

No Excuses!

After surviving cancer, a stroke and the death of her husband, Bishop Marva Mitchell believes God has raised her up to take the excuses out of the body of Christ.

Bishop Marva Mitchell is a “no excuses” kind of leader. In 1988, when she realized local children weren’t eating on Saturdays because they weren’t in school to receive free lunches, she fed them. And when she discovered that these same children couldn’t read proficiently, she taught them.

In the last 14 years, the church she pastors, Revival Center Ministries International in Dayton, Ohio, has won numerous awards for its truancy prevention and substance abuse programs. This year the governor of Ohio appointed Marva to his task force for faith-based initiatives, and she became chairwoman of Dayton’s faith-based committee. Marva also travels the world training pastors and teaching churches how to become more involved in their local communities.

How to Start a Prayer Ministry That Releases Outreach

God is calling His people to communicate better with Him and for Him—to get in touch with Him in a way that makes a difference. It is time for the church to learn to pray adult, knowledgeable, well-informed, intelligent, strategic,

Scripture-based prayers that will help bring the supernatural plans of God into earthly reality and destroy the works of the devil. Time has run out for prayers that are based on selfish needs and that reflect culture, custom and tradition.

In order to heed the call, we must first make sure we understand the basic purpose for prayer and how to effectively use it. Prayer is a supernatural tool created by God that allows natural human beings to communicate with Him in the supernatural realm. It was created for His purposes, not man's purposes.

Prayer is not ACTS (adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication), nor is it a posture or attitude. Though these elements are important for producing results, they are simply components necessary for effective communication—not prayer itself.

Prayer is a supernatural entity governed by its own set of principles. It is an invisible reality. Like the wind, we are unable to see it, but we see the effects of it. Without prayer it is impossible for human beings to transcend the natural realm and impact the supernatural realm, where the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness operate.

Hundreds of books have been written about prayer. I am not a scholar on the subject, yet neither am I a novice. My approach to prayer is simple.

As I've studied various aspects of prayer during the last 10 years, the Lord has revealed strategies that have produced significant results and impacted thousands of people. Employing these strategies has provided the necessary spiritual foundation to build our Power Center—the multi-faceted complex that houses Windsor Village United Methodist Church, employs more than 200 people and pumps approximately \$15 million per year into the local economy—as well as fund numerous related projects: a master-planned community that

will include 454 single-dwelling homes, a prayer center, a family life center, a tennis complex, two commercial catfish ponds, a business park, a YMCA, a public elementary school and a community park. Though these community development projects are materializing through the hard work and faithfulness of many professionals, the genesis of this God-inspired vision was in strategic, Scripture-based prayers.

At Windsor Village, we use two primary methods of prayer: praying God's Word and praying in tongues. Our method of supernatural communications is based on 1 John 5:14-15: "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."

In this passage, God promises to hear the prayers of the believer if the believer prays in accordance with His will. What is the will of God? His will is His Word—the Bible. God is legally bound to adhere to His own Word, but He is not obligated to answer anything outside it.

Jeremiah 1:12 tells us that God watches over His Word to perform it, and Isaiah 55:10-11 states that God's Word will not return to Him void but will accomplish what He has designed it to accomplish, and will "prosper in the thing for which [He] sent it." God has created His Word to perform and produce results, and it is His Word that He acts upon.

Furthermore, the Word of God is food for life. Luke 4:4 tells us that "'man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" Without God's Word as a source for nutrition, our spirits and souls become malnourished.

Building a Powerful Prayer Ministry

The spiritual maturity of our church increased rapidly after my pastor-husband, Kirbyjon, and I began to emphasize the importance of prayer. As the people grew and as God's vision

for the church was being manifested in the natural, it became paramount for us to operate supernaturally. We had to effectively address the increase so that growth, both natural and spiritual, would continue. In order for the church to operate as dictated by Jesus, we had to become skilled in both the natural and the spiritual realms.

To address the spiritual need, we created a special department at our church called the Department of Supernatural Services and Communications (SSC). This department, which I oversee, houses the prayer ministry, miracles and healing ministry, Repairers of the Breach (ROB) deliverance ministry, youth prayer ministry and Christian education. The purpose of SSC is to teach people how to operate in the supernatural power and authority of Jesus Christ.

Supernatural Services and Communications provides services that minister to the individual and empower the corporate membership to operate more fluidly in the supernatural. Responsibilities include developing programs and systems that inform and educate about the supernatural; interceding and ministering through prayer; providing prayer counseling; coordinating church family fasts, prayer vigils and corporate prayer events; and providing spiritual guidance.

SSC began more than nine years ago as a small group of seven people who prayed regularly for the corporate church. Through a methodical, systematic and patient process, the steadfast efforts of a small group of people flourished into a movement of prayer.

You may not be responsible for the prayer ministry at your church as I am for mine, but I believe the principles we have learned can help you no matter what type of prayer effort you may want to initiate or participate in. Based on our experiences during the development process, I offer the following suggestions:

Seek the Lord's guidance about His plan for your prayer ministry. Ask Him to help you determine the mission or objective of the prayer ministry; what should you pray; how you should pray; who your target population is; and why you are developing a prayer ministry. If your prayer ministry will be in any way involved with your church, be sure to obtain pastoral approval before starting it.

Establish the primary avenues for praying. God may give you a different direction than He gave us, but after seeking the Lord and studying the Scriptures about prayer, we decided that we would pray in two ways: pray the Scriptures and pray in tongues. Since most Christians have not been taught how to pray Scriptures, we began to slowly teach people how to search the Bible and find Scriptures that applied to specific prayer petitions.

First, we encouraged intercessors to read the Scriptures verbatim as their prayers. Next we taught them to incorporate their prayer petitions into the Scriptures. We placed intercessors in small groups and encouraged them to practice this technique during corporate prayer. Most people had difficulty just praying in front of other people.

During this time, we found that many people did not have the biblical foundation to adequately pray, so we gave the intercessors brief teachings about topics related to prayer ranging from "How to Operate in the Holy Spirit" to "Knowing Who You Are in Christ." After three years of teaching and practicing, intercessors began to pray with ease scripturally appropriate prayers.

Develop a prayer strategy. Whatever you're praying for, develop a specific approach to pray for the need. We write most of our prayers, researching each prayer topic and composing a prayer that is based on Scripture knowledge obtained about the topic. We then incorporate our prayers into a prayer strategy that is intentional and specific. We develop

prayer strategies for all the various ministry efforts and community development projects.

For example, during the construction of the Power Center (once a rat-infested, asbestos-filled, dilapidated, 98,000- square-foot, old K-Mart building on 24 acres), the prayer ministry developed prayer strategies that targeted its financing, construction and operations.

We researched the Bible in order to understand God's directions and promises for social and economic empowerment of a community and interviewed key planners of the project in order to gain the technical specifics involved in refurbishing the property. Our strategy included writing Scripture-based prayers, organizing a 500-member prayer effort, and conducting weekly prayer walks that targeted the legal, financial and business communities; local, county, state and federal agencies; architects and construction companies.

We were intentional, tenacious and consistent. As a result, the Power Center today is a vibrant, productive, economic, social, educational and medical force in the Houston community. Numerous professionals were instrumental in making the vision a reality; but the key to its development was that my husband, who is the founder of the Power Center, made prayer the foundation.

Develop a training program. Continuing education is a key to praying effective, productive prayers. Provide training that will help your ministry members to grow in their walk with the Lord and their ability to communicate with Him.

Through the process of developing a prayer ministry, you may learn, as we have, that most people are told to pray but lack the adequate skills and tools to do it. In other words, they do not learn how to pray on their Christian journey. Don't assume they know; teach them!

Hold prayer partners accountable for living a holy life.

Require prayer partners to conduct their lifestyles in accordance with biblical teaching. In other words, expect them to change habits, behaviors, attitudes and anything else that is contrary to the teachings of the Bible.

For us, lifestyle is critical. We do not want anything in the life of a prayer partner to hinder the prayers that are offered to God on behalf of our church membership.

When a prayer partner sins (and occasionally one does), we encourage him or her to repent quickly and get help (professional counseling, if necessary) to make sure the sin is not repeated. Our prayer partners will tell you that their lives have improved greatly as a result of the required discipline.

Expect God to answer. It is important that you collectively decide you will believe the entire Bible and operate in accordance with its principles and instructions. For example, since Mark 16:17-19 tells us that every believer should heal the sick and cast out demons, it is important that you believe this and work to operate accordingly. Remember, prayers without faith are useless. We have to pray believing God will answer.

We are successful in prayer because we expect God to hear our prayers and bring them to pass (see 1 John 5:14-15). We operate in the power and authority that has been given to us through Jesus Christ, and we fight valiantly against the works of the devil.

Prayer is not a glamorous ministry, and the results are not always immediately visible. However, we have persisted in our efforts to systematically train people how to pray, and we have remained steadfast in our intercession for the church. As a result, we are seeing the fruits of our labor. Be consistent in praying and in leading others to pray, and you will be amazed at what God will do.

Read a companion devotional.

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Not Afraid Anymore

I thought I was losing my mind. Following a sexual assault, I was nervous, worried all the time and suffering with agoraphobia.

I was afraid to leave my home. Whenever I went out alone, I'd be stricken with panic attacks. My heart would begin beating erratically, making it difficult for me to breathe.

A panic attack is brutal and debilitating. For relief I began taking prescription drugs, but unfortunately, they were addictive.