

Community Houses of Prayer (CHOP)

While there are a variety of ways our local churches can organize programs of prayer, we believe the contents of this material can be useful to our churches in considering ways to spur its members to faithfulness in prayer and witness. From page 9 of the *Community Houses of Prayer Ministry Manual*:

“CHOP is a ministry tool that employs prayer as means to *revive* (motivation) our hearts in grace as we draw near to the living God as our loving Father and *to involve* (participation) us in our everyday lives as active witnesses for Jesus Christ in dependence and expectation of His working. CHOP directs prayer so as to cultivate in us a greater awareness of the evangelistic nature of ordinary life in which we find ourselves every day. It engenders an attitude of personal involvement and expectation as the witnesses for Christ we are by virtue of being His disciples. It leads us in the actual activity of bearing verbal witness to the glorious gospel of salvation bound up in Christ alone.

“CHOP weaves together four strands: 1) lifestyle evangelism, 2) strategic prayer, 3) personal spiritual renewal, and 4) spiritual warfare. Your participation in CHOP will not only *involve* you in these four aspects, but will also *train* you in them through instruction, reinforcement and practice.”

For more information on this ministry you may go to its website
www.CHOPministry.net

Community Houses of Prayer / Ministry Manual

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Outreach Orientation

Welcome to Community Houses of Prayer (CHOP), a ministry tool for reaching others for Christ through strategic prayer. We begin by taking stock of the lay of the land in an effort to get our redemptive bearings. Enter a typical shopping mall and you'll find a large map that gives an overview of the various stores of the mall. On that map will be a little indicator saying, "You are here." As we speak of reaching others for Christ we would do well to step back and look at the bigger picture to identify where we are, how we came to be there and why we're there.

Scouting Out the Land

Our Lord Jesus Christ has called us to Himself to belong to Him and to follow Him. He has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness that imprisoned us in sin's mastery, misery and condemnation and has brought us into His kingdom of light and life, the very ground and reason for our worship (1 Pet. 2:9f.). Through Him we are sons and daughters of the living God, servants of the Most High.

To us belongs a hope, not a "hope-so" hope of wishful thinking but a hope of confident expectation, of assured conviction, of vibrant certainty. Ours is not futile hype, but a fertile hope grounded in the historical work of Jesus Christ. As the writer of Hebrews puts it: "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf." (Heb.6:19-20a). This hope points to the finished, victorious, redemptive work of Jesus on our behalf that secures our salvation and secures us as heirs of eternal life. The apostle Peter exclaims the praises of such a God who graciously gives us new

birth into a living hope (1 Pet. 1:3) in which our inheritance is held for us (1 Pet. 1:4) and we are held in His mighty hand for our inheritance (1 Pet. 1:5). We live out our days in anticipation of the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13). Every day of our lives we live as the redeemed of God, children of hope (1 Thess. 5:5), different from those of the world who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13). As we walk by faith, God fills our lives with joy and peace, causing us to overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:13).

As subjects of this new kingdom we enjoy not only the blessings of heavenly citizenship, we find ourselves as subjects and servants of a new King, workers in His vineyard. No longer is this world our home. Rather we are citizens of heaven, aliens and sojourners in this world, concerned no longer with building our own kingdoms or enhancing our own reputation but with kingdom priorities and values, seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness. In this sojourning our Lord calls us to be ambassadors of hope, declaring to those around us the sure hope of the gospel wherein a perfect righteousness is found apart from law (Rom 3:19-24). Our lives bear witness to Him both in word and in deed. The character of our lives is to point others not to how great we are but to how great is our God (1 Pet. 2:11). That our behavior might not point to us or to any sort of works-righteousness, we are to give *interpretation* to our deeds as the Lord provides opportunity by verbal explanation for the hope we have (1 Pet. 3:15). Our lives are governed by the reality that Christ bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; by His wounds we are healed. We were as sheep gone astray, but now by the grace of God we have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. (1 Pet. 2:24f; cf. Is. 53:4-6). Our lives are His and we live for Him.

As we look to embark upon a ministry of reaching others for Christ what bearings are we given? The land we survey gives us a panorama of *grace*, a grace that has swept us up in its current, a grace that oxygenates our existence in this world, and a grace that qualifies our role as ambassadors of Christ. We enjoy the standing we do only by the grace of God. His grace sustains us each and every day, leading us away from self-focus and self-dependence to find our strength and sufficiency in Christ (Titus 2:11- 14; 3:4-7). His grace has given us a new identity and a new home and His grace will lead us home.

With these bearings, as ones who have received every spiritual blessing in Christ because of the grace of God and who are stationed as His witnesses in this world, we turn to how we can carry out that role. CHOP is a tool designed to equip and engage us for faithful service to our Lord as instruments of grace in His hand for the spreading of the sure hope of the gospel.

Operation Outreach

The heart of the Community Houses of Prayer ministry approach is *prayer*. Our Lord Jesus has given us prayer not only for delight in communion with Him or for bringing our burdens to Him, but also as a means for the extension of His kingdom in this world. Each local church is an outpost of His kingdom, established by Christ, for the extension and strengthening of His kingdom in the midst of this world. As part of His church, we are all agents of His kingdom, soldiers conscripted by His Spirit and equipped with the spiritual weapons suitable to carry out our work. Those basic weapons are truth and prayer.

CHOP is a ministry tool that employs prayer as means to *revive* (motivation) our hearts in grace as we draw near to the living God as our loving Father and to *involve* (participation) us in our everyday lives as active witnesses for Jesus Christ in dependence and expectation of His working. CHOP directs prayer so as to cultivate in us a greater awareness of the evangelistic nature of ordinary life in which we find ourselves every day. It engenders an attitude of personal involvement and expectation as the witnesses for Christ we are by virtue of being His disciples. It leads us in the actual activity of bearing verbal witness to the glorious gospel of salvation bound up in Christ alone.

CHOP weaves together four strands: 1) lifestyle evangelism, 2) strategic prayer, 3) personal spiritual renewal, and 4) spiritual warfare. Your participation in CHOP will not only *involve* you in these four aspects, but will also *train* you in them through instruction, reinforcement and practice.

Briefly surveying these four strands, lifestyle evangelism looks to share the gospel in the context of those relationships at work or at home or wherever God has providentially placed us. Strategic prayer is kingdom prayer

(i.e., prayer concerned with Christ's kingdom issues and goals) characterized by planning, intention, focus and direction. Personal spiritual renewal reaches to matters of motivation as we are invigorated with the scent of God's grace so richly, unexpectedly and undeservedly poured out upon us. It seeks to grow in intimate knowledge of God fueled by His revelation of Himself in His Word. Such prayer draws us near to God, cultivating in us His heart for the lost, compelling our witness by love and gratitude and not by sterile duty. Spiritual warfare takes into account the biblical data of the reality of spiritual opposition for our work of witness for the extension and strengthening of the kingdom of God against the kingdom of the prince of darkness. This strand attempts to be biblically balanced while avoiding the pitfalls that could lead to fanciful error and excesses.

One of our goals will be to learn to use prayer as a *weapon* of the kingdom. We're not all that accustomed to wielding prayer in this way. One of the purposes of CHOP is to train you in kingdom prayer, *prayer that seeks God for His purposes and not merely for our personal needs or wants*. As with any tool or weapon, the more we become familiar with the way it works the more adept we will become in its use.

CHOP involves a small group of two or more believers committing themselves to a 12-week period of meeting together weekly and praying privately daily. The mission of the CHOP group is the common goal and mutual support in reaching others for Christ, particularly through prayer. This prayer will *affect* you as God's instrument and will *effect* God's purposes in the field about you.

The Community Houses of Prayer ministry approach is based on the following principles and precepts:

1. Personal evangelism belongs in some degree to the role of all who would call themselves disciples of Jesus Christ. God has designed it so that those captured by His grace would be con- scripted to His service as instruments of His for the communication of the gospel.
2. Evangelism belongs to the realm of ordinary life and not merely to those extraordinary opportunities afforded by a special visitation night or in being part of an evangelistic program of some sort.
3. Evangelism is best understood not as an event but as a process, where the role of the witness is to encounter someone for Jesus Christ to the advancement of the person's knowledge, assent or trust in Christ as the source of the gospel of life.
4. The gospel is ordinarily communicated in increments and not in totality, or at least developed through a building process. God may use us to sow the seed, weed out error, or nourish through truth. These things are not necessarily all done in a single encounter, nor are they done necessarily just by us. God may raise up others to influence that person for Christ.
5. While the gospel demands a response, a call to response at every encounter is not inherent to faithful evangelism. The presentation of truth in itself demands a response of stance on the part of the hearer. In God's design, it is better to see ourselves as spiritual midwives responding to the work of the Spirit, rather than as spiritual salesmen cajoling conversion.
6. Faithfulness to the evangelistic enterprise is not measured by conversions but by attitude, intent and activity in obedience to Christ in bearing witness to Him as Savior and Lord.
7. The most natural and ordinary way for Christians to communicate the gospel authentically is through the relationships of life that serve as a context for that communication.
8. It is only the Spirit of God who opens eyes and changes hearts to understand and embrace the gospel. The effectiveness of evangelism is contingent on the sovereign, gracious working of the Spirit in applying Christ's accomplished work of redemption.
9. God is sovereign and His providence governs all events and contingencies, both means and ends, for His purposes. For that reason it is assumed that we find ourselves in the life-spheres we do, at the placement of our God

and in service of His kingdom. He has established us as beacons of light in the midst of the darkness of sin and unbelief.

10. By its very character evangelism involves a spiritual dimension in the supernatural working of the Spirit of God for the redemptive kingdom of Christ against the fallen kingdom of darkness ruled by the devil and his minions. This spiritual dimension must be accounted for and addressed with the wisdom and weapons of God's provision.

11. Prayer is a weapon of the kingdom of God ordained by Him as a means for His ends against spiritual opposition.

12. Prayer is communication with the living God that will promote intimacy with Him. Prayerfulness is the domain, privilege and responsibility of all Christians, useful for all levels of educational background, spiritual maturity, and other dividing criteria that might characterize believers.

13. Prayer is intended by God to enfold us into the accomplishment of His purposes for His glory. In the majesty and scope of God's design, in praying we can expect God to do something He would not have done had we not prayed—not to the constraint of God but to the glory of His unfathomable greatness and providence.

14. Prayer is not merely for cathartic value in which we unburden ourselves of sins or cares. Rather, prayer is eminently effective for the building and strengthening of the kingdom of God and for the accomplishment of His purposes.

15. God has provided for special benefit and blessing in corporate prayer as opposed to private prayer alone.

Evangelism is a kingdom mission, declaring the glorious redemption of the Savior, calling for the repentant faith of changed kingdom allegiance. It is a spiritual activity, facing spiritual opposition, employing spiritual wisdom and weapons. The church is the kingdom's agent, local congregations outposts of the kingdom, the congregation its soldiers.

Community Houses of Prayer seeks to mobilize Christ's disciples for obedience to the Great Commission, emphasizing prayer that would shape us as God's instruments and accomplish His saving purposes in those around us. As soldiers of the cross, we fight not for victory but in victory. Nowadays military missions are dubbed with appropriate identification handles. Perhaps ours could best be captured with the title "Operation Outreach," as we enter the harvest of our worldly surroundings *as witness* for Christ intent on *bearing witness* to Him.