

## Upper Room Prayer Hotline Testimonial

It's just a few seconds past 8PM, the first Tuesday of the month. The distinct ring of a landline phone awakens the quiet library on Centenary's second floor. Four heads turn as their designated prayer line operator, picks up the phone,

*"Upper Room Prayer Line, how may I pray for you? May I ask your first name and the state you are calling from?"*

The caller is Teresa from Mississippi.

The one answering the phone, providing hope and a connection to God, is anonymous to Teresa, but not to Centenarians and definitely not to his fellow petitioners. Four others, Jim Coots, Don Ernst, John Foster and Larry Crouch, join Clyde Tharp. They are a cozy group, comfortable with each other, and full of anticipation. The only voice you hear is Clyde's.

*"Teresa, is your prayer request for yourself, someone else or both? We're praying for your daughter and your grandchildren. Okay. What are their names? April is your daughter and your grandsons are David and Andrew. Where are they? In LA?"*

Clyde explains to Teresa he is taking notes to capture her prayer request. *"How may I pray for your daughter and grandsons?"* The room is quiet except for an indistinguishable sound from the phone and the scratching of the prayer partners' pens. They are taking notes to refer to in their future prayer moments. Bits of the conversation Clyde carefully repeats, giving a hint of the anxiety of Teresa's heart. The four have leaned toward the phone, not trying to hear the caller but to feel closer to her. Perhaps, they are symbolically lending their shoulders to help Clyde carry the weight of Teresa's concerns as he calls on our Lord to unburden her heart.

*"Are the children together? Un-hu. Five years ago. She and her husband. Your daughter's a nurse. Okay. He's demanding part of her income. Mhm. For the sake of the boys, something has to be done. Yes."* Teresa's outpouring continues. A minute more. Or is it five minutes? The clock is silent.

Clyde looks at his prayer partners, *"Teresa, I'm joined tonight by others who want to pray for you. I will summarize your concerns so that they, too, know as we go to the Lord in prayer for you; your daughter, April; and your grandsons, David and Andrew your concerns."*

As heads bow and, in some cases, hands clasp, Clyde takes a soft breath and brings Teresa's pain and longing to God.



Centenary Prayer Line Team: left to right, Clyde Tharp, Jim Coots, Don Ernst, John Foster, Larry Crouch not shown.



*“Holy God, I bring Teresa to your throne. You see her whole picture.”* His words are without judgement, or apology, no preaching or counseling or advice, no sharing his own troubles. He speaks to his Heavenly Father as any child seeking guidance would speak to a loving Father. Clyde pours out Teresa’s anxieties to God as tenderly as you would call a kitten from its hiding place, but with the strength of conviction that he knows to Whom he is speaking is in charge of all things.



*“Lord we know that you fully understand what is going on in this family. We know that you know their names and everything about each individual. And we know that you know what is on their hearts. Lord we just ask you at this point to give April a power of discernment, a power of patience, and a power of love that can somehow endure in all that is going on. Help her understand what is the correct thing to do. Whether it is to stay, or whether it is to abandon this relationship at this particular time. Take her boys, and go to another location. Lord you know the avenue in which she should approach this and how it should be done. Guide and direct her. Let her sense you just this evening in a most special and personal*

*way that she can say, ‘Oh, that is God speaking to me’. And she can in turn call her mother and say, ‘Mother, you know prayers are working for me. They’re helping me understand what I need to do and how I should do it. God’s will is coming to be within my life. I know that there will be challenges but I know that it will be God’s will.’”*

As Clyde speaks, there is a hush over the room that is strangely audible. There is assurance that God is on the other end of this call, nodding his head, saying, *“Yes. Un-hu. Okay, Teresa and Clyde, I am listening.”*

The prayer on behalf of Teresa was also to give her, the mother of April, the grandmother of David and Andrew, *“to just give her the listening ear, the praying heart that will help April grow, and survive, and discern. . .these things we say in Thy Son’s Holy Name, Amen.”*

Clyde politely closes the call, *“May God bless you, Teresa, and bless your daughter.”* The weight of concern for Teresa that was so heavy a few minutes ago is now manageable. There is a sense of relief filling the Centenary Prayer Team.

With nods of approval, his prayer colleagues reassure Clyde that he captured the woes of Teresa and delivered them to God in a way that should have been heartening for Teresa. Intercessory prayer for someone with such heartache is draining for everyone, but Clyde’s faith is strengthening him as he speaks for the caller. *“I’m lis-*



tening as intently as I can, trying to disassociate my own feelings. It is interesting to me that 90% of the time I won't have any idea of the words that were said or of what my own feelings are. I am blessed to be void of myself and to let God work me. Sometimes, I think God is using me and my background (spouse, father, educator, school administrator, Child of God) to understand their situation. I don't have any idea what I am going to say to a person. It just flows out. Invariably I go out feeling very blessed. I believe all of us feel blessed at the end of our prayer time."

**A summary of Teresa's prayer concerns**, and those of any other caller, will be sent to the Upper Room Living Prayer Center in Nashville, TN. From there, their concerns will be sent to volunteers from 10 different Covenant Prayer Groups around the country who will also pray for them for another 30 days. You may wish to join them in prayer for Teresa and the others the team will pray for starting this night in August.

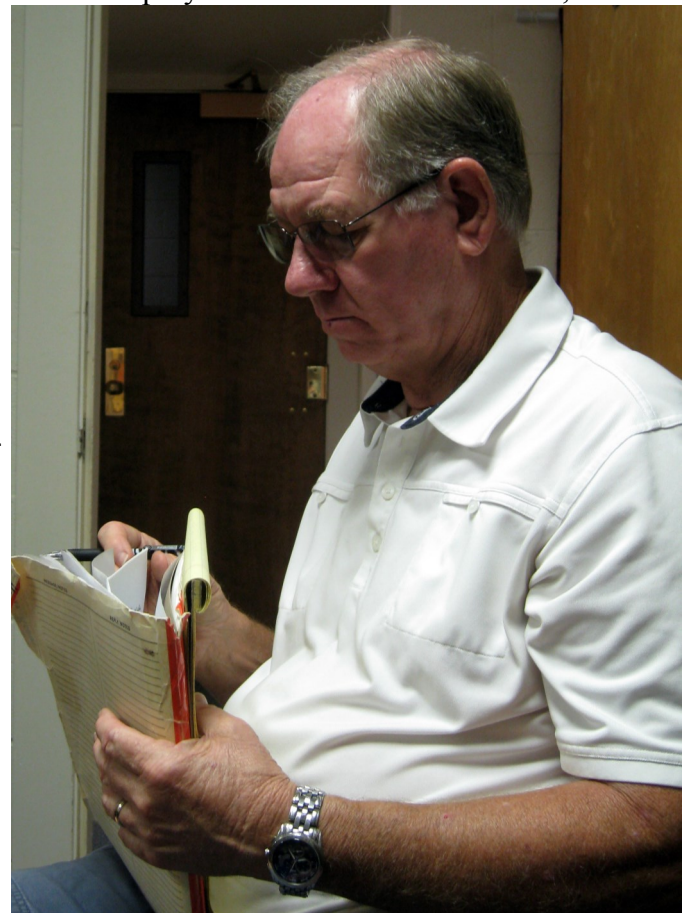
Centenary's Upper Room Prayer Team, which today includes Clyde Tharp, Jim Coots, Don Ernst, John Foster and Larry Crouch is not exclusive. However, its numbers and members, except for a spell when Karen Crouch's schedule allowed time for her to join the men, have been the same most of its service life. Meeting the first Tuesday of every month, they squeeze into Centenary's library starting about 7:30 and take prayer requests from 8 – 10PM. Some folks in Centenary call the team the "Upper Room Hotline Team." **If you would like to join the prayer line team call Clyde Tharp.**

The team's an interesting combination of personalities, but there is a comradery, mutual respect, and commitment that is obvious. Clyde remembers John Foster's answer when he asked him to join the team to pray for callers, "I can't do that." Clyde asked John, "can you pray for me as I pray for callers?" John answered, "I can do that." Clyde commends John, saying, "He's been here ever since. He says it sometimes blows his mind the situations people find themselves. It is difficult to understand, to wear the shoes some people walk-in. Some of the things people ask you to pray for are very hard to hear. Still I leave here feeling refreshed and blessed recognizing God is using us in some way to serve others, and we are truly blessed."

Jim Coots says, "Every now and then you feel a real connection. You feel the pain they are in and you feel motivated how to pray. I usually have trouble going to sleep afterwards. It might be that God may be pulling my strings or something."

Don Ernst says he joined the team, "because Clyde asked me to. I keep coming back because I enjoy being with these guys and seeing what happens." John says, "Somebody has to do it. I believe it's a contribution that is very important."

**Time flies when you're having fun**, so the old adage goes. Time Soars when you're Serving our Lord, is Larry Crouch's affirmed reality. Tuesday, August 4th we asked Larry, "Why do you serve on Centenary's Upper Room



**Larry Crouch searches his notes from previous callers. He thinks he recognizes a caller from several sessions back.**

Prayer Line?” Looking at his friend, Clyde Tharp, he laughingly responds, “Clyde makes me come.” He quickly adds, “We started doing this about five years ago.” Instantly the others correct Larry, “we’ve been doing this since 2005.” The prayer team is celebrating a decade together. Larry shaking his head concludes, “I didn’t know we’d been doing this that long. I do know that there are a lot of people that need our prayers.”

Clyde is often the prayer liaison for the team. The love and support of his prayer partners combining with his faith in Jesus, strengthens his words. The team members realized early on that Clyde’s articulation of the prayer concerns and the words God was putting in his mouth made him the better prayer warrior and the voice callers needed to hear to lift up their concerns. God was also helping Clyde’s voice to demonstrate compassion without judgment, preaching, counseling or giving advice and identifying mutual problems; the later, discussions the Prayer Center discourages. Clyde reexamines the calls, “I’m listening intently while trying to disassociate my own feelings so 90% of the time I won’t have an idea of what I have said. I am separated from my own feelings and blessed by God to be void of myself, of me. Let God work me.”

### **Brrring! Brrring!**

*“Upper Room Prayer Line,” answers Clyde, “how may I pray for you? May I ask your first name and from what state you are calling? Rose from CT . . . How long since you’ve been employed? . . . What would be your ideal job? Okay. . . Do you have a church family? Uh-hu. . . May I explain your situation to those here with me so that we may collectively pray while I am praying with you? Thank you.”*

Looking to his team Clyde summarizes, “Rose is a 62, single, divorcee, unemployed. Not had a job for 2 years. When she applies, she senses an obvious rejection. She feels defeated as she becomes used to these different things. Has no vehicle. No church family connection. Prayer request: a job where she can assist people.”

And, so the evening goes. The calls continue quickly, one after another. The Prayer Line Team, will hear other callers and their prayer needs:

- ♦ LaChanna of MA and her 3-year-old daughter, Heaven, are being harassed by neighbors. Clyde says, *“I’ve never prayed for anyone named Heaven before.”* Then he prays for a hedge of protection around them as they look for a safe place. Clyde prays for God to work with the harassers so that they will stop.
- ♦ Robin of NY wants healing prayers for her friend Sandra in SC. Clyde prays for God to place his healing, loving hands on Sandra.
- ♦ Tanisha in CA and her husband Marcus to have a favorable financial and judicial outcome. Clyde prays for Tanisha to recognize God at work in her life.
- ♦ Oily in MN, her son in MT with multiple life challenges.
- ♦ Ben in CA worries about his Ham Radio friend Mike who has MS and no support.
- ♦ Ronsheka in FL, her mother Dianna, and son Jayden who feel their house is possessed.
- ♦ Robbie in OH has three requests: for a loved one brought to salvation, heal his OCD, help him find the right someone to love.

Perhaps you will pray for these callers and the members of Centenary’s Prayer Line Team for the next 30 days.

Clyde sees their ministry is another way to live out Centenary's Vision:

*To be changed by Christ*

*to love and serve in the streets of Shelbyville and the world.*

The prayer line helps get the love and serve part beyond Shelbyville and on to the world.

A typical Tuesday night is 7-10 callers from anywhere in the country or the world. In their ten years of service, they have had callers from the states, and as far away as Puerto Rico, Quebec, the Philippines and even India. Some callers are repeaters. Most callers seem to be in their 50s but they know they have callers from teen to their 80s, maybe 90s. Gender is probably 60/40% toward women and most are either Caucasian or African-American. Some, 20 – 25% are institutionalized, prison, mental institutes or halfway houses. A few callers had to be referred to the Suicide Help Line, the National Hope Line. One caller wanted prayers to have God sway an election. Clyde wouldn't pray that, but he did the best prayer possible, "that God's Will be done."

**How many callers** has Centenary's prayer line team prayed for Clyde? "I would be comfortable with you saying we have handled 600 – 800 calls for prayer over the ten years. Believe God will forgive us if the numbers are too large. I do know He responded in some manner to everyone we took. Who am I to keep count when I am trying to serve?"

The Upper Room Living Prayer Center is a global initiative underwritten by the United Methodist Men. Since its inception in 1977, it has grown to accepting about 500,000 requests annually. The toll-free number. 1-800-251-4687 has volunteers standing by 24/7/365. Call the first Tuesday of any month between 8-10PM and you might hear your friend Clyde Tharp say, "Upper Room Prayer Line. How may I pray for you?"



Bear one  
another's burdens,  
and in this way,  
you will fulfill the  
law of Christ.

GALATIANS 6:2