

Is My Church a Praying Church?

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“The purpose of prayer is to know God Himself.” ~ Oswald Chambers¹

“Prayer is the measurable, dynamic act that determines a Christian’s spiritual state.” ~ Robert O’Bakke ²

Therefore, prayer can also be described as the measurable dynamic act that determines a “church’s spiritual state.”

Three Types of Adventist Churches

All churches operate from three distinct models of prayer and spirituality, according to research done by Dr. Joseph Kidder between 2003-2007 on flourishing congregations in the North American Division.

1. Prayer-less Church (Book-end/Zipper Church): These churches recognize the importance of prayer to their ministry but have not developed prayer strategically. Meetings open and close with prayer; they have pastoral prayers and possibly have weekly prayer meetings. Prayer is unstructured. People pray for the church and its ministry but are not given specific requests. Prayer is not recognized as a ministry in the church. **Fifteen percent of all Seventh-day Adventist Churches** fall into this category.

2. A Church with Prayer: Most members of a “Church with Prayer” delegate the praying to a group called “Prayer Warriors.” Prayer is recognized as a ministry and emphasized to some extent. In this church, the congregation has no sense of urgency about prayer. Most members do not pray much — they believe that someone else will do it. This church **represents 80% of Seventh-day Adventist churches.**

3. The Praying Church (Church with a Culture of Prayer): This church takes the Holy Spirit and prayer very seriously and makes them the center of every activity. They make sure that all activities of the church are bathed in prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit. The atmosphere and culture of the church is all about prayer.

Strategies for ministries are developed as a result of prayer. Every ministry is prayed for and has leaders who pray. These houses of prayer grow as a result of the relationship of its leaders and members with God. Board meetings are prayer meetings. Weekly prayer meetings offer opportunities for the congregation to commit to God, pray for each other, celebrate victories, and to worship. The members of this church model are passionate and hungry for God. God's plans become their plans. **Only 5% of all Seventh-day Adventist Churches fall into this category.**³

Reflection:

1. How does my church measure up if "prayer is the measurable dynamic act that determines its spiritual state?"
2. Where does my church fall in the description of the models above?
3. How can I encourage and develop prayer life in my church?
4. What does God want me to do to help my church grow in its prayer life? Devote time to praying about this and listening to God's voice.

Formality? Or House of Prayer?

"Ninety-five percent of Seventh-day Adventist churches relate to prayer as an incidental concern or as the ministry of a few people. Thus, 95% of Adventist congregations need to move from treating prayer as a formality or one ministry among many and become sanctuaries focused on the God of answered prayers."⁴ Five percent of Adventist Churches are houses of prayer.

How does a church become a House of Prayer? It begins with one. Pray for your pastor, church leaders, church families, and your communities. Ask God to give you the names of at least five people who need to come to Christ that you pray for in the next year. Ask for a prayer partner to pray with you.....then ask for others in your church who have a burden for prayer and are willing to commit to a ministry of prayer. Involve church leadership in all decisions and plans.

Look for ways to model prayer in practical and easy ways for your congregation. Help them see the many ways they can incorporate it into their lifestyles and ministries.

Seven Marks of a Praying Church

How do you know if your church is truly a praying church? Does a pastoral prayer on Sabbath suffice? What about having a prayer group or two that engages in prayer for the church?

The following marks of a praying church, as seen in the book of Acts, provide a helpful way to assess the prayer life of your congregation:

1. Most members have a robust devotional prayer life and are committed to praying for others. Acts 12:12
2. Church members have a biblical understanding of God and how they can relate personally to Him through prayer. Acts 1:14, 2:1-4
3. Leaders are praying people who set an example of prayer for the congregation. Acts 4:23-31, 20:36
4. Prayer is a way of life throughout the church. Rather than being seen as an isolated program, prayer permeates every ministry within the church and every church outreach. Acts 2:42, 13:1-3
5. Corporate prayer meetings are prioritized in the lives of the church leadership and congregation. Acts 1:14
6. Spending time in the presence of the Lord produces humility, purity, unity, compassion, and Christ-likeness in the lives of leaders and the congregation. Acts 2:40-47
7. God's presence fills His house. *Perhaps the single most distinguishing characteristic of a "house of prayer" is that it is filled with the tangible presence of God.* A lack of spiritual appetite in the congregation is replaced by spiritual hunger. Unbelievers' hearts are converted by the life-giving messages preached from the pulpit. The spiritual objectives of the church begin to move forward, not so much by human ingenuity and hard work as by the supernatural assistance of God's Holy Spirit. Striving ceases; more is accomplished with less effort.⁵ Acts 16:25-34, 2 Chronicles 7:1-3

Reflect:

1. Which markers are seen in my church's prayer life?
2. What areas of my church's prayer life need growth? Ask God to show you how to work on these areas through the Holy Spirit.

"If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in Heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" Matthew 18:19, 20
"Ask of Me, and I will answer your requests." **The promise is made on condition that the united prayers of the church are offered, and in answer to these prayers, there may be expected a power greater than that which comes in answer to private prayer.** The power given will be proportionate to the unity of the members and their love of God and for one another.⁶

¹ Oswald Chambers. *My Utmost for His Highest*. Barbour & Company. 1963. August 28. p. 241.

² Robert O'Bakke. *Power of Extraordinary Prayer*. Crossway Books. 2000. p. 17.

³ Joseph Kidder. *The Big Four*. Review and Herald Publishing. 2011. p.12, p. 94-97.

⁴ Joseph Kidder. *The Big Four*. Review and Herald Publishing. 2011. p. 100

⁵ Adapted from Sacks, Cheryl. *The Prayer Saturated Church*. Navpress, 2004, 2007. p. 29.

⁶ White, Ellen. Letter 32, 1903, p.5 (To Brother and Sister Farnsworth, January 28, 1903.) White Estate Washington D.C. October 22, 1979 (9MR 303.3) –MR No. 748 – *The Power of United Prayer*