

A Partnership Prayer Chain

Michael and Jo Selman

We are often hesitant about prayer. Does it ‘work’? Can it make a difference? This often shows in the language we use: ‘we can’t do anything except pray’ – as if it were the last resort.

It is undeniable that there are problems – we have all prayed for deeply held concerns that have apparently not been answered. And our understanding of prayer must not treat it like some kind of magic, which is bound to work, if only we get the formula right.

Having said that, it is clear that Jesus took prayer seriously: the two parables that Luke recounts – the ‘Bold Friend’ (Lk 11.5-8) and the ‘Persistent Widow’ (Lk 18.1-8)- and his words in the Sermon on the Mount, “Ask and it will be given to you...” (Matt 7.7-8) – are very direct and unambiguous.

So if we follow his example and teaching, we are to pray, and to pray persistently and expectantly for God’s will to be done, knowing that his will is to bless and to heal. And we are to pray alone and as part of the fellowship of the church, for it is when we agree on earth about what we ask for, that the Father grants our requests (Matt 18.19). That is why public intercession is so important, and why we always include the names of those who have asked for prayer in our Sunday worship.

At the moment in the Partnership, this is done almost exclusively within parishes, but we are proposing that we extend our range and learn to pray across the boundaries of our seven parishes – for those who need, or have asked for, prayer; and also for important events and needs within the churches and in the community. That, I believe, will give us a stronger sense of mutual belonging and commitment to each other. It also means that we can involve more people in praying for those in need.

Starting in Advent, we hope to develop a Partnership-wide Prayer Chain. Jo has offered to co-ordinate this and there will be people in each parish nominated to collect names and give them to her to be ‘shared around’. The main focus will be in preparation for Sunday’s worship, but it should be possible to process emergency requests by prayer, phoning them round to each parish representative. Hopefully within each parish there also will be ‘chains’, to involve as many people as possible in intercession.

Prayer can be a powerful ministry – not least for those who may otherwise feel they have little to offer the church. As Tennyson wrote, ‘More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of’.

Part of the mystery of the Christian life is the truth that God involves us in his work of redeeming and transforming the world; our prayer is one of the principal ways we can enable God to reach into situations and touch lives. Our not praying may hinder or frustrate God’s work.

Please pray for the success of this development. It will mean we are sometimes praying for people we do not know – but God knows them! It may mean that some weeks there are a lot of names on the prayer list – but that simply reflects the needs around us. A little patience and understanding on our part is a small effort, to bring something of God’s love to those who are hurting or in darkness. For though our prayers are not always answered in the way we hope for, we cannot begin to estimate the difference they can and do make.