

'777' on the pager means somebody is praying_80904

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DALLAS-Prayer and pagers are being brought together in an innovative way that benefits congregations and people in need.

Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas and First Baptist Church in Richardson are using pagers to let people on their prayer lists know when church members are praying for them.

"We say a lot of times that we will pray for someone, and this is a good way to put feet to that," said Jack Martin, minister of pastoral care at Park Cities Baptist Church.

The pagers are given to people in need of prayer, and then the congregation is supplied with the number to the pager. The number 777 is typed in to signal that someone is praying specifically for that person and his or her need.

The person praying intentionally doesn't indicate his or her telephone number. That way, the person being prayed for doesn't feel obligated to return the call.

"These people don't need to be returning any calls. They need to know that someone is praying for them," Martin said.

It's a good thing they don't have to return the calls, because they often number into the hundreds.

"My biggest fear on starting this thing is that we'd give somebody a pager and nobody would call. That would be awful, but it's been just the opposite," said Bill Webb, associate pastor of spiritual development at First Baptist in Richardson. "It took about a day and a half for us to know this would work."

Martin's experience has been similar. "They often get calls of up into the hundreds, and that can be an amazing thing to a family that is in a tough situation," he said.

It is not just the person with the pager that reaps benefits from the ministry, however.

"It's a benefit in that it keeps those who can't be in attendance from being pushed to the backs of our minds, and it lets them know they haven't been forgotten," he said.

He said it also has been a boon to Sunday school classes. "I've heard comments like: 'We'd been wondering how best to minister to this family, and this works well,'" he said.

It also provides an opportunity for homebound church members to stay in touch.

"Shut-ins can pray and call the number, and that allows them to remain active in a part of the church's ministry, even if they aren't able to leave their homes," he said.

While envisioned as a ministry to the church's members, Webb said, the

pager ministry has become known outside the church as well.

A church member's son who had a brain tumor was one of the first to receive a pager. He estimates 3,500 pages have alerted him that he has been the subject of someone's prayers.

"He says is such a blessing to know that there are people who have been praying for him and his situation who don't even know him," Webb said.

A couple of the Richardson pagers now are with people with no immediate connection to the church but who heard about the ministry and wanted to know how they could get on the pager prayer list.

Park Cities only gives the pagers to people in extreme situations.

"We don't give them out to everyone who goes into the hospital; it has to be a pretty serious situation," Martin said. But the gravity of those situations makes it especially sweet for the prayer warriors when someone recovers, he added.

First Baptist in Richardson gives the pagers to a variety of people in a variety of circumstances.

"We don't really have any rules. We're still making this up as we go along," Webb said.

Both churches use six beepers. Sometimes they all are assigned; sometimes they are not, and more pagers are readily available from the supplier.

The ministry demands little in either time or money, Webb noted. "It's very little effort on my part-and well worth what little effort it takes and the small amount of dollars we spend maintaining the pagers."

Both churches use the same pager company, which charges them \$5 per month for the service. Park Cities uses pagers it already owned but was not

using. First Baptist leases its pagers for \$1 per month.

“You just can't imagine how much good this has done for everyone involved for only \$5 a month,” Martin said.

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