

Power of prayer

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ful atmosphere.

"They don't have to sing, they don't have to pray out loud," she said. "Many people are so moved that they cry. You are in the presence of people and God."

Emmy Lou Belcher, minister of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Peninsula Township, allows time in her service for members to discuss "joys and concerns."

"This is a time when people can come forward and discuss things in their personal lives," she explained.

Belcher lights a candle while the group gives the speaker their attention.

"They feel strengthened by that," she said. "It gives them extra support."

She then gives a pastoral prayer for those mentioned.

When people are aware that others are praying for them, they receive a psychological as well as a spiritual boost, she said.

Many times, however, people have had improvements in their health or situations, and have not known about the prayer. The group does not necessarily take credit for helping. It depends on how individuals interpret the outcome, she said.

Belcher called attention to the work of Dr. Larry Dossey,

retired internist and writer, who has lectured widely on the subject of science and spirituality, particularly the power of the mind and prayer in healing. Former chief of staff of the Medical City Dallas Hospital, Dossey is the author of "Space, Time and Medicine Beyond Illness" and other books. He is known for his series of scientific experiments on the effect of prayer on people.

Praise West Church of Beulah has been described as a church without boundaries and also a church based on

prayer. Members meet in a variety of different places, such as a township hall, someone's house, or an office, anywhere there are Christians that believe in God's presence. Members often phone to find out where they will next meet.

The church has a Thursday night prayer group, said Rev. Dan Henke.

Members distribute "Prayer Packs" throughout the neighborhood: They include prayer request forms, stamped self-addressed envelopes and prayer requests.

"We believe that God answers prayers, we pray on their behalf," said Henke. "We don't just believe that prayer is a one-way thing where people talk to God. He talks back."

Henke explained that there are three ways in which a person could receive an answer from God. God could lead them to read a relevant passage in the Bible. Other people could be prompted to give an answer. Or the person praying could be given a feeling of resolve.

Henke said he has witnessed

healings. He has also seen many personal relationships restored at the time the group was praying.

Anyone who wants to learn more is free to contact the group, Henke said, but he urges them even more to try prayer for themselves.

"They don't have to be embarrassed that anybody else heard them. They just need to ask God: 'Show me you are real,'" he said.

Sheila Garrett is a local freelance writer.

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