

Prayer: a case study

The challenge is to encourage and enable as many people as possible to pray for the Giving in Grace programme in the church. This paper tells how one church planned a creative prayer event and offers some very practical ideas for churches to adapt.



People have been praying at Ormskirk Parish Church in Lancashire for a very long time. One of only three churches in the country with both a tower and a steeple, the church contains Norman, Saxon and perhaps even some Celtic masonry in the east wall. The steeple dates to the fifteenth century; the tower was built a hundred years later to house the bells from Burscough Priory after the Dissolution. Today the church is at the heart of Ormskirk town centre and is home to a thriving worshipping congregation.

The prayer co-ordinator

Ormskirk Parish Church was fortunate in having a committed and creative lay member of the planning group who served as prayer co-ordinator, ensuring that that worship leaders and those leading the intercessors were familiar with the prayer and liturgical materials on the web site.

The Prayer co-ordinator also planned for and led a dedicated prayer group. For a month before the preaching series launched the programme, a group of five or six people met to pray for half an hour. It was not the same people each time; about twelve people were praying for Giving in Grace. That shared prayer underlined that Giving in Grace was an initiative focused around discipleship and spirituality.

Prayer cards

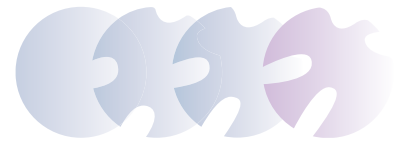
Before the preaching series began, each church member was given a *pre-launch prayer card*. This had the Giving in Grace prayer on the front and a series of prayer pointers on the reverse. On the Sunday that saw the first sermon in the preaching series, a second prayer card was made available. This card again featured the Giving in Grace prayer, this time with the General Thanksgiving on the reverse.

A special *bookmark prayer card* was also made available to the members of the house groups in the church. This card featured prayers from the Iona Community and the Methodist Covenant Service. This was particularly helpful in providing simple but beautiful prayers that helped the small groups to pray together at the end of the evening.

A simple but effective idea was to create credit-card-sized prayer cards for keeping in wallets and purses. Each time a credit or debit card was needed for day-to-day stuff, the prayer card was there as a reminder that all we have is a gift from God.

Children were not excluded from either Giving in Grace or the prayer material. A special children's prayer card was made available featuring the parish puppet, 'Grandpa George'.





The prayer event

The prayer co-ordinator also developed interesting resources for a special Giving in Grace prayer event. A prayer event was planned for just prior to the launch of the programme. Church members were invited to sign up for a one hour prayer slot in church. The event took place in a room underneath the church tower, which functioned as a prayer room.



The prayer room was largely silent, with some Celtic music played in the background from a portable CD player. The impact upon the 30 or so who attended was significant. Many stayed longer than the hour they had pledged, several came back later in the day and others expressed the wish to

do a similar initiative again. The intent was to offer Giving in Grace 'first to the Lord' in prayer before the shared task of preaching, teaching and encouraging people to make their response to God's grace (2 Corinthians 8:5).

Prayer stations

To help people pray, a small team created 'prayer stations' around the prayer room. The prayer stations were simply small areas of the prayer room with specific activities and prayer focus.

One prayer station featured a bowl of water and small pebbles; another a cross and nails; another food and drink; while another used a globe to represent reflection on world mission. The stations encouraged people coming to pray to move around the room, moving from one focus or activity to the next in their own time and at their own pace.

The paper *Ormskirk Prayer Stations'* offers more details on how the prayer stations were designed and used. The ideas, generously shared, can be used by churches to develop their own creative prayer stations.

