



# Neighborhood Prayer Walks

## What Is a Neighborhood Prayer Walk?

It's not just walking around. It's not just praying. It's walking through your neighborhood or "parish" praying with your eyes and your heart wide open. It's noticing signs of hope and signs of need, and how God calls you to be present to both. So get a group. Take a walk. Listen closely. Pay attention. Offer prayer. Take pictures. Maybe even video. Notice what God is up to. Then re-imagine how your ministry could join God and join your neighbors.

## Guidelines for Prayer-Walking

- Whether you're near your church or in another neighborhood, plan your route ahead of time. Try to walk on a variety of days and times, not just Sunday morning. What's happening on a Tuesday at 5:00 p.m.?
- Meet at the church and pray before you leave. Form groups of 2-6 people. Multiple groups can cover different areas. If the group is too large, you're likely to focus on each other instead of the neighborhood.
- If your area is dependent on cars, you can still prayer walk. Your route should include common gathering places: shopping centers, groceries, dog parks, town squares, community gardens, the church's 5-block radius, and more.
- As you walk, look around with care and pray, either in silence or aloud softly. Feel free to tell your walk partner(s) what you are praying about, but avoid chatting or focusing on each other. Focus on the neighborhood.
- Don't call attention to yourselves. Respect the dignity of community members. Be present as servants, not tourists. As veteran prayer walkers say, "You can be on the scene without making one."
- Although it is not the primary purpose, be open to opportunities to interact with people you encounter.
- If anyone asks what you are doing, be prepared to respond: "We're from \_\_\_\_\_ Church, and we are praying and getting to know our neighborhood better." You're not selling anything; you're demonstrating genuine curiosity about them and their experience of the neighborhood. Offer to pray, if it feels appropriate.

## Community Observation Guide

On your walk look for evidence of the following:

- **People groups:** Who is standing at bus stops, hanging on street corners, going into businesses, playing in parks, waiting in line at the store? How much do people interact with one another?
- **Places of activity:** Cafes, shopping plazas, heavily trafficked intersections, playgrounds, schools?
- **Structures:** What are the types and conditions of the structures (homes, businesses, roads, parks)? How much "free space" is there in the community? What is the mix of private and public space?
- **Services:** Where do people go to shop, eat, study, worship, and receive assistance? What appears to be the quantity and quality of available services? Who provides services, and who is receiving?
- **Signs of change:** Note businesses opening or closing; housing under construction, for sale, or being demolished. See languages on shop signs, and buildings used differently from their original purpose.
- **Signs of hope:** Where do you see evidence of God's grace and God's people at work? Look for churches and nonprofit organizations, playing children, uplifting artwork, faith symbols, social gatherings, gardens. Look especially for local assets that could be connected with neighborhood needs.
- **Signs of need:** Look for evidence of hardship, hurt or injustice. Is what you see specific to particular areas or affecting the neighborhood as a whole? Be aware that marginalized people and social problems are often hidden, especially in communities that appear well-off.

## How Should We Pray?

- **Pray for discernment** – Seek the gift of seeing the community through Christ’s “lens,” and to discern what God is already doing there; ask God to show you how you can pray with greater insight for the people, events, and places in the community.
- **Pray for blessings** – Pray for every person, home, school, business and situation you encounter.
- **Pray with empathy** – See and feel what your neighbors live with every day; offer intercession for signs of brokenness and give thanks to God for the blessings and gifts in the community.
- **Pray from Scripture** – Prayers based directly on God’s word can be especially powerful. You might start with Jeremiah 29:5-7; Luke 10:1-2; Mark 12:30-31; or Revelation 21:3-5a.
- **Pray in God’s power** – Allow times of silence for God’s spirit to speak to you, or through you.

## Concluding the Neighborhood Prayer-Walk

Immediately afterwards – perhaps over a meal – gather to share your prayers, observations and experiences:

- What did you learn about the neighborhood?
- Where was God’s presence especially apparent?
- What surprised you?
- What was hard? What was engaging?
- What ministries and what worship would truly speak here? With whom could you partner and learn?

## Neighborhood Prayer Walks throughout the Liturgical Year

You may gear your walk to the seasons of the liturgical year and make Prayer Walks a regular part of your spiritual and missional life. Notice changes and how the face of Jesus shows up throughout the liturgical year.

- **Advent:** Focus on your neighborhood’s longings. For what are we waiting in this time and this place?
- **Christmas:** Where do you see God’s love Incarnate? You could sing as you walk in this joyful time.
- **Epiphany:** What places in your neighborhood shine brightly? Where do you still see darkness?
- **Lent:** Where does your neighborhood feel like wilderness? Where are the temptations? The Angels?
- **Holy Week:** If Jesus processed into your neighborhood, where would he walk? What would people shout to him? Where do you see Jesus suffering most?
- **Easter:** Where are signs of resurrection? What surprises you? Can you call your neighbors by name?
- **Rogation Days:** Walk your parish “boundaries.” What do you pray will grow and blossom here?
- **Pentecost:** Walk your neighborhood seeking the Holy Spirit. What do you feel fired up to do or say?
- **Ordinary Time:** Where is life springing up in this green season? Pray for the community’s flourishing.

## Witness for Peace and Partnership

Especially in areas that have witnessed systemic oppression, violence or conflicted police relations, a Prayer Walk can signal the abiding peace and justice of God and facilitate healing and hope.

- Choose an area where you or your congregation already have or desire to be in relationship. It does not have to be the neighborhood where you live or the one closest to your congregation; you could choose to move into solidarity with people whose struggle is different from your community’s.
- Prayer walking is chiefly about being a presence and seeing your surroundings through God’s eyes. As you walk, ask, “What would God celebrate here? What would God heal? How can we pray for what we see?”
- If you encounter people and enter conversation, you might ask, “Is there anything you like to tell us about? Would you like us to pray for you or someone you are concerned about?” You can pray right there and/or assure them that the church will be praying for them on Sunday and throughout the week.
- Consider walking occasionally or regularly in conjunction with local police who “walk the beat.” You can introduce yourself to police officers familiar with the area, and ask to join them as they walk. Many police departments value this community connection, and they will tell you how you could be most helpful.
- If you’re walking with the police, you might have the opportunity to greet people on their stoops, on the streets, etc. One question you might ask is, “Do you have any concerns about the neighborhood that you’d like to share with us, or with the officer?” They may want to share something only the police officer can hear. If so, the prayer walkers can talk with others while the officer has that conversation.

Adapted by Stephanie Spellers and the Missional Vitality Team in the Diocese of Long Island, from resources by Waymakers, a global prayer and evangelism ministry. See [www.waymakers.org/pray/prayerwalking](http://www.waymakers.org/pray/prayerwalking).