

A Message from Pastor Linda Stoddard of Maple United Methodist Church

What prompts you to pray?

God's Word tells us we should "Pray without ceasing". (1 Thessalonians 5: 17) That's a little hard to do, isn't it? If we prayed all the time, we wouldn't have time for anything else!

I posed the above question in worship on the Sunday after Easter because of my own realization that God "nudges" us in various ways to remind us to pray for each other (and for our world). I have had the experience in my Christian walk of promising to pray for certain folks and situations and then, days later, realizing that I had forgotten to pray! (Have you ever had that problem?) Now, I've learned to set up "triggers" — sort of a spiritual "string around my finger" reminders to pray. Let me share some with you.

I recently promised to pray for a church member who has been helping a friend and her family to deal with cancer. I happen to drive by the street where she lives twice a day on my way to my "other" job. So twice a day (at least), I am praying for that member, her friend, and other concerns that she has shared with me.

We all prayed desperately for the people in Haiti after the devastating earthquake in January. Sadly, prayers for those people who are still struggling (or for those still affected by Hurricane Katrina and other natural disasters) tend to peter out after a time. But every time I hear of another earthquake (and there have been MANY big ones since January), I am reminded to pray for the people of Haiti once again — and for those who are still there ministering to the people who are trying to recover their lives.

When Maple was still in the throes of wondering which way we should go on the purchase of the house and lot next to the church, I prayed for wisdom and guidance each time I pulled into the church parking lot. After awhile I was nudged to pray every time I saw a yellow house! (Do you know how many yellow houses there are in Battle Creek?)

Sometimes something in the news or on a TV show will trigger my "prayer bone." Someone needs prayer for a child who is making poor choices (lots of reminders on TV about that!) . . . another is facing marital distress (more TV nudges) . . . a friend in an abusive situation (ditto). Maybe you have a friend or loved one who is struggling with addictions of one kind or another. Walking through the drug store or past the aisle of alcoholic beverages in the store can prompt a quick prayer.

I get daily e-mails from the Conference Prayer Center for fellow clergy, their families, and their church families. Rather than just adding them to a list to try to remember their needs later — I stop right then and offer a prayer for their need. Some of you use prayer journals or have an on-going list of people you are praying for. (Our prayer list in the "Rooted in Christ" is a good reminder.) Put that list where you'll see it daily (maybe the bathroom mirror or refrigerator door) to remind you to pray.

Years ago I read a wonderful book by Eugenia Price entitled *What Happens When Women Pray*. I also had the opportunity to sit under the instruction of a great prayer warrior, Dr. Thomas Carruth, in the ONLY prayer course being taught in any seminary back in the early 70's. Both were adamant that we need to readjust our idea of prayer. It doesn't always have to be a long, drawn out event. It can be a simple prayer that we "shoot" at folks throughout the course of the day. We don't even have to close our eyes or fold our hands!

During this month of May, I challenge you to look for those spiritual "strings on your finger" that remind you to pray for me, for our church, for friends, family, and even strangers. And I challenge you to discover the power and joy in praying without ceasing.

Praying for you,
Reverend Linda