

## **Chapter Two**

### **Start a Local Email Prayer List**

Starting an email prayer list may be the simplest of all the ministry ideas I'll describe in this book. It requires no additional hardware or software beyond your computer, an email client (this software is usually included with your computer at the time of shipment), and your Internet connection. All you lack are the email recipients' addresses with their own computers, email software, and Internet connection, and, of course, the topics for prayer.

The only difference between this chapter and Chapter Eight, "Start an International Prayer List", is the list of intended recipients. While it is perfectly okay to include both local and international prayer concerns on the same email prayer list, the decision to do so rests with the email prayer list manager. Therefore, I think it is better to discuss these two lists separately, due to their distinction.

If you're wondering about the value of having an email prayer list, here are a few things to consider. Establishing an email prayer list can accomplish a number of positive effects in your congregation. For instance, it will serve to strengthen the ties that already exist, as well as create new ones. It will also deepen the prayer life of your people by turning an ordinary group into a *praying* group. The bonding and blessing that result from this bearing of one another's burdens through a deeper commitment to prayer will probably surprise you.

However, you must guard against letting your prayer list degrade into a gossip or rumor mill. If someone requests prayer for their marriage or for someone else's marriage, list members should not spread all over the community and Internet that these two are having marriage trouble, all in the name of prayer. This is why you must exercise great care and sensitivity with

the prayer concerns you share with your email prayer list. It may even be prudent *not* to share some prayer requests with your list, if it is of a particularly personal nature, unless you can say it in such a way as to mask the personal details.

Having said all that, if you're ready to get started, the first step is to announce in your congregation that you're starting an email prayer list. Use as a point of contact the email address you intend to send messages from. Therefore, when members send you their request to join the list, you will automatically have their email address. Of course, you can have them write down and hand you their email addresses personally, too, but you should send a test greeting message to it first to confirm its accuracy before you begin sending prayer list messages to it. In fact, it is probably a good idea to do this with your entire list in order to correct any faulty addresses before you begin sending prayer concerns. You could save yourself some time and headache if you do.

The second step is to add all of the accumulated email addresses you receive into one group list. Depending on the email client you use, creating an email group will have varying degrees of difficulty. Of course, the email client you use will also depend upon the Internet service provider (ISP) you use. A widely available ISP, such as America Online (AOL), will usually include, and even require, its own email client, though there are ways to get around this. For instance, you can connect to your ISP, and then start your preferred email client to check your email.

A smaller, more localized, ISP will likely rely on Microsoft Outlook Express as its email client, because it's free and usually included with Microsoft Internet Explorer. Most computers nowadays come pre-loaded with Internet Explorer and Microsoft Outlook Express. If your computer does not already have Outlook Express, you can download it for free from Microsoft's

web site when you download Internet Explorer. The URL is <http://www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/downloads/default.asp>. Be sure to review the system requirements for your particular system before downloading.

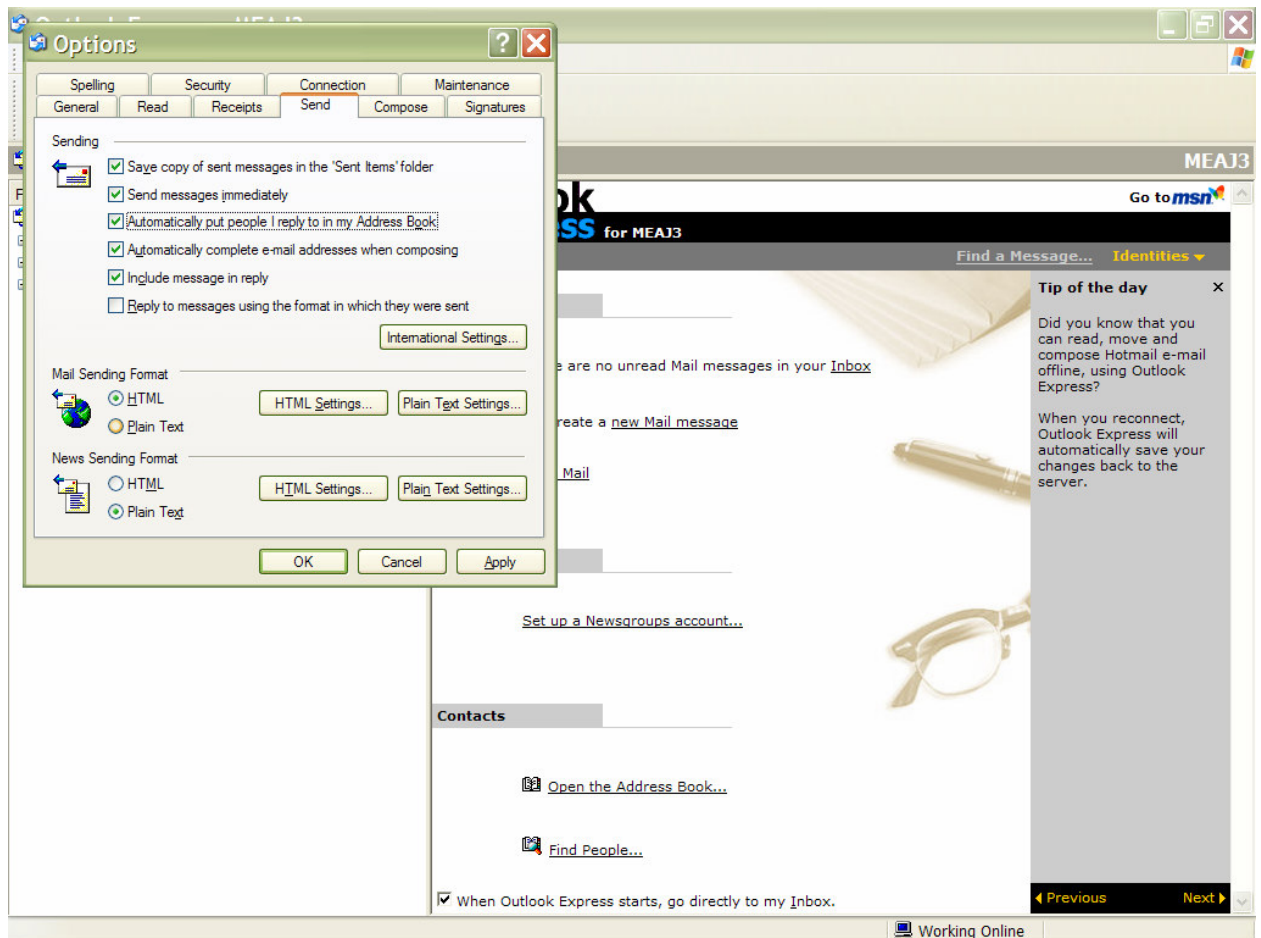
If you're using AOL, or any other widely available ISP, refer to their online help for detailed instructions on how to use their email client. If you're using Outlook Express, creating a group list is fairly straightforward.

First, click on the Addresses icon on the program's menu bar, or select Address Book from the Tools menu. If you like keyboard shortcuts, as I do, you can also press CTRL+SHIFT+B to open the address book. Once the address dialog is displayed, select New Group from the File menu, or simply press CTRL+G to open the New Group dialog.

One feature that can save you a lot of work is if you have the "Automatically put people I reply to in my Address Book" checked. You'll find this option on the Tools | Options menu. Click on the Send tab and check the box next to that item on the list. See Figure 2.1 for a screenshot. If you do this *before* you receive all your subscription requests, you'll be way ahead of the game. Then, when you send them a reply to let them know you've received their request to add them to the list, their address will be automatically added to your address book.

Next, when you open the File | New Group dialog from your Address Book, type in a name for your group in the Group Name textbox, and then click on the Select Members button. This will bring up the complete list of everyone currently in your address book. Simply scroll down the list, highlight the address you want to add to your group, click on the Select button at the top, between the left and right panes, and click on the OK button when you've added everyone you want. You can also double-click each address to add it to your group list in the

right pane immediately, or you can scroll down the list holding down the CTRL key and clicking on each address with your mouse, then click on the Select button to add them all at once. If you

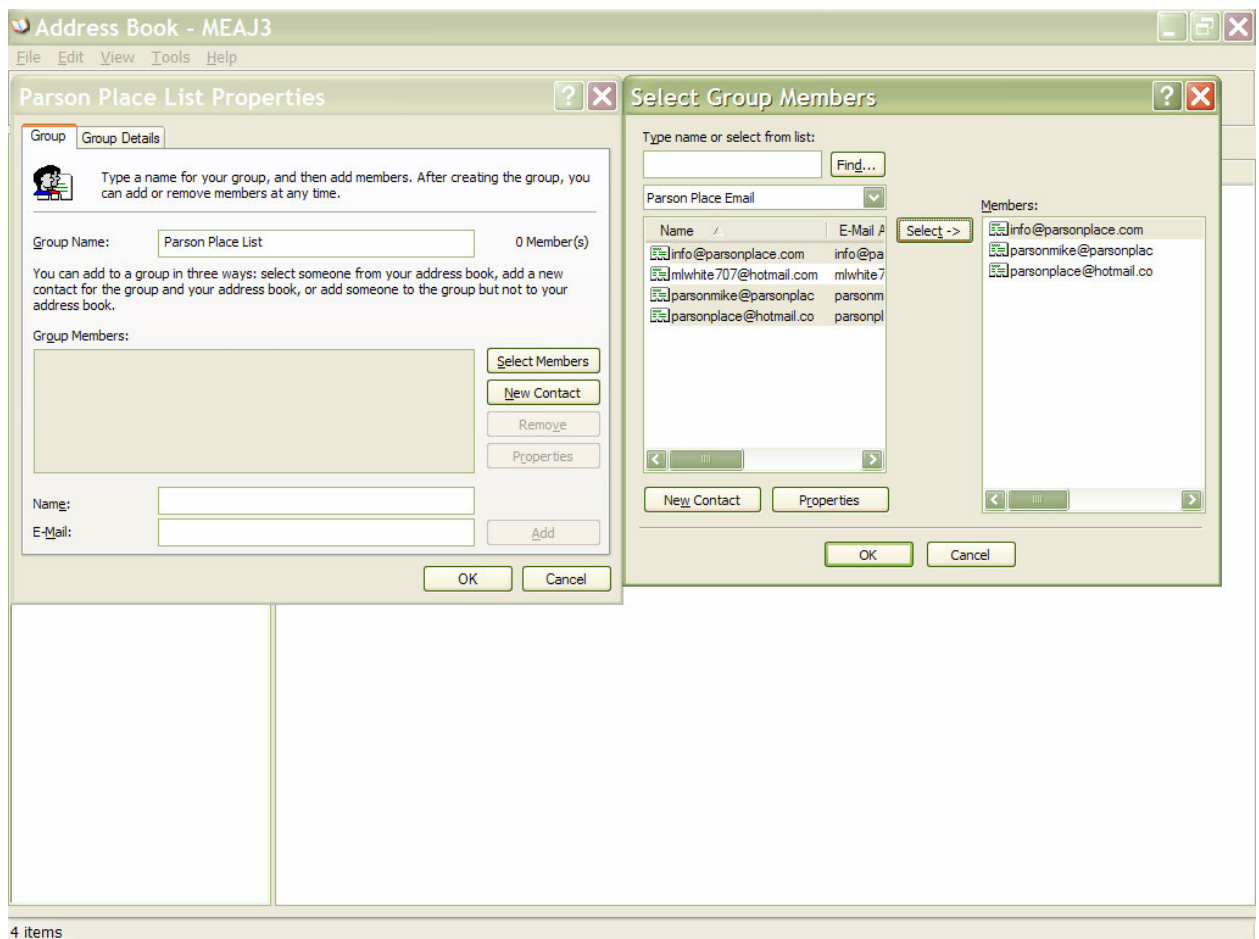


**Figure 2.1 – Automatically put email addresses you reply to in your Address Book using Microsoft Outlook Express.**

want to add everyone in your address book to your group list, just select the first address on the list, scroll to the end of the list and, while holding down the CTRL and SHIFT keys simultaneously, click your mouse pointer on the last address on the list. This will highlight every address between and including those two addresses. Now, click on the Select button to add every highlighted address to your new group list at once. Name your group something simple

that easily identifies it for you, and then click the OK button to save your group list and close the dialog.

You're all set! I've created a make believe group for the purpose of this exercise and captured a screenshot of it in Outlook Express to demonstrate for you how this is done. See Figure 2.2 for the screenshot.



**Figure 2.2 – Create and manage email groups in Microsoft Outlook Express.**

There is, however, one more thing to consider before you begin sending messages: proper protocol in sending emails to a group list. Here are a few simple "netiquette" rules you need to keep in mind.

Always put your own or a generic email address in the "To:" box and enter your "Send To:" email addresses in the blind courtesy copy ("BCC:") box. The BCC option will hide all the addresses on the outgoing message to protect the recipients' privacy and to spare them from a lengthy scroll down the page to the eventual message. Using the BCC box also provides email address security from any prying eyes, a VERY important feature in today's flood of "spam mail"!

Since the BCC box is not visible by default, you will need to enable it. To do this, start Outlook Express; create a New message; choose View | All Headers from the menu of the new message, and the BCC box will appear. Follow the same process to hide the BCC box.

Be sensitive to folks' prayer requests and how you broadcast them. There's no need to go into great, intimate detail about matters that may be deeply personal. Whether you are the Prayer List manager or one submitting a request, follow the KISS principle: "Keep it simple, Saint."

Try as much as possible to combine multiple prayer requests into one message to avoid overwhelming your list members with a flood of requests everyday. Many of us get large amounts of email everyday as it is. Increasing that number unnecessarily will cost your recipients valuable time and may even prompt them to delete some messages without reading them.

Finally, use a generic subject title, such as "Church of the Savior Prayer List" or "COS Prayer List", for all your broadcast messages so your recipients can easily identify them as coming from you. That will help prevent accidental deletions due to a mistaken identification as "spam mail".

There are probably many more common sense rules to use in managing an Email Prayer List, but I think these are likely the most important. Now, all you have left to do is gather the email addresses of those in your local church who are interested in joining your list, and you'll be ready to create your local church's Email Prayer List!

In Chapter Three, we'll consider the value and effects of creating an email announcements list. How is this different from creating an email prayer list? I'll tell you in the next chapter.