

Laity Sunday (October 18, 2009)

Disciples Transforming the World: Through Prayers by Sandy Jackson

"When persons unite as professing members with a local United Methodist church, they profess their faith in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; in Jesus Christ his only Son, and in the Holy Spirit. Thus they make know their desire to live their daily lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. They covenant together with God and with the members of the local church to keep the vows which are a part of the order of confirmation and reception into the church:

'6. To faithfully participate in its ministries by their **prayers**, their presence, their gifts, their service, and their witness.'" (§ 217 *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* 2008)¹

All members of the UMC affirm this covenant when they join the church and again as they renew the covenant when others join . . .

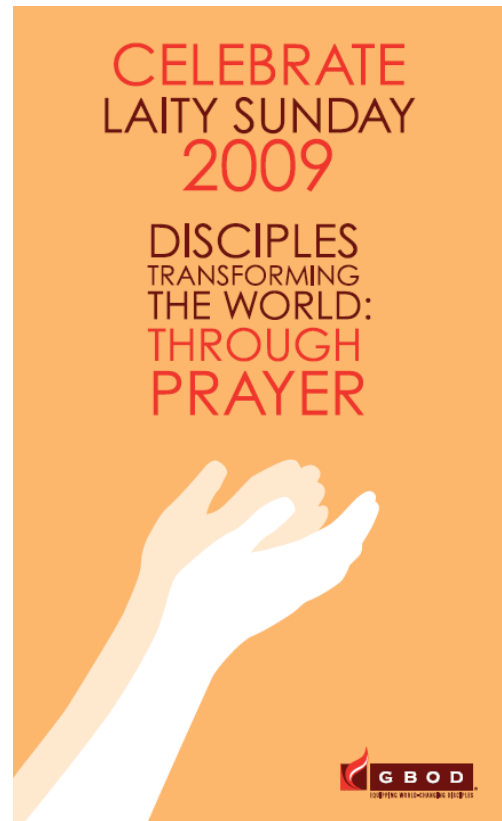
"As members together with you in the body of Christ and in this congregation of The United Methodist Church, we renew our covenant faithfully to participate in the ministries of the church by our **prayers**, our presence, our gifts, . . ." (Baptismal Covenant I, page 38, *The United Methodist Hymnal*).²

How often do we repeat this vow? How often do we keep it? How do we "participate in the ministries of the church by our prayers"?

Prayer may be much talked about and too often not practiced. How goes your practice of prayer? And what can you do to improve it?

Our prayer practices critically affect our discipleship. The time we spend in prayer (or the lack thereof) is reflected in our lives. Think about people you know whose prayer lives are intentional and fruitful. They are the people to whom you go with prayer requests. Sometimes it is the pastor, but sometimes not. Pastors are not the only people who have active prayer lives. There is something about people with active prayer lives that gives you confidence in their ability to communicate with God. It should be more than the ability to use flowery words and phrases. It is their sincere and open conversation with the Lord and Giver of Life.

Some people certainly are gifted by the Holy Spirit for intercession, but all people have the ability to come before God with their needs and requests to "find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16, NRSV). James 5:13 says "Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise." (James 5:13, NIV)³



There are many forms of prayer -- contemplation, singing, praying Scripture, and more; and no one way is better than another. Often, prayer does not require words: God knows what is in our hearts. In a book titled *Cloud of Unknowing*, the author writes that all that matters in prayer is to allow the awareness of our selves to be "carried up with glad, vigorous love and, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, united with the precious being of God, just as (God) is in himself, no more and no less."

The important thing about prayer is to do it! And remember that all effective communication is two-way. Spend time in God's presence listening for God's response to your prayers.

Jesus did mention some ways that we should and should not pray:

"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father, who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matthew 6:5-8, NRSV).

In these days of uncertainty, there may be much to pray about. Remember these words from the Apostle Paul, "Do not worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving [for what you already have], let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding [often found while we spend time listening] will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7, NRSV).

John Wesley, founder of Methodism, had this to say about the effects of prayer: "God does nothing but in answer to prayer." And he encouraged others in their discipleship; "O begin! Fix some part of every day for private exercises. Whether you like it or no, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way: else you will be a trifler all your days."

If you think that your prayers are not important see these verses from Revelation 5:8 (NRSV): "When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, Each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."

And from Revelation 8:3 (NRSV): "Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel."

What a wonderful image -- to envision our prayers rising like incense before God!

I have many books on prayer, but reading all of them will not improve my prayer life unless I put that information into practice, take time to spend with God, present my requests, and listen for God's response. Jean Pierre de Caussade said, "If we wish to quench our thirst we must lay aside books which explain thirst and take a drink."

Our membership vows and the wisdom of Scripture point the way to a deeper relationship with God through prayer. All we have to do is to be faithful in our practice!

"Pray diligently. Stay alert, with your eyes wide open in gratitude." (Col. 4:2, *The Message*⁴)

Becoming a People of Prayer

If you are struggling with your prayer life or would like to develop prayer ministries in your church to encourage others in their prayer lives, an opportunity awaits. [Becoming a People of Prayer](#) is a conference designed to help you and/or your congregation improve personal and corporate prayer. Please join us in Nashville, Tennessee, September 17-19, 2009, at Brentwood United Methodist Church. Visit the website at www.gbod.org/peopleofprayer for more information.

If you would like to learn more about leading prayer, there is a course called [Leading in Prayer](#), using the text [Let the Whole Church Say Amen](#) by Laurence Hull Stookey. Both are available at www.upperroom.org/bookstore.

Resources can be found at www.gbod.org/laity

- [Worship Resources for Laity Sunday \(October 18, 2009\)](#)
- [Celebrate Laity Sunday 2009 Poster \(11 by 7 -- pdf\)](#)
- [Celebrate Laity Sunday 2009 Bulletin Cover \(8 1/2 by 11 -- pdf\)](#)
- [Celebrate Laity Sunday 2009 Bulletin Insert \(8 1/2 by 11 -- pdf\)](#)
- [Laity Sunday Worship and Music Resources](#) by Dean McIntyre
- [A Great Thanksgiving for Laity Sunday](#)



Sandy Jackson is the Director of Connectional Laity Development for the General Board of Discipleship.

¹From *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* -- 2008. Copyright © 2008 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.

²Baptismal Covenant I, page 38, *The United Methodist Hymnal*, Copyright © 1989 The United Methodist Publishing House.

³Scripture quotation from the NIV (New International Version) copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society.

⁴Scripture taken from *The Message*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. All rights reserved. Used by permission.