



# Creative prayer diaries

**TN69** Training Notes series: Communication

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**Many churches produce some form of prayer diary to encourage people to intercede either for their own local church or for more global issues.**

Typical formats include:

- a termly or annual card or directory, sometimes listing individuals and families together with more general ideas for prayer for each weekday or day of the month;
- a monthly sheet, emailed or given out on a given Sunday, with one entry for each day of that month;
- a weekly listing on the notice-sheet or newsletter, with one entry for each day of that week;
- occasional cards encouraging people to pray on a daily basis for a major event or issue in church life;
- a daily Twitter feed or text message of a prayer idea.

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Such items may be prepared by the Minister or other member of the church staff such as the Administrator, by a specially-appointed Prayer Co-ordinator, or by a rota of volunteers.

In some churches the Minister may ask to see the draft before it is printed, in others someone may edit the entries if produced by volunteers, and in still others all such checking is deemed unnecessary. There may be a link to the intercessions on Sundays, and there will often be an organised prayer-chain for more personal and immediate needs.

But most of the printed diaries I see are pretty ordinary in what they say. Here are some typical examples.

- MON* Pray today for our musicians as they meet this evening to plan and rehearse for Sunday's services. May they be united and inspired as they lift our worship.
- TUE* We pray for all our young people as the exam season gets under way: for clear thinking and the ability to do their best.
- WED* Today the bill on retirement ages goes before Parliament. Pray for an informed debate, for the contribution from our own MP and a just outcome for our country.
- THU* Peter and Paula, working with the Zambia Mission Agency, ask us to pray for a series of outreach meetings taking place in their home throughout this month.

There is nothing wrong with any of these entries as such. They provide ideas for prayer. But after reading 31 of them on a monthly list or seeing entries like this every week on the notice-sheet, there is a danger of their being somewhat less than inspiring.

They don't exactly get inside the situations described. They assume the reader already has a high motivation to intercede. There is a danger of some fairly predictable 'Christian' language creeping in.

It may well be worth some discreet market research to discover how many people value and use what you currently put out. If you print a weekly prayer list that very few use, is this a good use of print and paper? Is the medium you use the best one or would some people prefer a daily text message or a termly card instead?

But there are other ways of presenting information for intercession. Here are three possible examples all on a common theme. These try to help people get inside the situation being described so that they are motivated to pray because they can experience the scene.

You would not want to overuse any one of these, but work with a creative writer to try them out and see how people react. They are not difficult to write once you get the idea – their one danger is that the items can take a few more words than the standard approach already described.

### Idea 1 **Start each entry with the word 'Imagine'**

Here is how each of our four entries above might be transformed under this approach.

- MON* Imagine you're in the music group. You've rushed home from work for a quick supper and you're now arriving at your weekly rehearsal to prepare for Sunday. What are you thinking about? What do you want God to do for the group?
- TUE* Imagine you are at school, aged 16 and starting GCSE exams today. How are you feeling? What would you be praying for over the next four weeks?
- WED* Imagine you are Laura, our MP, and your name has just been called in the House of Commons to speak on the Retirement Bill. You are not a church member but keen to represent your constituents while under party discipline.
- THU* Peter and Paula are starting a series of outreach meetings in their home in Kampala today. Imagine you are one of them, with a meal prepared, waiting anxiously to see if anyone will arrive.

Note that none of these asks people to pray! This is deliberate – so it may need an introductory sentence at the very start to explain this. What each entry is attempting

to do is to get people's imaginations working so that they feel their way into the situation and can then pray for it as though they were the one being prayed for.

The repeated use of the word 'imagine' is not a problem provided you don't use this format every month or week. It also avoids having to repeat phrases such as 'pray for', 'please pray for' and so on. It can profitably cut out some of the Christian clichés that prayer diaries attract. These entries are trying to be normal, not seeking to make a point by being super-spiritual.

Notice that the first two entries make use of a question construction. This can be employed in several entries in this approach, though it is helpful to vary these with others that do not have a question in them.

Each of these entries is a little longer than the original, but they are still kept pretty much to the point. You could expand each of them a little if you had the space and make them even more attractive. But there is no need to fill too much detail in – you leave all that to people's imagination!

## Idea 2 **'Look' into each situation**

A similar idea is to get people to 'look' at the situation they are being asked to pray for and then to pause and consider what they 'see'. You can vary the language here with various words such as 'look', 'study', 'have a peek', 'glance', 'see', 'picture', 'take an overview', 'peer' and so on. So, if the first idea appealed to readers' minds, this one appeals to their eyes.

Here again are our four entries, this time given the 'look at' treatment. I've given each entry a different slant this time to show a varied approach.

*MON* Come inside the church tonight and watch our musicians as they practise. Some are confident, some are not so sure of their ability. Adrian's leading them from the keyboard as they learn two new songs for Sunday.

*TUE* Your worst nightmare! You are at school and it is GCSE time. Stare at those rows of desks in the large hall and see, not yourself, but one of our young people just turning over the paper at the start of an exam. Oh, no!

*WED* Look out from the public gallery at the floor of the House of Commons as Laura, our MP, is called to speak in today's debate on the Retirement Bill. Does she seem nervous? What will the outcome be for our country?

*THU* Peer through the open front door of Peter and Paula's home in Lusaka. It's hot and sticky as they wait for people to arrive for the first in a series of outreach meetings. Now look down the street. Is anyone coming?

Note again the lack of the word 'pray' because there is no need to put this into each entry. Questions are again used in some of the entries to encourage involvement in what the reader can see. The point about these is to move away from a word-approach to use our other senses.

An additional point in the GCSE entry is the use of gentle humour – why not? The point is to engage people, to get their attention, to turn the prayer diary into something that people want to read the moment they receive it. This approach will not appeal to everyone, but it may well grab the interest of some of those who hardly even bother to read the present diary, let alone use it day by day.

### Idea 3 **Make it personal**

As a variation on the first idea you can drop the word 'imagine' and simply say 'you are...' and then a person (named or not) for each entry. This can make it more direct and it loses the monotony of the word 'imagine' appearing in every entry, but it needs an introductory explanation.

The point here is to introduce a name into each entry (so be careful and sensitive to people's feelings or you could hurt someone).

Here's another take on our four entries, making it a little more specific to people this time.

*MON* You are Adrian, the leader of our Music Group, who's rehearsing the group tonight but who also has a family to look after and a demanding job as a Deputy Head. You want tonight's practice to go well and Sunday's services to focus us all on God.

*TUE* You are one of our teens taking GCSEs today. You're just rushing to catch the school bus, trying to memorise that physics experiment, texting your friends ... and, not that you would tell anyone, shaking inside.

*WED* You are Laura, our MP, on the Jubilee Line into Westminster at the moment, conscious of many emails and letters from constituents about the Retirement Bill you are speaking on today. You know it could have a major impact on so many lives.

*THU* You are Isaac, a Zambian teenager living with your family in Lusaka. This couple Peter and Paula have helped you so much and have invited you to a meeting in their home. You hesitate as you look down the road towards their house. Perhaps you will turn and go home.

These four have taken, in turn, a real member of your church by name, an unnamed member of your church, a public name everyone will know and a made-up name to describe a scenario for prayer. If you name people in your church (as with the previous two ideas) you need to be careful as to who you name and who you never mention – or you can cause upsets.

There are many other ideas you can try (such as basing entries around some famous Bible prayers), but the point with these three is to help people experience the situation rather than just read words in print. Try them and share your experiences with others on your prayer diary team.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN69. See also Training Notes TN38, *We've got news for us!*, TN47, *Breathing life into the intercessions*, (the same kind of treatment given to intercessions) and TN93, *And now for the notices*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN69 under Communication.

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