

upper-room prayer gathering has one agenda—to minister to the Lord with our prayer and worship. Until we understand that our first assignment is to minister to the manifest presence of Christ, God will not give us our second assignment.

It was in the RIVER one night that God put a burden on our hearts for the neighborhoods, apartment complexes,

and subdivisions immediately adjacent to our church property. I saw a picture of myself going door to door, introducing myself and saying to the people, “I would like to pray for you—what would you like Jesus to do for you?”

This struck a chord with our whole church family. Since then, we have visited 5,000 homes around our church campus. At our Wednesday night

AWANA kids clubs, more than half of the children are from the neighborhoods around our church. Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu parents bring their children to our church. It looks like a meeting of the United Nations each week.

Now when I walk the neighborhoods around our church, most of the people recognize me, smile big, and many thank

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How to Build a Prayer Culture for a MISSIONAL CHURCH

While the Holy Spirit will show you the unique pattern for *your* particular congregation to become a house of prayer for all nations, here are some keys we have discovered in Atlanta and around the world.

1. The pastor sets the tempo. Jesus made praying disciples (Acts 1:4). John the Baptist made praying disciples (Luke 11:1). We, as pastors and leaders of our people, are the ones who make praying disciples. We dare not delegate prayer discipleship to anyone else.

2. Bring others with you. Just as Jesus, John the Baptist, and the Apostle Paul brought praying people along with them, we want to invite rising leaders to pray with us. The best way to learn to pray is with people who know how.

3. Build a prayer shield. A prayer shield is a group of personal intercessors who are recruited to consistently pray for the pastor(s)—prayers for God to protect them from the plots of the evil one and to empower them for service. I now have more than 400 people around the world who are committed to praying for me on a daily, or at least regular, basis.

4. Appoint a prayer team and a team leader. The prayer team in my local church is a powerhouse. They not only facilitate pre-service prayer—filling the room with the presence of God before our worship celebrations—they mobilize prayer throughout our church family.

5. Every meeting is a prayer meeting. We find that a prayer meeting breaks out more often than not in gatherings such as small groups, Sunday school classes, women’s

meetings, elders’ meetings, and business meetings. We follow the pattern, “*everything by prayer*” (Phil 4:6).

6. Call for seasons of fasting. We call for fasts throughout the year—seven days, 21 days, or 40 days. During these times of accelerated spiritual growth, we see dramatic answers to specific prayers.

7. Give invitations to meet God. In the middle of Sunday worship we call people to come to “The Garden of Prayer” at the front of the auditorium to meet God. We’ve discovered that church is not a place to hide from God; it’s a place to meet God. People bring their highs and lows, their challenges and their blessings. Some weeks 50 or more people flood to the front and encounter God.

8. Emphasize mid-week prayer. Our mid-week corporate meeting is called the RIVER, a worship-based prayer gathering. We assemble chairs in concentric circles, which puts the focus on Christ and keeps us close enough to hear each other pray. It also gives opportunity to call people with needs into the middle of the circle so we can pray over them.

9. Ask for the nations. The size of our prayer life is revealed by the size of our answers to prayer. Therefore, we ask for the nations. What bigger thing can we ask for than the nations? When we began asking God for the nations, He began to expand our territory. We now have 54 nations worshipping together under one roof. “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance” (Ps. 2:8). God wants to take us all from the upper room to the nations.

—Fred Hartley