

PRAYER || FIRST

Prayer First Weekend Planning Guide

Dear Friends,

The Apostle Paul instructs Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:1a with the following. “I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people.” (NIV). Notice Paul’s choice of words as he begins, “urge” and “first of all”. Webster defines the word urge this way. “To try to persuade in a serious way to do something.” Paul is not simply passively suggesting, but rather persuading Timothy in a serious way to make prayer a “first of all” priority in the church.

That is the call of Converge MidAmerica’s Prayer First ministry. It is our goal to urge our churches, first of all, to pray! It is our prayer that God would increase a movement of prayer in our churches that would usher in an unprecedented work of spiritual renewal and revival.

So it is with that passion, that we offer these Prayer First Weekends. Know that we will be praying along with you, that God would create a new healthy desperation for prayer in your congregation that would breathe a fresh work of the Holy Spirit in your church and community.

Praying with you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bryan Moak', written in a cursive style.

Bryan Moak

Vice President of Church Strengthening
Converge MidAmerica

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Section One

For the Pastor and Church Leadership

Our greatest desire is first and foremost to glorify God by encouraging a sweeping movement of prayer in our time. We would love to be one vessel God uses to prompt an unprecedented outpouring of prayer in your church.

To that end, we hope that this Prayer First emphasis impacts your church leadership, both staff and lay leaders. This is critically important. Our conviction is that if the prayer emphasis is to have lasting results, it must make a lasting impact on those in leadership.

Our greatest desire is first and foremost to glorify God by encouraging a sweeping movement of prayer in our time.

The question is often asked, "What do you hope to accomplish in just one weekend?" One significant way we answer that is this. We hope that at the next church board meeting, following a Prayer First weekend, that someone will ask the question "What more ought we to be doing to encourage prayer in our church?" If that question is being asked by leaders, Prayer First has done its job, and the potential exists for a long lasting impact on the church.

We certainly realize that the call to prayer is not our own, but God's. That God calls His people to prayer is clear from the Bible, and that is why Bible teaching and preaching is such a critical element in any Prayer First event. As your planning team puts the event together, the use of three crucial elements is encouraged:

- 1. The preaching of a biblical call to prayer,**
- 2. Teaching sessions which include both clear Bible instruction and practical help for taking next steps,**
- 3. A Prayer Gathering in which all that has been learned is "tried out."**

As the Holy Spirit speaks through the word of God to call Christians to prayer, as practical help is given on next steps, and as people "taste and see that it is good," the potential exists for a dramatic step forward in the church's prayer life, individually and corporately. At that point, it is absolutely necessary that church leaders are there to nurture and encourage this outpouring of prayer.

May God work powerfully in the life of your church, calling His people to pray, and blessing you with new spiritual interest and passion. Thank you for welcoming Prayer First to your church.

A Word to the Pastor, Staff, and Church Board

Scripture plainly teaches that for leaders, prayer must be a priority (Acts 6:1-6). Prayer is a vital part of how God will guide your leadership in the church body.

Sometimes church leaders hope that someone else will be the prayer catalyst in the life of the church. Leaders are already busy, with many responsibilities and concerns. Adding prayer seems like adding to the burden. However, please don't pass on the responsibility for planning this Prayer First weekend to others and then disengage from it.

Your role is crucial. Let God speak to you through the weekend. Set a powerful example for your church by attending the Prayer First sessions. Please make this prayer weekend a priority in your life and ministry. Lead the way!

Even if the detail planning is left to others, we encourage you to stay in touch with them and support them. Give them your undivided attention.

One way you can ensure that this Prayer First weekend has its greatest impact in the life of your fellowship is to clear the schedule for maximum participation. Get as many groups in the church to commit to the prayer emphasis as possible, such as small groups, classes, musicians, youth, and the like. Try not to make the prayer weekend "one of many" options for that date, but rather make it "*the* option." We realize that the larger the church, the more difficult this is. But we also realize that it takes unusual steps to convince people that "Prayer is a *First of All* priority" (I Tim. 2:1)

“I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people.” 1 Timothy 2:1

Selecting Teams

Who will plan and carry out the details for a Prayer First weekend in your church? That will depend on the size of your church, and how you plan special events. We encourage you to utilize teams involving as many people as possible. If the pastor does it all, it will be a great burden. When responsibility is shared, many will have a personal investment in the impact of the weekend.

You might organize three teams: a prayer team, a planning team, and a promotion team. Or you might combine the responsibilities. However you do it, please share the tasks as widely as possible.

As you select teams, begin by identifying someone (or two or three) who have leadership gifts and experience along with a personal commitment to prayer. This is the kind of person (or persons) you want to ask to be in charge. Don't just ask those who attend prayer meeting. If they don't have skill in organizing, promotion, etc. then they would probably be better off as part of the prayer team for the weekend. When looking for one or more key leaders for the prayer weekend, they must have both a passion for prayer and leadership skills and organizing ability.

Once you have identified a leader or leaders to work on the prayer weekend, you have choices for how to fill out the team or teams. The leaders may simply be given the responsibility to choose the persons they want to work with on their team. Or you may make those choices. Look for a variety of people - ages, men and women, a variety of gifts, representing various segments of your congregation. As stated before, the wider the participation up front, in planning and promoting and prayer, the wider the participation is likely to be during the weekend.

Section Two of this manual is specifically for the Prayer Team, Section Three for the Planning Team, and Section Four for the Promotion Team.

Finally, please make certain that the prayer weekend has adequate "prayer cover." That is, get as many people praying for this weekend and its impact as possible. Having this kind of special emphasis on prayer is likely to stir up some spiritual opposition in the heavenly realms - don't be unprotected. Getting a group of people to pray earnestly for the prayer weekend is vitally important. Also, this "prayer cover" will heighten anticipation and interest in the weekend.

Closing Words

An Opportunity to Bring Believers Together

We would strongly urge you to consider involving other churches from your community or region in the Prayer First weekend. This enables Prayer First to impact more than one church at a time, maximizing the use of our time and effort. But more than that, it also communicates our commitment to the greater kingdom work of God in our community.

Further, it communicates that revival and renewal and a movement of prayer are needed in the wider body of Christ, not just in one church. Historically, revivals came to a region, not just individual churches.

Finally, incorporating other churches also communicates our desire for biblical unity and love within God's family.

A Word About Finances and Housing

Converge MidAmerica is committed to serving our churches, and it is because of the ongoing financial support of our churches that we are able to serve you as we do. We are grateful for that support, and encourage you to give regularly and generously to Converge MidAmerica so that we might not only continue our service to you, but to increase our effectiveness through ministries like Prayer First.

Additionally, we are frequently asked if the church is expected to give an honorarium to the person serving you for these prayer weekends. The answer is - it's up to you. It is always an encouragement for the presenter to be blessed through an honorarium. However, there is also no expectation of it either. So we leave that up to each church to decide.

Finally, the presenter for the weekend will take care of their own housing, as Converge MidAmerica has a standing relationship with Hilton hotels.

**Thank you for your part in bringing Prayer First
to your church and community!**

Section Two

For the Prayer Team

Covering Your Weekend With Prayer

We believe that the Prayer First ministry must be a work of God. Therefore your role in this upcoming prayer weekend is crucial. It would be ridiculous to have a prayer weekend without significant prayer preparation. Thank you in advance for all you will do to prompt much prayer in anticipation of what God will do during and after the prayer weekend.

We urge your prayer team to begin by asking God to guide you as you consider how best to prompt additional prayer in the weeks leading up to Prayer First.

Here are some of the possible ways you might organize this prayer preparation:

- Prayer partners (two persons meeting together to intercede)
- Prayer triplets (three persons meeting together to intercede)
- Home prayer gatherings (planned prayer meetings in church homes)
- Special prayer meetings at church
- A 24/7 prayer effort (with people praying at church or wherever they are)
- Prayer walking opportunities (covering your community with prayer as you walk through neighborhoods, etc.)

As your strategy unfolds, here are some simple guidelines for keeping your effort focused and on track:

- Supply those committed to the prayer effort with *requests, fuel* for prayer.
- Keep track of answers to prayer and report them to the congregation.
- Offer inspiration and encouragement in the form of articles, books, videos, etc.
- Ask the prayer team to be actively praying during the weekend, even as they listen to the presentations.

Please contact us prior to your weekend about other materials that may be available to help your people pray more effectively.

Section Three

For the Planning Team

Putting together your Prayer First Weekend:

Step One - Choose a format

We will be offering you several alternatives to choose from. Flexibility is a key word. Prayerfully consider which approach is best for you. Your format will depend on who you are trying to reach and whether or not you are going to invite other churches to join you. It is very important to communicate your approach with the Pastor and church leaders responsible for the prayer ministry.

We seek to combine four crucial elements:

1. A biblical call to prayer,
2. Time with church leaders (*crucial!*) and prayer mobilizers
3. Practical teaching with steps for becoming more effective in prayer
4. A prayer gathering which allows people to experience a dynamic time of worship and prayer

Two formats are often used for prayer weekends, the "Target Audience" and the "School of Prayer". Examples of both are described on the next two pages.

You do not need to be restricted by these two approaches. You might choose a combination of the two, or something completely different. You will work with your presenter to provide the format that will work best for your setting.



Target Audience Approach Example

Friday or Saturday Evening

Leadership dessert with challenge ***“Leading By Prayer”***.
As wide or narrow an audience as you prefer.

Saturday 8:00 AM

Men's breakfast sharing ***“Muscular Prayer”***

Saturday 10:30 AM

“Teaching Your Children to Pray”, or ***“Arrested Prayer Development”*** seminar

Saturday Noon

Women's luncheon sharing ***“A Widow's Might”***

Sunday

Sunday School teaching all adults ***“Jumpstart your prayer life”***

Worship service - Preaching on the subject of Prayer

Lunch with those involved in prayer ministry Evening

“Prayer Gathering”, including worship, some teaching, and creative times of prayer

School of Prayer Approach Example

Friday or Saturday Evening

Session One: *"Leading By Prayer"*

Saturday

Session Two: *"Becoming a House of Prayer"*

Session Three: *"Jumpstart your prayer life"*

Lunch

Session Four: *"Arrested Prayer Development"*

Sunday

Sunday School - Teaching all adults

Worship service - Preaching

Lunch with those involved in prayer ministry

"Prayer Ministry Clinic the 'H.A.B.I.T.' Method"

"Prayer Gathering" including worship, some, and creative prayer

**Why not invite other churches to join you?
Either the Target Audience or the School of Prayer format could
include another church, but it might be a bit easier to do so with
the School of Prayer format.**

Step Two - Select Sessions to Fill Out the Schedule

The titles from the above formats are simply an example of the sessions you might choose to do. Following, is a current list of seminars/workshops you can choose that we believe will have the greatest impact in the life of your church (or churches). Again, make these choices very carefully, with much prayer.

Seminars/Workshops:

Praying For and With Your Children

This is a very basic, very practical teaching on encouraging parents in creative ways to pray for your children, as well as ideas in teaching and modeling prayer with your children.

Arrested Prayer Development

A workshop on learning to pray the Scriptures.

Becoming a House of Prayer

A seminar sharing keys to becoming a praying church and creative ways to see that practically played out.

Leading By Prayer

A session for church leaders from Nehemiah 1, including the challenge to saturate the leadership task with prayer.

Prayer Ministry Clinic H.A.B.I.T.

A simple session for those involved in or interested in prayer ministry, sharing and showing how to minister to an individual who requests prayer. We won't just talk about it, we'll DO IT!

Jumpstart Your Prayer Life

A seminar of fifteen ideas for taking a bold step forward in your practice of prayer. Items covered include prayer walking, praying the Scriptures, praying with an accountability partner, etc.

A Beginner's Guide to Fasting

Calls for obedience to Jesus' statement, "When you fast. ..." Simple, practical starting points for individuals and churches.

Praisebuilder

In this session, each participant will get practical help in praying prayers of adoration and praise by building their own Praisebuilder, a simple one page "cheat sheet" to keep in their Bible or devotional material. In just a few minutes, the richness of praise prayer comes into focus, through an analysis of Psalm 145.

Prayer Evangelism

Do you know that prayer can be a powerful tool for evangelism? Learn how to use some amazing prayer tools to help encourage a spirit of Evangelism in your church and people.

Muscular Prayer

A challenge to the men in the church, in particular, regarding prayer as a "first priority" in their lives and leadership. The scripture text is I Timothy 2:8 in its context. A bold exhortation to the men in your church!

The Widow's Might

This call for persistent prayer, using the widow of Luke 18, is a wonderful message for women's events.



Step Three - The Importance of a Prayer Gathering

It is vitally important that the Prayer First emphasis include a time of gathered worship and prayer, a time which puts all that has been learned into practice. Although for a number of years churches have referred to such prayer events as "concerts of prayer" we prefer to call these times Prayer Gatherings.

Prayer Gatherings can be focused around several different themes. We encourage you to work with your presenter to customize your Prayer Gatherings for your particular situation. However, there are certain "essentials" that should be included in every Prayer Gather.

- Powerful worship singing
- Praying through Scripture
- Kingdom-focused prayer (such as prayer for world evangelization, prayer for our nation, prayer for the suffering church, etc.)
- Confession of sin
- Outwardly focused prayer (such as prayer for our lost neighbors, friends, etc).

Your presenter will lead a variety of creative ways to include each element.

Please ask your most effective worship music leadership to be available for the Prayer Gathering. The presenter will suggest the type of songs to be used.

Most often, this time of putting into practice all that has been talked about, is scheduled at the end of the weekend, often on Sunday afternoon or evening. There are exceptions to this, and since you make these choices, we will be guided by your planning team. Keep in mind that we want this Prayer Gathering to be a kind of culmination for the Prayer First weekend. All the congregation should be encouraged to attend.



Section Four

For the Promotion Team

Jim Cymbala, pastor of Brooklyn Tabernacle is quoted as saying, “You can tell how popular the church is by who comes on Sunday morning. You can tell how popular the pastor or evangelist is by who comes on Sunday night. But you can tell how popular Jesus is by who comes to the prayer meeting.” Unfortunately, this profound illustration is why calling the church to pray can be one of the most difficult works of promotion in the church. Are you encouraged yet? :)

We believe that this call to increased prayer in your church through a prayer weekend has the potential to be transformative, not only for the weekend, but for months and years to come in the life of your church. However, it is also true that people won't simply show up because you are going to pray. That is why the promotion team is so very important. You must put time, energy and resources in promoting your prayer weekend. Following is a timeline for thinking through promoting your prayer weekend. The examples are simply to spur your thinking. Feel free to get creative as you promote your prayer weekend. As you promote, remember that it is virtually impossible to over communicate!

Timeline

3-6 Months Out

- Put the prayer weekend on the calendar. Begin to talk about the weekend throughout the church.

2-3 Months Out

- Create a theme for the weekend, along with any graphics. From that, create posters, flyers, an online presence on your website and scrolling slides for announcements. Make sure they are up and used by 8 weeks out.
- If other churches are participating in the weekend, make sure they get that promotional material.
- Encourage Small Groups to make this weekend a priority in their group schedule.

4 Weeks Out

- Announce weekly in the weekend services.
- Make sure all posters are out and at least 2 weeks of inserts in the weekly bulletin.

For logos, examples and other resources, visit convergemidamerica.org, and click on the ministries tab.