

Teen devises prayer app for iPhone

July 26 2009, By Hudson Sangree

For eons, people have reached out to the Almighty with prayers and supplications. Soon they might be able to use their iPhones.

Fair Oaks teenager Allen Wright thought up an application for the Apple iPhone called "A Note to God."

It lets iPhone users send prayers into [cyberspace](#) and allows them to read the prayers of others. The messages are stored in a database, and users remain anonymous.

Wright, 17, submitted his proposal to Medl Mobile, a Los Angeles startup that is developing apps for Apple to sell on its Web site. It selected "A Note to God" from 20,000 proposals.

"It's so simple, it's brilliant," said Andrew Maltin, one of the co-founders of Medl Mobile. "We think it's going to be extremely successful."

Wright, a junior at Del Campo High School and regular churchgoer, said he came up with the idea while lying in bed and feeling lonesome.

"If you want to send a message, and you don't have anybody to talk to, you could send a little prayer," he said.

Apps, which iPhone users download from Apple, range from free to \$5 or more. Users can play games, find restaurants or transform their iPhones into remote controls. There are hundreds of other applications.

Successful apps can generate thousands or even millions of dollars for developers. Any proceeds from "A Note to God" would be shared among Apple, Medl and Wright.

If his app becomes a big seller, Wright said he'd like to use his share of the profits to go to college.

Maltin said his firm is still waiting for approval from Apple, but it could come any day now. The [Silicon Valley](#) giant didn't respond to inquiries Monday.

[Apple](#) has rejected apps before for what it deemed inappropriate religious content, but Maltin said he didn't think that would happen with "A Note to God."

The application is not a joke, but a sincere way for people to reach out to the divine and to each other, he said.

Users can read each others' prayers and be supportive by clicking on a "thumbs up" sign, he said. Otherwise, they can't leave feedback or respond, he said.

Religious scholars contacted by The Bee on Monday welcomed the concept, although one offered a note of caution.

The Rev. James Murphy, vicar general of the Catholic Diocese of Sacramento, agreed the iPhone app "could be a high-tech form of prayer and an authentic way to express our desires to God."

"There is in each one of us the need to communicate with the divine and to reach the transcendent," he said.

But he cautioned would-be users to question their motivations.

"Prayer is direct to God, and God should be the primary motive," he said. "If the motive is to be seen by others, be careful. There's a sense in which prayer is private."

He said whatever the form, prayers are heard. "God will hear it," he said. "You don't have to have his e-mail address."

Darleen Pryds, an expert in medieval religious practices at the Franciscan School of Theology -- part of the Graduate Theological Union, in Berkeley -- called the app "a brilliant use of technology" that brings to mind the 13th-century bells summoning people to pray.

"This application sounds to me like a call to prayer," she said. "It creates a community of prayer, and by seeing other people's prayers, it is a reminder to pray yourself."

Wright, a lanky fair-haired teen, said he prays regularly and attends the New Life Community Church in Fair Oaks.

His favorite iPhone app is one that calls up quotes from Scripture.

In his suburban home on a quiet cul-de-sac, Wright demonstrated the working model of "A Note to God" on his [iPhone](#).

He said the need to write a message focuses his prayer. The messages can be as long as you want, he said.

Wright's father, Tod Wright, said he was badly hurt in a bulldozer accident two years ago and has struggled to raise his children as a single dad while being out of work.

He said his family has been through a lot of hardship in the past five years. Cancer, divorce and the death of a baby grandchild have taken

their toll, he said.

The 44-year-old Wright said people need a way to reach out when they are grappling with heartache, trouble and tragedy. His son's app might provide an outlet for their prayers.

"It's going to do something for a lot of people to help them through," he said. "Having a place you can send a message to your lost and loved ones _ people you believe are your guardian angels."

"All of us could use some place to reach out," he said. "I think Allen's is perfect."

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