

Why Walk Together in Prayer through a Year Long Vigil?



Romans 12: 12 and 16:
...pray continually
...live in harmony with one another.

The word Synod, means “*walking together.*” The congregations of the Northwest District LCMS are Synod in this geographic location. We believe that Prayer Vigils throughout the district will bring deeper relationships with Christ and one another as we emphasize “*walking together*” by joining hands and hearts in the unity of prayer. Consider making dedicated time and space at your locations for active prayer as one body in Christ – filling each day with prayer vigils in congregations throughout the Northwest District.

We recognize that we as Lutherans are also a part of the Holy Christian Church on earth (and specifically across the Pacific Northwest), which includes all Christian congregations in each community. For that reason, we encourage participants to pray not only for the congregations of the Northwest District of the LCMS, but also for all congregations in their communities.

The Word of God and history show that prayer is not preparation for the work of ministry. Prayer IS the work of ministry.

It has been said, “*The future of the world is in the hands of praying Christians.*” Similarly, the future of the church is in the hands of Christians who pray for what the Lord shows us in His Holy Word.

Consider the following:

THE PRAYERS OF GODS PEOPLE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT SHAPE HISTORY

- When Moses stood on a hillside and lifted up his hands in intercession over a battlefield (Exodus 17:8-13), history was shaped. Joshua and the Israelite army defeated the Amalekites in the valley below. In the Old Testament, one of the common postures of prayer was standing with hands lifted up and held out to God. Moses’ staff was the symbol of God’s authority. When Moses’ arms were lifted up and his staff was stretched out, the Israelites prevailed. When his arms drooped, and the staff was lowered, the Amalekites prevailed. Through prayer, the Israelites moved forward and God’s kingdom advanced. As Christians, we are involved in spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-18). Prayer is one of the instruments that the Lord has given to us to move forward in ministry.
- We see God shaping history through prayer in the life of Elijah (the event is recorded in 1 Kings 17-18). It’s referred to in James 5:17-18. God’s people and their king had turned away from the Lord and were following other gods. To get their attention, God directed Elijah to pray that it would not rain. There was no rain for three and a half years. As a result of the drought, God’s people were open to hear what He would say and do through

Elijah on Mt. Carmel in the confrontation with the prophets of Baal (the fertility god, the Israelites had worshipped). 1 Kings 18:16-46. The people returned to the Lord. Then God directed Elijah to pray for rain. The drought ended.

- The Lord wants us to seek His will for what He wants accomplished. For example, in Zechariah 10:1-2, the Lord directed His people to pray for rain, even though it was the time of the spring rain. That's like telling us in the Pacific Northwest to pray for rain in January.
- When it was time for God's people to be liberated from captivity in Babylon, the Lord moved upon Daniel to pray for Him to release the people. This is shown in Daniel 9:1-3, 15-24; 10:2-8, and in verse 12 through chapter 11, verse 1. Daniel had evidently read Jeremiah 25:12, where Jeremiah said that God's people would be in captivity for 70 years and then God would act to deliver them.
- The Lord uses our prayers in acting as He desires. (does this express the meaning here?) In Ezekiel 22:23-31 (especially verse 30), prayer is absolutely necessary for the Lord to work. In the Scriptures, no phrase identifies intercessory prayer better than this phrase: "stand before me...on behalf of..." An intercessor stands before the Lord on behalf of other people. In these verses of Ezekiel, the Lord did not want to destroy His people and was looking for someone to intercede for them. But, He could find no one. So, "I have poured out my indignation on them..." Would Israel's history have been different if the Lord had found an intercessor? What about the church today? Our local congregations? Our Northwest District? In Psalm 8, our Lord makes us partners with Him (Psalm 8:6). The Lord asks us to pray, not because He can't rule without our prayers. He asks us to pray because in His grace and His sovereign nature, he determined that He will rule through our partnership in prayer. He has chosen to partner with us in order to accomplish His purposes in the Church and the world.

PRAYER IN THE LIFE OF OUR LORD JESUS AND THE EARLY CHURCH

- Before Jesus picked the 12 apostles from among His disciples, He spent the night in prayer. Luke 6:12-16. This was one of the biggest decisions of His earthly ministry. It would have temporal and eternal consequences. He wanted to know which ones His Heavenly Father had chosen. He had come to do His Heavenly Father's will, not His own. We can see this in the ministry of our Lord.
- Another example is recorded in Mark 1:35-39. He had gotten up early and had gone out to a solitary place to pray. When His disciples found Him, they said "everyone is looking for you." But, Jesus said, "Let's go somewhere else, so I can preach there also." Evidently, He had gotten directions from His Heavenly Father to continue the ministry elsewhere.
- In Acts 12:1-17, Peter was imprisoned and awaiting execution by King Herod. God's people gathered in prayer. God answered by delivering Peter from prison in a miraculous way through an angel. He went to another place and continued the ministry.
- The missionary journeys of St. Paul and Barnabas begin as a result of prayer. Acts 13:1-3, reveals that during that time of prayer, the Lord was able to make His will known to His people who were praying. "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

CHURCH FATHERS ON PRAYER:

St. John of Chrysostom has this to say:

If we are generous in giving time to prayer, we will experience its benefit throughout our life.

There is nothing more worthwhile than to pray to God and to converse with him, for prayer unites us with God as his companions.

This meeting is like that of an infant crying on its mother, and seeking the best of milk. The soul longs for its own needs and what it receives is better than anything to be seen in the world.

Once he has tasted this food, he is set alight by an eternal desire for the Lord, the fiercest of fires lighting up his soul.

This sounds like the emphasis of our Synod--ABLAZE.

MARTIN LUTHER ON PRAYER

- Martin Luther wrote to his barber, Peter Beskendorf in 1534, "We have to watch so that we may not get weaned from prayer by fooling ourselves that a certain job is more urgent, which really isn't—and we finally get sluggish, lazy, cold and wary. But, the devil is neither sluggish nor lazy around us." (from A Simple Way to Pray for a Good Friend—a 40 page letter to his barber who asked, How do you pray.)
- We may be proceeding quite satisfactorily in our faith and life as Christians. Yet we should know that there are all sorts of transgressions and offenses that seek to hinder our progress in Christian living. We battle against these foes of faith continually with all our might, but the strongest shield we have is prayer. If we do not use that, it is impossible for us to hold our own and to go on being Christians. While there are many obstacles to living the Christian life, neglect of prayer means surrendering the weapon we need most of all. Jesus' admonition, 'Ask and it will be given you, seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you,' (Matthew 7:7) needs therefore to be heeded. We cannot keep on being Christians in deed and in truth without tapping the resources of spiritual power through unceasing prayer." (page 128, Luther and Prayer, by Martin E. Lehmann)
- "Because of all the temptations and hindrances we face, nothing is more necessary in Christendom than continued and unceasing prayer that God would give His grace and His Spirit to make the doctrine powerful and efficacious among us and among others." (page 116-117, Luther and Prayer, by Martin E. Lehmann)

A NORWEGIAN LUTHERAN PASTOR: Ole Hallesby, Prayer

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- "Prayer is a labor for which there is no substitute in the kingdom of God. We need to be reminded of this because it is easy for us to look upon it in exactly the opposite way. We are inclined to think that when we are real busy in the work of the kingdom of God, then we can, without danger, spend less time in prayer. This way of thinking is in our very blood (as part of a fallen humanity). Satan sees to it that it is quickened into life at just the right time. It is, therefore, necessary for the Spirit of God to burn into our hearts this mystery - that the most important work we have to do is that which must be done on our knees, alone with God, away from the battle of the world and the plaudits of men."

THE PRAYERS OF GOD'S PEOPLE IN THE PRESENT DAY

- For more than a year before Campus Crusade for Christ began, Bill Bright, the founder, led church teams into dormitories, fraternities and sororities in the Los Angeles area. There were no students who committed their lives to Christ during that year.

After Bright launched Campus Crusade for Christ, he held an evangelistic meeting on the campus of UCLA at the Kappa Alpha Theta house. That evening, more than 30 of the 60 girls present received Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. In the next few months, more than 250 students at UCLA, including the Student Body President, the newspaper editor and several top athletes received Christ.

What made the difference? The leaders of Campus Crusade for Christ had immediately formed a 24 hour prayer chain, which they divided into 15 minute periods. Dozens of Christians spent 15 minutes in prayer every day for the ministry at UCLA.

- A congregation in California wanted to know if prayer really makes a difference. They chose 160 names from the phone book, assigned 80 names to members, who prayed for them for 90 days that the Lord would open their hearts to Jesus. They did not pray for the other 80 people. After 90 days, the church secretary called the 180 names and asked this question: "Can someone from our church come and pray with you about any needs that you have? We won't try to get you to come to church. We won't even come into your home." Of the 80 names they had prayed for, 69 said "Yes." Of the 80 for whom no one had prayed, only 1 (one) person said, "Yes." The rest said, "No."
- Wesley Duewel, a former missionary to India and a teacher of prayer, tells how his mission struggled for 25 years as it planted one new church a year. The missionaries decided that something was wrong. They enlisted 1000 people in their sending countries to pray daily for the Lord to open hearts of people. In the next few years, the missions exploded from 25 to more than 550 churches and from 2,000 to nearly 75,000 Christians. (Taken from Why Pray John F. DeVries)
- For two years, Calvary Lutheran Church, Aberdeen, prayer walked its surrounding neighborhood on a Saturday morning before the festivals of Christmas and Easter and before the start of the new school year. They would pray for the people, school and businesses in the neighborhood. One of the results is that the school in that neighborhood invited the congregation to conduct its midweek children's ministry in their facilities for no charge. And, the principal would send a note home with children in the school, inviting them to the light supper and the sessions following the meal.

QUOTES FROM PEOPLE INVOLVED IN PRAYER MINISTRY

- E. M. Bounds, author of the 19th century classic, Power through Prayer: "What the church needs today is not more of better machinery, not new organizations or more novel methods; but, people whom the Holy Spirit can use—men and women of prayer...The Holy Spirit does not flow through methods, but through people...and does not come on machinery, but on people...does not anoint plans, but people—people of prayer."
- R. A. Torrey: "The devil is not afraid of machinery in the church. He is only afraid of people. Machinery without prayer is machinery without God."
- Samuel Chadwick: "The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work or prayerless religion. He laughs at our work, mocks our wisdom, but trembles when we pray."

- Del Fensefeld, Jr.: “Our generation has tried every conceivable way to experience spiritual reality. The need of the hour is not for better preaching, promotion, entertainment, programs, organization, seminars, conferences, television and radio broadcasts, techniques or methods. The battle cannot be won with weapons and strategies of people. The battle must be waged and won in prayer because prayer activates God’s power in response to our prayers for His kingdom to come.”



God Bless you as you
Walk with Him
and your brothers and sisters
in dedicated prayer!