

## **THE DEMISE OF THE MID-WEEK PRAYER MEETING**

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In years gone by the mid-week prayer meeting was at the heart of the church's life and was viewed as the 'power-house' of the church. Today things have changed. In most churches centralised mid-week meetings of any kind, let alone prayer-meetings, appear to be unpopular. Instead, we have home groups (or 'fellowship' groups, 'cell' groups, or whatever is the preferred name for your church's 'small' groups). And there, of course, people pray. First and foremost they pray for one another – and rightly so. Unfortunately that is sometimes as far as the prayer goes. The concerns of the wider church somehow go by the board. However, to be fair, that is not always true. My mind goes to two long-running small groups in our church which have only one purpose: to pray for the church and its ministers. As a minister, I feel truly privileged. But important though they are, these are just small groups. So, from time to time, at the beginning of a new session, for instance, we cancel our home groups and organise a so-called 'church-wide' prayer meeting – but far fewer people turn up to the central meeting than would have been present in the home groups. Another place for prayer is our mid-week church meeting, held five times a year (the remaining church meetings are held after the Sunday morning service and are therefore necessarily short in time): there we devote the first half of the meeting to a brief act of opening worship, the sharing of news and concerns, and prayer. The difficulty here is that in this larger setting only the confident few feel free to pray aloud – so I tend to use 'bidding' prayers, where people do the praying in their hearts. In addition to all this praying, one must not forget that without exception all the organisations and activities of the church have their own times of praying. Indeed, in addition to their times of regular praying, some of these organisations come together for a Saturday morning of prayer – for instance, all the organisations involved in 'youth' ministry meet once a year for corporate prayer, as also all the organisations involved in ministry to 'seniors'. I sometimes wonder whether those who hanker after the old-fashioned mid-week prayer meeting are mindful of what goes on. The chief place, however, for large-scale corporate prayer is surely the Sunday services. In our church the Sunday intercessory prayers are serious business. The instructions which go out to those church members tasked with this responsibility is that they lead us in three or four short prayers to be focussed on aspects relating to the church (local or overseas), the nation (or local community), and the world. Then, after the service, 'prayer ministry' is offered for individuals in need of one kind or another. In other words, although we have no mid-week prayer meeting, this does not mean that the church does not pray. And I am sure that what is true of our church is true of many others too. So perhaps we should not be too concerned at the demise of the old mid-week prayer-meeting .

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