

The Hundred-Year Prayer Meeting

description: In the eighteenth century, a relatively small group of Christians sent out three hundred missionaries from their community. And it all began with a prayer meeting that just wouldn't stop.

creationDate: 2024-10-11 13:49

tags: []

url: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-hundred-year-prayer-meeting>

domain: www.desiringgod.org

Notes

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Introduction to the Moravian Prayer Movement

- Nathan A. Finn is the Provost and Dean of the University Faculty at North Greenville University in Tigerville, SC, and is the coeditor of Historical Theology for the Church (B&H Academic, 2021).

- Throughout church history, prayer, awakening, and missions movements have often been interconnected, with concerted prayer efforts leading to spiritual awakenings and the spread of the gospel across cultures.
- The Moravians, a group of Christians, began a prayer meeting in the early eighteenth century that lasted for over a hundred years and played a significant role in the connections between prayer, awakening, and missions.
- The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 ended the Thirty-Years War, resulting in most small states in the region adopting the religion of their respective nobility, except in Silesia, where the Catholic Hapsburg dynasty ruled over both Catholics and Lutherans.
- In Silesia, Lutheran subjects resisted the Hapsburgs' efforts to demand conformity to Catholicism, influenced by the Pietist movement, which emphasized biblical authority, the new birth, discipleship, and faith-based activism.
- In 1708, children in southern Silesia began holding large outdoor meetings, known as camp meetings, which included prayer and singing, leading to a revival centered in the town of Teschen.
- The Teschen Revival, led by Johann Adam Steinmetz, a Pietist minister, became a center for spreading Pietist spirituality across Europe and is often considered the beginning of the eighteenth-century transatlantic awakenings.
- Steinmetz's admirers included Jonathan Edwards, the Wesley brothers, and Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, who was a Pietist and a member of the German Lutheran nobility.
- Count Zinzendorf was a protégé of August Hermann Francke, the leading Pietist theologian in Europe, and was deeply committed to Pietism, building institutions, personal evangelism, spiritual formation, and global missions.
- Zinzendorf's leadership style was sometimes heavy-handed, and he had some significant flaws, but his priorities of personal evangelism, spiritual formation, and global missions became part of the DNA of the movement he led.
- Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf owned a large estate in Saxony called Herrnhut, which he opened to Protestant refugees from all over Europe in 1722, attracting believers from Silesia, Bohemia, and Moravia, many of whom had been influenced by the Teschen Revival.
- By 1727, around three hundred Moravians were living at Herrnhut, with Zinzendorf as the de facto leader of the community, and the term Moravian began to refer less to the ethnicity of the refugees and more to Zinzendorf's emerging denomination.

The Hundred-Year Prayer Meeting and its Impact

- In the spring of 1727, some Moravians began praying for fresh revival in their midst, and by late summer, almost fifty Moravians had committed to pray for one hour a day, one after the other, for 24 consecutive hours, seven days a week, leading to a spiritual

awakening that caused their group to grow and draw more refugees from all over Europe.

- The Moravians kept up their round-the-clock prayer ministry for over a century, known as the Hundred-Year Prayer Meeting, which has inspired countless churches and ministries to host 24-hour prayer meetings for revival, missions, or other priorities.
- The prayer revival led to a missionary awakening among the Moravians, who became the tip of the spear for evangelical global missions, with dozens of missionaries leaving Europe to spread the gospel to other lands, including the West Indies, Greenland, Turkey, West Africa, South America, and the English colonies of Georgia and Pennsylvania.
- By 1791, around three hundred Moravian missionaries had been sent out from Herrnhut, equivalent in size to the total number of Moravians when the round-the-clock prayer ministry first began in 1727, and their missions awakening predated the modern missions movement by two generations.

The Moravian Missionary Awakening and its Influence

- The Moravian missionaries spread the Pietist emphasis on the new birth, small accountability groups, and evangelism and missions, influencing key figures such as John Wesley, George Whitefield, and William Carey, who became known as the father of the modern missions movement.
- William Carey's treatise, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, published in 1792, became a manifesto for global missions among English-speaking evangelicals, and he acknowledged the Moravians as missionary pioneers who inspired his work.
- The Baptist Missionary Society was founded in 1793 with the help of Carey, who later left to serve as a missionary to India, following in the footsteps of hundreds of Moravian missionaries.
- The Moravians' legacy demonstrates the interconnectedness of prayer, revival, and missions, as they dedicated themselves to prayer for spiritual awakening and global missions, and God answered by calling hundreds of Moravians to become missionaries.
- The Moravians played a significant role in spreading the gospel to unbelievers, promoting evangelical emphases to other believers, and inspiring generations of Christians to obey the Great Commission.

Conclusion and Call to Action

- The story of the Moravians serves as a reminder that God still answers prayers, as stated in James 5:16, and can bring about spiritual awakening, reviving cold hearts and stirring dormant affections.

- There are still billions of people globally who do not know Jesus Christ as their King and Savior, highlighting the need for a new prayer-driven missionary awakening among God's people.
- The author invites readers to join in praying for a new prayer-driven missionary awakening, for God's glory and for the sake of global disciple-making.