



An Answer to Prayer

October 19, 2022

Rachel Yates

In church last Sunday, we followed the usual order of worship, but the service was anything but usual. First, the pastor did a cartwheel – in robe and stole! You don't see that every day. A new ministry partner spoke about her organization that provides protection from abuse (domestic violence, trafficking, elder or child abuse). As we reached the time for the prayers of the people, a handful of folks lifted prayer concerns. Then the cartwheeling pastor began to pray. Abruptly a loud voice exclaimed, "I'm sorry. I didn't catch that."

My immediate reaction was to wonder whether God couldn't keep up with holy notetaking. "Wait, wait, slow down. I didn't catch that." Instead, the person in front of me scrambled to silence Siri and her ever-helpful cell phone services. I know because I peeked up, and then I had to stifle my laugh.

I give thanks to God for the gift of prayer. From simple one-word prayers like "help" or even "why?", to memorized, universal prayers like the Lord's Prayer, we are invited into conversation with God. Sometimes, we might do too much of the talking. Sometimes, our prayers might be a bit off target from God's intentions, prompting, "I'm sorry. I didn't catch that. Did you say xxxx?!? Is that what you really mean?" Sometimes the answer to prayer comes quickly, but we ignore it, hoping for a different option. However inartfully we might pray, we are invited to keep practicing, alert to how the Spirit is guiding our prayers and how God is answering those prayers.

On Sunday, prayers were answered as the congregation entered into the relationship with its new ministry partner. Embodying the mark of outward incarnational focus, the church's energy has long been around shelter and food security. Aiding those who have survived abuse and protecting them from a continuation of that abuse was a natural extension of their sense of call. Rather than try to replicate what this organization does well, the congregation came alongside it, filling gaps where there was need. For the people who depend on the integrated emergency housing, clothing, legal aid, counselors, and medical treatment of this organization, the congregation's commitment to partnering was an answer to prayer.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness month, and locally UMOS is active in assisting abuse survivors. Check out Fresh Impressions for their Open House and "Empty Place At The Table" exhibit, to honor the lives lost throughout the state of Wisconsin as a result of Intimate Partner Violence this year.

As we live into the outward incarnational focus mark of vitality, perhaps our first prayer is "what are our gifts, skills, and resources?" That includes spaces where your congregation already has connections. It might even include a deep longing or sense of injustice that is heavy on your hearts.

Just because you *can* do something, doesn't necessarily mean you're best suited to do it. So, we also ask, "who else is engaged in this work?" You'll be looking for opportunities to partner with other congregations or community organizations, asking whether you might build on each other's strengths. Think of the Food for the Journey gardening project here in Milwaukee Presbytery.

Then, pray. Pray with short words and memorized words. Pray by listening. Pray alone and together. God might answer your prayer with signs of peace, joy, relentless messages, a coming together of plans, and eventually fruitfulness. In turn, you might be answering the prayers of others.