

# The Village Prayer Mission



Almost every day we are likely to find ourselves asking someone how they are. In many situations this is little more than a polite greeting, but sometimes the question is asked sincerely. I was brought up to understand that 'How do you do?' was not an invitation to pour out a list of all that is wrong in our lives. However, between friends it can be a genuine invitation to share personal information. In such circumstances I sometimes feel prompted to offer to pray for that person; I am no longer surprised that the offer is often well received.

Praying for those who are struggling is one way of expressing that we care about them. This was one of the reasons behind a week-long Prayer Mission held in three small villages in Northamptonshire. There were two other intentions: seeking to deepen the prayer life of local Christians and encouraging others to start a conversation with God.

The seven churches in these villages included three Church of England congregations, a Congregational Church, a United Reformed Church, a Catholic Church, and an Independent Evangelical Church. The Prayer Mission was held during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity early in the New Year, which meant careful preparation was needed.

Once the shape of the Mission had been agreed, the first challenge was to optimise the involvement of all local Christians. Information about the Prayer Mission was written up in articles for church magazines, and in letters distributed in the churches. The two organisers offered to speak in each of the churches; six took up the invitation. Every church was asked to use prayer as a sermon topic before and after the week.

Every home in the villages received a letter explaining the purpose of the mission and what would take place. More importantly, it gave an invitation for people to write a prayer request, and leave it at any one of four collection points. Finally, villagers were encouraged to talk to God about things good and bad, and to know that God cared about them.

During the mission week itself, each day had a different local community focus. These covered:

- schools and pre-schools
- medical and care support
- transport (the villages were close to major road, rail and canal routes)
- those with political responsibilities (parish, district, county, UK and European Parliaments)
- farming communities
- friends and neighbours
- the life and work of the churches

All were informed we would be praying for them.

Three churches were open during daylight hours for people to drop in. Helpful tips on prayer, information about the daily focus and free booklets encouraging prayer were available. In two churches 'prayer pebbles' were available: we suggested people held a pebble as they prayed and then dropped it into a bowl of water.

Prayer meetings were held in homes each evening. Prayer request cards and pebbles were collected at the end of each day, taken to the meeting that evening and shared out among those present. While we never knew who had dropped a pebble into the bowl, there were some amazing prayers said as Christians took into their hands other people's concerns and offered them to God.

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*This article first appeared in Country Way 76: Sharing Faith, October 2017. Go to [germinate.net/country-way](http://germinate.net/country-way) for more information about how to subscribe.*