

Dear Body of Bethany;

How are you doing regarding those resolutions for 2006? Perhaps you are the 'bah humbug' type who says 'I don't need resolutions. I am who I am. What's the big deal, people fail to keep them. Why set yourself up for failure?'

I empathize with you but I also know I need goals. I recognize that I don't accomplish them perfectly. But it is necessary for me to state these goals and there is one goal that is there every year-*'be devoted to prayer.'* In fact right at the top of the stated core values of Bethany Church, we read "*Expectant Prayer: We pray with growing expectancy and increased fervency, seeking to know God and His will, opening ourselves to His Spirit's leading.*"

I encourage you to put prayer on your list of priorities for 2006 and keep this promise. The kingdom of God is in desperate need of people who take prayer seriously. Even though you may already be active in your prayer life, there are always deeper levels of the relationship with the LORD that come only through prayer. As O. Hallesby noted, "prayer is the most important work in the Kingdom of God." As God's people, let's make sure that we are offering ourselves as a gift to God through our prayer lives. May we bathe our lives and the ministries of Christ's church in prayer for without it we merely rely on our own strength. There is the notion that runs contrary to Biblical Christianity that promotes the idea that the church and prayer are here to meet our needs and make us happy. No, the cost of discipleship means to climb daily on the altar and let God shape us according to His will not ours. This takes prayer-**humble, authentic, expectant, bold, and desperate praying.**

Will you commit with me to letting God lead Bethany through fervent and faithful prayer? Christ calls us the branches on the vine who are called to bear fruit-much fruit- greater fruit. In fact, the Bible calls the church a body. A body is meant to grow and develop. It is, after all, an organism created to grow. God provides what is necessary for growth. When it is not growing, the question needs to be asked, 'why not'? Why is it that there are 450,000 churches in our land and nearly 80% are declining? Is this body called Bethany growing?

I believe there are two keys for this body to be burning white hot for Christ and His kingdom. When you look at the early church, we note two important characteristics, prayer and community. In Acts 1, the church met together to pray and we read that the Holy Spirit filled them and moved them to share their faith. In Acts 2 we read of the holistic communities who cared for one another. It is the goal here at Bethany to foster those kinds of communities through our CAMP ministry.

CAMP stands for care and ministry partners whereby the congregation is divided into 7 smaller groups whereby members of the CAMP minister to and with one another. We hope that you are involved in your CAMP looking to exercise your spiritual shape. One of the parts of CAMP is that we pray for one another. Each CAMP has a prayer coordinator. Hopefully, you know your prayer coordinator. If there is a need, please don't hesitate to call your prayer coordinator or elder or deacon. There are certain requests that you may only want your coordinator to know so we ask that you specify that. However, there may be other requests that you would want the whole CAMP to be in prayer for you or the whole congregation. We would ask that you would clearly communicate that in your time of need. You may also hear from your prayer coordinator asking for you to intercede on behalf of the CAMP or the Body. We trust that you will be willing. We also encourage you to seek ways to join with others in prayer- either through forming prayer cell groups or joining the Wednesday evening prayer meeting held at 7 PM.

As you begin 2006, may we keep prayer a priority in our lives. Prayer clearly had a high priority in Jesus' life as Luke tells us that 'Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayer 'even on occasions spending the night praying to God. The New Testament church gave prayer that same high priority 'raising their voices together in prayer to God'. May we, too, be known as people of prayer.

Shalom,  
Pastor Henry

January 15, 2006