people that they will have multiple opportunities to pray can help overcome the felt need to “cover it all” in one shot.

Christ-centered. Two tendencies in community prayer can keep the prayer time from being focused on Christ:

- 1) The inclination to address group members (through exhortation, instruction, or encouragement, for example) rather addressing God;
- 2) The predisposition to focus on the details of petitions rather than on the One to whom we pray.

Both of these must be avoided if community prayer is to be an effective avenue for a group to relate to God.

We’ve provided multiple opportunities for prayer.

To involve a significant part of the congregation in prayer for missions, we seek to provide opportunities to pray that dovetail well with people’s availability. Sometimes churches offer one event per week, month or year to pray for missions. Many people find it difficult to make room in their schedules for one more meeting, or only one opportunity. An occasional Concert of Prayer around the topic of missions may help cast church-wide vision; however, a significant ongoing ministry of missions prayer should probably rely mostly on structures and meetings that are already in place. Existing structures like the small group ministry, adult Sunday School classes, or the midweek or Sunday evening service all provide multiple avenues for engaging people in ongoing prayer for missions.

We organize prayer opportunities that tap into a variety of interests.

Often a church’s missions prayer meeting is centered on the church’s missionaries. But what if many people in your church don’t know your missionaries personally? Most Christians will pray once for almost anything out of a sense of obligation. Engaging the congregation in ongoing, committed prayer for missions, however, requires tapping into people’s passions. To do this, provide

opportunities to pray for multiple different areas in missions such as:

- missionaries supported by your church
- strategic global causes (such as unreached peoples, the persecuted Church, or the AIDS pandemic)
- strategic countries (Iraq and China are two current examples)
- particular types of missions ministry (e.g., children at risk, church planting or Bible translation)
- religious blocs such as Hindus or Muslims
- your church's short-term missionaries now on the field
- the ministries borne out of your church's missions strategy

A current commercial series on television talks about what life would be like "in an ideal world." In an ideal world, people would flock to every prayer meeting, regardless of how well or poorly we planned for their participation. The fact is that our people live busy lives and we need to design prayer opportunities that are well-planned and set up for effectiveness if we hope to see wider church participation in prayer for missions.

Andrew Wheeler has served in leadership in the prayer ministries of Willow Creek Community Church's Barrington and McHenry County campuses in suburban Chicago. Contact him at wheelerand@earthlink.net.

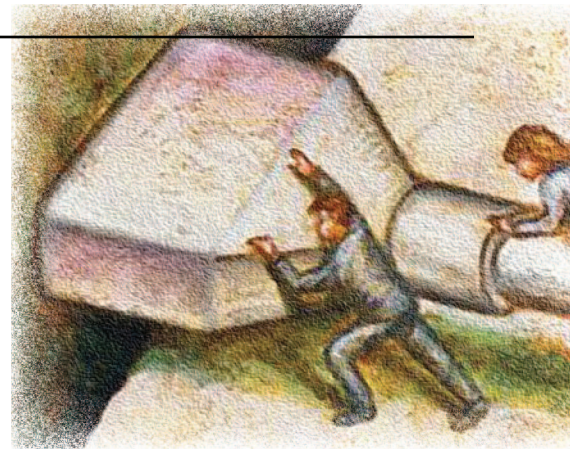


Photo Source: Caleb Project

Oppressed Women and Children

Did You Know?

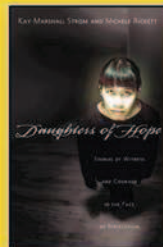
- 70% of the poor and 80% of refugees are women and children
- 500,000 girls die each year of shock and infection from female mutilation
- 2/3 of illiterate adults are women
- 1 million girls are missing. They have been sold, enslaved or murdered

Learn what
you can do...



SISTERS IN SERVICE

Extending God's love to oppressed women and children in least reached places of the world.



FREE! For a donation of any amount to *Sisters In Service*, when mentioning this ad.

IVP bestseller, Daughters of Hope, a \$12.00 retail value FREE!

2975 Northwoods Parkway • Norcross, Georgia 30071

www.SistersInService.org • Telephone: 770-783-1665 • Fax: 770-881-7626

