

*Welcome*  
*to the Catholic Parish*  
*of the Wairarapa*



**'A community living and sharing the Good News of  
Jesus Christ.'**



## **PRAYER CHAIN MINISTRY GUIDELINES**

## **THE MINISTRY**

The Prayer Chain Ministry is a practice often found in many Christian communities, including Catholic parishes, that focuses on the power of communal prayer. While the concept of prayer and intercessory prayer has deep biblical roots, the formal organization of prayer chains has developed over time. The formalized Prayer Chain Ministry emerged more recently, particularly during the 19th and 20th centuries. It reflects the ongoing Catholic and Christian commitment to communal intercession and support, emphasizing that prayer is not just an individual act but a vital community endeavour.

### **Biblical Foundations**

The practice of intercessory prayer can be traced back to Scripture. In the Old Testament, figures like Moses interceded on behalf of the Israelites (Exodus 32:10-14), and the New Testament emphasizes the importance of prayer in community, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles where the early Christians prayed together (Acts 1:14; 4:24).

### **Early Christian Practices**

In the early Church, prayer was central to the community's life, including communal prayers for specific needs. However, the formal structure of prayer chains as we understand them today was not yet established.

### **Medieval and Reformation Periods**

During the medieval period, monastic communities, such as the Benedictines, engaged in regular prayer and intercession for the wider community. The Protestant Reformation (16th century) also saw a resurgence in personal and communal prayer, but again, specific prayer chains were yet to be formalized.

### **19th Century Growth of Prayer Groups**

As Christian communities began to grow in size and diversity in the 19th century, various prayer movements emerged, particularly during the revivalist movements in America. Churches began forming prayer groups, and the idea of having individuals commit to praying for specific intentions became popular.

### **20th Century Formalization**

The modern concept of prayer chains began to take shape in the mid-20th century, especially within Protestant denominations. The use of

telephone trees, where one person would call several others to share prayer requests, became a common practice.

### **Adoption in Catholic Communities**

In Catholic parishes, prayer chains became more widely recognized and organized, especially in the late 20th century. Parishes would set up prayer chains to respond to specific needs in the community, including health concerns, bereavement, or other personal intentions, fostering a sense of communal support.

### **Contemporary Practices**

Today, the Prayer Chain Ministry has evolved with the advent of technology. Many parishes utilize email and social media platforms to disseminate prayer requests quickly. The underlying principle remains the same: to unite members of the church community in prayer for one another's needs.

### **Spiritual Benefits**

The Prayer Chain Ministry not only allows individuals to seek spiritual help and support but also encourages a stronger sense of community within the parish. It fosters the belief that prayer, whether offered individually or collectively, is powerful and effective (James 5:16).

## **AN INTERCESSORY PRAYER CHAIN**

An Intercessory Prayer Chain consists of a group of people which has been called to the ministry of praying for others on a regular and ongoing basis. They have committed themselves to pray regularly, confidentially and individually for the people and concerns that are requested of them. They form part of a chain through which God's love flows, and they circulate prayer requests and results amongst themselves via a communications chain. Prayer Chains are most often organized amongst people of a church congregation or parish.

### **Requests for Prayer**

The Prayer Chain prays for particular situations and persons that come to it from a variety of sources:

- The parish/congregation pastor or priest or church office;
- A prayer request box;
- Phone calls from members of the parish/congregation;
- Individual requests;

- Situations known to the members of the chain.

## **THE GUIDELINES FOR THE PRAYER CHAIN**

### **Intentions**

- short term (a week or less) emergency situation prayers (crisis situations, medical emergencies, deaths etc.).
- longer term situations (illness, parish leaders, clergy etc.).

It is critical that the Prayer Chain clearly establish:

- what they will pray for,
- how they will operate, and
- agree on a person who will screen the prayer requests and keep track of what is being prayed for.

### **Members of a Prayer Chain**

A member of a Prayer chain is committed to pray regularly, preferably daily, for the concerns brought to them. They must be able to communicate effectively with others in the chain so as to be able to receive prayer requests and accurately pass them on to others in the chain.

### **Confidentiality**

It is important that the members of the Prayer Chain be able to keep what they pray for confidential and to themselves. While the knowledge of some of the situations and people they pray for will be widely known, many are confidential and must not be talked about except in the context of passing on the information to another person on the chain.

### **Regular Prayer**

The members of the Prayer Chain pray individually for the concerns given them. Each person chooses their own time, place and method of praying, but they are committed to regular prayer for others. This is not something everybody can do. It is for those who are called to do it.

Sometimes there is a desire by some to know all the technical or medical details of the situation or infirmity being prayed for. However, knowing details can fix our minds on the infirmity and prevent us from connecting with God. It is, perhaps, sufficient to know that someone is in distress and is in need of prayer, and the general situation.

Our prayers should be positive rather than negative, dwelling on the perfection to which God wills to bring to the person or situation, rather than the imperfection which exists.

## **Coordination**

Experience has shown that a Prayer Chain needs one person, who is not the parish rector or pastor, to act as the coordinator. The coordinator has four principal responsibilities.

- Set up the chain so that each member knows who will be calling them with the prayer request and to whom they are to pass the request along.
- Screen all prayer requests to make sure that they are appropriate for the Prayer Chain, and that there is either a clear time limit for the prayers or that there is a way to follow up to determine when prayers should cease.
- Keep track of what the Prayer Chain is currently praying for, and inform the chain when prayers are no longer required.
- Gather the members of the chain together from time to time so that they can: pray together; get to know each other; share their experiences; and share suggested changes in how the chain might operate.

## **Suggestions on Procedure**

- When a prayer request is received it should be initially passed to the coordinator, who will then telephone or otherwise communicate it to the first person in the chain.
- If the first person cannot be reached and there is urgency in the situation then the next person on the chain is contacted.
- That person will then pass the request to the next person on the chain, and so on until the end of the chain is reached.
- The last person in the chain then informs the coordinator of the message he/she has received to ensure that the message went down the chain correctly.
- As each person receives the message, he/she puts the person or situation into their personal prayers.
- Experience has shown that a chain which is longer than 6-8 people is cumbersome and messages often get delayed or mixed up.
- If there are more than 8 members in a prayer chain then it is desirable to have two or more branches in the chain, in which case

the coordinator starts things off by phoning the first person in each branch of the chain.