The study of Pentecostal-Charismatic prayer raises a number of questions about the relationship between our understanding of prayer, spiritual renewal, and social engagement. Yet, there is still very little social scientific research on prayer beyond measures of frequency and whether or not people believed prayers were answered. Although Gallup surveys since 1948 report that nearly 90% of the American population pray (Poloma and Pendleton 1989; Poloma and Gallup 1991; Gallup and Lindsay 1999), in most cases the question asked ‘Do you ever pray?’ only assesses the frequency of prayer. What is less known is how people pray, what kinds of prayers are offered, and in what contexts and life circumstances people pray.

Among Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians there are varieties of prayer. For example, speaking in tongues is described as a type of prayer language that is said to empower Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians, serving as a form of primal speech or ecstatic utterance (Cox 1995; Csordas 1997). Healing prayer is another type that has received attention among scholars (McGuire 1988; Csordas 1994; C. Brown 2010). The laying on of hands for imparting spiritual gifts, prophetic prayer, spiritual warfare, and intercession are all types of prayer within Pentecostal-Charismatic spirituality (see Anderson 2004). How these kinds of prayer are learned, practiced, and what effects they have on the individuals who pray or the people they pray for requires more research. Furthermore, Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians are innovative and often adapt older forms of prayer; this too requires attention.

1 We use the term Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity to refer to the broader movement of renewal that defines the various groups that historically developed in the twentieth century. Such groups as the Assemblies of God are referred to as classical Pentecostals while charismatic is used to specifically talk about renewal within the Roman Catholic Church and the mainline Protestant Churches. Neo-Pentecostalism refers to those particular groups like the Vineyard churches and Catch the Fire Ministries that emerged since the 1980s. There are other evolving terms to describe the indigenous Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. While this chapter focuses on a neo-Pentecostal group, those who participate within it are representive of the larger global movement.
For example, ‘soaking prayer’ is a recent innovation and adaptation of prayer. It is a development from the ‘Toronto Blessing’ that emerged in the early 1990s (see Poloma 2003). While most scholars believed the movement was over by the late 1990s, our research shows that the Toronto Blessing has not ended. Rather, in the past fifteen years the church has gone through several changes including a new name, the development of a global strategy to plant new churches in major urban areas such as Houston, Raleigh, Montreal, and London. Now known as Catch the Fire (CTF), the ministry has encouraged soaking prayer as central to its mission and vision. CTF has developed an extensive prayer network encouraging followers to attend Soaking Prayer School, Soaking in His Presence weekend retreats, to form soaking prayer groups in homes, churches, and places of work, and to practice soaking prayer on a daily basis. Soaking is a metaphor used by CTF to describe a type of prayer that focuses on receiving God’s love, which facilitates loving others. In this chapter we examine the prayer practice of soaking among CTF participants and evaluate as a case study the implications of such prayer. More specifically, we measure the level of social engagement associated with soaking prayer, noting how Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians claim God’s love enables them to love others more deeply.

Toward a Sociology of Pentecostal-Charismatic Prayer

Pew Forum’s 2007 Survey on prayer suggests that praying is not as frequent as a decade earlier, but the survey asked only two questions on prayer: frequency of prayer and believed answers to prayer. Though the national average reveals that 58% of Americans pray daily, diminishing to 17% weekly, the higher percentages of prayer frequency are reported for Evangelicals (78% daily), historic Black Churches (80% daily), and sectarian type churches, i.e., Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses (82% and 89% respectively). When probed further about whether respondents received an answer to prayer, the national average is 19% at least once a week, 12% once or twice a month, 18% several times a year and 23% seldom or never. Once again Evangelicals, Black Churches, Mormons, and Jehovah Witnesses score higher on the weekly measure (29%, 34%, 32%, and 36% respectively), but with other Christians within the range (29%). Although  

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