

# Prayer toolkit

## Telephones, texts and emails

### AIMS

To explore ways in which telephones, texts and emails –and other similar technologies – can be used prayerfully.

### Let me tell you....

The other day I got an email that went like this:

A woman's daughter had asked the local minister to come and pray *with* her mother. When the minister arrived, he found the woman lying in bed with her head propped up on two pillows. An empty chair sat beside her bed.

The minister assumed that the woman had been informed of his visit. 'I guess you were expecting me', he said. 'No, who are you?' said the mother.

The minister told her his name and then remarked, 'I saw the empty chair and I figured you knew I was going to show up..' 'Oh yeah, the chair,' said the bedridden woman. 'Would you mind closing the door?' Puzzled, the minister shut the door. 'I have never told anyone this, not even my daughter,' said the woman 'But all of my life I have never known how to pray. At church I used to hear the pastor talk about prayer, but it went right over my head.' 'I abandoned any attempt at prayer,' the old woman continued, 'until one day four years ago, my best friend said to me, "Prayer is just a simple matter of having a conversation with Jesus. Here is what I suggest. Sit down in a chair; place an empty chair in front of you, and in faith see Jesus on the chair. It's not spooky because he promised, 'I will be with you always'. 'Then just speak to him in the same way You're doing with me right now.' 'So, I tried it and I've liked it so much that I do it a couple of hours every day. I'm careful though. If my daughter saw me talking to an empty chair, she'd either have a nervous breakdown or send me off to the funny farm.'

The minister was deeply moved by the story and encouraged the old woman to continue on the journey. Then he prayed with her, anointed her with oil, and returned to the church.

Two nights later the daughter called to tell the minister that her mother had died that afternoon. 'Did she die in peace?' he asked. 'Yes, when I left the house about two o'clock, she called me over to her bedside, told me she loved me and kissed me on the cheek.'

When I got back from the store an hour later, I found her. But there was something strange about her death. Apparently, just before Mum died, she leaned over and rested her head on the chair beside the bed. What do you make of that?'

The minister said, 'I wish we could all go like that.'

**Just send this to four people or more, and do not break this, please.**

**Prayer is one of the best free gifts we receive.**

### Think about this story

Have you received an email like this or heard a story like this?

What did you think?

Did you send the email on or repeat the story?

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### INTRODUCTION

Christians have always shared news and needs for intercessory prayer. Now we have many ways of doing this including using telephone, texts and emails. We can share ideas and feedback with each other and give thanks for answered prayer, allowing God into our lives, so our faith and sense of community can grow.

### Ways and means

Text messages can be used for prayer: they are quick but limited. They're a good way of getting an urgent update or prayer request through to those who already understand a situation. Check your message carefully for clarity. Use the 'send to many' or 'forward' options as appropriate.

Email is a good choice for prayer, especially when people live far apart and want to send other material. Try not to send too much, too often, or people will feel overwhelmed and give up.

Offer to print and deliver the papers for those not online if possible, so everyone feels included. Creating an email 'group' in your contacts (updated regularly) means you can send to many addresses with one click. Always send 'Bcc' unless you've everyone's agreement to sharing their email addresses.

Watch your language – cross cultural issues may crop up and your intended tone of voice doesn't travel by email. Protect the person asking for prayer by not giving too much detail. Copy in your minister or pastoral carer if the email prayer group is linked to a church.

Telephone prayer chains are lists of prayer volunteers. When a prayer request is passed on, the list is phoned in order. If someone doesn't answer, the next number is rung until someone else does and the message is passed on. Each person should only have to make one connected phone call.

It's best to channel all requests through one person so the message is given briefly, clearly and well. Don't leave a message on an answer machine as this may undermine confidentiality. Ask people to write down the message, and read it back, to make sure they have it right.

The members of these prayer groups may not ever meet for prayer but this is an option to consider. It can be good to gather them occasionally to debrief, chat over any new ideas and pray.

If your prayer group is long-term, it's good to hold an annual review to receive feedback. This can be done by email, post, phone calls or a meeting. People may then be renewed, look for new members, or decide to withdraw.

Ask God how to keep your prayer group fresh so people find it a gift not a burden. Whatever you do, remember confidentiality, speed, accuracy and feedback are the hallmarks of good prayer chains. Do not pray for someone without first checking they give permission to send out a prayer request naming them.

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### Prayer

Cosmic Christ, you relate to us in so many ways.

Bless our use of technology through emails, texts and telephones  
as we pray and praise you together.

### EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

### THE NEXT STEP

If you want more items from the prayer toolkit please revisit the website. You will also find seasonal prayer items there too.

### Acknowledgements

The email prayer featured in the 'let me tell you' at the beginning of this story has been forwarded by many since it first started life, probably in the USA. If it is copyright please let us know, but we don't think it is.