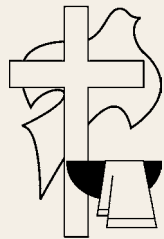




# WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS PRAY

*A discipleship resource of the Brethren in Christ Church*



## BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

Warren Hoffman, moderator  
Don McNiven, general secretary  
Rob Patterson, fervent prayer point person  
Rebekah Burch Basinger, director of congregational relations  
Dulcimer Hope Brubaker, editor  
Katie Geshay, graphic designer  
Mipa Lee, illustrator

431 Grantham Road  
PO Box A  
Grantham, PA 17027-0901  
Phone: 717.697.2634  
Web: [www.bic-church.org](http://www.bic-church.org)

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*“These I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”*

*—Isaiah 56:7*

## *PRAYER: a Brethren in Christ priority*

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The Brethren in Christ are a people of prayer. We confess our dependence on God for everything, and seek to deepen our intimacy with Him by living prayerfully. We acknowledge that it is largely through prayer that we hear from God and grow in spiritual maturity. As Brethren in Christ, we also have a vision of fervent prayer—that by 2010, there will be “new (or renewed) practices of fervent prayer and fasting in every congregation to ask for the life-changing grace of God to renew the Church” (Impact 2010 goals).

Toward that goal, BIC congregations are encouraged to participate in a church-wide week of prayer early in each new year. In some congregations, prayer is a primarily individual activity. For other churches, the emphasis is on corporate prayer, including prayer assemblies of multiple congregations. In addition to local activities, individuals are encouraged to sign up on the denominational website to take part in covering the BIC Church with nonstop prayer.

## *Prayer guide*

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This resource is designed to help you organize your congregation’s prayer ministries, events, and activities, during the annual week of prayer and continuing throughout the entire year. The practical ideas and suggestions included here point the way to transforming your congregation into a house of fervent prayer.

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## Becoming a prayerful congregation

### FERVENT PRAYER: an Impact 2010 goal

*We will pray and fast for the life-changing grace of God to renew the Church.*

With four out of five American adults claiming they pray to God on a weekly basis<sup>1</sup>, it's clear that prayer is not an unfamiliar concept to either people in the pews or to the broader American public. But as Brethren in Christ, we believe that prayer is more than just desperate thoughts sent heavenward or a religious verse at mealtimes. Rather, we take seriously Paul's call to "pray continually" (1 Thess. 5:17).

*"The Lord is pleased with transformed lives and prayer is a privileged gift from Him."*

*—Donna Lenbert, assistant pastor, Gateway Community Church, Chino, Calif.*

There may be individuals in your congregation—and perhaps you are one of them—who possess the gift of intercessory prayer. Such individuals play an essential role in the vision and ministry of your church. But as believers, we are *all* invited into God's presence to speak with Him and to hear what He is saying to us.

In a culture of instant gratification, waiting patiently for the still, small voice of God may be the most challenging spiritual discipline for North Americans to master.

Nevertheless, if we are to be in close relationship with our Creator, we must work both individually and congregationally to speak openly with God and to listen for His will.

#### *That we may be one*

One of Jesus' most earnest prayers appears in John 17, just before His arrest. In reference to His disciples, the bearers of the salvation message and the predecessors of the Church, Jesus prays, "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—*so that they may be one as we are one*" (verse 11b, emphasis added).

Jesus knew that the effective witness of the Church depended on unity, and that with our sinful ways, it would truly be a miracle if His 12 disciples—let alone a worldwide church of over two billion—could ever agree on how to follow Him in harmony.

*"In the last week of every month our church gets together for prayer, and this has woken up not just the adult brothers and sisters but also our youth. The testimony is that 80 percent of the church is attending the meeting."*

*—Pablo Lago, pastor, La Roca Firme BIC, Hialeah, Fla.*

A quick glance at the fragmented state of Christianity around the globe assures us that this prayer is as urgent today as it was then. And so, for the health of both the local congregation and churches around the world, we are urged to follow Christ's example of praying for the unity of believers everywhere.

But Christian unity is not only an object of prayer; it is also a result of prayer. In earnest prayer, we approach God in humility, submitting ourselves to His power and authority. Just think, then, how congregations can be transformed when they seek God's will together! The more we talk with God—individually or in groups—the more we will become like the early church just after Pentecost: "one in heart and mind" (Acts 4:32).

#### *That we may know Him*

Just before He prayed for His disciples, John records, Jesus prayed for Himself. The focus of His prayer was clear: that through His life, the Father would be glorified. Jesus prayed for Himself on many occasions, sometimes desperately, imploring, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

For Jesus, talking with the Father was as natural and necessary as breathing. It was His source of strength, and He made it a priority to rise early in the morning to pray in private. It was in prayer that He submitted His life to the Father, and it was in prayer that He received encouragement and guidance. But most significantly, prayer for Jesus was not just a one-sided account of His wants and concerns; it was the vehicle for a dynamic relationship in which the Father knew Him and He knew the Father.

It is this divine-human connection that we ought to pursue most ardently in prayer, for Jesus reminds us, "this is eternal life: that they may *know* you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3, emphasis added).

## *That the world may believe*

Jesus also ached for unbelievers to experience the eternal life that comes from knowing Him. With the last words before His arrest, He prayed that through the disciples' ministry, others would come to know Him, saying, "Father, I want those you

have given me to be with me where I am" (John 17:24a).

*"Requests received from attendees on Sunday are compiled and e-mailed to a network of congregation members on Monday morning. In addition to the requests received, each week focuses on a different family and a particular church ministry. We have witnessed several answers—at times miraculous—to these prayer requests."*

—Jonathan Stanton, pastor, Carland-Zion BIC, Owosso, Mich.

Like Jesus, our hearts also break when we think of loved ones who may never make the decision to follow Christ. And just as Jesus did, we must ask God to intervene in the lives of our families, next-door neighbors, and unreached peoples across the world. As we humble ourselves and pray for the spiritual needs of others, He will listen and add to our fellowship.

At the deepest level, prayer—whether for the unity of believers, for building a relationship with God, or for others' salvation—is about breaking through the barriers that separate us from God's richest blessing.

Prayer is not just good for individuals. It's the lifeblood of

all vibrant churches. And as we Brethren in Christ seek to become 325 healthy congregations by the year 2010, we must be a people united in fervent prayer.

<sup>1</sup> Barna Research Group, 2005

## *Planning your church's prayer activities*

Prayer is an essential part of the individual Christian life. Many believers rise early each morning to spend solitary time with God. But Jesus also promises that God will be responsive when we call on Him in corporate prayer: ". . . I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matt. 18:19–20).

This guide is designed to help you plan meaningful, powerful corporate prayer events that enrich your church, community, and the world. As a denomination, the Brethren in Christ have dedicated the first week of every year to prayer.

*"For years we have had a regular prayer meeting. We prayed for one man who had connections with the church some time ago. He had since been imprisoned on charges of attempted murder. We began to correspond with him in prison and he did likewise for us. Interestingly, he would ask us for prayer requests from our church and take those requests to his Christian community in prison. He was eventually let out of prison and was able to attend a service at our church. Even though I had never personally met him before he came, I felt like we were fast friends through our correspondence. We know prayer made a difference in this man's life."*

—Kathleen Leadley, pastor, Ransom Creek Community BIC, Clarence Center, N.Y.

During this designated week, churches are encouraged to focus on prayer through a variety of events and practices. Any of the following chapters may be used to plan your church's week of prayer, but they could also be used for prayer events at any time of the year.

Additional prayer resources, including a denominational sign-up for 24/7 prayer are available at [www.bic-church.org](http://www.bic-church.org). Booklets to guide individuals through the week of prayer, with tips on fasting and praying through the Scriptures, may be downloaded in the fall.



*“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” —Matthew 18:20*

## PRAYER ASSEMBLIES

As the children of God, we are called to join together in conversation with our Heavenly Father. Congregational prayers may already be a significant element of your services, but if you’re planning a week of prayer or other prayer event, you may want to consider including some form of focused corporate prayer.

Prayer assemblies are wonderful times to join with other congregations, forging bonds between believers that are not quickly broken. And times like these should also be seen as opportunities to model fervent prayer to younger, newer believers who wish to grow in their faith.

Corporate prayer can be led by an individual or group of individuals, with those gathered following along in unity. Or it could involve a network of small groups praying together for specific needs. Or your group could embrace a diversity of prayer styles by inviting those in attendance to pray however they feel led. Whichever format you choose, you can look forward to a greater sense of unity in your church than you’ve ever known.

### Informal Group Prayer

#### *How it works*

A prayer leader or facilitator opens the assembly with words of greeting and general instruction, and participants are then released to pray in their own way—kneeling, moving about, alone or in groups, silently or aloud—and depart when they’re ready.

*Note: Leaders should make sure that someone’s “liberty” doesn’t become a license for disorderly or otherwise unbiblical behavior.*

### *How to lead*

**Give guidance.** Prompt participants to pray for specific needs in your community, the Church, and the larger world by providing a printed guide or a repeating PowerPoint presentation. Be specific about each prayer need, and when possible, add a personal touch by including names and photos. Current prayer requests for our brothers and sisters around the world are available at [www.bic-church.org/lwm](http://www.bic-church.org/lwm).

**Consider the ambience.** Background music, lighting, seating that can be rearranged—each of these elements can make a world of difference in participants' ability to remain focused.

## Prayer Circle

### *How it works*

A prayer leader or facilitator opens the assembly with words of greeting and general instruction, and participants, usually an intimate number, are guided through a time of singing and conversational prayer with specific instructions. A suggested format is included below.

### *How to lead*

**Call to Prayer.** Open the time of prayer with song(s), a responsive reading, a unison Scripture reading, or some other formal call to prayer. Consider selecting a call to prayer that focuses on praising God.

**Confession.** Call for a time of silent individual confession. Alternatively, this could take the form of a public prayer of corporate confession and repentance.

**Supplication.** Invite participants to an open time of calling on God conversationally, especially focusing on the chosen subjects, themes, and/or Scriptures for the event. Scripture readings and songs may be interspersed during the prayers to help focus the prayers on the chosen themes.

**Thanksgiving.** Express thanksgiving through songs or readings, and prayer, then bring the time to a close by administering a spoken blessing and benediction.

## Concert of Prayer

### *How it works*

A prayer leader or facilitator opens the assembly with words of greeting and general instruction, and participants are guided through a service of prayer and singing. Often, concerts of prayer are the joint efforts of multiple congregations uniting in prayer. A suggested format is included below.

### *How to lead*

**Call to Prayer.** Working alone or as a team, open the time of prayer with song(s), a responsive reading, a unison Scripture reading, or some other formal call to prayer. Consider selecting a call to prayer that focuses on praising God.

**Confession.** Call for a time of silent individual confession, followed by a public prayer of corporate confession and repentance.

**Supplication.** Designate leaders to share a brief thought and then facilitate a few minutes of concerted prayer, focusing on the chosen subjects, themes, and/or Scriptures for the event. Scripture readings and songs may be included during this time as an aid to the main focus of prayer. Depending on the number of participants, this time of prayer may take on different forms. If you have a large group, you may want, at times, to divide into smaller groups to allow for conversational prayers.

**Thanksgiving.** Express thanksgiving through songs or readings, and prayer, then bring the concert to a close by administering a spoken blessing and benediction.

### **Prayer and assemblies in the Bible**

2 Kings 23:1–3

2 Chronicles 34: 29–32

Joel 1:14

Matthew 18:18–20

## Assembling to heal

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*“At our local church we have had several sacred assemblies to repent before God for certain issues in the church and to seek God’s blessing. These assemblies were organized when we discerned that past issues had not been dealt with. Just as individuals need forgiveness and healing applied to things in our past, so do families, churches, communities, and nations.*

*In our area we have a habit of moving disgruntled “sheep” from church to church. At our community sacred assembly, the pastors, repented to each other for disunity. After a time of repentance, there was a time of blessing each other and people were invited to share what God was laying on their hearts.*

*Another sacred assembly took place between congregational leadership and intercessors. The purpose was to repent for past sins and hurts within our church body. The body repented on behalf of past and current members for the sins against the pastors, and the pastors repented on behalf of previous pastors for the sins against the congregation. A very sensitive issue in our past was repented of and made right with God. God is breaking down denominational walls in our area and although we didn’t see immediate changes in the ‘religious’ community, each attempt to repent and unite made a difference, and plowed the ground for the progress we’re seeing now.”*

*—Laurie Okuley, Mt. Rock BIC, Shippensburg, Pa.*

*“Is this not the fasting I have chosen...to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?” —Isaiah 58:6*

## ACTS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

### *How it works*

Combining prayer, fasting, and social justice can move you beyond concerns and concepts and into God-directed action that is meaningful and helpful to those in your community and the world. Prayer and fasting are the first steps in acts of social justice but not a replacement for action.

As a family, group, or congregation, select a project to support and decide on a strategy to raise funds or perform a service. Consider fasting from certain foods, meals, or an activity for a week or perhaps even a month. Choose a time to gather together and pray for the needs of the people that your service project involves.

### **Informal Group Prayer**

Isaiah 58 is one example of fasting paired with social justice. After listing the wrong attitudes and actions of the people on their fast days, the Lord asks,

*“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”  
—Isaiah 58:6–7*

God expected His people to fast and He expected his people to be involved in social justice.



## PRAYER WALKS OR DRIVES

### *How it works*

Prayer walks are an excellent way for churches to be in prayer for their neighbors. For communities that are too spread out to walk through, driving is an excellent alternative. Driving is also an excellent way for those with physical limitations to participate. Gather together and walk or drive the streets of your community, praying for God's power and presence to be revealed in your neighborhood and in your neighbors' lives.

Whether you choose to travel as large groups or small groups, it may be helpful to further divide into groups of three in order to facilitate participation and conversational prayer.

Determine what route you will take through your community. You may want to stop to pray at places like schools, playgrounds, government buildings, Christian ministries, and popular hangouts.

As your group walks along, pray conversationally (with no long speeches and no "amens") for what you see. Be open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and dare to pray big things and little things alike. A school could elicit prayers for the teachers, the students, and the school board. Pray for the families who live in the homes you are passing. Pray for the police officer who passes you on patrol. Pray for salvation and the role your church can play in bringing restoration to the lives in your community.

Walking or driving in your community helps you to pray for specifics that you would miss sitting in your church. You pray for the real families that you see, and the actual children playing outside. The owners and employees of the businesses you pass and the teens hanging out on the corner all become a part of your earnest prayers. By walking or driving you let the streets and the Holy Spirit direct your prayers and open your heart to the people that you see.

If you hold prayer walks on a regular basis you may find that people will notice and may talk to you and even begin to ask you to pray for them. Prayer walks or drives are more than symbolic; they're dynamic.



*“They all joined together constantly in prayer.”  
—Acts 1:14*

## PRAYER 24/7

### *How it works*

We are called to “pray without ceasing,” but the fact is that we cannot completely devote our hearts and minds to prayer at all times; we must take time to work, sleep, and care for others. But, joining together with other intercessors—each covering an hour here and an hour there—we can enter into a fellowship of unending prayer.

In the Bible, continual prayer is an offering of praise, worship, intercession, and reconciliation offered by the priests to God. Leviticus tells us that the fire on the altar “must not go out.” In Isaiah God talks about posting watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem who will “never be silent day or night.” And Revelation tells us that in heaven there is ceaseless praise, worship, and intercession. But we don’t need to wait until we get to heaven to pray continually.

Prayer 24/7 is an initiative designed to blanket the BIC in constant prayer, involving intercessors across North America in praying for the health of the Church. By covering each year with prayer, we pray with the Scriptures that the eternal truth and practical teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) will be fulfilled in BIC people, households, congregations, leaders and ministries.

We also want to pray that the values, mission, vision, priorities, and outcomes as expressed in the BIC Impact 2010 booklet will be brought to fruition throughout the BIC Church in North America.

To find out more about Prayer 24/7, and to sign up to pray, visit [www.bic-church.org/connect/prayer](http://www.bic-church.org/connect/prayer). You may also register for Prayer 24/7 by e-mailing your prayer times to [biccomm@messiah.edu](mailto:biccomm@messiah.edu).

## Coordinating Prayer 24/7

### How to lead

- *For individuals.*

Invite members of your congregation to sign up online and pray through the prayer goals listed above in their own home at the hour of their choosing. Suggest that individuals sign up for a regular time, praying for the same hour(s) weekly (e.g., every Monday at 10 a.m.) or monthly (e.g., the first Monday of every month at 10 a.m.).

- *For groups.*

Encourage friends and accountability partners to sign up online to pray together. For some, this may be less intimidating than praying alone for a protracted time. Small groups or prayer groups that already have an agreed-upon meeting time could easily participate in Prayer 24/7 together.

- *For congregations.*

Challenge your church to cover a certain day or week with prayer. Sign up online for one 24-hour period and recruit people to pray either at home or at church for one-hour time slots. Try one of these approaches:

- Choose several hours (e.g., 4–7 p.m.) every day of the year to cover with prayer. (If every day of the year is too daunting, narrow your focus to certain weeks of the year or certain days of the week (e.g., every Monday and Thursday from 4–7 p.m.).
- Sign up online for your church to cover a whole week (or several weeks a year) with prayer.
- Partner with a sister congregation to cover a specified amount of hours, days, or weeks

## Making room for prayer

*“In the spring of 1997 we opened a 24-hour prayer room. It’s a room used only for prayer, and has an outside door for easy access during the night. A person can sign up for a one-hour slot each week, and the room is reserved for them during that time. The room is set up with different ‘stations,’ each with a specific theme or emphasis.*

*These stations include (but are not limited to):*

- *Cleansing*
- *Lost (“most wanted”)*
- *State/nation/world*
- *Children*
- *Answered prayers*

*One of the most significant stations for us over the years has been one that we call “most wanted,” where we pray by name for people who don’t know Christ. Anyone can submit a request by writing it on a card provided by the prayer room door or by e-mailing the church office. When a prayer is answered, another card is filled out so that all who prayed can rejoice in the answer to prayer.”*

*—Doris Barr, associate pastor, Mechanicsburg BIC, Mechanicsburg, Pa.*

## 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

### How it works

With “40 Days of Community” and “40 Days of Purpose” sweeping evangelical churches everywhere, running 40-day-long programs may seem like nothing more than a fad. But in reality, they have their basis in the Bible, where the unit of 40 days appears during significant events and transformations. For Noah, the rain lasted 40 days, the spies were in the promised land for 40 days, Nineveh was given 40 days to repent, and the disciples spent time with Jesus for 40 days after His resurrection. There are also 40 days of prayer and fasting recorded at various times, including:

- Moses on Mt Sinai
- Elijah on Mt. Horeb
- Jesus in the wilderness during His temptation

In each circumstance, God was bringing about change or the beginning of a new work. For us today, praying for 40 days has biblical, spiritual, and symbolic significance.

Historically, the Church has used the 40 days prior to Easter as a time to prepare for the celebration of the resurrection. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on the Saturday before Easter Sunday (Sundays are excluded from the count of 40 days). Lent, meaning “holy spring,” was a time for self-examination through repentance, self-denial, prayer, and fasting. Believers were encouraged to fast during this time by giving up an enjoyable activity or food in order to help them focus more clearly on the suffering of Jesus.

Today, Lent is observed in more or less formal ways and its observance is a private matter between you and God. But it is also the perfect opportunity to give up an old habit, or

start practicing a new spiritual discipline or good deed. And anytime you miss the item you gave up, or tire of doing the good deed, take that moment to remember and thank Jesus for His sacrifice. As you approach Easter Sunday you’ll increase your awareness of Christ. But you don’t have to wait until Lent to practice 40 days of prayer.

### Coordinating 40 days of prayer

#### How to lead

In order to unite your congregation in 40 days of prayer, you will need to provide two essential support—focus and structure. You will need to decide: what will be your congregation’s focus throughout these 40 days of prayer, and how will participants be guided through each day?

There are many resources available to help you plan your church’s 40 days of prayer, but with a little preparation, you could also create your own focus (perhaps taken from Scripture) and a guide that directs each individual’s prayers. Some guides are very simple, giving just a verse and a prayer direction for each day; others guide participants in several prayers including such specifics as praying for different nations each day or going on prayer walks.

*“Our church started as a result of the Pequea congregation’s 40 Days of Purpose campaign. Most of the people who came to help start the church felt moved by their 40 Days experience to launch out and try to reach the unchurched of Lancaster. The Table Community Church was born out of prayer and obedience to God’s leading.”*

—Dan Houck, *The Table Community Church, Lampeter, Pa.*

### Resources

• WayMakers publishes a 40-day guide (in both English and Spanish) suggested for use during Lent, called *Seek God for the City*. This is a comprehensive approach to 40 days of prayer, including weekly themes, daily Scriptures, and daily suggestions for prayer. It can be used for Lent or at other times in the year. While “city” appears in the title, the word “community” could easily be used instead. To learn more, or to see the children’s version, visit [www.waymakers.org](http://www.waymakers.org)

• Wesleyan Publishing House produces very simple prayer calendars called *A Place to Stand* and *Declare His Name*. These

are fold-out brochures with 40 days of Scripture and prayer suggestions. To find out more, visit [www.pparable.com/wph](http://www.parable.com/wph).

- A 40 Days of Prayer program, affiliated with Harvest Prayer Ministries, teaches participants what to pray, how to pray, and why to pray through a devotional book, DVDs, and small group study guides. Detailed information is available at [www.40daysofprayer.net](http://www.40daysofprayer.net).

- Purpose Driven Ministries offers a campaign called *40 Days of Purpose*, leading churches through a concentrated time of prayer and purpose. This is a comprehensive program that encompasses many aspects of church life. For more information, go to: [www.purposedriven.com/40daycampaigns](http://www.purposedriven.com/40daycampaigns).

