

A CULTURE OF PRAYER

IN ONE LOCAL MISSIONAL CHURCH



JOHN LO

John Lo is the Lead Pastor of Epicentre Church based in Mott Auditorium on the campus of the U.S. Center for World Mission in Pasadena, CA. Epicentre is a part of the Antioch International Movement of Churches. Learn more at www.epicentrechurch.org

The following is an interview by MF staff with John Lo, lead pastor of Epicentre Church in Pasadena, CA.

MF: How do you as a local church pastor make prayer a priority in both your personal life and in the life of your church?

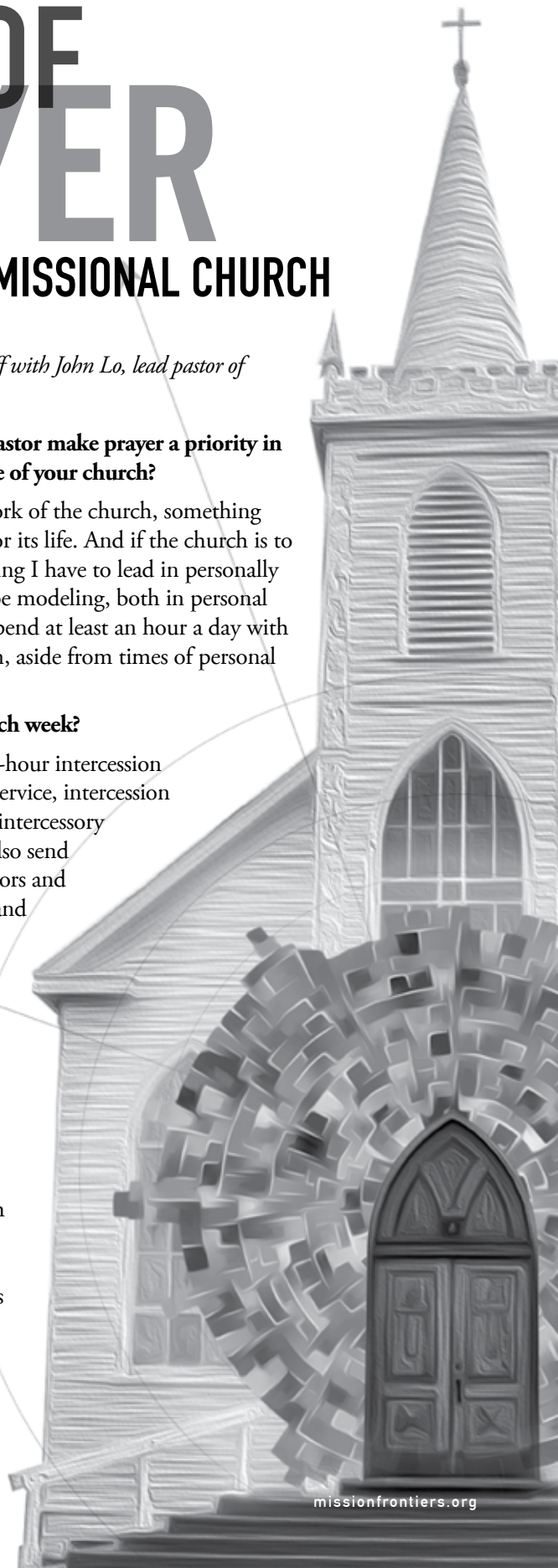
JL: Prayer is the foundation of the work of the church, something that must precede, and set the tone for its life. And if the church is to be a house of prayer, then it's something I have to lead in personally—something that I believe I should be modeling, both in personal and public ways. I personally try to spend at least an hour a day with the Lord, in listening and intercession, aside from times of personal retreat and reflection.

MF: How do you structure prayer each week?

JL: We have weekly staff prayer, a one-hour intercession service before our corporate worship service, intercession during worship service along with an intercessory prayer guide for Sunday service. We also send out weekly prayer updates to intercessors and regularly make time as a staff to stop and wait in silence for God to speak to us. Listening prayer is a very important part of our ongoing decision-making process for everything from budget to staffing issues and more.

Each one of our pastors has their own team of personal intercessors who are committed to praying for them as a part of their regular ministry. We send monthly prayer updates to our Antioch prayer room. We also send bi-annual prayer updates to the entire Antioch movement globally. When emergencies come up, we immediately mobilize corporate prayer as well.

MF: Do you have a person on staff that is responsible for maintaining a



prayer culture? If so, what does this role look like?

Yes, we have a person who oversees all of our prayer ministries. She oversees the corporate intercession service and staff prayer as well as training, organizing and overseeing the prayer ministers. She is tasked to raise up, mentor and lead prophetic people while bringing in spiritual formation perspectives and spiritual self-care to the staff and leadership of the church. She also initiates and leads the church in corporate fasting and prayer times and heads up strategic level intercession for the city and over our organizational history and needs. We work to keep intercessors in the loop on what's going on weekly and really do everything we can to support their work.

MF: How do you feel prayer works together with missions?

As I said before, prayer is the real work. It precedes, underlays, strengthens, sharpens, protects and fuels missions and missionaries. Living out Zechariah 4:6 means being able to hear his voice in prayer and doing what he says as key to mission to the people they work with. And then there's the work of strategic intercession. Focusing intercession in the midst of spiritual battle clears the way for missions to take place.

Prayer also must be the foundation of missions mobilization. Recently, we have partnered with the Ekballo House of Prayer to this end.

Prayer is key to how a missionary is trained in understanding their work. And prayer also has to be part of the long-term pastoral umbrella, spiritual protection and ongoing missions fuel and strategic intercession for missions work. And it's key to what missionaries pass on. Missionaries not only evangelize, disciple, plant churches and equip indigenous leaders to be agents of transformation, but they also equip indigenous intercessors to begin the work of healing prayer, intercession and strategic intercession for their own people.

MF: What are some local outreach initiatives your church has been a part of recently? How was prayer included?

We recently joined with many other local churches to prayer walk the city of Pasadena. As a group, we prayed door-to-door for over 50,000 homes locally and then followed up the next week. We also prayer walked the grounds of our outreach before Easter. We also regularly ask our cell groups to intercede for specific non-believing friends they want to invite to church or outreach.

MF: What advice would you have for pastors and church leaders who are struggling to incorporate consistent prayer into their lives and ministries?

First, we need to back up our conviction of the importance of prayer through our schedule. I have to ruthlessly block off time in my daily schedule, lest the needs of people or ministry priorities invade that space. If I say God is first in our life as a church, then I have to put him first in my schedule (communing with him, listening to him, getting his directive, as well as intercession).

Second, don't be afraid to ask for help and prayer support. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring you back to your first love. Don't feel discouraged; the Spirit is more than willing to help! Prayerfully look for some personal intercessors. Peter Wagner's book *Prayer Shield: How to Intercede for Pastors, Christian Leaders and Others on the Spiritual Frontlines* was really helpful for me.

Third, ask other pastors you know who have a strong prayer life to pray with you—praying with passionate intercessors rubs off on us.

MF: Anything else you would like to share?

As our world changes more rapidly, the needs of people seem more insistent, the voices of the unreached continue their cry, and spiritual battles seem ever more intense, we need, more than ever, to learn how to listen and obey God. Jesus only said what he heard the Father speaking (John 12:49) and only did what he saw the Father doing (John 5:19). That has to be the starting place of my life as a leader. That's what my church ultimately needs from me and what I want to reproduce in those under my care. My ideas, talent or zeal alone will not produce victory. To see God's light invade the darkness requires spiritual weapons and spiritual power. I need to organize my life accordingly. 