Deacons Ministries of Care

Intercessory Prayer:
The Quiet Heart of Deacon Ministry
submitted by Alison Thomas,
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Do not worry about anything; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6 –7 (nRSV)

In many respects Deacons are the connective tissue of the church. We comfort, assure, support and care for those in need, inside the congregation and beyond. And prayer—particularly intercessory prayer—is the vital element that guides and binds those connections. As we provide sympathy, witness, and service, we are called, above all, to manifest God's love, a love that creates, sustains, and redeems the relationships we have with one another and with God. When we pray for each other, we live out that love in a very direct way, opening a channel that can touch and lift up the life of another even as we open ourselves to God's abiding grace.

More than anything, intercessory prayer shifts our focus and perspective. As we pray for others, our tight cocoon of “self” falls away and we become in a very real way the “body of Christ,” at work in the world to spread God’s love and grace. Whether we are praying for (or with) someone we know well or a stranger, someone from very different circumstances, or even a person we don’t particularly like, the effect is similar: we see the other with new eyes, God’s eyes, and recognize him or her as our sibling, sought after and loved by the Father as we are. In the moment of extraordinary intimacy and trust when a prayer request is shared, distance closes and we are moved into active relationship—with one another, with life, and with God. This is what makes intercessory prayer such a precious and defining practice for Deacons, the very heart of our ministry.

Deacon Opportunities for Intercessory Prayer
There are a variety of opportunities for deacons to offer prayers of intercession, both formally and informally.

- By leading the Intercessory Prayer services held in Stone Chapel each Sunday morning following 11:00 a.m. worship
This core Deacon responsibility, one of our weekly volunteer opportunities (DVOs), involves praying for both those who come in person to the chapel and those who submit written requests in one of the four prayer boxes. A duty description provides full instructions for this service (found at the end of this document).

- **By joining in the intercessions (and petitions) offered as part of each Deacon meeting.**
  Typically there are opportunities to offer up such prayers both corporately, with the full group, and personally, with a Deacon on duty to receive special prayers.

- **By encouraging prayer requests during Network Calling and, in some cases, joining in immediate prayer with those contacted.**
  As many of us have found, the calls that do get personally answered (vs. going to voicemail) are often the ones where there's a real need—and, in that moment, there's a chance to make a prayerful connection, even as information is gathered for passing along to the staff for Morning Prayer.

- **By inviting prayer requests at suppers and other community outreach programs.**
  Deacons on duty at the Monday, Sunday, and Fourth Friday Night Suppers and at other outreach activities, such as picnics at the Community Garden, invite guests to submit written requests, using the standard form, or to pray one-on-one in a quiet place, off to the side. Written requests are distributed among Deacons on duty at the event, who offer up those prayers over the ensuing week and then forward them to Ali Trowbridge, Associate Pastor for Congregational Care.

- **By spreading the practice to other committees and fellowship groups . . . and beyond.**
  Deacons can help to create a richer prayer culture throughout the church by sharing the practice of intercessory prayer, through both leadership and training, with other groups.

- **By including in your personal prayers.**

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**Some Thoughts on Becoming More Comfortable with Intercessory Prayer**

- Do some preparation. Read and think about the practice. Tap into your own prayer life; if you have a prayer that is familiar and personally resonant, use it as your “go-to” resource for starting (or concluding) an intercession. Work from a standard framework, such as:
  - Opening prayer, often of praise and thanksgiving.
  - Lifting up of prayer request(s).
  - Silent prayer.
  - Closing prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer said in unison.
• Take a moment to quiet and calm yourself before starting. Offer up your own petition for peace and presence.

• Focus on and think about the request(s). Open up your senses. Listen or read for the real concerns and feelings of the person making the request. Let go of any preconceptions and welcome in the Holy Spirit.

• Be yourself. Don’t worry about pauses or hesitations or using “perfect” words. This is not a performance, but a moment of intimacy and personal connection.

• Practice the practice.
  – Hold in your heart the prayers shared in an intercession, whether at the prayer service on Sunday morning or during a Deacon meeting. Return to them over the ensuing week.

  – Pray your own “naturally-occurring” intercessions as an expression of love and care for the people, groups, and situations close to you, in your own life.

  – Take advantage of opportunities to pray “publicly” as a Deacon:
    Say grace at Sunday Night Supper.
    Sign up for Intercessory Prayer duty or back-up another Deacon.

  – Ask another Deacon to join you in conducting Intercessory Prayer.

  – Participate in partner prayers and similar practices at Board of Deacon meetings and extend them to your home life and/or other groups with which you’re involved.

  – Share in the Deacon Prayer Book, available for contributions at each meeting.
The Deacon Duty of Leading Weekly Intercessory Prayer Service

The Deacons lead Intercessory Prayer services in John Timothy Stone chapel following the 11:00 a.m. worship service each Sunday morning. Visitors and members of Fourth Presbyterian Church are encouraged to participate either by joining the Deacon prayer leader in Stone Chapel or by filling out a prayer request form and dropping it in one of the designated boxes. Box locations are at the entrance to Stone Chapel, on the Volunteer table during Coffee Hour, in the Narthex, and with the receptionist. Request forms can be found in the church literature racks, at the Welcome Table, and alongside the boxes outside Stone Chapel, on the Volunteer table during Coffee Hour, and in the Narthex.

Deacon responsibilities for this activity are as follows:

- Check all four prayer boxes (Narthex, Receptionist, Volunteer table, and Stone Chapel) for requests and arrive at Stone Chapel before the end of 11:00 worship. Plan to stay until at least 12:45 p.m. (most prayer seekers arrive between 12:20 and 12:40 p.m.).

- Partially close the doors to increase privacy while still encouraging entry of late arrivers. Be aware that you may continue to get traffic through the chapel from the choir loft and back doorway. Position yourself toward the front of the chapel and signal “Quiet” to anyone straying in.

**NOTE:** On Communion Sundays, Stone Chapel is used to stage the communion elements for each of the services. Work around the set-up table—try drawing some chairs into a circle for the prayer.

- Greet anyone wishing to participate. Welcome them in, introduce yourself, and invite them to share a bit about themselves and their prayer request(s). Probe gently to be sure you have the information you need to make your prayer focused and personally meaningful for the attendee.

  - Let go of any assumptions, anxiety, or “agenda.”
  - Listen attentively for the concerns and feelings of the person with you and for the Spirit.
  - Explain the process and ask whether attendee(s) would like to offer the prayer in their own words or would prefer for you to say the prayer(s).
  - If there are multiple attendees, you may want to check whether they want to pray together or would rather do it individually.
• A common order for this type of prayer service is:
  Opening prayer, often of praise and thanksgiving.
  Lifting up of prayer request(s).
  Silent prayer.
  Closing prayer, for example, the Lord’s Prayer said in unison.

• Prayer leaders are encouraged to draw from their own prayer resources and experiences. They can also use the prayer booklet distributed to Deacons, a copy of which is kept in the piano bench in Stone Chapel.

• Should someone appear to be in distress and in need of special attention or intervention by the church staff, locate the minister in charge (MIC)—who is usually available in Coffee Hour—or any of the pastors.

• After prayers, place the written prayer requests in one of the envelopes addressed to Ali Trowbridge’s attention (kept with the request box at the Volunteer table) and give to the receptionist.