



issue 4 **my**
com
mun
ity



(How 2 Pray 4) is a range of titles from ALOVE UK and The 24-7/SA Prayer Network. These titles are designed to get you thinking about prayer; and more than that, they're designed to get you praying. They have all been written by people who have experience and a passion to see prayer become a priority. It is our hope that these resources will equip young people to become passionate and prayerful disciples.



ALOVE UK is The Salvation Army for a new generation – an expression of The Salvation Army for young people and young adults. ALOVE is calling a generation to dynamic faith, radical lifestyle, adventurous mission and a fight for justice, focusing on the four essentials of worship, discipleship, mission and social action. You can connect with ALOVE at www.salvationarmy.org.uk/alove



24-7 PRAYER
PRAYER, MISSION AND JUSTICE

The 24-7/SA Prayer Network exists to promote prayer in The Salvation Army in the UK. We offer training, create resources and help churches grow in prayer, as well as supporting several specialist prayer centres. We believe that prayer works, and that it is vital in enabling transformation in individuals, churches and communities.

This prayer guide has been written by Mark Read, from working at IHQ (in Programme Resources, Health and Education Services) and leading Laos Youth Congregation / Nunhead Salvation Army with his wife Ellie (for two years). He has experienced a variety of Salvation Army churches, programmes and projects and has seen that God's most powerful gift to us is community: 'When we are united, sharing life as a people, we become part of God's new creation and become the followers Jesus calls.'



h²p⁴ my community

Communities are funny things. In The Salvation Army, when we talk about the church we go to, we tend to name it by its location. For example: my church is The Salvation Army in Nunhead, but whenever I am asked where I worship, instinctively I reply, 'Nunhead.' After all, that is what's written on my epaulettes. I have to admit I am encouraged by this idiosyncrasy because it reflects a church that doesn't see itself as the building it meets in, rather the community in which it exists. At least I hope it does.

You're part of lots of different communities: school communities, church communities, clubs, groups or teams. For this h2p4 guide we are looking at your local community, the one you live in. If you live in a rural village it is easy to define: it's the space between the first and last house in your village. If you live in a town or city it gets more complicated. One definition of community is;

'A group of interacting people sharing their populated area.'

That's the people you shop with, get the bus with, live near, work near. You may know lots of them, or not many of them – but, a bit like your family, you can't really choose them but you are called to love them.

In August this year (2011) I watched events unfold that would change my community for ever. Civil unrest, riots, vandalism and looting broke out in Tottenham but rapidly spread to Peckham and Nunhead. Large groups of disaffected people came together to damage and steal. As I watched I was horrified, disappointed, worried, but not surprised. I knew what was driving these events. The news spoke of gangs, of poverty and of negativity towards the police; and all of these were contributing factors. But it wasn't until a few days later that someone hit the nail on the head:

'These people do not feel that they have a stake in their own community.'

Community is so important.

Life has returned to its usual rhythm in Nunhead and Peckham now, but I wasn't exaggerating when I said community had changed for ever. People won't forget what happened. We have seen what happens when an idea for community is lacking: how ugly and terrifying it can be to live in the same place as others but not share life with them. Community is important, whole communities, with everyone involved and where everyone feels they are invested.

Communities like this are hard to create – but they are what God intends. If you search Scripture for reference to community you will find lots (literally, LOADS) in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. This is because in these three history books we see the account of God, through Moses and Joshua, trying to build a community out of the Israelite people. In Exodus 15:17 we read a song, or prayer, Moses offers to God thanking him for creating a community, having an idea for them, and leading them to a place where God would dwell with them.

BUT WHY, AND HOW, SHOULD WE PRAY?

My wife and I have spent two years running Laos Youth Congregation and Youth Church that is part of Nunhead Salvation Army. As part of this we've organised a few community events, including each summer organising a Community Week: a week of community mission and service. This is always a vibrant and exciting time for our community, a time when we see God at work in Nunhead. But what we have learned is that it requires a huge amount of prayer. Prayer is us communicating with God, tuning into his creative will, seeking his vision. Through prayer God gives us insight into our community that we desperately need and there are issues in our communities that need responding to with prayer.

Just after the riots we visited the shop owners on Peckham Rye, where a lot of the damage had happened. Shop windows were still smashed, glass still on the pavements, buildings boarded up and burned. I walked into a taxi office and a lovely Jamaican lady, Cordella, was sitting behind the desk. She stood up as she saw us. I introduced myself:

'Hi, I'm Mark, I'm from The Salvation Army up the road...'

Hardly any response as we shook hands.

'We've come to see how you are, maybe offer some prayer for you if you would like.'

Immediately she sat back down in her chair. As we spoke she told me how she had been confronted with a large group the second evening of the riots. They had opened the door of the shop and looked in. She described how, despite being terrified, she stood up and looked them in the eye. The group stopped for a moment, and then walked on. Cordella asked if we could pray. Pray that she would feel strength again and that she would feel safe again. But also that the members of the rioting groups would also feel strength and safety:

strength from God to stand against violence and safety each as an individual God created. As we said goodbye Cordella put her hand under the little window and held mine with a new strength.

In short, prayer is vital to community. God has an idea for each of our communities, an idea that includes everyone, but we have to communicate with him to begin to see it.

My prayer for your community:

Ephesians 2:19-22 (NIV)

'You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.'

SO, HOW DO WE PRAY FOR THIS COMMUNITY?

Here are five ideas to stimulate some prayer. Try them on your own or as part of a group.

Find a map

Find a map of your area (if you can't find one, print one), preferably one with lots of space, like an Ordnance Survey map. Lay it out on the floor, and either on your own or as a group (like a cell group) start to label items on the map that have significance for your community, from doctors' surgeries to parks, to train stations. Use Post-it Notes to label what things are, who goes there and why your community needs them.

Once you've spent some time doing this, take a few Post-its each (maybe your top five most significant) and pray for those places.

Prayer walk

A prayer walk is not a new idea, and it's very simple to do. What you do is – pray and walk. It's all in the name, really. Pick your route first. It may be from door to door of your cell group, or along your route to school or church. Don't be embarrassed about stopping to pray and closing your

eyes (you know your area; only close your eyes if it's safe to do so). If someone comes up to ask what you're doing, then that is a great opportunity to share your faith. Don't hesitate to tell them that you care about your community and are out to pray for it.

Chalking

This is like graffiti but less permanent. Take some chinks out, and on the pavements (nowhere else because pavements will definitely get rained on to wash off the chalk!) write very quick prayers, even just a word, that asks God to bless where you are. The best place to start is outside your church.

Community matters

Get some big paper (flipchart paper or the back of a roll of wallpaper) and draw a rough map of your town centre. Try and include the main high street lengthways on the paper. Get hold of some local newspapers, online discussion forums etc, and start to note down issues that affect your area. They may be big or small, but whatever your findings are, jot them down around your high street. Take some time to pray for these, but



also write them down in a prayer journal / notebook so you can keep praying for these issues. Don't forget that prayer and action go hand in hand (check out Nehemiah) so if there's some way you want to respond to an issue, do it. Commissioner Helen Clifton had all sex industry advertising banned from her local newspaper by prayerfully writing letters of petition each week.

Community Boundaries

Find the boundaries of your community, and as a church / cell group/ prayer group spread yourself along this boundary and at the same time pray into your community. This is a good activity to do after 'Community matters' as you may find that your prayers lead in a specific direction. The symbolic act of praying INTO your community may help you focus on what it is God wants to do in that place. There is something powerful about literally surrounding your community with prayer.

These are all good active prayers; they will help stimulate your imagination and help you engage prayerfully with your community. But what about understanding more about the idea of community and how it links with Church?

That comes next...

BACKGROUND

It's no secret – God is all about community. If I were to pick a bit of the Bible that shows this it would be nearly all of it. If you haven't read all of it then you will have to just trust me on this one. Here are just five of the bits that really help me when I'm thinking/praying about my community.

God exists as a trinity

God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. These three persons are 'co-equal in power and glory'. What this means is that God appreciates and enjoys the diversity of different characters co-existing. He is made for relationship, beginning with relationship with himself. Complicated, I know, but then he is the creator of everything. If we look back at our definition of community we see that it uses the phrase 'a group interacting'. Interactions create and exist within relationships. So the key part of a community is its relationships. This is hard to understand when we are talking about the universally incomprehensible relationships between God and God... well, God again. What else does the Bible tell us about community?

Adam and Eve

Man is not meant to live alone, as he is created in God's own image, so he inherits God's desire to be in relationships – and not just romantic ones like Adam and Eve. God created Eve so that the human population would grow, creating more relationships and eventually community.

Exodus

In honesty, this is my first stop when I talk about community. Exodus tells the story of a group of people not bound together by geography or church membership. They are bound together because they are a community – Israel. As a community, or 'people' as the Bible puts it, they have this joint identity in their heritage. God creates an agreement with them, meaning that God can live in community with them, He chooses them as his people – his community. Sometimes it works OK, but this community has some issues. Nevertheless God continues to work with the community, dealing with issue after issue, leader after leader, every time investing to bring that community closer to himself. But it isn't enough. God desires a deeper relationship.

Jesus

The all-time best community leader. Teacher, pastor, healer, listener, defender; Jesus has it all. He single-handedly takes the agreement God makes with Israel and makes it real. And by living completely by this covenant, dying on a cross and being resurrected, Jesus completes something that results in us being covered by God's grace. We are in direct relationship with God (if we choose to be) meaning we are tied into the most vibrant, exciting and intense community – a community of believers. And when we start to interact with God, and listen to his ideas, we become something even more special – followers, or disciples.

Acts

The disciples are the people that interacted with Jesus on earth, and became his followers. They built a community of followers that we read about in Acts. This is sort of a blueprint for how Christian communities should be. But for most of us we don't live in Christian communities – we are surrounded by people who have turned their back on faith, on interacting with the people that share their populated area, on the idea of community; or they have turned their back on all three. In opening up opportunities for these people to reconnect to a community, we show them the value in it. Not just the value of knowing and loving your neighbour, but the value of knowing and loving God.



TOP TIPS FOR PRAYING FOR YOUR COMMUNITY



1. Create a Community Prayer Space

If you live in an area with other faiths, make it a multifaith prayer room.



2. Community Prayer Meetings

Why not advertise a meeting where you will specifically pray for your local community? You may find relationships with other churches/Christians are created and you may even find that people without faith still care enough for their community to come along to a prayer meeting for it.



3. Personal Prayer Walks

You all have to walk through your community sometime; put some worship music on your MP3 player and have a prayer session as you go.



4. Yellow Pages Prayer

List the streets in your community and each day pray for one specifically. If you're really dedicated visit that street on that day. If you're doing this as a group make sure you're not praying for the same street on the same day.



5. Local Papers

Keep an eye on your local papers. If an issue or article grabs your attention cut it out, keep it, pray for it. Maybe create a prayer wall with these.



6. Local Council

However you feel about your local authorities, they need prayer. But write to them and tell them you're praying for them. Ask for a list of departments or employees and create a prayer rota that you will commit to. (Don't forget to send an invitation to your local authority to Community Prayer Meetings or other community events – they appreciate it, even if they can't always be there.)



7. Shopping Prayers

Offer prayer to the staff in the shops you go into. Be sensitive – not everyone will be comfortable with this, and if they look busy or have a queue, don't take their time – remember, they are running a business.



8. Prayer Requests Box

Make a box available (outside) that people can confidentially pop prayer requests in, and then meet as a small group to pray for whatever appears.



9. Prayer Business Cards

Set up an email address where people can email prayer requests, include it on business cards and leave these cards with local businesses or anyone else you meet.



10. Community Prayer Book

Try and add prayers into a written book. When the church is open to the public, make this book available for people to look at and read.

ALOVE+



The Salvation Army for a new generation



24-7 PRAYER
PRAYER, MISSION AND JUSTICE

www.salvationarmy.org.uk/ALOVE

Registered Charity No. 214779,
and in Scotland SC009359

design // john@filtrum.co.uk