

Results of Prayer

What God Is Doing through the Praying Churches in Austin

By Kie Bowman



It isn't often you hear about a prayer meeting on the evening news, especially in Austin, Texas. However, in 2014, when the city gathered to pray for rain at the height of a drought, local media outlets paid attention. Admittedly, at times they appeared skeptical and seemed to report with a thinly disguised "tongue in cheek" about religious leaders gathering to pray for rain. Nevertheless, we planned a prayer meeting for rain—and local television news decided to cover it. Their reporting, regardless of the motive, helped get the word out to a much larger audience that the citywide prayer meeting was happening.

The need was real enough. We were experiencing the worst drought in Austin's history, and the demand for water had never been greater due to an unprecedented lack of rainfall and the taxing needs of a rapidly expanding population. Explanations of the seriousness of the water shortage sounded more like exaggerations, but it was truly that bad.

Austin's drought was the worst on record and spurred lawmakers

to consider multiple options, none of which promised rain. The main water source for our fast-growing city is taken from Lake Travis, fed by the Colorado River. During the worst days of the drought, we experienced months with virtually no rain and daily temperatures higher than 100 degrees for most of the summer. It was an economic and human crisis with no good options. The computer models showed worsening conditions, more severe water restrictions, and no rain in the forecast.

One morning, a group of pastors and intercessors from the prayer movement gathered at 6 a.m. to pray at a local church, as they routinely did. This particular morning, they were at Hyde Park Baptist Church. After they had prayed for a couple of hours, one of the intercessors announced she sensed an impression from the Lord that we needed to call a citywide prayer meeting for rain. Another prayer warrior chimed in to report he had received the same impression while he was praying. Everyone agreed the prayer meeting should be held at Hyde Park Baptist Church.

A month later, 1,000 believers from numerous churches gathered to pray and worship. For almost two hours, we asked God for rain.

We needed more than a little. Lake Travis is full at 681 feet (surface elevation), and it had dropped to less than 618 feet. Lake Travis is almost 19,000 acres in size, so to increase the depth of the lake one acre foot requires 325,851 gallons of water. The lake level was down in an unprecedented amount, and the water needed to fill Lake Travis was mind-boggling (more than 20 million gallons needed)! So, 1,000 people gathered to pray for a miracle. We prayed for rain.

That next weekend torrential rains and flash floods covered Austin. It was only the beginning. Ignoring every computer model predicting more drought, the rains fell regularly and relentlessly. The lake started to fill up. The prayer for rain and the sudden downfall was covered by a national news outlet.

The unseasonably heavy rains continued regularly for months. It wasn't uncommon for someone to jokingly chide me with a comment like, "Pastor, could you pray it stops now?"

We watched God answer prayer with a modern-day nature miracle. In less than two years, the millions of gallons of water needed to fill Lake Travis pushed the levels back to 681 feet. God answered our prayers in one of the most conspicuous ways imaginable.

UNITY AMONG BELIEVERS

In addition to answered prayer that ended a drought, there are other results of the prayer movement in greater Austin. One of the most obvious is the unity of the Body of Christ. One of the easiest ways to evaluate this unity in Austin is to ask some of the city's Christian leaders.

Tim Hawks has been in Austin for 30 years. He is the lead pastor of Hill Country Bible Church, one of the largest and most mission-minded churches in the United States. Today, thousands of worshippers gather at Hill Country Bible every week in one of its multiple locations. In addition, Hawks is a leader in the national Christ Together Network. I suspect no one in Austin understands the religious demographics and spiritual dynamics of our city better than Tim Hawks.

Recently, I asked Hawks to reflect on the impact of the prayer movement in Austin. His thoughts were insightful. He remembers coming to Austin three decades ago to a "divided" city. Churches within the same denomination were battling each other at times.

Denominations were contentious. The "charismatic/non-charismatic conflict was raging" and churches were going to "war" with an increasingly secular city—rather than praying for and ministering to the city in Jesus's name.

Today's climate is different. Churches work together. The city leaders now believe the churches bring value to Austin. Pastor Hawks remembers Austin Mayor Steve Adler recently saying when he came to office it was with the idea that government's role is to improve people's lives, with help from the faith community. Now he believes the faith community improves people's lives and government is alongside to help! That's a significant change. Hawks believes prayer helped move the dial.

In addition, Hawks sees pastors working together with greater unity. He believes the prayer movement, along with the efforts of ministries like Christ Together, has brought about that change. The prayer movement has "raised awareness of the value of the 'Big C' Church in Austin."

I agree with Hawks. In Austin, mega-church pastors and church planters stand side-by-side in prayer and vision for the city. Bible church pastors, Baptist pastors, Charismatic pastors, Hispanic pastors, Asian pastors, Black pastors, traditional church pastors, contemporary church pastors, baby boomer pastors, and millennial pastors all pray, worship, and work together to share Christ with our city and cover the city in 24/7 prayer. That kind of unity doesn't just happen by accident. People prayed for that result, and we never stop praying to maintain and improve it.

RACIAL FELLOWSHIP

The Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, is the oldest African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church in the south. On Wednesday, June 17, 2015, a few congregants gathered with the pastor for prayer. A white stranger entered the church and was warmly welcomed by the black Christians who enjoyed praying together. The night ended in terrible violence when the young, white stranger opened

fire, killing nine innocent Christians while they lovingly sat in their church praying. It was a national tragedy.

One week later, hundreds of people, mostly white, joined with the Metropolitan AME Church in Austin to pray, pledge our love for our brothers and sisters, and share in their grief. One of the leaders of the Unceasing Prayer Movement, Rick Randall, had a relationship with Jordan Mkwanzazi, pastor of the Metropolitan AME Church. Pastor Mkwanzazi is a distinguished, Christian gentleman originally from Zimbabwe. He has a gentle pastor's heart for his congregation and a fierce zeal for the spiritual growth of other people. Pastor Mkwanzazi greeted and welcomed us as brothers as we crowded into his church's worship center until we had to move many to overflow rooms. It was a significant night of prayer. The leaders of the Unceasing Prayer Movement put a stake in the ground, declaring our repudiation of racism and our love for every child of God regardless of race.

I wonder if many communities could rally a prayer meeting of hundreds of people from multiple churches to gather in a church of a predominantly different race within one week of a tragedy. I believe it came together because the infrastructure for the prayer movement was already in place. The relationships already existed. Our movement isn't about traditional, bureaucratic structures requiring multiple levels of decision approvals. It's a movement with alacrity and flexibility tied together by a common love for Christ and a burning passion to pray and lead others to pray. Imagine how quickly cities could respond to tragedies if the pastors of every city were already praying together.

Imagine how much more quickly revival could come! One of my joys that night at Metropolitan AME Church was meeting Pastor Mkwanzazi. We hit it off with him right away, and he has become a part of our seven-person leadership team. His passion to build a culture of prayer in his church is obvious.

In addition to Mkwanzazi's leadership, we intentionally reach out to other pastors from African-American, Hispanic, and Asian congregations. We include them in leadership in both the decision-making process and publicly as prayer leaders in our prayer gatherings. Men like Daryl Horton, Abraham Perez, Gerald Johnson, DeChard Freeman, John Monger, Charlie Lujan, Kevin Workman, Sylvester Patton, A.W. Mays, and many others represent different races and ethnicities, but we are brothers in prayer. We eat meals together, preach in each other's churches, attend each other's church events, and pray together. We may not be able to end racism, but we can stand against it and pray against it. One of the results of the prayer movement is greater fellowship among the various racial groups in our city.

The result of greater friendship among God's family from different races is more than just good fellowship. Our larger vision is mobilizing every church to grow in prayer. Pastor Mkwanzazi is a prime example. After the prayer meeting at his church, we became fast friends, and he has since mobilized his historic church toward even more prayer. He recently shared this insight:

Following one of America's greatest tragedies in church history (nine people having Bible study and prayer at The Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, gunned down by a white supremacist on June 17, 2015), I received a phone call from the Unceasing Prayer Movement of Austin, Texas, with a gracious offer to gather and call the churches of Austin in prayer at my church—Metropolitan AME Church. Hundreds gathered (black, white, Hispanic, Asians) in prayer and remembrance. Little did I know that I was being exposed and introduced to one of the most powerful and significant prayer movements in any American city.

I have since been invited to be a part of this extraordinary prayer movement, led by seven committed and dedicated brothers whose passion for prayer is unrelenting and

unquenchable. My first and foremost impression was the discipline of prayer that was exhibited through these brothers in their local churches. It became obvious to me as I listened to their testimonies during our monthly meetings that prayer was an integral part of their local ministries. They were not just talking prayer; they had, in fact, built a culture of prayer in their respective ministries. I have been a pastor for over 32 years in three respective leading cities in Texas, and I have never encountered a group of pastors/ministers whose passion, dedication, and focus is praying for their city.

Undoubtedly, the Unceasing Prayer Movement has played a major role in my own focus and commitment to prayer as a pastor of a local church in Austin. Like most churches I know of, prayer has always been a part and parcel of our local ministry. Metropolitan AME Church was traditionally committed to our Wednesday night prayer meetings, as are many churches. Being part of the Unceasing Prayer Movement quickly brought to my realization a rude awakening that there is a difference between having Wednesday night prayer meeting and developing a culture of prayer. The New Testament Church "all joined together constantly in prayer" (Acts 2:42), suggesting a mindset that places prayer at the heart of a church's activity—always a part of everything the church does.

This new revelation about developing a culture of prayer challenged my willingness to take a traditional church that only had a few people meeting on Wednesday night for a prayer meeting to developing a culture of prayer. How to do that was the impending question. I quickly realized this was not going to be an overnight undertaking. The change and the desired outcome were only going to happen based on several conditions: (1) As a pastor, I had to take the lead; (2) I had to make the culture of prayer mandate a part of my vision, and (3) I had to remember this was going to be a process.

In the last two years, Metropolitan AME Church has shifted toward becoming a church that embraces a culture of prayer. We have moved from Wednesday night prayer meetings to overnight prayer gatherings to having every Monday morning intercessory prayer. Prayer has become the center stage of our ministry. We are evolving as a church into fearless, bold, and committed prayer warriors.

Pastor Mkwanzazi's zeal speaks volumes. His own church's commitment to developing a culture of prayer can work in any church. Prayer is contagious!

THE PRAYER MEETINGS

If the average mid-week gathering in most churches is the standard for a prayer meeting, then we are doomed. Most people don't even attend prayer meetings. John Franklin states the problem in his book *And the Place was Shaken*: ". . . by and large we have abandoned meaningful prayer meetings. Most that remain are anemic and weak."

Fortunately, in Austin the energy around our prayer meetings is anything but average. After the citywide prayer meeting for rain, the Unceasing Prayer Movement caught a fresh vision of the city in prayer. Since that event, we have coordinated citywide prayer meetings at least once per quarter.

Our lowest-attended gathering has been 150 people. Our best attendance was 2,000. We average between 300 and 500 people at a typical gathering. Most importantly, we have never had a disappointing prayer meeting. They are all accompanied with power. They are a highlight of my life. I love our prayer meetings.

A few years ago, the Southern Baptists of Texas decided they

wanted to host mid-day prayer meetings for pastors throughout the state of Texas. The state was subdivided into 18 regions, and my friend Ted Elmore, a leader in evangelism and prayer for Baptists, helped coordinate the events. Most of the regional events were not well attended. I told Ted about the Unceasing Prayer Movement and asked permission to let our mixed denomination leadership team help coordinate the event in Austin—and he agreed.

While the average attendance throughout Texas for the prayer meetings was about 13 pastors, the prayer meeting in Austin was attended by 300 people at ten o'clock in the morning!

A few weeks later, Dr. Jim Richards, the executive director of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, asked if our prayer team could help lead a segment of their upcoming annual meeting held in Austin that year. Of course I agreed, and we worked with Ted Elmore to host a 24-hour, nonstop prayer room in the lead up to the prayer meeting.

We reached out to Malachi O'Brien, a national prayer leader from Kansas City, to help us coordinate the logistics. When the time came, we had 24 worship teams leading one-hour segments of worship and a dedicated room for non-stop prayer at Great Hills Baptist Church, where my friend Danny Forshee serves as pastor. Several people stayed in the prayer room almost the entire time.

When the time for the prayer meeting arrived, at least 1,500 people were present. Our Unceasing Prayer Movement team led the prayer time, joined by our honorary member Malachi O'Brien. It was electric. Jim Richards tweeted it was the greatest prayer meeting he had ever been in. We have led numerous prayer meetings with hundreds of people and where the power of God's presence is manifestly conspicuous. They are a major force in deepening the resolve for prayer in the Body of Christ in Austin.

When we recapture the New Testament vision of prayer meetings, spiritual awakening won't be far behind. Prayer meetings change the world!

AMERICA PRAYS LAUNCH

Another result of the prayer movement in Austin is the growth of the movement in other places. It seems prayer begets prayer. Brian Alarid is a young leader with an unusually engaging personality.

Alarid was working with the Franklin Graham team to coordinate Graham's prayer rallies at the state capitals around the United States in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election. Alarid was responsible for Texas and the other southwestern states. He and Trey Kent became friends while they worked together to coordinate the rally at the Texas capitol in Austin.

Alarid has a deeply devoted heart for prayer and almost immediately recognized the power of the Austin Unceasing Prayer Movement model. God stirred his heart with the possibilities. After praying and fasting, he launched New Mexico Prays and then America Prays. The stated goal of America Prays is to involve 40,000 churches in 24/7 prayer. His model for this ambitious vision is the model he learned from Trey Kent in Austin. As of this writing, America Prays has launched in 14 states and continues to expand.

YOUNG LEADERS ENGAGED

Another result of the prayer movement is the involvement of millennials. Young leaders like Kyle Hubbart, who leads a day and night prayer room in the west Austin community of Lakeway, echoes what other leaders have noticed: Austin's Christian community is unified. In Hubbart's words, "We don't just

tolerate each other, we actually like each other.”

In his enthusiasm for the prayer movement, he likens what he sees to something akin to the experiences in the Book of Acts. Unified efforts at street evangelism often grow directly out of one of our citywide prayer gatherings. Leading a prayer room can be both rewarding and draining, but the larger prayer movement in the city and the frequent prayer gatherings have often provided Hubbart the encouragement needed to continue through challenges.

Blaise Raccuglia, a gifted worship leader and soloist and once a contestant on *The Voice*, is, like Hubbart, in his early 20s and attends our prayer gatherings regularly. John David Vasquez directs a school of worship in Austin and lives to pray and lead worship. We often call on Vasquez and Raccuglia to form a band and lead worship at one of our events. When we operated the 24-hour prayer room at the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Vasquez arranged to cover the entire time with worship leaders who contributed their talent without charge.

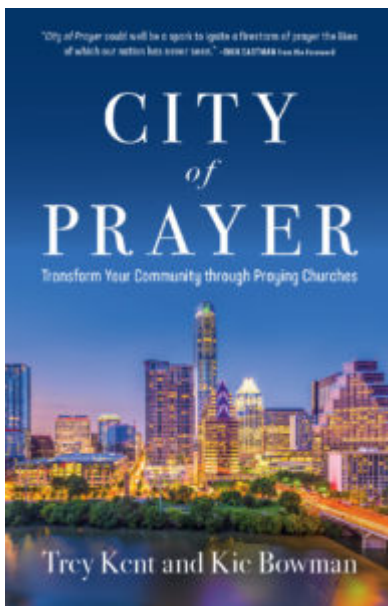
Recently, Will Davis, Jr., a member of the Unceasing Prayer leadership team, pastor of the large multi-site Austin Christian Fellowship, and well-known author, pressed the rest of the team to include

the younger leaders from around the city in our ministry. We always involve younger leaders on the teams who lead in prayer at citywide prayer gatherings. But we wanted to go farther, so we invited a select group of young ministers with a heart for prayer to attend our monthly leadership meeting. In addition, recently we scheduled two hours at the H.O.P.E. Prayer Room (House of Prayer East) for a time of worship and prayer for the “young guns” and our existing leadership team. These young men and women are branching out on their own to lead prayer and worship gatherings all around our city with incredible passion.

RESULTS POINT TO HOPE

In one sense, prayer is its own reward, since we are talking to God. Spending time with Him and leading others to do so is satisfying in and of itself—even if we see no other results. The results we see, however, are pointing toward something else that is sure to come. Numerous leaders in the city sense an unusual unity and a growing passion for prayer. A younger generation of prayer leaders is emerging. Every spiritual awakening has been preceded by a prayer movement, and it is clear we are in a swelling prayer movement now. We can only conclude that a powerful spiritual awakening is in our future.

So, until we begin to reap that harvest, we will persist in unceasing prayer. We invite you to join us by submitting to what God wants you to do in your city!



—Taken from *City of Prayer: Transform Your Community through Praying Churches* by Trey Kent and Kie Bowman. [Click here to order this book](#) for yourself and the pastors of your community.

See other articles and information on praying for cities—including a 7-point prayer guide to use—at [City Prayer Movements](#).