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The Salutary Use of Corporate Prayer with Special Reference to the Community of the Congregation

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THE SALUTARY USE OF CORPORATE PRAYER
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE COMMUNITY
OF THE CONGREGATION

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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June, 1960

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SHORT TITLE

INFORMAL CORPORATE PRAYER IN CHURCH

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CHAPTER I

A REVIEW OF PRAYER

Doctrinal and Historical Implications

The privilege and opportunity to pray is a great mystery. A succinct definition is that prayer is a two-way conversation with God. O. Hallesby in his classic volume on the subject says that prayer is to simply let Jesus come into our need.¹ Prayer in its widest meaning, according to the compilers and editors of the several major articles and encyclopedias consulted,² agree that prayer, in its widest Christian meaning, is communing with God. Some form of prayer is found in all the various world religions, and the history of religions has put much attention on primitive prayer. Christian prayer, however, is unique both in meaning and in manner. The root of the principle Hebrew verb, "to pray," has been variously interpreted as "to cut, decide" and "to level, arbitrate." The Greek New Testament words used almost synonymously for prayer, προσεύχομαι (προσευχή), δέησις, ἐπιτεύξεις connote needful petition, devout entreaty to God, and confiding access, respectively. The English word, "pray" is derived from the latin precari, "to entreat."

Prayer is characterized by various moods such as adoration or praise, thanksgiving, confession, petition and intercession; dedication

¹O. Hallesby, Prayer, translated from the Norwegian by Clarence J. Carlsen (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, c.1931), p. 12.

²The Jewish Encyclopedia; Encyclopedia Britannica; The Encyclopedia of the Southern Baptists; Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics; A Theological Word Book of the Bible.

and imprecation; speaking and listening; no one of which can be rightly regarded as the totality of prayer. Prayer may be either oral or silent, explicit or implicit, private or corporate.

Prayer in the Old Testament took for granted that God is personal and active; omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. Significant prayers recorded in the Old Testament include those of Abraham, Moses, Hannah, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Isaiah, Hezekiah, Job, Daniel, and those of the Psalms. Frequently prayer was led by a national leader and was evoked by particular need. With the prophet Jeremiah individual prayer attained great importance.

The Apocrypha, although containing some noteworthy prayers, reveals little development in prayer. Liturgical prayers in pre-Christian Judaism can be noted in the Talmud and Prayer Book.

Jesus, both by example and by teaching, emphasized the urgency of prayer. For Him prayer was both daily communion with the Father and a special discipline preceding the crises of his life. His prayers, as those uttered while on the cross demonstrate, were largely intercessory and not solely petitionary. James Leo Garrett comments in the Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists:

The Lord's Prayer, probably designed for personal usage although containing social elements, proceeds from adoration to petition, from "thy" to "us." Jesus stressed as essential elements in prayer--sincerity without ostentation, Matt. 6:5f.; simplicity without verbosity, Matt. 6:7f.; humility, Luke 18:9-14; importunity, Luke 11:5-10, 18:1-8; forgiveness, Matt. 6:14f.; faith, Matt. 17:20, Mark 11:22-24; and a vital relation with Himself, John 15:7. His teaching on secret prayer, designed as a corrective for Pharisaism, was in no sense intended to discourage genuine public prayer. Prayer "in my name" involves the willing submission of the one praying to be Christ's agent.³

³Ibid.

The early Christians for a time simultaneously participated in the Jewish worship while engaging themselves in communal prayer. Prayer characterized the leadership of the Apostles. Directed to Jesus, it affected the work of the Holy Spirit, preceded providential deliverance, and resulted in missionary expansion. According to Paul, prayer is to be in and by the Holy Spirit. It is to be strongly intercessory and unceasing. Paul's prayer for removal of his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:8f.) is a classic illustration of the truth that, although a petition may not be granted, the prayer is answered. The letter to the Hebrews stressed the new approach to God's throne of grace through Jesus' continuous work of intercession. James mentioned prayer in faith for wisdom and for healing, God's availability and prayers' efficacy, and the cause of neglected and misdirected praying. According to Peter, prayer should be offered seriously to the God who hears. Peter also pointed out that prayer can be hindered by domestic trouble. Boldness to ask according to God's will characterized John; "the prayers of the saints" and a prayer for Christ's coming are found in The Book of Revelation.

The history of Christian prayer, as Garrett quotes Hughes, is largely the record of the struggle between two conceptions, the "prophetic" and the "mystical," the one leading to communion and the other to absorbtive union with God.

In the ancient era the formulation and usage of liturgies was marked by the decline of spontaneity in prayer. Prayer was offered for persecutors, for heretics, as propitiation, and commonly, by the fourth century, for the dead. Tertullian's de Oratione (A.D. 204) is the oldest extant commentary on the Lord's Prayer. Monasticism served to discourage petitions for temporal things and to make prayer the special continual task of its ascetical adherents. In the East mystical prayer soon prevailed in the mysterious complex of ritual and Sacrament;

later in the West, prayer to Mary and the Saints increasingly prevailed. Augustine affected a synthesis of the contemplative and the mystical in prayer. The synthesis Thomas Aquinas sought to preserve, but mystics such as Hugo of St. Victor gave the contemplative, the pre-eminence--a trend followed by John of the Cross and Francis de Sales. The Reformation brought about a renewal of prophetic prayer. For Luther and Calvin, prayer was through Christ's intercession the privilege and duty of all Christians amid their vocations. Such a prophetic type of prayer prevailed among most of the Anabaptists, the Puritans and the Pietists, but the Quakers extended the mystical tradition. Comte anticipated the modern denial of prayers reality. Intercessory prayer was the matrix from which the modern protestant missionary movement was formed. The social Gospel directed prayer toward social reform.⁴

In the contemporary period prayer has been the object of a two-fold assault. Philosophical naturalism under the guise of "natural law" and "scientific necessity" has argued the impossibility of prayer, especially petitionary prayer. From psychology have come the defective propositions that prayer is auto-suggestion and that it is projection, a rationalization, a wishful thinking. "Modern man," Garrett says, "to deny prayer, must nullify personality, even his own, or give ascent to the idea that self is the only existent thing (which he never practices). Christian prayer cannot be adequately defined solely as a means of personality adjustment."⁵

Practical difficulties regarding prayer often beset the Christian, viz., unanswered petitions, prayer in relation to God's will, petitions for physical healing, and so forth. Prayer interpreted as "communion" means that there can be petitions not immediately granted but not genuine prayer without answer. God answers all Christian prayer by saying "yes," "no," or "wait, I have something better in mind for you."

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Praying according to God's will may alter particular intentions or executive directions of God, but not the ultimate purpose of God, for man, and the world. Not all petitions for physical healing are necessarily to be granted.⁶

Prayer is imperative for the Christian, for prayerlessness is the tap root of the Christian's sins and failures, and praying brings the believer into God's presence. It is at once privilege and duty, at once from God and by man. Prayer necessitates, as Hallesby contends, a veritable wrestling with God.⁷ It has been stated that "it is truer to say that we live the Christian life in order to pray than we pray in order to live the Christian life."

Isolating the Subject: Objectives and Limitations

In the life of the Christian prayer is to the soul as breathing is to the body. We sing in the hymn "Prayer is the Christian's vital breath un-uttered or expressed."⁸ Although we know the reasons for praying, the how and the why of it all, and although volumes have been written on the subject, yet it appears that much of the praying in our church is very formal and awkward. We know how and why to pray but do we really pray? The purpose of this study is to particularly isolate

⁶Prayer Meetings," Lutheran Cyclopedia, editor in chief, Erwin L. Lueker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1954), p. 836.

⁷Hallesby, op. cit., pp. 78ff.

⁸Elmer A. Kettner, "Prayer," Educational filmstrip on the Six Chief Parts of the Catechism by Church Craft, Inc., n.d.

and point up the problem of praying together. In confirmation classes the children can, over a period of time, be taught how to pray together from the heart and how to express themselves particularly with others. However, when the same attempt is made with adults who have been in the church for many years and have not had this training from little on, it appears a very difficult thing for them to do and very difficult to accomplish. Recognizing that informal corporate prayer is a part of the Christian experience it is the intent of the author to show that this is being done today in the correct Scriptural way and that from this intimate fellowship many blessings for individuals and congregation are forthcoming. The author feels that the ability of the laity to speak and pray ex corde has not been in the warp and woof of our congregational life, nor has this teaching and practice been directed to the laymen. Like the ancient art of making stained glass, this is a lost art among us, a lost talent.

Thus, the scope of the problem will be limited to learning to pray together; not the how of prayer, or the mechanics of prayer individually, or the idea behind prayer, necessarily. This is not meant to be a completely thorough presentation but only an elementary primer. The paper will not discuss: corporate prayer in formal congregational services, including Baptism, Holy Communion, weddings, funerals, or at other public occasions and gatherings. The paper will allude briefly to family (home) devotions, but will be primarily concerned with the larger family of the local congregation. The study will show the naturalness of community prayer from Scripture and how this has worked out historically in certain groups. We will show by way of various reports the particular approach of our own Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. The thesis will

then outline two contemporary prayer situations. This study is meant to be a positive approach to the subject with suggestions for our use at this time and in the future, in order that we may be all built up in the faith and be better able to express ourselves as children of the living God.

Our church has always been known as a singing church. It should also be known by everyone as a praying church.

CHAPTER II

THE RE-DISCOVERY OF CORPORATE PRAYER

Study of the Scripture

When St. Paul in Ephesians 4:15 speaks about edifying the Body of Christ, he says we should "continue to speak the truth in love that we may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head even Christ." The verb *auxaysomen* ἀὐξήσωμεν is the first person plural aorist subjunctive of the verb ἀύξάτω . The form is horatatory and means that we as a community should keep growing and maturing in Christ with one another. Our Christian faith is not something that we learn once and for all. We are a mutual-aid society, a group of sinners working together through our lifetime, helping and befriending one another. We are to come together in the church militant

in the unity of the faith, and in the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a more perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ; from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.¹

One of the most salutary rediscoveries of modern Christianity has been the discovery of this Christian truth. The proper Lutheran emphasis of every man his own priest, 1 Peter 2:9, is right and proper. However, the Scripture also speaks and agrees with modern psychology that the

¹Eph. 4:13-16.

roots and life of each individual are very deeply entwined in the family and community (in this instance the family and community of the Church). Reginald E. O. White says: "Socially, no man is an island: His thoughts, feelings, reactions and growth are inseparably conditioned by his circle. Racially, in defiance of all artificial barriers, we are bound in the bundle of life with all the human family."² As we study the Scripture on this matter we see that although spiritual life is the most personal of all experiences, yet the need for unity with others is most important. Christ said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another."³ The individual Christian's experience of Christ may be sincere, and yet will be narrow, colorless and limited if it is kept in isolation from the brethren. In the Old Testament as we shall see the faith was a corporate affair.⁴ The tribes, the families, and the whole Jewish nation were one united corporate unit. The Scriptural emphasis upon personal experience, personal responsibility, and personal testimony is always made within the framework of the community of our Savior God and His Church throughout the Old and New Testament down to the present time--and looking forward to the return of Christ. Always, at the center of Christian fellowship is the shared act of worship and the unity of common prayer. Reginald White comments:

Beneath the level which intellect and varied interests divide men from each other, spirits do meet, awareness of God is heightened, souls are enlarged and made increasingly responsive, differences

²Reginald E. O. White, Prayer is the Secret (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1958), p. 113.

³John 13:35.

⁴Infra, p. 14.

dissolve and greater things become conceivable in that recapturing of elemental human unity which may be experienced in religious fellowship. Each contributes, and is contributed to; and the total value of shared devotion is much greater than the sum of all its parts. Each is enriched by what he gives away.⁵

Probably the most basic passage for this paper is the promise of Jesus: "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in Heaven."⁶ The early Christians discovered that prayer gained immensely in authority and power when the Saints shared in the approach to God. We find them praying together at the choice of Matthias, in response to persecution for the release of Peter and for the sick.⁷ Paul prays with the elders of the church at Miletus and at Tyre.⁸ United prayer is one of the four marks of the Apostolic community in which the Pentecostal converts "continue," and concerted prayer at the temple at appointed hours finds Peter and John in attendance. In Advance Magazine, June, 1956, the quotation is given that "the Church of Jesus Christ was born in a prayer meeting." Such meetings are always the spiritual thermometer of the Church. It is also interesting to note that joint prayer service seem to have found a place within the Apostolic worship--for detailed instructions are given concerning speech, orderliness, the covering of the head, topics for request, and the corporate utterance of the "Amen."⁹

⁵White, op. cit., p. 115.

⁶Matt. 18:19.

⁷Acts 1:24; 4:24; 12:5.

⁸Acts 20:36; 21:5.

⁹"April 1957 - The Fellowship of Prayer," Advance Magazine, III (June, 1956), 45.

Beside times for praying together in the congregation, mention is made of united family prayer. For this we refer to 1 Corinthians 6:5 and 1 Peter 3:7. Prayer was taken as normal in the Christian household. When the New Testament is studied it is easily seen that communion with God (and that done together with others) was a regular and essential part of Christian experience. Reginald White, who writes extensively on this subject in his book The Secret is Prayer declares that "united prayer was at once the highest expression and the surest safeguard of the Church's oneness in Christ, and to which prevalence much of the richness and depth of Apostolic experience must be attributed."¹⁰ He goes on to say that without a doubt our spiritual experience and power would be immeasurably greater if we could recapture this art and custom of regularly praying together.¹¹ George Buttrick, in his book entitled Prayer says "the needs of the Church are many and urgent, but they might all be met by the leaven of genuine corporate prayer."¹²

As Christians prayed with each other, so they also prayed for each other, with earnest sympathy and deep concern. White lists six references concerning the "prayerful remembrance" of parted friends or the "bridge" as he says of prayer, that unites in common understanding and concern those as yet strangers in the flesh but one in Christ. These passages are: Romans 1:9; Colossians 1:3; 2:1; Phillipians 1:3,4; Ephesians 1:15,16; 3:14; Colossians 4:12; and 1 Thessalonians 1:2,3.

¹⁰White, op. cit., p. 117.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²George A. Buttrick, Prayer (New York: Abingdon Cokesbury, c.1952), p. 292.

Such intercession greatly encouraged the young pastor Timothy¹³ as it also increased the spiritual indebtedness of Philemon to Paul.¹⁴

It is also interesting to note how Paul constantly expressed his desire that his churches would pray for him.¹⁵

This great man of work and prayer leaned heavily on the prayer partnership of the ordinary rank and file converts in his congregations and who by this means of community and prayer fellowship entered deeply into all his enterprises for the Gospel. Note how the leader in writing the letter to the Hebrews "beseeches" such intercession from the congregation, that he might be restored the sooner to his reader's fellowship.¹⁶ Paul also asks such intercessions of the Roman and Philippian congregations.¹⁷ Such mutual sharing, by intercession, in the labors of the Apostles was counted a very real "helping together" (2 Corinthians 1:11), and a "striving with me in your prayers" (Romans 15:30). White says that the experience of praying for each other here becomes not simply mutual concern but corporate participation in the labor of the Kingdom.¹⁸

Finally, we should notice the prayers of these early, ardent Saints offered for each other's spiritual improvement, and for the gift of the Spirit.¹⁹ Nor, were their intercessions confined to the brotherhood in

¹³2 Tim. 1:3.

¹⁴Philemon 4.

¹⁵Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:3,4; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1; Philemon 22.

¹⁶Hebrews 13:19.

¹⁷Romans 15:30; Phil. 1:19.

¹⁸White, op. cit., p. 119.

¹⁹2 Cor. 13:9; Phil. 1:19; Col. 1:9; 2 Thess. 1:11; Acts 8:15.

Christ. They prayed for blessings on the sinning brother, as on the sick; prayer was requested for Simon the Sorcerer immediately following upon Peter's rebuke and very significantly--Paul never ceased to pray for unrepentant Israel.²⁰ Thus we see in the study of the early Church emerging from the Book of Acts, and the lives of the Apostles expressed in their epistles that a wholly new quality of communal life flourished. It found expression in mutual sympathy, loyalty to each other before the persecuting world, community of goods, dissolving of all barriers--racial, religious, and social--in unity in Christ, and in shared worship. This prized "koinonia" or spiritual oneness was a new thing in the earth: and it found no outlet and no stronger reinforcement than in prayer with and for each other before the eternal throne. Men found that because "God is love," they were now all one in Christ.²¹

"All one in Christ Jesus" meant, in their conception, all one in actual experience of unity with Christ in worship, in comradeship, in work, and especially in prayer. Their motto might well have been, "We stand together and we intend to kneel together"--for so at least their writings make clear.²² They found their unity in Christ and preserved it in their prayer fellowship with Him.

A study of the New Testament will show that Jesus' word about the brother and the gift and the altar and His command to love²³ shows that there can be not the slightest doubt that prayer means Christian unity.

²⁰ 1 John 5:16; James 5:14; Acts 8:24; Romans 10:1.

²¹ Gal. 3:28.

²² Ibid.

²³ Matt. 5:23,24.

Hearts that pray long and earnestly to the Father, through one mediator, by one spirit, cannot remain indifferent to each other. If intelligence does not make it plain then conscience will: for we shall surely find that enmity, division, and unfriendliness stand up accusingly within the soul whenever we seek the presence of the Lord. We seek, as Jesus said, "Our Father," not each his own, but each seeking help of the Father of all. And in our prayer experience God binds us all in one. Thus it is precisely correct when Paul says in Ephesians 4,

There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all. But unto everyone of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.²⁴

Through this fellowship we are to speak the truth in love and continue to grow up together and into Him in all things who is the Head, even Christ.

Chabburah

סַטְרֵי חַבּוּרָה ח. (חַבּוּרָה) company, association, party;

especially those united for eating the Passover lamb in company.²⁵ This began when God commanded Moses to institute the Passover, shortly before the children of Israel were driven out of the land of Egypt. Ever since that time it was the custom of the people to wait until the first star of the evening would appear and then they would gather in small groups for prayer and the evening meal--this especially before the Sabbath day.²⁶

²⁴Eph. 4:4-7.

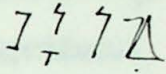
²⁵Ex. 12:4.

²⁶"Habburah," A Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and The Midrashic Literature, compiled by Marcus Jastrow (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1903), I, 416.

The importance of Chabburah for us is that this was a custom followed by the faithful Jews. They gathered together in small groups and prayed and ate together before the Sabbath. It was an informal, yet very important and blessed fellowship which they shared. Jesus himself with His disciples probably many times shared the Chabburah together.

This ancient custom would compare today with our own family devotions held after the evening meal and particularly as the family prepared for the reception of The Lord's Supper on the Lord's day.

Minyan

Minyan  literally means "to count"; it was the quorum necessary for public worship in the Old Testament. It was the rule among the Israelites that the smallest congregation which was permitted to hold public worship was one made up of at least ten men who must be at the minimum boys at least over the age of thirteen. These boys for this and other religious purposes were counted as men. The writer in the Jewish Encyclopedia says that the minimum of ten men is evidently a survival in the Synagogue for a much older institution in which the ten heads of families made up the smallest political division. For instance, in Exodus 18 Moses on the advice of Jethro, his father-in-law, appoints chiefs of tens as well as chiefs of fifties, of hundreds and of thousands.²⁷ The number ten is derived from the Biblical edah ("congregation"); in Numbers 14:27 ten men are understood by the term "congregation" (cf. also Genesis 18:23-32). A public divine service containing

²⁷"Minyan," The Jewish Encyclopedia (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1916), p. 1104.

the kaddish, kedushah, Priestly Blessing and the reading of the Torah cannot be held without a Minyan (Megillah 4:4). However, where ten Jewish men are assembled, any kind of Jewish divine service, even Yom Kippur, can be held in its complete form, without there being required the services of a rabbi or the ministrations of a priest. In cases where there are nine men present for services, and it is impossible to secure another man, a minor may be counted as the tenth for the Minyan.

Even in ancient Palestine it was not always easy to obtain a Minyan, since the settlements were small and the inhabitants were all engaged in occupations. According to Megillah 1:6, a place in which there were ten "Batlanim," i.e. ten men who were free from their occupations and trades to the extent that they voluntarily went to the house of prayer at the times designated for the various services, was regarded as a great city. Beginning with the Diaspora it became a difficult matter to secure a Minyan. Hence the custom developed of hiring Jewish men for this purpose; these hired Minyan members came to the synagogue, especially on week days, and made it possible to hold divine services. Such a person, in popular speech, is called a Minyanmann.

It is very interesting to note that traditionally and historically while there may have been many women present there nevertheless had to be at least ten men to hold a worship service. While women may in certain contingencies have taken an active part in public service by reading parts of the weekly lesson, none of the authorities speak of counting the women in the Minyan. Today in reformed congregations, on the basis of the general principle of the full religio-legal

quality of men and women, the women are included in the counting of a Minyan.²⁸

The writer in the Jewish Encyclopedia commenting upon the Babylonian Talmud says that Scriptural authority for ten men constituting a congregation is found in the words of Numbers 14:27: "How long shall I bear with this evil generation which murmur against me?" This is a reference to the scouts who went out to spy in the land of Canaan. There were twelve in all, two of whom, Caleb and Joshua, were faithful and ten were doubters and did not believe that God would give them the victory in settling this land. The exact connection here with the ten evil or unbelieving spies and the ten needed for the Minyan is not exactly clear to the author but nevertheless this is the reference for the beginning of the number needed for carrying on of worship. All the male Israelites of the proper age, unless they were under the ban, or had openly severed their connection with their brethren by professing a hostile creed, were counted among the needful ten even though they may have been notorious and habitual sinners.

It was the firm belief of the Sages that wherever ten Israelites were assembled either for worship or for the study of the law the Shhekinah (Divine) "dwells" among them. In other words, when ten men sit down together to study the law and to worship, the Presence dwells among them; for it is said in Psalm 82:1 "God [Elohim] standeth in the congregation."

King Solomon's prayer of 1 Kings 8:28 "Yet have thou respect unto

²⁸"Minyan," The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, edited by Isaac Landman (New York: The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, Inc., 1942), VII, 577-578.

the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O Lord my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer," is shown to mean by Abba Benjamin as noted by the Jewish Encyclopedia to mean that man's prayer is best heard at the Synagogue, for where men sing, there also they should pray.²⁹ Other commentators noted in the Encyclopedia article held that for the purpose of study or prayer people could meet in even smaller numbers than the ten and that there was even value for the one who meditates or prays alone; but the stress is put upon the merits and sacredness of the Minyan.

It is interesting then, to note the stress put upon the need for ten people to be present for a worship service. For some reason the women did not count. There could have been many women present but unless there were ten men they could not hold the service. For our purposes however, the emphasis is upon the fact that their worship services and their formal prayers were to be held as a corporate group expression. Throughout the Old Testament there is great stress upon the community and the need for corporate prayer and expression in worship.

The Marks of a Healthy Parish

The Right Reverend Richard S. M. Emrich in a sermon entitled, "The Five Marks of a Healthy Parish" describes what he feels is essential for a dynamic congregation.

First, I can always tell whether a church I visit is loved and cared for. Does it smell clean or musty, is the wood polished and the brass shined, and the hymn and prayer books in order? It is not easy to worship God in sloppy physical surroundings.

²⁹"Minyan," The Jewish Encyclopedia, p. 1104.

Second, I look for signs of fellowship in a church--what everyone wants is to be loved and needed. America is on the move, new people are constantly coming to our towns and cities from other parts of the country. They are lonely, they feel uprooted, they need to be welcomed into the family fellowship of Christ's church.

Third, I look for a spirit of worship. When we worship we recognize the authority under which we stand. Christ is our King. We recognize and obey Him as such. How can we speak with authority unless we are under His authority? When we cease to worship Him as our Lord and Master, we become not a church but a club. [Underlining mine.]

Fourth, we need a sense of destiny. Every year every church should be taking new ground for our Lord and His Kingdom.

Fifth, we need loyalty.--Loyalty to those in authority over us, our ordained and elected leaders. Without this we will have anarchy and division.³⁰

The remarks to the point of worship are singularly interesting.

Again, speaking to the point of proper worship, Dr. John Heuss in a sermon entitled "The True Function of the Parish" makes a number of brilliant observations particularly concerning the "parade of trivialities," as he calls them. He has this to say:

For a long time I have had an uncomfortable feeling that we churchmen are working industriously away in our parishes without asking too many critical questions about what we are doing or why we are doing it. . . .

. . . It may well be that most of those things upon which we usually congratulate ourselves--statistical increases in membership, erection of new church buildings, larger collections of money, cleverly contrived promotional ventures--as pleasant as they are for us to behold in our human pride, if viewed as the sole ends for which our parishes exist, are repugnant to Almighty God.

I believe evidence can be seen that the true function of a parish is obscured today by the attitude most men have toward the church's proper and constant claim that the Christian religion alone can save the world. . . .

³⁰ Helen Smith Shoemaker, Power Through Prayer Groups (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, c.1958), pp. 51f.

It is customary for all of us to lay the blame for public indifference to religion at the door of the secularism and materialism of our age. It is my personal opinion that neither of these does as much harm as does the constant parade of trivialities [underlining mine] which the typical church program offers to the public. This program is only rarely related to the real issues which are clawing the soul of modern man to shreds. . . .

. . . We have all gotten so caught up in the success of running of the church that it is common for many to think that business activities are identical with religion. To pay mortgages, to build new parish houses, to put on a drive for new members, to hold bazaars, lunches, dinners, and bake sales--all of this is admirable, but it is not religion. To confuse it with religion is the ever present temptation of the activist American.

. . . We all need to get a clear grasp again on what the spirit-filled fellowship was like which came into existence immediately after Pentecost. What it did to people, your parish and mine should be doing to people now. . . .

. . . It is a growing conviction of mine that no parish can fulfill its true function unless there is at the very center of its leadership life a small community of quietly fanatic, changed, and truly converted Christians underlining mine. The trouble with most parishes is that nobody, including the rector, is really greatly changed; but even where there is a devoted self-sacrificing priest at the heart of the fellowship, not much will happen until there is a community of changed men and women.³¹

Helen Smith Shoemaker quotes The Right Reverend Steven Neill, one of the best-known bishops of the Church of England, concerning the need for small fellowships:

The Gospel must be brought back where people live, in simple forms, and in terms of small and manageable fellowships.

Which brings us to our next point: Why this upsurge now? He says there are several possible explanations. The continuing state of tension in the world and the possibility of extinction by the hydrogen bomb and guided missiles have brought us to the realization that human wisdom is not enough. We crave to know God and his ways better than we do. We long to test and find true what the Prophets, our Lord, and the Church have taught us about prayer. We want an answer for our loneliness, our fear, our problems. We long to know how to pray, not just repeat prayers or to hear them repeated for us.

³¹Ibid., p. 53.

And so we meet together to seek an answer to these questions and anxieties and problems in united bible study and prayer.

Nature and human nature seem to be so constructed that when a need or a crisis arises, at the same time powers are let loose which meet the need. When disease or accident attacks our bodies, our circulatory system marshalls all its strength to counter-attack these destructive forces. So with the needs of our hearts and souls. When the destructive forces of the world--fear, hatred, want, and oppression--join ranks to destroy us, at the same time unseen positive forces are marshalled to save us. One of the greatest phrases in the Bible is, "In the fullness of time." In the fullness of time Christ came--again and again and throughout history there has occurred a "fullness of time." When the very powers of Heaven seem to be shaken by the clash of world forces, there appears on the horizon a small cloud the size of a man's hand, signalling a new release of spiritual power.

It is possible that this small group movement is such a cloud full of renewal and refreshment for Christ's church.³²

³²Ibid., p. 21.

CHAPTER III

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FOR PRAYER GROUPS

Secretly Among the Faithful

Helen Smith Shoemaker says that the small community or fellowship of Christians has an honorable lineage. It is a descendant of the informal fellowship of the ancient Jewish "Chabburah."¹ Far back in the midst of history, the Jewish people began forming small groups which met on a Sabbath eve for supper and prayer. These groups were called "Chabburah." Jesus and His disciples would, possibly, have formed such a company with very close bonds of love and fellowship. It was quite natural that the early Christian church included both the Ecclesia, which is the organized church with its worship centered largely in the Holy Communion, as well as the Agape, the informal fellowship of those who love one another in Christ.²

It is interesting to note that Jesus made His fullest self-revelation before a small group. Peter and James and John were included at the time of His transfiguration. The Twelve shared in the Last Supper experience. Again the three were with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane; and at Pentecost, so reads Acts, chapter two, the disciples were gathered with one accord in one place.³

There is account after account in the Book of Acts of the disciples

¹Supra, p. 13.

²Ibid., pp. 55f.

³Acts 2:1-13.

coming together for prayer. They were faithful to the Lord's expressed wish and promise. ". . . If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall 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). This, of course, is a most basic passage to our study. An interesting commentary is made by J. B. Phillips in the preface for his New Testament paraphrase of the Epistles The Young Church in Action.

here we are seeing the Church in its first youth, valiant and unspoiled--a body of ordinary men and women joined in an unquerable fellowship never before seen on this earth.

Yet we cannot help feeling disturbed as well as moved, for this surely is the Church as it was meant to be. It is vigorous and flexible, for these are the days before it ever became fat and short of breath through prosperity, or muscle-bound by over-organization. These men did not make "acts of faith," they believed; they did not "say their prayers," they really prayed. They did not hold conferences on psychosomatic medicine, they simply healed the sick. . . .

No one can read this book without being convinced that there is someone here at work besides mere human beings. Perhaps because of their very simplicity, perhaps because of their readiness to believe, to obey, to give, to suffer, and if need be to die, the Spirit of God found what surely He must always be seeking--a fellowship of men and women so united in love and faith that He can work in them and through them with a minimum of let or hindrance. Consequently it is a matter of sober historical fact that never before has any small body of ordinary people so moved the world that their enemies could say, with tears of rage in their eyes, that these men "have turned the world upside down"!

. . . Many problems comparable to modern complexities never arise here because men and women concerned were of one heart and mind in the Spirit. Many another issue is never allowed to rise because these early Christians were led by the Spirit to the main task of bringing people to God through Christ and were not permitted to enjoy fascinating sidetracks. . . .

. . . This is the beginning of the Christian era. This is the beginning of the practice of those virtues which scientific humanists so frequently assume to be natural to all human beings everywhere, despite the evidence of two world wars and the observable values of atheistic communism.

. . . They will find in this honest account of the early Church a corroboration of what Jesus meant when he said, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth: so is every-one that is born of the Spirit." For this is the story of Spirit-directed activities and there is what appears to be from the human point of view an arbitrariness, even a capriciousness, in the operation of the Holy Spirit. . . .

When we compare the strength and vigor of the Spirit-filled early Church with the confused and sometimes feeble performance of the Church today, we might perhaps conclude that when man's rigidity attempts to canalize the free and flexible flow of the Spirit he is left to his own devices.

. . . Here is a simple, unvarnished, conscientious account of the behavior and actions of quite a small group of people who honestly believe that Jesus was right in his claims. . . . No honest reader can evade the conclusion that something very powerful and very unusual has happened.

. . . Very little of the modern church could bear comparison with the spiritual drive, the genuine fellowship, and the gay, unconquerable courage of the young Church.⁴

A characteristic of these groups is that they are largely made up of lay people who, with the approval of the clergy, are seeking to capture what Dr. John Heuss has described as the "Spirit-filled fellowship which came into existence immediately after Pentecost."⁵

In a small book entitled An Adventure in Discipleship which describes the development of the movement known as the "The Servants of Christ, The King in the Church of England," the author, Roger Lloyd, quoted by Helen Shoemaker, states that the theological basis of all such groups and the first condition upon which alone the Pagan Kingdoms of this world can be brought under the divine obedience is the filling of

⁴J. B. Phillips, The Young Church in Action (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), pp. viiff.

⁵Helen Smith Shoemaker, Power Through Prayer Groups (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, c.1958), p. 58.

the members of the Church with Spiritual power. Since they cannot fill themselves with this grace, their first need is to yield to the inspiration of God. "In practice this means that we have to create the mold or shape the association upon which the inspiration of God can come, the state of affairs on which God can get a purchase and through which He can act." The Bible makes this shape absolutely clear. Hundreds of years of history separate its writers; and their motives and methods of writing are often quite different from each other. Yet, when they come to defining the conditions of God's dealing with men, His plan and purpose in the world, they all say exactly the same things. Their unanimity of testimony is absolute and most impressive.

Floyd says, broadly speaking, there are two things:

First, God is energy as well as love, or, as Archbishop William Temple used to so often say, "Absolute Power held in control by Absolute Love; that it is upon the togetherness of the communities of those who love Him that this strengthening inspiration normally comes.

. . . Their first obligation is to listen, not to act. Their first prayer must be, "Lord, teach me that I may be usable, and then use me as, where, and when seems good to Thee."

The second principle upon which the Biblical writers insist is that this attitude of mind which stakes all on the initiating energy of God is only fully fruitful when the mind which holds it is deliberately laid along side other minds which are thinking in the same way. . . . In the Bible, God's plan of redemption requires a dedicated community to be its instrument. No other authors of the ancient world are so consistently sure that it is only in the togetherness of spiritual community that we can be fully shown the things that belong to our health, and to the world's health. . . . From end to end the teaching of the Bible seems to be that divine inspiration normally descends on the dedicated community, and upon specially gifted and heroic individuals in and through their membership in it. . . . In a word, it seems incontestably part of the divine plan that God's people should respond to Him first of all, and that they should do this together. When they do this, they will find that their separate individualities so far from being blurred, are in fact enhanced and intensified.

Christ took over this double insight of the sacred writings of His nation, and in speech and action He endorsed them at every point. He chose Twelve men out of the whole body of his first disciples. They were to be given a special training, and it chiefly consisted in learning to live together with Him. They must share a common life, experience the joy and bear the strains of being constantly together, and learn little by little that their strength together, the product of Grace, would be greater by far than the sum of their strengths in isolation, the product of nature. . . .

Before Pentecost, the principle that those who would live for Christ must hold together and keep themselves close was well established and understood, and after Pentecost the Church at once began to try to live and work in this way. At first, during the period covered by the Book of Acts in the New Testament, the apostles moved about in small groups. The different churches they founded in places like Antioch, Ephesus, and Corinth were all household churches. As long as Christianity was a proscribed religion there could be no church buildings, and congregations must always be small enough to be contained in a single room in a house. They were in fact sufficiently compact to become true communities and to express all that is meant by the phrase, "Togetherness in Christ." . . . History is the record of the power and the revolution-making life of these little companies of Christians. . . .⁶

Again, Helen Smith Shoemaker writing in her book Power Through

Prayer Groups quotes the Right Reverend Austin Pardue, Bishop of Pittsburgh, concerning where prayer groups are found today.

A "prayer group" movement is spreading throughout the world rapidly. There are all types of groups within the movement. . . . I have found them in Korea, in Japan, in England, in West Germany, in North Africa, and in France. . . . Although supported by many clergy, these prayer groups generally are made up of lay people seeking a faith that is more intimate and personal than can be found in formal Sunday services. . . . The value of the lay prayer group is summed up in the phrase from a familiar Psalm: "I will give thanks unto the Lord with my whole heart, secretly among the faithful and in the congregation" (Psalm 111:1). The Bible suggests that vital religion is to be found by worshipping both "in the congregation," where one is part of the whole corporate body, and also "secretly among the faithful," where one joins a small intimate gathering of like-minded individuals.⁷

⁶Ibid., p. 64.

⁷Ibid., p. 83.

Mrs. Shoemaker says the Iona Fellowship in the Church of Scotland is such a movement. The German Institutes is another. She writes: "I am told neighborhood Bible Study prayer groups were meeting for several years all over Budapest prior to the great fight for freedom."⁸

The Church of England sponsors several small movements. One is described by Dr. Earnest Southcott in the book, The Parish Comes Alive, another under the title The Servants of Christ, the King. There are many more, she says.⁹

In our own country we have the Kirkbridge Fellowship in the Presbyterian Church, the Discipline Order of Christ in the Methodist Church, the Yolk Fellow Movement founded by Elton Trueblood, a Quaker, the I.C.L. Breakfast Groups, the Camps Furthest Out, and in the Episcopal Church there are thousands of small anonymous groups permeating the larger worshiping body of Christians with new warmth and life.¹⁰

Awakenings and Revivals in U.S. History

In discussing the background for prayer groups, it is necessary to devote some time and attention to the subject of revivals, especially in America. Merriam Webster, in his New International Dictionary, defines the word revival, particularly the revival of religion as "renewed interest in religion after indifference and decline; a period of

⁸Ibid., p. 53.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

religious awakening."¹¹ In sectarian religious history, revivals were always accompanied with a period of intense prayer or themselves were the result of periods of corporate prayer. The first great revival in American history was begun in 1735 with the preaching of Jonathan Edwards in Massachusetts. In 1662, the clergy of the colony of Massachusetts adopted what was called the Half-way Covenant. People who could make no profession of regeneration under this plan were still able to have their children baptized, so long as they could assent to the doctrine of faith and were not "scandalous in life." When the children grew up, if they couldn't testify to conversion, only one privilege was denied, they could not take the Lord's Supper.

Soon the half-way members outstripped the members in full communion. Half-way membership was socially acceptable and so people did not bother about going all the way. Eventually, the bar on the Lord's Supper was dropped, and soon half-way covenanters filtered into the ministry. It was in this situation of spiritual decline and indifference that Jonathan Edwards began to preach the sovereignty of God and the way of salvation alone by true repentance and faith in Christ. In May of 1735, the revival (using the term according to the definition of Webster) began to cool off in the city of Northampton, Massachusetts where Edwards was successful in bringing about three hundred to conversion. It was then that George Whitefield, colleague of the Wesleys in England, burst upon the scene. Edwards had touched off the revival fire and George Whitefield swept the white-hot flames through all of New England and into the

¹¹Merriam A. Webster, A New International Dictionary (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. and C. Merriam Company, 1936).

South. Edwards was the flint; Whitefield the tinder. Jonathan Edwards was a quiet, nevertheless penetrating preacher of the Word. He endeavored to paint pictures of Heaven and Hell that would be very clear for the people to understand. On the other hand, George Whitefield was a fiery, stentorian type speaker, and relied heavily upon his mastery of speech, voice and emotional impact to hold the attention of his listeners. This great awakening, as it is called, finally died out around 1760. The published results, whether correct or not, state that from twenty-five thousand to fifty thousand converts were gained. The writer of the article published in the Christian Life Magazine, and later in the little booklet entitled, America's Great Revivals, says that at that time the population of New England was only three hundred and forty thousand people. This would have the impact of twenty-five million on the Church today.

Quoting further he says:

It is a matter of record that from 1740 to 1760, 150 new Congregational churches were founded. Separatist churches multiplied. So did Baptist and Presbyterian bodies. Other immediate results were these--that an unconverted ministry could not be tolerated. It gave added emphasis to ministerial education. It advanced the cause of missions among the Indians. And it struck a blow for the cause of religious liberty, in that the great awakening caused legislation for the separation of Church and State in the Constitution. And finally it made the ministry's traveling evangelists not only respectable, but desirable.¹²

Throughout this awakening there are many instances recorded of prayer groups, larger and smaller, that were coincidental with the preaching and teaching and in-gathering.

The next great revival of interest began around 1795. Eastern colleges of the new country were filled with skepticism, the skepticism of

¹²"America's Great Revivals" (Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), pp. 24f.

the age. Lawlessness ruled on the western frontier. People were floundering in the bog of confusion created by the French and Indian War and the Revolution. There were few churches, few praying people. A group of twenty-three New England clergymen recognizing this problem asked what could be done and the answer was: "Pray." Thus, a circular was issued calling on the people to pray for revival. They said:

Let there be "public prayer and praise, accompanied with such instruction from God's word, as might be judged proper, on every first Tuesday, of the four quarters of the year, beginning with the first Tuesday of January, 1795 at two o'clock in the afternoon...and so continuing from quarter to quarter and from year to year until the good providence of God prospering our endeavors, we shall obtain the blessing for which we pray."¹³

Thus, it was that prayer meetings and groups themselves were very instrumental in causing a "religious awakening" (as I think we would prefer to term "revivals"). History then records instances in New England particularly, of violent physical and emotional experiences that resulted in conviction, conversion and revival. At Yale University (then called Yale College) it is said that a revival shook the institution to its center. The man who led this was Timothy Dwight, grandson of Jonathan Edwards. Dwight became president of the institution in 1795. He began to preach and debate against humanism, rationalism, and spiritual infidelity. A very famous sermon of his in 1796 was on "The Nature and Danger of Infidel Philosophy." As a reawakening hit the college it is stated that by 1800, between one-third and one-half of all the students at Yale were members of the Moral Society founded for the purpose of discouraging profanity, immorality and intemperance.¹⁴ The reawakening

¹³ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 34.

or revival spread to Pennsylvania and Ohio, and the Presbyterian clergy as well as the Baptist and Methodist were quite active in causing an impact upon the people.

The revival preaching was spectacular to say the least. The lot of the sinner was painted in vivid colors. James McReedy, a famous Presbyterian preacher during this awakening, preached a sermon on the text "The Fool Hath Said in His Heart, There is no God." He spoke of the "black, flaming vultures encircling the fool at death," the fiends dragging him into the eternal gulf as he roars and screams and yells while "accursed sinners of Tyre and Sidon and Sodom Gomorrah spring to the right and left and make way for him to pass." Finally he sinks to the deepest cavern in the flaming abyss where his "consciousness like an everdying worm stings him forever and gnaws his soul."¹⁵

Peter Cartwright, a famous Methodist circuit rider of that day would spend some forty minutes or so warming up his audience with humorous talk, puns, anecdotes, and witty sayings that would finally have the people convulsed with laughter. Then his manner would change and his voice and face would grow earnest. Soon "tears came to his eyes and he would tell of the horrors of Hell till every shuddering face was turned downward as if expecting to see the solid globe rent asunder."¹⁶

There were also many physical manifestations recorded, some of these valid, many probably simply the results of unleashed emotion.

There was the weeping and the fainting and the shouting. Many people were possessed with what was called "the jerks." Sometimes just

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 43.

the head would jerk back and forth from side to side; sometimes the whole body. Peter Cartwright recollected that he had seen more than five hundred persons jerking at one time. Then there were the "rolling exercises," where people would roll over and over like a wheel; the "dancing exercise" when the jerking of legs looked like dancing; and the "running exercises," merely an attempt to run away from the physical manifestations. One of the most peculiar of all was the "barking exercise." Men went down on all four's and barked until they grew hoarse. It is said that this designation actually originated from the time when an old Presbyterian clergyman got the jerks and grasped a tree for support. Some punster saw him and reported he had found the minister barking up a tree.¹⁷

The writer in the Christian Life Magazine says that we can draw three general conclusions concerning these revivals:

1. When God moves the spirit of a man, He also touches his emotions. Some men are moved more violently than others. Certainly, King Saul prophesied, David danced, and Saul (later Paul) fell blinded when the Spirit of God came upon them. No doubt, many of the physical manifestations of the Revival of 1800 were of God.
2. Satan is a master counterfeiter. Even as he tries to counterfeit conversion, he tries to counterfeit its emotional reaction. And he was busy during the camp meetings of 1800 to degrade them by emotional excesses.
3. Modern psychology explains many such reactions in terms of group behavior. Probably some of the manifestations were natural in the highly emotional surroundings. In fact, God may have used some of these natural reactions to attract the attention of the spiritually hardened pioneer.

Probably a combination of these three explanations would best describe the physical reactions of the Revival of 1800. . . . The revival of 1800 was definitely a revival of Christians. The conversion of people outside the church came only after the churches were revitalized.¹⁸

¹⁷Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 46, 51.

Further conclusion of the Revival of 1800 was the impetus that was given to missions. In the shelter of a haystack during a storm a number of students at Williams College (which underwent a great revival) pledged themselves to work for the kingdom of God. The outcome was the formation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. For twenty-seven years, this was the agency that backed all congregational, Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, and German Reformed missionaries. Another result of the haystack meetings was the formation of the American Bible Society.¹⁹

The Sunday school movement in the United States got a tremendous push from the revival. The first Sunday school union was formed in Philadelphia in 1791. It was the forerunner of the American Sunday School unions started in 1824.

In 1857, with the nation bitterly divided on the issue of slavery, the third and greatest revival began in American history. This awakening, or revival, actually started with a prayer meeting, and prayer was the underlying emphasis of this movement from the very beginning. Jeremiah C. Lanphier, a merchant who gave up his trade to do church visitation work, is the person to whom this movement is originally attributed. He worked at the Fulton Street Church in lower New York City, and although it got off to a very slow start, it is said that within six months, ten thousand businessmen out of a population of eight hundred thousand (at that time) were gathering daily in the city of New York for prayer. The movement was predicated upon the fact that conditions were ripe for a national revival. In 1800, the revival of that

¹⁹Ibid., p. 50.

day began in an age of religious interest. But by 1843, the nation was intent upon getting and spending and had lost interest in religious things. The West had opened up. Gold was discovered in California. Railroad building was a craze. Slavery was a very hot issue. Fortunes ballooned, and faith diminished. And then in that fall, the nation experienced a great financial panic, one of the worst in its history. Banks closed, people were out of work, families went hungry. No doubt, the crash had something to do with the astonishing growth of Lanphier's new meeting (by now called the Fulton Street Prayer Meeting). It started with six men who turned out to pray and then jumped to crowds of more than three thousand filling up the entire building and overflowing into the streets. The news of this religious interest hit the front pages of the papers and was also described in Europe and Ireland.²⁰ Chicago was also stirred and the Metropolitan theater, a newspaper commented, where two thousand showed up for prayer:

So far as the effects of present religious movement are concerned, they are apparent to all. They are to be seen in every walk of life, to be felt in every phase of society. The merchant, the farmer, the mechanic, all who have been within their influence have been incited to do better things; to a more orderly and honest way of life. All have been more or less influenced by this excitement.²¹

The writer of the article from which we quote says, "and everywhere it was a revival of prayer. There was no hysteria, no unusual disturbances. Just prayer."²² Finney, a revivalist preacher of this time said:

²⁰Ibid., p. 65.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

There is such a general confidence in the prevalence of prayer, that the people very extensively, seemed to prefer meeting for prayer to meeting for preaching. The general impression seemed to be, "we have had instruction until we are hardened! It is time for us to pray."²³

The revival rolled on into 1859 and 1860. Statistics are rampant concerning the gains for Christianity at this time. Some seem to be way out of line, others seem to be the statements of just one person and their own idea of what it was all about. For instance, it is said that fifty thousand persons a week were converted when the revival was at a high tide throughout the entire nation. Another statistic says a number who joined the churches in 1858 amounted to almost ten per cent of the country's total church membership. If the estimate of one million converts is correct (some say the number is closer to three hundred thousand), that accounts for one-thirtieth of the total United States population of that time and almost all in one year! The revival also had repercussions in the awakening which swept the British Isles. Statistically, it is reported the greatest gainers were the Methodist churches. It is estimated that twelve per cent of their membership came from the revival. The second largest denominational group, the Baptists, said that ten per cent of their total membership came from this revival. The Presbyterians, the Congregationalists and the Episcopalians also jumped.

For our purposes in this paper, it is interesting to note the three things that stand out about this particular spiritual awakening. (1) It was a laymen's movement--almost entirely. Except for Charles G. Finney and a few others, ministers were on the sidelines. It began an era of lay participation in the general work of the church, the Sunday School,

²³ Ibid.

and the Y.M.C.A. (the Young Men's Christian Association). (2) It was non-sectarian. In the first Fulton Street Meeting, of the six persons present, one was a Baptist, one a Congregationalist, one a member of the Dutch Reform Church, and one a Presbyterian. It was the same thing wherever the revival struck. Denominational differences were forgotten in a concern for people's souls. (3) As we pointed out before, it was a revival of prayer. In conclusion, I would like to point out from the article that appeared in the Christian Magazine, the conclusion of the author himself. His name is not mentioned but he has something of interest to say:

In every age, revivals have been scorned, divided, condemned. The revival spirit of the Nineteenth Century was blamed for causing controversies and divisions among Christians, of fostering confusion and disorder in worship, of being responsible for doctrinal heresies.

These criticisms cannot be answered by denying them--for there is an element of truth in each one. Yet, they can be countered with facts--agreed to by historians. The revival spirit of the century made Christian liberty, Christian equality, and Christian fraternity the passion of the land. Slavery, poverty, and greed were attacked as never before. Home and foreign mission efforts, the Christian philanthropy, moral reform became the concern of almost every converted soul.

Though it was true that the Nineteenth Century saw schisms in churches and the multiplication sects, it also saw a tremendous growth in the Church as a whole. At the beginning of the Century, one in sixteen persons in the United States was a church member; at its close, one out of every four belonged to Evangelical protestant churches.

Too Much Emotion?

Undoubtedly the chief criticism leveled at revival was that they overemphasize the emotional, and underestimate the rational element in religious experience.

True, Christians were emotional about religion in the Nineteenth Century; they were called the "sentimental years." But in the Twentieth Century the pendulum swung the other way. Critics--and the church as well as without--embalmed revivalism, buried it

and sat on its gravestone. Emotion was all but squeezed out of religion and the denominations that once vigorously promoted revivals.

But emotion had not been squeezed out of mankind. Men found an outlet in wars, crime, adulation of popular entertainers, and the pursuit of material success, and in the pleasures of the senses.

The pendulum is swinging back. Once again many are seeing that religion must be personal and individual or that it is not religion at all. The words of Jonathan Edwards wrote in defense of the great awakening more than two centuries ago are just as true today: "True religion is a powerful thing.....a ferment, a vigorous engagedness of the heart."

Revivals have accomplished what God placed his Church into the world to accomplish--they have brought countless numbers of men and women into personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That is justification enough.²⁴

So much for awakening and revivals in America. In this paper we are concerned with the relation of Christians and the work Christ has given His Church to do. From the overtones and themes which run through the historical spiritual awakenings of our country, it is evident that informal personal corporate prayer, as it was at the time of the writing of the New Testament, was still very much a factor and parcel in the religious upheavals in our own history.

Dwight Lyman Moody

A unique person we should mention in connection with religious awakenings is a layman by the name of Dwight Lyman Moody. Even today he is well known and remembered particularly for The Moody Bible Institute in Chicago and his work as a lay evangelist. Moody reached the pinnacle of his success around 1875 and preached extensively in Chicago and throughout the United States and even in London, England, and throughout

²⁴Ibid., p. 94.

the British Isles. One of the interesting marks of his ministry is the great emphasis he placed on prayer and prayer groups. It seems as though everywhere he went he was busily engaged in organizing people also for the purpose of interceding on behalf of him and his ministry.²⁵

Billy Graham

Contemporary to our own day is the remarkable ministry of Billy Graham. In all of the thorough planning, execution and follow-up of his numerous crusades and world-wide preaching trips there is the constant invitation for Christian people to join in prayer groups and individual prayer for the success of the entire venture. Many times there are reports from various areas of prayer groups large and small in churches and in homes that have banded together for this ministry of intercession.

It is simply noteworthy to our study that a frank and forthright ministry of intercession is marked as being so important a part in the success of these Billy Graham crusades.²⁶

²⁵Bradford Gamaliel, D. L. Moody, A Worker In Souls (New York: Doubleday Doran, 1927).

²⁶Curtis Mitchell, God in the Garden (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1957), passim.

CHAPTER IV

APPROACH TO THE SUBJECT IN THE MISSOURI SYNOD

The Augsburg Confession

As one turns to the subject of corporate prayer and its use in our circles, it is soon apparent that this emphasis is simply not in the warp and woof of our Church. There are volumes that have been written on the subject of prayer, and rightly so, but all of the writings seem to be concerned with what prayer is and how it works for the individual. There is a dearth of information in our circles on the subject for which this paper concerns itself. In fact, there seems to be even a shying away from this topic as if it were something that were taboo or hush-hush. Generally speaking, the lay people in our church simply do not pray unless it is from a book (and that at very special and exceptional times) or the well-worn (actually over-worn) Lord's Prayer which is glibly and many times thoughtlessly prayed by a group of laymen with their pastor at the conclusion of a meeting or service. This approach to the subject of corporate expression in prayer is not simply from neglect. Rather, the roots for this approach go far back into our Lutheran thinking and convictions. It is the opinion of the author that with the confessional approach of our Synod the very idea of lay people praying informally was simply out of the question.

Our spiritual forefathers were very insistent upon the relation of the clergy to the laity and the part and role that each had to play in the work of the Kingdom. It is interesting to note this policy as expressed by the venerable Dr. John H. C. Fritz, for many years professor

at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis and a leader in our Church, in his Pastoral Theology, a book written to seminarians concerning the practice of the office of the ministry, in a paragraph entitled, "The Congregational Meeting," says:

Conducting the meetings.--It is self-evident that the pastor should open and close the congregational meetings with prayer. The Lord's Prayer may be prayed in unison at the close of the meeting; but when some special resolutions of great importance have been passed (case of church discipline, building project, missionary efforts), it is well that in addition to the Lord's Prayer special mention be made of such things in an excorde prayer.--In the pastor's absence, the teacher of the parish school or a member of the church council may read [underlining mine] a prayer that has been prepared for such an occasion. Since praying in public is teaching [underlining mine] in public, only such should publicly offer excorde prayers as have been called publicly to teach.¹

This, of course, goes back to the formal presentation of Luther in the Augsburg Confession, Article XIV: "Of Ecclesiastical Order," which says: "Of Ecclesiastical order, they teach that none should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called."² It is the opinion of the author that this particular emphasis (at this point) goes beyond the scope and intention of practical Christian expression. Nevertheless, it has been for this reason that the laity in our church simply were never taught to express themselves informally and in prayer in a church meeting or group project endeavor.

Fear of Revivalism

There is also another reason that informal corporate prayer is

¹John H. C. Fritz, Pastoral Theology (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1945), p. 315.

²Martin Luther, "The Augsburg Confession," Concordia Triglott (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 49.

foreign to our thinking and action; and that is, the author feels, the fear that the spirit of revivalism might creep into our midst. This is something that must be shunned, for the Lutheran Church with its history and heritage certainly wants no connotation and connection with such sectarian and unliturgical movements! The writer, in the Lutheran Encyclopedia, edited by Erwin L. Lueker, has this to say under the subject of "Prayer Meetings":

Special stated services, common in reformed circles, usually held on an evening about the middle of the week, the chief features of such meetings being the singing of Evangelistic or hortatory hymns, extemporaneous prayers by worshipers called on without discrimination for that purpose, and the relation of religious experiences by individuals, either with or without special invitation. These meetings are based upon the notion that prayer is a means of grace, the use of the word of God for the purpose of instruction being omitted entirely or almost so. In this form, prayer meetings are not Lutheran in character.³

The point of this paper is to show that the corporate prayer emphasis of which we speak is not the same as the sectarian prayer meeting which is popular in baptistic congregations even today. This sectarian emphasis has been discussed in a previous chapter.⁴ We wish to show the quiet, on-going power of God and the working of the Holy Spirit in small gatherings within a congregation or congregations that meet for the purpose of intercessory and supplicatory prayer.

Another problem in the approach to corporate prayer for us is the great emphasis that has been maintained (and correctly so) throughout the history of our Synod concerning purity of doctrine. For over a century the cardinal rule in our Synod regarding formal altar and pulpit

³Prayer Meetings, Lutheran Cyclopedia (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 836.

⁴Supra, pp. 28ff.

fellowship has been on the basis of complete doctrinal unanimity. This conviction also has many overtones concerning informal fellowship, particularly as it effects the laity. It is the opinion of the author that our people feel they are not qualified to pray because they have not had formal training and even more important, they dare not pray when in the company of other Christians who may not be members of our Synod or Synodical Conference because of doctrinal differences. Again in the Lutheran Encyclopedia, the writer on the subject of "Fellowship" has this to say:

Doctrinal controversies among Lutherans during the second part of the Nineteenth Century focused doctrinal differences, alienated Lutherans, strengthened synodical walls, and occasioned some re-statements of the boundaries of fellowship. The Missouri Synod instructed its delegates to the Synodical conference not to deliberate with persons who have accused Missouri of Calvinism (Synodalbericht, 1881, 45). Lehre u. Wehre (LI:3ff.) upheld the refusal of the Missouri delegates to pray with those of Iowa and Ohio at Detroit (the item quotes Rom. 16:17; Matthew 7:15; 2 Corinthians 6; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; Titus 3:10; 2 John 10:11; Jeremiah 23:31; Luke 21:17; etc.).⁵

Concerning formal altar and pulpit fellowship the position of our Synod is true, correct, and God-pleasing. On an informal, devotional level, particularly as other Christians join us as guests in our church prayer groups, we must use our sanctified common sense and realize we are all one in Christ, fellow members of His Body, the Church. We come, and should come together, because of what we hold in common, not because of what keeps us apart.

Types of Approach

An interesting and positive approach to the subject of corporate

⁵Ibid., p. 371.

prayer is shown in an article published in Advance Magazine, November, 1954, by Rev. Eugene Burger of Ft. Wayne, Indiana. It is entitled "Let us Pray for our Missionaries" and tells the story of the seventh graders at St. Paul's Lutheran Congregation who are taught to remember and pray for the missionaries on the foreign field, particularly at the time of their birthday. The missionaries name and station are noted on the blackboard on the proper day. A special committee takes care of this detail. This committee also writes a short note to the missionary, wishing him God's blessing and telling him that a special prayer will be offered for him and his work. (The letters are sent early enough so as to arrive on his birthday.) The money for postage is gathered by means of a small bank in the classroom. The author says that as simple as this idea is, nevertheless it has had a lasting value.

With the pupils there has been a feeling of doing something for Christ's Kingdom. They have gained closer contact with the mission program of the church by hearing and learning of the various mission stations, and at times it is necessary to get the atlas to locate preaching places.⁶

Rev. Burger comments that the pupils are thrilled when they receive letters of appreciation from the missionaries.

It has become a daily habit to pray for all the missionaries. On days when there are no birthdays, there is a natural desire to mention missions in prayers. When under the pressure of a busy schedule I forget to pray, the pupils never fail to remind me. At first I offered the prayer. Before long various students were asked to pray. Now, at a moments notice, students step to the front and lead the class in prayer. Their words are generally fluent. It is hoped that there will be a lasting carry over into their lives.⁷

⁶Eugene Burger, "Let Us Pray for Our Missionaries," Advance Magazine, I (November, 1954), 10ff.

⁷Ibid., p. 39.

The rest of the article goes on to show how very appreciative the missionaries on the foreign field are to receive these letters and prayers from the children back home. Here is an example of one congregation teaching the children from little on to learn to pray corporately and from the heart for specific needs in the Kingdom.

Another illustration of corporate prayer on the formal level is that of the Rev. Waldo J. Werning, Counselor of Missions and Stewardship of the Southern Nebraska District. He has compiled a booklet entitled Our Mission Prayer Book to be used in conjunction with the general prayer on Sunday morning.⁸ The prayers are introduced with pertinent information concerning that for which the prayer will be given, and then on each particular Sunday there are special intercessions for the work at home and the work on the foreign field, including the work in special organizations and areas; universities, the blind, the deaf, institutional missions, radio and television, and colleges and seminaries. The prayers for the mission fields include every area of the world in which we are working. This booklet of 28 pages, although used by the pastor with the congregation in the worship services on Sunday morning, could also very effectively be used in small prayer groups through the week.

There is a most peculiar point of view concerning corporate prayer, which is manifested by a group of clergymen, particularly, and outlined in a paper called Sharing (issued by the Federation of Lutheran Altar Guilds).⁹ In the January, 1959, issue of this paper the subject of the

⁸Waldo J. Werning, Our Missionary Prayer Book, p. 28.

⁹Paul H. D. Lang, "The Devotional Life of The Altar Guild Member," Sharing, VIII (January, 1959).

devotional life of the Altar Guild member is discussed in an article by the Rev. Paul H. Lang. It seems, according to the writer of this article and the gentlemen of like persuasion, that only a devotional life (whether private or corporate) that has very strict liturgical forms is acceptable. Rev. Lang begins by saying:

First of all, you should have definite times, places, and forms of prayer and you should discipline yourself to keep these so far as possible.

Secondly, your devotional life should be liturgical. The Lutheran Church is a liturgical church, therefore, your forms of devotion should not be un-Lutheran, individualistic, sectarian, or heretical, but Catholic (in the sense of the universal Christian Church) in doctrine, right and ceremony. . . . Since the center of the Church's life is the Holy Communion Service, therefore, our devotional life should be built on the Holy Communion Service. . . . unless it is built on this, it is built on sand. . . . Other devotional efforts will inspire a devotional life of a kind but not a sacramental and genuinely Lutheran devotional life.

It seems to the author that Rev. Lang expresses the view of a very narrow and exclusive group. Although these folks use the ancient and ecumenical forms of Christianity, they nevertheless isolate themselves from contemporary informal and normal patterns of Christian worship and prayer. The idea of togetherness (even in private) is expressed by Rev. Lang when he says, "In silent recitation it is good to move the lips to express the fact that you are saying these offices in union and communion with the Church."¹⁰ The article concludes:

in addition to this [material mentioned concerning the general and particular rubrics and offices for the expression of prayer and worship] you may wish to use other forms of prayer and devotion. Here the field is wide open ranging all the way from materials of a liturgical character and in harmony with the liturgy to forms of prayer which are unliturgical and even anti-liturgical.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Once you have a liturgical life, however, you will soon learn to distinguish between the good and the bad.¹¹

By way of personal comment on this approach the author does not want to appear negative, however, there are many people, the author himself being of this persuasion, who feel that although this form of worship and prayer expression may be good, there are still other more simple and spontaneous ways of expressing our corporate needs without going through the very formal and high-church procedures here outlined. It might be noted that there is also much good that can be gained from an examination of an "unliturgical" approach.

In the section of the Lutheran Hymnal devoted specifically to hymns of prayer (Hymns 454 to 459) it is interesting to note that three of the six hymns have in their lyrics an emphasis on the togetherness of the congregation in presenting their common supplications. For instance, Hymn No. 455, Our Heavenly Father Hear, the words are in the first person plural:

Our Heavenly Father hear the prayers we offer now.
Thy name be hallowed far and near; To Thee all nations bow.

Thy Kingdom come; Thy will On earth be done in love
As saints and seraphim fulfill Thy Holy Will above.

Our daily bread supply while by Thy Word we live. The guilt of our
iniquity
Forgive as we forgive.¹²

Hymn 457, the familiar and beloved What A Friend We Have In Jesus speaks to the point of the congregation as a group, as a community,

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² The Lutheran Hymnal (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1940).

expressing their trust and confidence in the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour.¹³

Hymn 458, Our Father Thou In Heaven Above of course is a hymn written to the text of Matthew 6:9 and following the words of the Lord's Prayer.¹⁴

Although these hymns (and there are many others in the Hymnal) do not specifically mention corporate worship and prayer, the empathy and rapport of the entire hymn is that of Christians together in common need before the Only true God.

An emphasis particularly for women in the church is noted by the Rev. Carl Walter Berner of Faith Lutheran Church, Los Angeles, California. In his book entitled Spiritual Power for Your Congregation he has among the many women's groups in the congregation a special group called The Prayer Guild.

Objective of this Guild is to stimulate the prayer life among the members of the entire group. This is done by giving an important position to prayer in each meeting, by distributing prayer helps, giving witness to experiences of prayer answered, and by suggesting certain prayer causes which commend themselves to the prayer ministry of all members. Prayer causes may match the theme of the month according to a planned parish program. They may be included on the private prayer list of each member.¹⁵

The emphasis in this group seems to be to implement prayers and increase praying at the various meetings of the congregation, particularly of the women's organizations. This is not a separate organization that prays by itself but ladies of this group contribute in other meetings and

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Carl W. Berner, Spiritual Power for Your Congregation (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 62.

projects of the church. Nevertheless it is a step in the direction of more corporate, personal prayer.

Thus, the approach to corporate prayer by our Missouri Synod has, at best, been an attitude of laissez faire. Here is a field that can be presented, developed, explained, applied, practiced and followed up, that will bring a tremendous blessing to all of our people.

CHAPTER V

A CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION OF CORPORATE PRAYER

"The Pittsburgh Experiment" of the Episcopal Church

One of the most amazing and effective prayer movements that can be mentioned as a contemporary illustration is that of the Episcopal Church and particularly the movement labeled "The Pittsburgh Experiment." This movement in a communion of Christians used to high and moderately high liturgical practices comes as somewhat of a surprise. Nevertheless, it is a very pleasant experience to read the accounts of Helen Smith Shoemaker, who has written a number of books on the subject of prayer groups. Her husband, Dr. Samuel Shoemaker, who is the pastor of Trinity Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the bishop of the Pittsburgh diocese of the Episcopal Church, has formulated, organized and administered a great many prayer groups and prayer organizations in what is now called "The Pittsburgh Experiment." The movement basically is that of Christians simply getting together for the purpose of reading the Scriptures and prayer, whether this be in the home, the shop, the factory, or the Church. The need for these groups sprang out of the fact that congregations on Sunday were so large that the people understood little of the full inwardness of the services, and they were filled with questions and had nowhere to get them answered. The movement was spontaneous being of the Holy Ghost, there is no other explanation. People wanted to belong to something small and intimate, a group where they could compare notes and feel wanted and needed, not be just another face in the crowd. Thus, groups of young married couples and newlyweds sprang

up. Other groups of men working together in shops and factories likewise developed. It simply amounted to taking The Bible into the factory and shop, and when coming to a coffee break or a rest period, simply gathering other men together in a quiet area and speaking these things from the word of God and from their hearts. Helen Smith Shoemaker in her book Power Through Prayer Groups says that there are now over one hundred and fifty prayer groups in the Pittsburgh area. Not only do these groups meet individually throughout the week, but they hold in this area an annual School of Prayer which recently was attended by one thousand and six hundred people. The reunion dinner and meeting of all the prayer groups which is held each September was recently attended by a thousand prayer group members.¹ Mrs. Shoemaker says that out of experience, a pattern for prayer group nurture seems to be emerging.

1. The groups start because of the courage and inspiration of one person in a neighborhood or a church. (Warning! Do not start a group in your church without the consent and support of your minister.)
2. A group may start because two or three people have a common interest or concern. One group I know of started because the minister of their church broke down and needed their prayers.
3. Many prayer groups start when a minister or qualified lay person first holds a School of Prayer.
4. Some groups are formed to pray for special intentions and disbanded when the need is over. Such a type is a prayer chain or a prayer vigil. Many people gain inspiration from holding prayer vigils all day on such occasions as World Day of Prayer and Holy Thursday. Prayer chains are formed to meet special needs, e.g., an all-night prayer chain called to pray for a young business executive.
5. Groups may meet in church parish houses, in the homes of members, or in the church itself. The place and time of meeting should be determined by the whole group.

¹Helen Smith Shoemaker, Power Through Prayer Groups (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, c.1958), p. 65.

6. Annual schools of prayer are valuable in order to help prayer group members learn more of the principles and laws of prayer, as well as to interest new people in forming prayer groups. Frequent reunions of small prayer groups are valuable in a parish or area in order to compare notes on progress.

When the prayer group movement is ecumenical, it is both encouraging and inspiring to hold an annual prayer group dinner and reunion, with an eminent speaker to help lift our sights and set our compass for the year ahead.²

The small, intimate corporate prayer group, which meets in churches or homes or factories is not simply limited to the Episcopal Church, nor to the Pittsburgh area. Mrs. Shoemaker, in her book, lists many illustrations of churches throughout the country--Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopalian, etc.--that have started these prayer groups and are meeting with much success. The general approach seems to be a Bible study on some particular subject, doctrinal or expository, followed by a period of prayer for particular needs in the congregation or community. These prayers are generally ex corde and most everyone joins in.

In the chapter entitled THE FAMILY PRAYER GROUP (Chapter VIII), Mrs. Smith outlines the simple procedure for parents and children getting together for Bible study and prayer. Mrs. Shoemaker quotes another source and says, "The church is the society of sinners, and not a fellowship of Saints."³ She goes on to say:

The home is a society of sinners and not a fellowship of Saints. The home is the place where we are learning about life, about each other, about faith, about God, about what it means to be parents, about what it means to grow up, about what it means to live together, to play together, to work together, even to weep together and pray together.

²Ibid., p. 67.

³Ibid., p. 69.

Her suggestions concerning the family prayer group are well known in any family devotional setup. The best time is when all the family can be together as a group. This would of course depend upon the individual schedule for the family for the day. The Bible is read and discussed, the needs of each person or of the group are mentioned, and the father and the mother pray being joined by the children in their own prayer sentences.

Another part of "The Pittsburgh Experiment" is the Schools of Prayer which are conducted for larger groups to help in the overall job of inspiration and edification on this subject. Mrs. Shoemaker says that these special schools are generally planned by the laymen or laywomen in a Presbytery or diocese or conference ministerium. A church with a parish hall large enough to accommodate one hundred or two hundred persons is chosen, the teacher is secured, the date set, and the group invited. The Schools of Prayer are for the purpose of instructing the presidents, the spiritual life chairman, and those interested in prayer or prayer groups in the lay organizations of the church. There is first an hour of instruction, say from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. followed by one-half to three-quarters of an hour for questions and discussion. There is generally a break for a light lunch from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. during which time individual talk is possible. From 1:45 to 2:30 the group meets together again for a time of further discussion followed by united prayer. This time of prayer is conducted by a leader who commences with a meditation of five minutes based on one or more of Christ's great prayer promises, such as "What things soever you desire when you pray believe that you receive them and you shall have them" (Mark 11:24). This may be followed by a prayer for world needs read by a chosen lay person, followed by

united silence, and spontaneous prayers if the group desires it. Another lay person may then read a prayer for our nation followed by silence and spontaneous prayers if desired. Similarly, prayers for the Church, prayers for the sick, the sorrowing, our loved ones and ourselves, involving five or six lay people may be offered. Mrs. Shoemaker says that it is important that the leader bring along a consignment of books and pamphlets on prayer which can be displayed and sold at large tables near the doors of the parish hall.⁴ A good teacher will instruct his or her class in regard to personal prayer, group prayer, the meaning of the Sacraments, and devotional reading and study. From participation and such a one-day school of prayer, many church leaders, spiritual life chairmen, and those interested in such groups return to their home churches with enough know-how to begin the experiment of starting prayer groups. An evening school of prayer may be held in similar fashion. The structure of a prayer school is presentation, participation, and demonstration.⁵

In the chapter entitled "Forming Prayer Groups" (Chapter X), Mrs. Shoemaker says that "In my experience the most satisfying and fruitful type of weekly prayer group is the prayer study group."⁶ These groups generally meet whenever and wherever it is convenient, and are composed of various types of persons. For instance, businessmen's groups meet at a luncheon downtown once a week, while couples groups and business and professional women's groups many times meet in the evenings, either in homes or at the church. Some meet and eat; some merely meet. All of

⁴Ibid., p. 75.

⁵Ibid., p. 75.

⁶Ibid., p. 78.

these arrangements depend, of course, on the decision of the individual group. Concerning the attendance and the size of these groups, it is interesting to note that there are from ten to twenty members in each group which assures a weekly participation of at least six.⁷ When a group becomes too large, as has been the case with several of the couples groups, a number of couples will agree to form a new group.

The following is an important quote which shows the important factors to keep in mind if one wishes a prayer group to remain vital.

1. We must choose a time of day and a day in the week on which a majority can agree.
2. We must make our prayer group attendance our first priority. It is well to remember that we are engaged in God's business and that hairdressing appointments, the weekly bridge club, and visiting firemen should not be allowed to infringe on this precious time, any more than we should allow trivial excuses to keep us from Sunday morning church or our family prayers.
3. The Holy Spirit must be the leader of a prayer group. Many a promising prayer study group has foundered because Mrs. So and So has dominated it. The members, not daring to speak the truth in love, slowly drop out and leave Mrs. So and So in sole possession. A healthy prayer group needs a moderator or convenor, one who will set prayer chains in motion, or call an absent member to find out if she has been ill, as well as to notify the members of quiet days, retreats, prayer conferences, or special services. Beyond this, it is well to rotate the leadership week by week.
4. In our group, we assign our prayer intentions for the week ahead, one member to direct a half-hour prayer period and four others to pray, respectively, for the world, the nation, the Church, and ourselves. These prayers may be written, said spontaneously, or chosen from well-known books of prayer. There should be unhurried time for united silent meditation; possibly choosing a Bible passage from the study of the day. This may be followed by a spoken prayer of praise or affirmation at the beginning of the prayer period, and time for united silence and spontaneous prayer in connection with the spoken prayers for the world, the nation, the Church, and

⁷Ibid.

individuals. The prayer period may be closed with the Lord's Prayer,⁸ or any of the other great prayers or blessings of the Church.

Culling the experiences and comments of various prayer groups studied aside from the "Pittsburgh Experiment," the author notes that the Bible study and discussion period generally occupies the other half hour of a Bible study and prayer group. We are speaking here particularly of the groups that have more time, not particularly those on a coffee or rest break in a shop or factory. Whether Bible study comes first and then the prayer period or the prayer period first and then the Bible study is entirely up to the group and how they determine they best want to do it. Generally, the pattern is that the choice of the Gospel, Epistle, or any other book of The Bible is determined by the group. Competent encyclopedias and commentaries should be on hand by the people attending the group, and particularly reference material should be handy for the use of the coordinator or leader. The group may then read a passage and the interpretation and comments or allow another member of the group to read the interpretation. There should be opportunity for discussion and comment during the readings. The group follows a prescribed pattern and closes with a blessing spoken by one of the members or the leader of the group. Some of the prayer groups studied apart from the "Pittsburgh Experiment" were found to use books of prayer from which they prayed exclusively. However, the general conclusion is this, that whatever procedures are used, the important thing to remember is that it is the prayer of faithful people gathered together claiming the promises of God that is effective and effectual. Nowhere did the author find in

⁸Ibid., p. 79.

the study of prayer groups of this sort that the people considered the praying to be in itself a means of grace. The important thing is simply that "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). Another Bible passage which we could use at this point would be Philippians 4:6 where St. Paul tells us ". . . and everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." Going back to the list of factors that keep a prayer group vital from the list of Mrs. Helen Smith Shoemaker, we further note:

7. Another factor to keep in mind if our prayer group is to remain vital is that all Christian people are called upon to minister. We hear a great deal nowadays about the ministry of the laity. We are reminded that if we are a part of the priesthood of all believers; it is not necessary to be formally ordained ministers to be channels for the Holy Spirit. We can each again become a part of that spirit-filled fellowship which was the heartbeat of the first Century Christianity. The ministry of prayer is a ministry that is open to every Christian, a ministry in which Our Lord himself engages with us, a ministry in which He invites us to join Him.
8. There must be continually developing a deepening of faith in God's power, God's love, and God's will to heal and restore and refresh us all.
9. Each prayer group will discover its own best methods of procedure, following only certain guides and adapting them to its own particular need in character. No two groups will be exactly alike, just as no two individuals are exactly alike. A prayer group is a living organism and, like all living things, it obeys certain laws to achieve certain results, at the same time retaining a freedom of spirit which illustrates Our Lord's mysterious word to Nicodemus when he said, "The wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst thou tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: So is everyone that is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8).⁹

"The Pittsburgh Experiment" and other prayer groups throughout the country use many devices to increase the effectiveness of this adventure

⁹Ibid.

in prayer. Prayer lists can be made and drawn up individually or by the leader or convenor which would be either dittoed or mimeographed, or written on a board that could be copied by the people present. Helen Smith Shoemaker says there are "some very great men of prayer in our churches who keep notebooks filled with names and needs and who at every leisure moment of the day, send up flash prayers for these people."¹⁰ This requires much discipline of thought and hearts wholly given to concern for others.

Another device for increasing the effectiveness of corporate prayer especially for special instances where intercession and supplication are the order is the prayer chain or prayer vigil. This, by the way, is an integral part of "The Pittsburgh Experiment." The devotional chairman of a congregation or the prayer group coordinator or convenor should take charge.

1. Take a large sheet of paper, mark off the 15-minute or half-hour periods, leaving space for the men and women to write in their names. Post this on the bulletin board.
2. See that a notice of the prayer chain goes into the parish leaflet or newsletter.
3. Get the rector to announce it and circularize your parish with postcards.
4. Whoever takes charge should make sure that every fifteen minutes or half-hour is filled.
5. See that your prayer program and prayers for your special intention are on a small table near the altar.¹¹

There are various kinds of prayer chains that can be held. People who have a problem of transportation and are not able to meet in the church

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 85.

may agree on a day and an hour when they will pray together in their own homes or even while on the job. Usually a verse from the Bible is decided upon for meditation and the names for those who will be prayed for together with other certain prayer needs and intentions. When the prayer vigil or chain continues over a period of time, the moderator will write or phone the people concerned and give them new prayer intentions and the names of new people that they are to pray for together with new verses for meditation.

Whether it is a prayer vigil or prayer chain, or whether it is just a regular prayer group, various means of notifying people in these groups were noted. For instance, there are telephone brigades and telephone chains which are called into action immediately when a particular emergency situation arises. Many groups are arranged so that no more than one person need call two or three others. In some congregations, the minister can appeal for special prayers from the pulpit or contact the prayer chairman or the head of the telephone brigade in the congregation. It is noted with interest that many of these groups seem to be stronger and more effective if they are made up of both men and women. Another form of prayer vigil noted by Shoemaker is that prayer group members be requested to spend at least fifteen minutes in their church or a church in prayer during weekdays.¹²

Thus it is seen in this particular reference of the "Pittsburgh Experiment" and other groups studied that the prayer group movement to date has been to a considerable extent, a movement from the grass roots, from the laity. However, it is also seen and noted by several authors

¹²Ibid., p. 86.

THE SMALL, INTIMATE, FELLOWSHIP
OF CORPORATE PRAYER

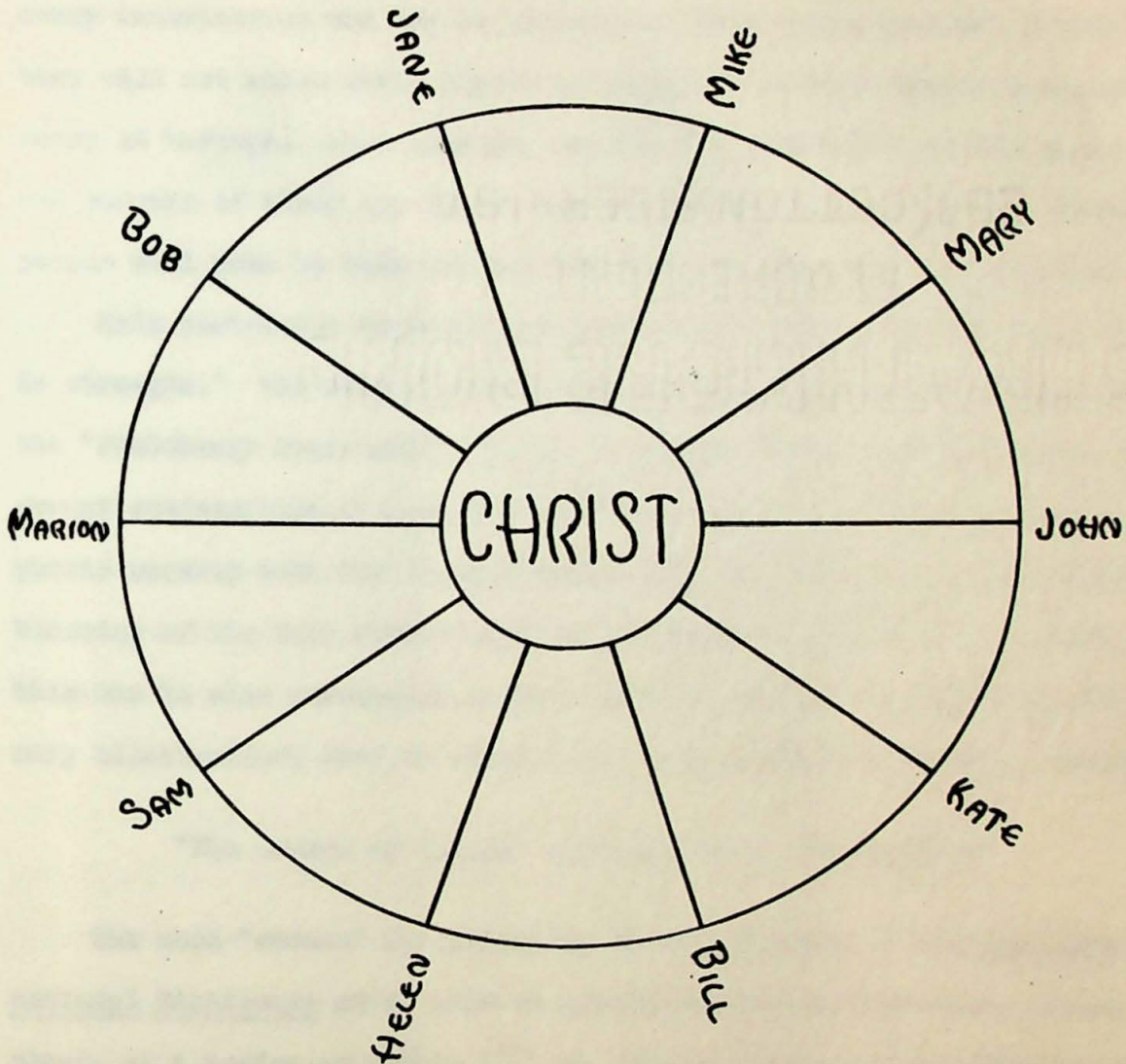


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and especially by Shoemaker that it must be supported wholeheartedly by the clergy if it is to succeed and prosper. On the other hand, it works both ways and the laity must have the diplomacy and the goodwill to enlist the aid of the local parish minister and his cooperation and help on all points of this prayer endeavor. There are a very few clergymen in every denomination who are so jealous of their ecclesiastical office that they will not allow their laymen or laywomen to begin such a movement or carry it through. Most however, are truly appreciative of the interest and concern of their lay people and are prayerfully hoping that these people will come to them and ask how they can work this out together.¹³

This particular emphasis and study shows that truly "in unity there is strength." The many church groups and particularly the example of the "Pittsburgh Experiment" of the Episcopal Church show that there are groups successfully filling the wide gap between private prayer and public worship with the small intimate praying fellowships. Through the blessing of The Holy Spirit they are eminently successful. The fact that this can be also successful in our church is proven by another contemporary illustration, that of Cedar Crest Congregation at Pontiac, Michigan.

"The Cordon of Prayer" of Cedar Crest Congregation

The word "cordon" is defined by Merriam Webster in his New International Dictionary as a "line or circle of persons around any person or place; as a cordon of police."¹⁴ We like to think of this endeavor of

¹³ Ibid., pp. 87ff.

¹⁴ Merriam A. Webster, A New International Dictionary (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. and C. Merriam Company, 1936).

community prayer as a small group of Christians shoulder to shoulder, surrounding and encircling the Throne of Grace. As we speak as children to our Heavenly Father, we recognize that prayer is a two-way conversation, and that by it we simply go together to the One who alone can help us. The portion of Scripture which guides us is in itself beautifully simple:

Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done of 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.

The Cordon of Prayer at Cedar Crest Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) of Pontiac, Michigan, is an experiment in the community life of the Body of Christ. One night a week for one hour, the congregation is invited to come together in the nave of the church. Men, women, and young people come and quietly gather in the front pews. Upon entering the narthex each person picks up a mimeographed prayer list with special reference to the needs of the Church, the Synod, the community, and the nation. At a table in the rear of the church are also a number of specially selected file cards on which the needs and special supplications of the members of the congregation have been noted. For this file, people of the congregation have been previously contacted and have communicated with the minister concerning their particular burdens. Some of these requests are confidential and are thus only listed as "unspoken prayer request." Those remarks which are not confidential include the gamut of prayer expression and speak specifically to adoration, thanksgiving, confession, petition, intercession, and dedication. The pastor or prayer leader, usually in this case a deacon, opens promptly with an invocation. There follows a hymn and then after a brief period of orientation concerning

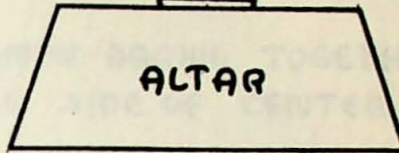
the most urgent needs before the congregation the group separates and the men and the women go their separate way. All age groups past confirmation participate in this Cordon of Prayer. The Cordon of Prayer speaks to teenagers as well as the older folks. Young people go their separate way and pray together as a third group. The groups take turns going to another prayer location, or staying before the chancel. The group staying before the chancel sits on the folding chairs (if the group is too large they remain in the pews) which have been placed in a semi-circular fashion before the chancel and the altar on the floor of the nave (see diagram p. 63). The other group or groups remove themselves to a special area of the basement or another suitable spot in the church plant where they may quietly compose themselves for a like period of meditation and prayer (see diagram p. 64).

The lighting is important. The soft lights of the nave and chancel which have been turned on even before the beginning of the prayer session are left as they are. The soft and indirect light gives an atmosphere of quiet meditation and intimacy which helps set the stage for the prayer session especially in the nave.

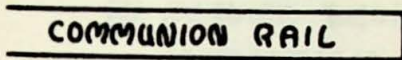
There follows a period (both for those in the nave and those that have removed to other parts of the church) of quiet meditation which lasts for about five minutes. Each group has a coordinator or moderator. This is a man (or woman depending upon the group) who holds the prayers together and keeps things moving according to schedule. After five minutes or so of silent prayer and meditation the coordinator begins speaking aloud by quietly inviting those present to proceed in clockwise fashion and speak of particular needs (whether they are on the file cards or mimeographed sheet, or just on the person's heart) that he would like

CORDON OF PRAYER

CEDAR CREST
LUTHERAN CHURCH
PONTIAC, MICHIGAN

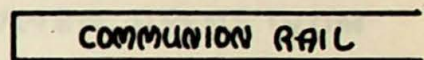


ALTAR

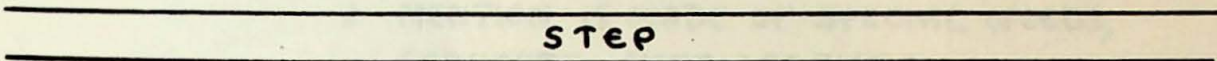


COMMUNION RAIL

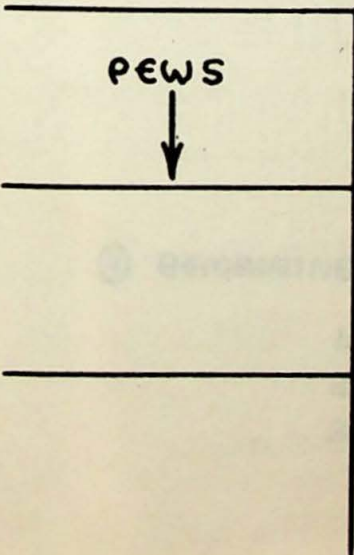
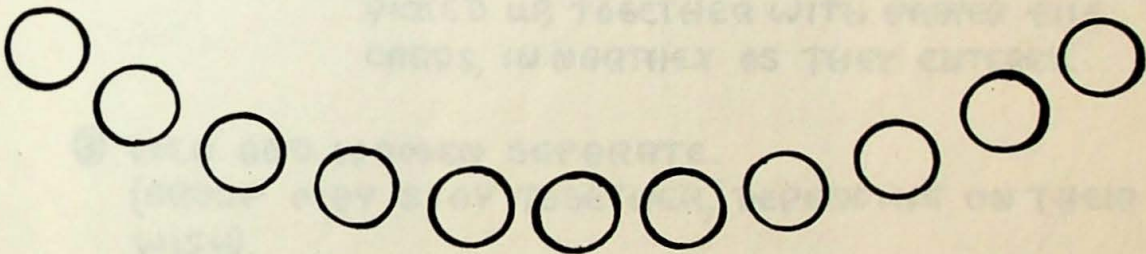
CHANCEL
AREA



COMMUNION RAIL



STEP

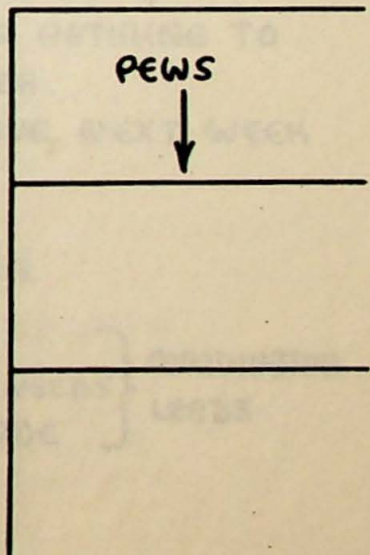


PEWS



FOLDING CHAIRS ARE
PLACED BEFORE THE
ALTAR AND CROSS IN
THE NAVE, FOR THE
ACTUAL PRAYER SESSION.

SOFT LIGHTS LIGHT
CHANCEL AND NAVE AREA.



PEWS



CORDON OF PRAYER MECHANICS AT CEDAR CREST

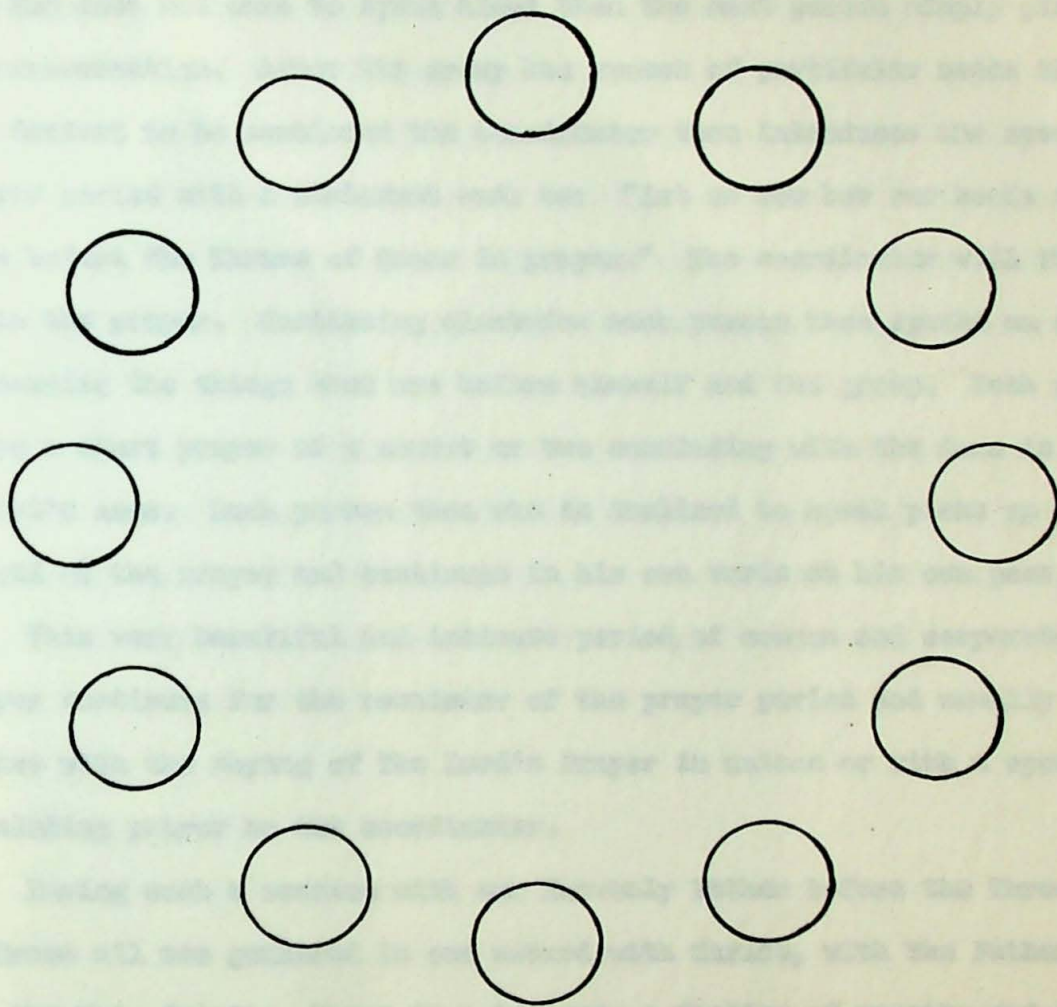
PROCEDURE -

- ① MEN AND WOMEN ARRIVE TOGETHER, SIT IN FRONT PEWS, EITHER SIDE OF CENTER ISLE.
- ② SERVICE BEGINS. PASTOR OR LAYMAN OPENS WITH INVOCATION.
 1. MENTION IS MADE OF SPECIAL NEEDS, REQUESTS, SUPPLICATIONS
 2. REFERENCE MADE TO PRAYER LIST (DITTOED OR MIMED) THAT PEOPLE PICKED UP, TOGETHER WITH PRAYER FILE CARDS, IN NARTHEX AS THEY ENTERED.
- ③ MEN AND WOMEN SEPARATE.
(GROUP MAY STAY TOGETHER, DEPENDING ON THEIR WISH).

MEN AND WOMEN ALTERNATE,
REMAINING IN NAVE OR RETIRING TO
OTHER PREPARED AREA.
(ONE WEEK MEN IN NAVE, NEXT WEEK
LADIES).
- ④ REMAINING TIME USED FOR PRAYER.
 1. SILENT MEDITATION
 2. SPEAKING OF PARTICULAR NEEDS
 3. ACTUAL PRAYER, EX CORDE

} COORDINATOR
LEADS

CORDON OF PRAYER
MECHANICS AT CEDAR CREST



FOR GROUP AWAY FROM NAVE AREA —

ROOM OR AREA SHOULD BE PRIVATE,
FREE FROM CLUTTER.

FOLDING CHAIRS SET UP IN CIRCLE.

to remember or have remembered in the corporate prayer. Those present then briefly speak concerning those special supplications and intercessions that they would like to remember or have remembered during the actual period of prayer. There is no compulsion whatever, if one is shy and does not care to speak aloud then the next person simply picks up the conversation. After the group has spoken of particular needs that are desired to be mentioned the coordinator then introduces the specific prayer period with a statement such as: "Let us now bow our heads and come before the Throne of Grace in prayer." The coordinator will then begin the prayer. Continuing clockwise each person then speaks *ex corde* concerning the things that are before himself and the group. Each person prays a short prayer of a moment or two concluding with the Amen in Christ's name. Each person then who is inclined to speak picks up the thread of the prayer and continues in his own words at his own pace.

This very beautiful and intimate period of common and corporate prayer continues for the remainder of the prayer period and usually concludes with the saying of The Lord's Prayer in unison or with a special concluding prayer by the coordinator.

During such a session with our Heavenly Father before the Throne of Grace all are gathered in one accord with Christ, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit. There is a tremendous feeling of empathy and oneness in the Christian faith. Pettiness, grievances, back-biting, bickering, cliquishness and other marks of the old Adam melt away and disappear when Christians gather together in such a manner and humble themselves before the Throne of Grace. The great blessings of body, soul and spirit which are experienced when Christians of like mind and purpose will come and seek the forgiveness and help and guidance of our Saviour God can

only be known by actually going through this experience personally.

Then the Lord's promise of Matthew 18:20 becomes a living reality:

"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." As one lives the experience of corporate prayer groups other passages of the Scriptures are brought clearly to mind. For instance: "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you, for he that asketh receiveth, he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocks it shall be opened."¹⁵ Also, the words of St. Paul: "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard nor have it entered into the heart of man the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him."¹⁶

To speak then of such a corporate prayer group as is the experience of those who are partaking of these blessings of Cedar Crest congregation is like the difference between talking of the Christian faith and Christian love and actually experiencing it through the power of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁵Matt. 7:7,8.

¹⁶1 Cor. 2:9.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND SUGGESTIONS

Expanded Lay Involvement

It is hoped by the author that the day will come, and that soon, that we will have in our beloved church a clergy and laity that are fully awakened to the great blessings that God offers in informal corporate prayer. Certainly we should continue our beautiful liturgies and formal prayer expressions, but between the formal worship of our Lord in the standardized services of our church on the one hand--and the informal family devotions or personal devotions on the other, there is a vast area that can very well be met and provided for in corporate prayer expression within the congregation. It is a proven fact that this has worked Scripturally and historically and in the "Pittsburgh Experiment" of the Episcopal Church it is seen that this is working with great blessing to many Christians even now. That this has not been in the warp and woof of the preaching and teaching of our Missouri Synod need not be a reason for it not becoming an integral thread in the warp and woof of our church today and tomorrow. As we emphasize the communion of saints we see that there are many things that our laity could and should be doing in the spiritual life of the congregation that at the present time they are not being enlisted and trained to do.

Projects for Special Groups

Perhaps in connection with our churches planned programs for the Preaching-Teaching-Reaching Evangelism Missions; the Every Member

Visitation concerning stewardship; the projects, workshops and programs connected with Lutheran Women's Missionary League and the Lutheran Laymen's League and the Walther League, there could be developed an emphasis in this almost untouched field. Through these agencies, as well as in the planning of the local congregation, our people could be taught that they can pray. They would become aware of their obligation and duty in the life of edification of one another.

It is an acknowledged fact that real people of real prayer will not only faithfully come to worship but they will also depart to serve. They will be concerned with their community and want to help people in their need. It is an acknowledged fact that people of real prayer also know how to communicate to others. This is probably one of the most important things that will be gained through a solid program of small corporate prayer groups. They will not remain tongue-tied Christians. It is also a fact that they will be happy to let their light shine before men that our Father may be glorified. They will not hide their faith and talents under the bushel of inactivity and smothered intentions but will be put as a bright light on a hill that many may see and follow the reflected beam of the grace and power of God and be brought also to salvation.

In conclusion we can very well bring to mind the words of the writer to the Hebrews where he says: "let us hold fast to the profession of our faith without wavering; for He is faithful that promised; and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another and so much the more as ye see the day approaching."¹

¹ Hebrews 10:23-25.

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