

PARTNERS

A Resource for Church Leaders from Diaconal Ministries Canada



Connecting prayer and action

By Ed Top

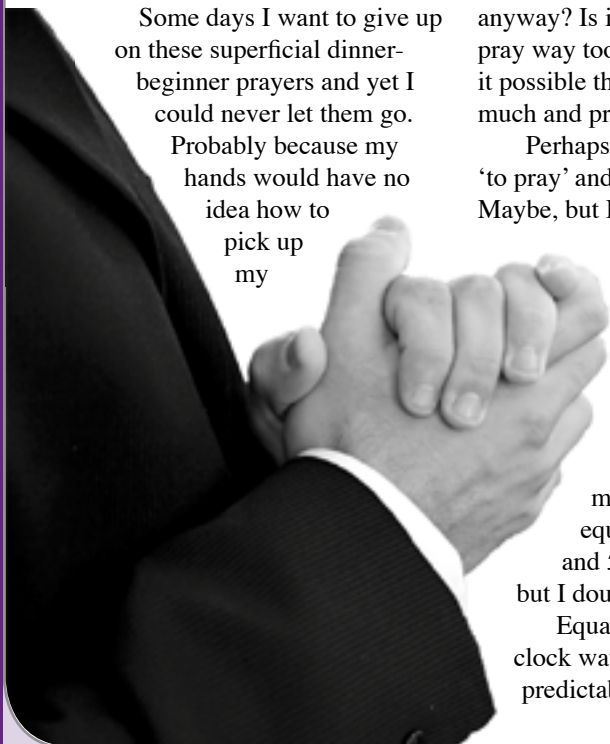
At dinnertime, Michelle and I will occasionally ask the kids for prayer requests.

I often find myself thanking God the same way and for the same things as we prepare to eat. I sometimes wonder if He's paying any attention to the often-repeated prayers. I sometimes wonder if I'm paying any attention.

Five-year-old Jonathan has two favourite requests. "Be with... the poor people out on the slippery roads" (we have a lot of dysfunctional drivers in Calgary) and "be with ... the poor people (in general)."

Some days I want to give up on these superficial dinner-beginner prayers and yet I could never let them go.

Probably because my hands would have no idea how to pick up my



knife and fork without folding them first.

Lately I'm thinking that God's communication to us can't be that much different than our prayers to Him.

Every time we pray "Be with..." I

Prayer is about being alert to opportunity; ... about seeing where God is pointing.

can almost hear God saying the same thing. While we pray, "My God, be with the poor," he must be pleading, "My children, be with the poor!" (If that's the case, who is ultimately 'responsible' for the poor?!)

But what does "be with" mean anyway? Is it possible that some of us pray way too much and do too little? Is it possible that some of us do way too much and pray too little?

Perhaps some of us have the gift 'to pray' and others have the gift 'to do.' Maybe, but I doubt it.

The extrovert 'works' and the introvert 'kneels'? Maybe, but I doubt it.

Both the experts 'in prayer' and the experts 'in doing' are avoiding something.

Is the answer a simple middle ground? Equal time, equal billing: 50 percent doing and 50 percent praying? Maybe, but I doubt that too.

Equal billing is a formula for clock watching; 50-50 is a recipe for predictability.

Perhaps 'prayer' and 'doing' are as inseparable as inhaling and exhaling. You wake with an inhale as your lips whisper "Thanks." You know the source. You jump out of bed with an exhale as your feet hit the floor. You're mobile.

You inhale breakfast. You exhale with a jog around the block. You're mindful of the gift of fresh air.

Prayer, in part, is as simple as inhaling and exhaling.

And, in so doing, it's about being alert to opportunity; it's about seeing where God is pointing. Paul wasn't kidding when he wrote that God is working in us, not only giving us the desire to work with him, but providing us with the power to do so (Philippians 2:13).

With eyes and heart open, a God-lover never stops moving, thinking, breathing. In calm rhythm, prayer is all at once and all together, like the rush of a heart beating.

You're pounding to the beat of the Way.

Our lives are 100 percent doing because our lives are 100 percent prayer.

Michelle and Ed Top have been pastoring a little inner city church called Lantern Community Church for over three years now. The little church began with eight families and many more curious expectations. God's been giving them open doors all over the place. Sometimes, they can report that they even see them!



TAKE NOTE

1. Discover more about the gift of prayer from the resources available at www.FaithAliveResources.org.

2. Explore the freshly redesigned and improved web site for diaconal resources: www.diaconalministries.com

3. A mini-workshop accompanies this issue of *Partners* online, providing a venue for further exploration on this topic personally and with other deacons. www.diaconalministries.com

Walk, pray and let God lead

By Hilda Vanderklippe

"...Pray to the Lord for that city where you are held captive, for if Babylon has peace so will you." Jeremiah 29: 7

All over the world Christians pray for their communities. In the above passage, prayer is connected with change. God told the small band of exiles in the Babylonian empire to pray for the city in which they were held captive. God answered those prayers by sending peace and prosperity to that city. In I Timothy 2:1-4, Paul connects our prayers with peace and also with salvation for those we have been praying for. Clearly God calls us

to pray for the communities in which we live and for the people that are in our lives.

And so Christians pray! Some pray at home, pleading for God's mercy for neighbours, friends, co-workers, etc; many Christians are also going out in the streets of their neighbourhoods and cities praying as they walk; this is called prayer-walking. Steve Hawthorne defines prayer-walking as "praying on site with insight". As Christians walk, they pray for what they see, but they also ask God to show them what He sees. Prayer-walking becomes a great way to not only bless your community but also to get to know your community. Furthermore prayer prepares the way by opening

hearts and doors.

Churches have found that prayer is a crucial part of being engaged in a Community Opportunity Scan process. Persistent prayer opens doors in schools and community agencies. Churches that prayer-walked before doing the neighbourhood surveys have found a greater willingness from people to participate in the survey. Even though prayer-walking is new to a lot of people they have found it to be a natural way to pray for their cities. One person said, "I learned that prayer-walking is walking with a partner in your neighbourhood and talking to God about what we see".

It is God's desire for us as His people to be concerned



about and build connections to our communities. Through prayer we invite God to go before us and lead, since "apart from Him we can do nothing" (John 15:5b).

Hilda Vanderklippe is Ministry Developer for Evangelism with Christian Reformed Home Missions.

**Contact DMC for more*

info on Community Opportunity Scans.



Intercession: the 'diaconal' focus of prayer

By Jane Graff

The form and content of our conversations, as well as the times and places where they occur depend a great deal on who the person is with whom we are speaking. That also applies to our prayers to God. Are you looking to Him as Lord? The King of kings? The friend who understands? Your Daddy who delights in you? Your prayers reflect the relationship.

There are also not any limits to how and when prayer takes place in our lives. Indeed, God is always there for us! He listens attentively to our serious thoughts and our questions. He delights in our joyful, thankful praises, aches with our cries of pain, attends to details, and is grateful for moments of intimacy. God is listening and He responds!

Intercession is a form of prayer where the focus is not on us. Instead we are speaking or, 'standing-in-the-gap' for someone else. It is what Jesus is doing at the right hand of the Father as our Priest. We are invited to join Him in that work! In some respects, it is the 'diaconal' focus of prayer, because you are helping and protecting someone else through prayer. Generally one does not decide to intercede, but God leads you to intercede. In fact, talking about something with God may lead to intercession!

What does that look like? Intercession may take place when you feel 'burdened' for a particular person or situation. You may experience more emotion than usual. You may have regular reminders about these circumstances. You may have more compassion, love, or grace towards the individual or situation

than you would expect. Ask God how He wants you to pray. Is there a need for repentance, protection, for proclamation or declaration? Pray God's Word, His promises, if that is what comes to mind.

In intercession, Kingdom work unfolds. It is in prayer—conversation with God—that we discern where He suggests how we serve.

God does not need our help and prayers, but in His love he chooses to include us in His Kingdom work. He is waiting to hear from us!



Jane Graff is Classis Prayer Coordinator in Alberta North.

www.DiaconalMinistries.com