



Intercession for Leaders

Recognising the Need

As a first step, leaders need to acknowledge their need for prayer support, to ask the Lord to provide them with intercessors who can "stand in the gap" on their behalf, (see Ezekiel 22:30) to present their needs and ministry before the Lord. There are several reasons why this may not be as easy as it sounds

☞ *Leaders may not realise how much they need prayer support.* Things may be going OK - but how much better could they be? There has never been as much pressure on our leaders as there is today, and many Christian leaders need greater prayer support than they are able to provide for themselves.

☞ *Leaders don't ask for prayer support!* After all, there are far more urgent needs out there - people in need of healing, a world torn apart by violence and war, those who are bereaved. Even if the need for greater intercessory support for leaders is recognised, humility can often be a barrier to the ministries and work of leaders being presented as a need for prayer. Yet it is a very healthy and positive Christian practice for others to engage in intercession for leaders.

☞ *Our use of prayer often tends towards situations where there is a problem, or healing is required.* Receiving regular prayer support may make the leaders feel that their ministry is inadequate, or riven with issues.

Paul's Requests for Prayer

Paul knew his need for prayer support, for particular crisis situations and for his ongoing ministry. He asked for prayer from the churches in Ephesus (Eph 6:19), Rome (Rom 15:30), Corinth (2 Cor 1:11), Thessalonica (1 Thess 5:25), Philippi (Phil 1:19) and Colossae (Col 4:3). Paul's request to the Philippians for prayer highlights the high importance he places on intercession in deliverance from his imprisonment. In his letter to Philemon he is so confident that the prayers for his release will be successful that he asks Philemon to prepare a room for him! His requests in Ephesians and Colossians are for prayer for his ministry of proclaiming the gospel.

Asking for prayer support, and building up effective relationships with intercessors is not easy.

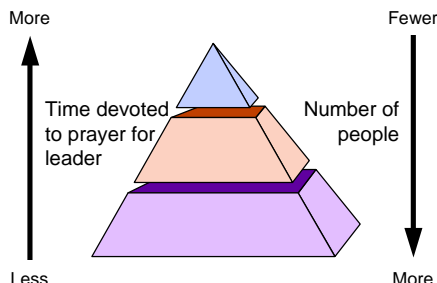
A pyramid of Prayer Support

Here's a three level model of prayer support, based on one presented by C. Peter Wagner, in his book "Prayer Shield".

At the base of the pyramid is general prayer support - often that provided by a congregation for their minister, or by regular supporters of an organisation for its leadership. It can be difficult knowing how much effective support is being provided at any point in time. Omar Cabera, the Argentinean pastor, simply asks church members to pray for him and his wife when they say grace at meals. The size of his church means this could lead to around 20,000 prayers a day!

The second level on the pyramid represents those who will undertake to pray regularly for specific leaders. Their commitment to this specific prayer need is greater than that of the base level, and they will be fewer in number. There will need to be regular two-way communication with these people. A New Zealand Anglican church planter who visited us recently has 15 intercessors who sign up for a year's commitment, which may be renewed, to pray for him daily. In return he and his wife pray for them once each week. Once a month he writes a very open and specific letter to these intercessors, giving answers to prayer, and some topics for prayer for the coming month.

The top level of the pyramid represents the one or two people who are prepared to undertake intercession for a specific leader as a significant part of their ministry. This may be as a response to a call from God, whether felt as a definite calling, or presented as a desire to pray for a particular leader and his/her ministry. Peter Wagner suggests that it is unlikely that a leader will have more than a couple of these intercessors at any point in time, and most often a single person fulfils this role. This kind of intercessor will very much need the faith to follow God's agenda, rather than solely presenting their view of the needs of the leader. It is clearly important that an open and trusting relationship is built between leader and intercessor.





Encouraging Prayer

This sheet aims to help leaders develop the prayer lives of their churches as they discern and move into the vision and direction that God may be setting before them.

Teaching on Prayer

Take a moment to review your teaching programme on prayer. You may have prayer groups, and house groups which pray along with other things. But what teaching and input is provided on prayer? There is a danger we rely on Christians working out for themselves how to pray. Here are some suggestions :

- If the church has **a lending library or bookstall**, offer books on prayer and books of prayers. Recommend them regularly, either via notice sheet or personal commendation from “the front”.
- Running a series of **groups on prayer** to give a taste of different approaches to prayer that people may not have previously experienced. These also offer people the chance to pray with others.
- Ensuring that **Sunday morning teaching** provides teaching on prayer at regular intervals. All too often, the only model of prayer a church demonstrates is that of one person at the front “doing the prayers”.
- Either as a church, or as a group of churches, consider running **a day on prayer** - this can combine a range of elements - teaching, silent reflection, praying in groups.
- Have a regular series on prayer in the **church magazine** - alongside topics for people to pray for. This can be a very non-threatening way of giving people chance to think about different approaches.

Developing a Prayer Strategy

Leaders have a critical role in developing the capacity of the church for prayer. This may be in an un-structured way, which is fine, as long as unstructured doesn't mean non-existent! Just as prayer itself can benefit from some structure, so too can the development of the prayer life of a church through a prayer strategy. A Prayer Strategy is typically a short document, possibly only with a few bullet points, that outlines how a church plans to develop its prayer life, and ensure that prayer needs are adequately covered. It is best formed by a church council or leadership team, arising from a review of the prayer life of the church. Like any strategy, it will need to have people identified who will be responsible for ensuring that required action happens. An example of a prayer strategy is on the right.

St.Ethelburga's Prayer Plan

To increase our prayer time - by holding a weekly prayer group, by encouraging all our housegroups to include some time in prayer at each meeting, and by encouraging people to have a daily personal quiet time with God.
To pray for our leaders, our mission and ministry by giving prayer needs in each Sunday's newsletter and by holding quarterly half day prayer meetings.
To provide regular teaching on prayer on Sunday mornings.
To respond quickly to urgent prayer requests from church members via a prayer team co-ordinator, available 24 hrs a day, who will pass such requests onto our prayer network.
To prayer walk a different part of our neighbourhood each month so that we cover the entire area each year.

Encouraging People to Pray Together

Church prayer meetings often need nurture and encouragement if they are not to lose their direction. There can be a danger that those outside “the prayer group” feel let off the hook - left to themselves, the need to pray for the church never gets urgent enough as a group is already meeting to do this. A number of different approaches may be needed...

Prayer groups need not meet in perpetuity. Groups which are formed to pray for a special event or campaign, or for a particular area can meet for a season, and then disband. For example, a group which meets to pray for a particular activity may meet beforehand, may pray during the event itself, may give thanks afterwards and then disband.

Try varying the format of prayer meetings - involving praise, silence, praying in twos, or fours, or all together as a church, praying on a theme, listening, ministering to those with needs etc.

Consider providing a variety of times and locations of prayer groups - some people prefer meeting in larger groups, others with three or four. Some prefer evening prayer meetings, others are unable to get out of the house in the evenings. What about a prayer breakfast??

Prayer walking gives another slant on praying for a neighbourhood. This can take a range of approaches from individuals praying as they walk around the parish, to structured prayer campaigns for particular streets and homes.