



PRAYER CONNECTIONS MINISTRY

You may know the story all too well: Some members of your church who used to be active and present every time you opened the door now seem to be absent more often than not. “In fact, when was the last time we saw that family in church?” you ask yourselves as a staff, or at a church board, parish council or vestry meeting.

What might be shocking to realize is that **that person’s or family’s absence may be for a longer time than you think—perhaps much longer**. Allow a true story, with the names changed to protect the guilty and injured parties.

Jeanine was an active member of her downtown Episcopal Church in the Midwest. She came into the church many years ago, deeply moved by the liturgy, and by the mature way that her church looked at faith and Holy Scripture. She became very involved at church, and, having a Masters in Arts and Religion from a seminary, began to teach Adult formation classes, eventually heading up the Christian formation for adults program.

Then Life stepped in. After going through some personal and family crises, Jeanine found herself going to church less and less. Her faith was at its lowest point in her lifetime, and she felt she had no place to go.

What surprised Jeanine most was that **no one seemed to notice she stopped coming to church**.

So, she decided to wait until someone from her church called to check in on her. Two times the annual pledge campaign letter arrived in her mailbox like clockwork, with pledge card duly enclosed. However, the letter was always addressed, “Dear Member of All Saints,” **the cardinal sin of annual pledge drives** in most churches: not addressing each letter personally through the use of mail merge, and not personally signing each letter, including a brief hand-written note expressing gratitude for previous ministry service and giving.

Into the trash went the anonymous letter and pledge card, and Jeanine’s relationship with All Saints Church.

As of this writing, no one has called on her yet; it has been three years now. This year, the priest has announced his retirement, and All Saints Church is moving on without her. Sadly, neither the priest nor any staff person ever thought to call Jeanine.

The story has a happy conclusion, however: Jeanine has found a new church home (of a different denomination), located a few blocks from her former parish, and in this church she has found the caring community her heart needed for healing. Good for her. Seriously.

What is most sad about this story, though, **is that the loss of Jeanine from All Saints Church was entirely preventable.**

Has your church lost any Jeanine's over the last few years? The last few months?

An active **Prayer Connections ministry in your church could prevent this story from ever happening again**—or make it extremely unlikely that it would ever happen.

What Is Prayer Connections?

In short, Prayer Connections ministry is a lay-led, lay-driven stewardship and pastoral ministry that expresses your church's care and concern to every member—and "permanent visitor"—on your parish membership list. When done properly, an effective Prayer Connections ministry will likely prevent any member from ever "falling through the cracks," as we often hear from clergy and lay staff members.

Best of all—it's free.

All it requires is organization, commitment, and people who are willing to call others, to pray with them and remind them of your congregation's love for them. It will require work to get started and keep going, but the results of the ministry will prove the work absolutely worth it.

Prayer Connections (first known as Telecare) appeared in an online article from the National Council of Churches extolling "California Church's 'Telecare' Ministry Proving Its Value in September 11's Wake." The story goes on to recount the birth of the ministry at St. Patrick's Episcopal Church in 1992, the "brainchild" of Rev. Fran Sweet, an Episcopal deacon, and the Rev. David Davidson-Methot, a priest at the church at that time. Deacon Fran calls the Telecare ministry as "a phone call of love." In a recent phone conversation, she described it as a loving process. "We simply wanted to reach out and see how people were doing, and offer to pray for them about anything going on in their life or on their mind. The call is to remind them that their church loves them."

The Rev. Nancy Brown, a lay member at St. Patrick's in 1992, introduced the Telecare Ministry when she came on clergy staff at St. Augustine's By the Sea, in Santa Monica, in 1998. The article went on to describe how that parish used the Telecare ministry after the attacks in New York City to check-in with people during the weeks following the attacks. Many parishioners in the parish had friends and acquaintance affected by the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

How Does Prayer Connections Work?

The genius behind the "phone call of love" is the one and only question that callers ask. It goes like this: Trained Prayer Connections ministry volunteers will call the entire church membership on a regular basis, asking this question:

"We're calling to see how you are and if there's anything you want us to pray for?"

That is it. Such a question clearly expresses itself as a ministry of caring. Who wouldn't be touched to receive a phone call from a church member and be asked such a question? Most of us would welcome that call. However, some members might feel that the church has long ignored them—like Jeanine. Therefore, for a time—especially when getting such a ministry started—you might get an earful about the church. Listen to what is being said, and to what is **not** being said. If you listen without judgement, and agree with any truth that might be stated, you just might preserve a relationship with that member. Perhaps the pastor can follow up.

One never uses the Prayer Connections call for anything other than this one question. You cannot ask the household or person you called about money—or anything else. No “Did you receive our pledge card?” No questions about church attendance (or lack thereof); no inquiries about people’s whereabouts; no promotion of church events. Prayer Connections is also not a counseling hotline or service, nor a place for gossiping! (“Have you seen the pastor’s new haircut? Mercy! You simply must get to church to see it!”)

What are the Key Benefits?

The biggest benefit of Prayer Connections is that you are regularly calling all members, saying, basically, “We love you, and want to support you in prayer.” Your beloved people will feel cared for, and looked after by their church. With proper use of recordkeeping, no one will fall through the cracks ever again. And, you will discover and respond to needs of members; member will know concretely that their church is there for them and cares for them. That is the most important value from the investment of time and effort in starting and maintaining this ministry: people will feel cared for, and looked after by their church.

Once it is up and running, an active Prayer Connections ministry is actually a true expression of stewardship: it is the care and tending of relationships. In her bestselling book, *Daring Greatly*, Brené Brown writes, “Connection, along with love and belonging (two expressions of connection) is why we are here, and it is what gives purpose and meaning to our lives.” Relationships of love and belonging are at the heart of a vibrant church community, because they provide the connection with others that is essential to being human. Jesus models for us the ideal of self-giving relationships, relationships based on mutual love, compassion, and respect, which gives life. Prayer Connections fosters that sense of connection in that it is an expression of the church’s love and belonging for its members.

Who is Involved?

Here is where great care must be taken. To have an effective Prayer Connections ministry, you must find people who can listen to others without interrupting them. People who can sincerely pray with others, and pray for others, either spontaneously, or from a set prayers provided. People comfortable working as part of a team ministry, who possess good phone skills, and who can record brief notes on a form.

Most importantly, in Prayer Connections ministry you must have people who can keep confidences, who can keep calm when necessary and remain non-reactive. When you regularly call your membership, and ask them: “We’re calling to see how you are and if there’s anything you want us to pray for?” the caller may discover some things that need to be handled well, with respect, confidence, and calmness. More often than not, however, the calls will be well received and a positive experience for all involved.

Where & When Does it Happen?

Multiple teams of three to four people make calls from the church offices. You will need to decide which day, at what hour and for how long you wish to make the calls: say, every third Tuesday, from 6:00 to 7:30 PM (or 6:30 to 8:00PM, if using a 90-minute window). Of course, you should have as many qualified Prayer Connections ministry volunteers as you can, so that the same groups of people are not always the ones calling—that would get exhausting for anyone!

In this digital age, people most likely do not like tele-marketing calls (understandably so). Because it is a team ministry, and because of the prevalence of Caller I.D., Prayer Connections ministry works

best when the calls are placed from the church offices, so that the name of the church pops up on the Caller I.D. of the person called. (You might need to encourage those “cell phone only” members to put the church telephone number(s) in their cell phone, so they can take advantage of knowing who is calling them, too.)

Calling from the church office preserves the team aspect of the ministry, as well—especially since the team will pray together before they make their calls, and afterwards, including the prayer requests that they discovered while making the calls. You may ask if the person would like to add their request to the parish prayer list used at the Prayers of the People (or other appropriate time in worship). They may say “yes,” or “Yes, but anonymously” or they may decline. Do inform them that you will be praying for them at the end of all calls that evening; they may wish to remain anonymous there, too. If so, respect that.

Any serious pastoral information should be given to the clergy upon consent: simply ask, “May I let the pastor know about this, and have them follow up with you?” Nine times out of ten, they will agree. Keep pastoral concerns of a serious nature confidential, unless told otherwise by the member household you called.

In your church, you may have a large contingent of people who would prefer that Prayer Connections calls take place at another time of day—say the morning, or mid-afternoon. With a good church management database, such a preference could be noted, and a team assigned to make calls to that group when they come up in rotation— which may be ideal for certain volunteers. Do what works best for your church; in time, you will discover what ideal times work for you.

The Necessity of Recordkeeping

In your church management database, it is vitally important to keep track of who has been called. You may wish to call through the membership alphabetically, or choose to mix it up in some way. No matter, just keep track of who has been called, so that everyone can receive at least one Prayer Connections call before you someone receives a second call.

Also, each time before you make calls, refresh the directory call list, in case someone has moved away (if you know they have) or has died. I can think of nothing worse than trying to call a deceased member of your church, and someone else answers the phone and is bewildered that you didn’t know that; especially since the funeral may have taken place at the church, but the Prayer Connections minister didn’t know that or attend. Awkward!

Conversely, during the course of a Prayer Connections call you may discover that “this number is no longer a working number” or that someone has—indeed—moved without telling the church office. (The nerve of some people!) Prayer Connections ministry may have the side benefit of helping you keep your church membership database up-to-date. Make notes of such discrepancies, and pass them on to the church office.

Since the results of each call is tracked and recorded, brief notations of date (and time?) of each call should be made to the church management database record of the member household, so that you can easily find out who has been called and who has not. Notations about leaving a message should be added to the record, as well, since it is not the Prayer Connections caller’s fault they had to leave a message.

This data will prove valuable and may actually help settle a dispute about whether a household has been called or not. For instance, let us say someone comes to the church office and complains “No one from the Prayer Connections ministry has ever called our home!” Then you produce the date

and time that several calls have been made— and who answered the call, or if a message has been left. End of discussion. Which makes Prayer Connections record keeping all the more important. It supports your ministry efforts with hard data, and that's always nice.

Once you have called your way through the entire membership, and have asked that caring question of each household—or left a message saying that you called to check in and ask for prayer requests—then go back to the beginning of the directory and start over calling the membership again. Check to make sure that recently added members to the church database are called first, so they are included. Then repeat. Repeat. Repeat.

Train Your Callers

Most Prayer Connections calls will be straightforward, but it is good to practice some calls before you begin. The following pages contain some practice scripts for training purposes, or actual use. Ideally, you will use them as a model or pattern for creating scripts specifically for your church.

Use the practice cards and try out the different calling scenarios; one person pretends to be the member who receives the call, and the caller has to respond to the scenario given to the call recipient. Afterwards, discuss as a group how the call went, and what the caller did (or could have done) that helped the call go well. The key idea is that whenever people try to get you, the caller, off the subject of the call—their well-being and any prayer requests that they might wish for you to pray about—gently redirect them back to your call's purpose:

“We’re calling to see how you are and if there’s anything you want us to pray for?”

Some sample reporting pages are also included, but you will want to design a reporting page that fits your own needs—feel free to adapt one of the sample pages and customize it.

It will help the launch of your ministry to announce it in church. Promote it widely throughout the church, and remind people in church every Sunday of the week that calls will be made that—“Prayer Connections ministry calls will be made this week; if you see it's the church calling, please pick up the phone and speak to our Prayer Connections minister.”

Remember to work closely with your parish office to keep your calling list and records up-to-date and ready to use. In addition, do not forget to thank your Prayer Connections ministry volunteers from time to time for all their hard work. They deserve your thanks and praise for serving in this vital stewardship and pastoral ministry.

God bless you and best wishes!

Sample script and prayers to use for Prayer Connections Ministry calls

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Sample Script for Prayer Connections Ministry

Member answers the phone: Hello?

Caller: Is this _____?

Member: Yes it is,

Caller: Good evening, _____. This is _____ from the Prayer Connections ministry at Prince of Peace.

[For the first few round of calls: "We're a new ministry at our church, and]

"We're calling to see how you are and if there's anything you want us to pray for?"

Commence with the conversation, keeping it focused on the member and member's household (if applicable).

Write down any prayer request you are given; use your judgement whether to ask

Caller: You know _____, this sounds (pretty serious/important/like this matters to you a great deal):

Would you like to put this on the parish prayer list used on Sundays?

Would you like the Pastor to know about this?

Depending on the nature of the request (and your comfort level) you may want to ask

Caller: Would you like me to pray with you right now about this?

If so, then pray for the request the member gave you, and for the member and the member's household (if applicable). For prayer ideas see the following pages.

OPTIONAL:

Caller: "By the way, we'll be making these calls regularly in the future: Is this a good time to reach you, or would a different time be better?"

EVERY CALL:

Caller: Please know that at the end of our time this evening, all of us Prayer Connections ministers here tonight will be praying for you and your request. Thank you for taking our call. Remember that God loves you, and we value you too.

Following the call, complete the form that indicates who you called, what day and time, and any information deemed useful; pass on to the designated person the results of all the calls, so basic details can be added to the congregational database. Pass the prayer requests to be added to the parish prayer list to the appropriate person, and give to the clergy (or pastoral care team) any information members requested to pass on to them.

Answering machine/voicemail script

"Hello, this is _____ from Prince of Peace Church. I'm part of the new ministry called Prayer Connections. It's now (time) on (day of the week). We were just calling to see how you are and whether there's anything you want us to pray for?

"I'm sorry to miss speaking with you. Know that when we're finished making all our calls tonight we will be praying for you.

"If you do have a prayer request you would like to share with us, please call the church office and leave a message for the Prayer Connections ministry with the person who answers the phone.

Again, sorry to have missed speaking with you. Remember that God loves you, and we at Prince of Peace value you, too.

Forms of Prayer to use during Prayer Connections calls, if needed.

(Please note: these are only suggestions. It is best to personalise our prayers.)

For a Sick Person

O God of mercy and all comfort, our only help in time of need: We humbly pray you to look upon, visit, and relieve from illness your servant _____ for whom our prayers are offered.

Look upon him with your eyes of mercy; comfort him with a sense of your goodness; preserve him from the temptations of the enemy; and give him patience under his affliction. In your good time, restore him to health, and enable him to lead the rest of his life in your grace, and to your glory; and grant that finally he may dwell with you in life everlasting; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Or this

Merciful God, be near to the one who is troubled with sickness; in the power of your love, bring relief from present suffering and the return of health; that having been made whole in body, mind and spirit, he may give thanks again in the fellowship of the Church, and follow your will to the end of his days; we make this prayer through Jesus Christ our Savior and healer. Amen.

For Recovery from Sickness

O God, the strength of the weak and the comfort of sufferers: Mercifully accept our prayers, and grant to your servant N. the help of your power, that his sickness may be turned into health, and our sorrow into joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

or this

O God of heavenly powers, by the might of your command you drive away from our bodies all sickness and all infirmity: Be present in your goodness with your servant N., that his weakness may be banished and his strength restored; and that, his health being renewed, he may bless your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For a Sick Child

Heavenly Father, watch with us over your child N., and grant that he may be restored to that perfect health which it is yours alone to give; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

or this

Lord Jesus Christ, Good Shepherd of the sheep, you gather the lambs in your arms and carry them in your bosom: We commend to your loving care this child N. Relieve his pain, guard him from all danger, restore to him your gifts of gladness and strength, and raise him up to a life of service to you. Hear us, we pray, for your dear Name's sake. Amen.

Before an Operation

Almighty God our heavenly Father, graciously comfort your servant N. in his suffering, and bless the means made use of for his cure. Fill his heart with confidence that, though at times he may be afraid, he yet may put his trust in you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

or this

Strengthen your servant N., O God, to do what he has to do and bear what he has to bear; that, accepting your healing gifts through the skill of surgeons and nurses, he may be restored to usefulness in your world with a thankful heart; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For Strength and Confidence

Heavenly Father, giver of life and health: Comfort and relieve your sick servant N., and give your power of healing to those who minister to his needs, that he may be strengthened in his weakness and have confidence in your loving care; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For Health of Body and Soul

May God the Father bless you, God the Son heal you, God the Holy Spirit give you strength. May God the holy and undivided Trinity guard your body, keep your soul, and bring you safely to that heavenly country where God lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

For Doctors and Nurses

Sanctify, O Lord, those whom you have called to the study and practice of the arts of healing, and to the prevention of disease and pain. Strengthen them by your life-giving Spirit, that by their ministries the health of the community may be promoted and your creation glorified; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thanksgiving for a Beginning of Recovery

O Lord, your compassions never fail and your mercies are new every morning: We give you thanks for giving our brother (sister) N. both relief from pain and hope of health renewed. Continue in him, we pray, the good work you have begun; that he, daily increasing in bodily strength, and rejoicing in your goodness, may so order his life and conduct that he may always think and do those things that please you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Chronic or Terminal illness

Compassionate God, we do not know how to pray as we ought. Accept our prayer as we commit _____ (or, this sick person) to your mercy, knowing that all things are your in life and in death—and that your love never fails.

Help us to find our hope and our joy in your will, and keep us steadfast in the faith that has sustained us, even to this hour; we make this prayer through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Or this

In this time of trouble, gracious Lord, we desire to give thanks for all the happiness that has been and for the love which holds us close to one another; give us grace to face with confidence all that is to be, knowing that you are working out all things to your glory. Comfort us in our moments of weakness, Lord Christ, and hold us close when we might feel lost or suffer despair; for it is in your Name we make this prayer. Amen.

Notes:

Lifeline – Crisis Support/Suicide Prevention: 13 11 14

Kids Helpline – young people age 5-25: 1800 55 1800

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Prayer Connections Ministry Practice Scenarios</i></p> <p>You are a child/young person who has answered the phone. Upstairs at home, your parents are fighting; they fight a lot lately. “I’m a little bit scared...”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Prayer Connections Ministry Practice Scenarios</i></p> <p>You haven’t told anyone until now: your spouse/partner has early onset of Alzheimer’s, and you are at a loss. Request a prayer from the caller.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Prayer Connections Ministry Practice Scenarios</i></p> <p>“Everything’s going great” “How nice of you to call...” Please keep my parents in your prayers, as they are dealing with aging – Thanks for calling!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Prayer Connections Ministry Practice Scenarios</i></p> <p>You’re grateful for the call. You’ve just received a call from the hospital that your spouse (or parent, or child, or sibling) has been in an auto accident; you want a prayer before you go there to see him/her.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Prayer Connections Ministry Practice Scenarios</i></p> <p>You are stunned at receiving the call: You haven’t been in church for over two years. Choose one of the following:</p> <p>a) You could use some prayer; things are not well at work, and you fear you may be let go in the near future—you’re glad the church called at this time;</p> <p>b) “So why has no one from the church called in two years? Do we not matter?” You are unsure if you’ll return to church. Thank them for the call, anyway.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Prayer Connections Ministry Practice Scenarios</i></p> <p>[You are an answering machine/voicemail recording.]</p> <p>Invite caller to leave a message and telephone number, and you’ll call them back.</p>

<p><i>Prayer Connections Ministry Practice Scenarios</i></p> <p>You are in disbelief at the call's timing— your spouse's mother has had a stroke two hours ago. Please pray, add her to the parish prayer list: Alice is her name. You would love a follow-up conversation with a pastor. You are grateful, grateful, grateful.</p>	<p><i>Prayer Connections Ministry Practice Scenarios</i></p> <p>So grateful for the call. You attempt to keep the caller on the line with boring details of recent life events. Eventually, concede the point of the call, and express your thanks by the call's end.</p>
<p><i>Prayer Connections Ministry Practice Scenarios</i></p> <p>The call comes as a surprise, as you have been lost in thought, dealing with a MAJOR life issue. DO NOT REVEAL THE ISSUE. ASK FOR A PRAYER, and to have a pastor call you as a follow-up.</p>	<p><i>Prayer Connections Ministry Practice Scenarios</i></p> <p>At first you are suspicious of the call. "What do you want really? (money, a pledge card, or other issue); eventually, you feel the real sincerity and you reveal your growing, private concerns for your adult children who are struggling in their lives.</p>
<p><i>Prayer Connections Ministry Practice Scenarios</i></p> <p>"I just saw you last Sunday at church. Everything's going great; well, except for _____. (Choose something that is a big deal, but you try to downplay it.) Keep it confidential. Yes, you can tell the pastor. Prayers, please, but not on the parish prayer list.</p>	<p><i>Prayer Connections Ministry Practice Scenarios</i></p> <p>You have had "a death in the family," but DO NOT let on (for as long as you can) that the death was of a 15-+-year-old beloved family pet.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Prayer Connections Ministry Practice Scenarios</i></p> <p>You are very worried about some upcoming medical tests, and what they might reveal. Ask for a prayer from the caller. “Yes” to parish prayer list.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Prayer Connections Ministry Practice Scenarios</i></p> <p>You are surprised but grateful for the call. After going back and forth for a few moments, you confidentially reveal that you need help—you admit to a serious drinking problem. Caller cannot tell anyone. Ask “What should I do? “Where can I turn for help?”</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Prayer Connections Ministry Practice Scenarios</i></p> <p>You are happy to hear from the church, but forget about the prayers (choose one of three options): “I need to _____.”</p> <p>a) “plan my funeral so my kids won’t have to”;</p> <p>b) “to find a substitute for me this coming Sunday, because I can’t make it to _____.”</p> <p>c) “join your ministry.”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Prayer Connections Ministry Practice Scenarios</i></p> <p>You tell the caller (nicely!!) that you are unhappy with changes made at the church recently, and you want to tell someone/ talk about it. Ask for prayers for your pastor and vestry.</p>

Prince of Peace Prayer Connections - Call Log

<i>Caller</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Start time</i>	<i>Stop time</i>	<i>Total Calls</i>	<i>Total Conversations</i>
Family Called		Result	Comments		
Family Called		Result	Comments		
Family Called		Result	Comments		
Family Called		Result	Comments		
Family Called		Result	Comments		
Family Called		Result	Comments		
Family Called		Result	Comments		

Result CODES

T = Telephoned

S/w = Spoke with

P = Prayer request

FLAG = flag for pastor

B= Busy

NA= No answer

NIS=Wrong number/not in service

Rec= left message on recorder