

LEADING INTERCESSIONS

A Practical Guide



imagination

Opening new paths to faith

INTRODUCTION

Leading intercessions in public worship is a wonderful ministry in which to share. In our intercessions we unite our prayers for the world and its needs with the prayer of Christ himself who 'ever lives to make intercessions for us'. Those that lead intercessions have the responsibility of enabling the rest of the congregation to share in this offering of prayer as they give voice to the concerns, hopes and thanksgivings of the community.

This booklet has been prepared on behalf of the Diocesan Worship, Prayer and Spirituality Group to provide practical guidance and advice for those who lead intercessions. It can be used as the basis for providing intercessions training locally and/or as a handout for people to use in their own preparations. Further resources are suggested at the end.

WHY PRAY?

"In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he **prayed**"
Mark 1:35

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the **prayers**"
Acts 2:42

"Jesus said **'When you pray...'**" Luke 11:2

"Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving" Colossians 4:2

WHAT ARE WE CALLED TO PRAY FOR?

For our world - First of all then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions...
1 Timothy 2:1-2a

For the church - At the same time, pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ...
Colossians 4:3

On behalf of all - Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.
Ephesians 6:18

WHAT ARE OUR INTERCESSIONS FOR?

The intercessions are the sum of all our individual thoughts and prayers - a time to bring our corporate concerns to God. The Intercessor is leading the prayers of the people - which is why it's so important that it is the laity's role to lead them if possible.

Remember intercession is one type of prayer - confession, praise, thanksgiving appears elsewhere in the service. Books of prayers can provide helpful resources, but it is good to also directly address the circumstances of your parish and the issues of the day.

WHAT DO I PRAY?

Remember that there is no need to update the Almighty with all the affairs of the world or parish - God knows more than we do!

Try to be inclusive - using lists can exclude some people from the prayers. Be as all-embracing and free from political bias or personal opinion as you can. In particular avoid focussing on one side of a current issue. All those present should be able to endorse the prayers and say "Amen!" at the end.

Be careful when praying about issues which may be sensitive to members of the congregation. Try and think through how your prayers will be heard by people who have different views and experience of e.g. divorce, abortion, motherhood etc.

The best liturgical prayer is simple, brief and modest. It should use language that can be understood by everyone,

avoiding anything too trendy or too intellectual! Acronyms and Christian jargon should probably be avoided.

The context in which you are worshipping is crucial i.e. what kind of service is it; who is attending; etc. Intercessions at the main Sunday Eucharist should last **between three and five minutes**, including a period of corporate silence. This is only around four hundred words; simplicity, brevity and modesty are essential!

FRAMEWORKS TO USE

Different church traditions have different ways of praying, but there are three common patterns for intercessions:

Litanies: short sections of prayer with a repeated response at the end of each section, i.e. "Lord in your mercy...", "hear our prayer".

Collects: with a phrase at the end of each prayer which invites the congregation to respond with "Amen". (See, for example, the prayers at the end of Evening Prayer/Evensong).

Bidding prayers: with a period of silence after each introduction, concluding with either "Amen" or responses as appropriate.

It is easiest to conclude with a regularly used response, e.g. "Lord in your mercy", or "Lord, hear us", so that everyone can respond. If you are using a special response, keep it simple and snappy (e.g. "Your kingdom come; your will be done", and introduce it clearly at the beginning of the intercessions. Before people begin to pray, repeat the bidding allow a brief pause, an in breath, and lead the response. You do not want people to spend all their energy on remembering the response.

It is not necessary to use "Merciful Father..." at the end every time. You could use a Collect instead (examples can be found in the main volume of Common Worship).

TOPICS TO COVER

Not everything has to be covered every time. Common Worship instructs us that the prayers of intercession, 'usually include these concerns and may follow this sequence':

- The Church of Christ
- Creation, human society, the Sovereign and those in authority
- The local community
- Those who suffer
- The communion of saints (the departed)

The prayers will express some of the concerns very briefly. It is often helpful to follow the sequence of concerns above as our focus narrows from the all-embracing to the most local and particular. Other special concerns and thanksgivings may also be appropriate, for example the charities or groups our church supports, or issues raised by the readings.

It may be appropriate to pray for particular parish events and activities, but you do not need to cover everything. You might include prayers for those being baptised or confirmed, the sick and those who have died—generally or by name. Remember to be pastorally sensitive—hearing someone's name in the prayers may be the first time some of the congregation hear about it. Do make sure permission is given to include people's names, if they are on an 'official' prayer list, this should be fine.

If you know a wedding couple is in church to hear their banns read, it would be welcoming to include them in the prayers.

PRACTICAL ADVICE

Try not to have too many books and papers which can be distracting to the people and difficult for you to manage. If you can write all your text out on one sheet, so much the better.

Get to the place you are interceding from in good time, ready to start with confidence.

Know whether you, or the president, will invite the people to pray, e.g. “In the power of the Spirit, and in union with Christ, let us pray to the Father”. If someone else has done so, then you do not need to have an introductory sentence to your prayers.

Project your voice, speaking slowly and clearly. Use a microphone where provided (correctly positioned and on).

Prepare in advance—you could read the Collect and readings for the day to see if they suggest any particular themes, or check with the preacher. The intercessions should be an integrated part of the service. But be prepared to amend them on the day.

Sometimes it is good to use silences rather than extra words, but explain what is happening first.

Please try to avoid outdated or gender-specific language i.e. “*may men honour one another and seek the common good*”.

You could try using more than one voice, or different postures and movement within the prayers.

RESOURCES

Your parish may have a weekly **pewsheet** as a resource with local prayer intentions. You can ask for it in advance or get to church early enough on the day to digest it.

You can also use the **diocesan intercessions booklet**, which includes daily requests from the Anglican Communion, our five overseas partner dioceses, and within the diocese. The booklet may be available in church and is also on the diocesan website. There may also be local cycles of prayer for your community or in the Deanery.

It is absolutely crucial that you have seen or listened to the news that day, but do not turn the intercessions into a bulletin - God knows!

Select your resources appropriately for that service. Never be afraid to ask for advice from your clergy or Readers.

THE LITURGICAL YEAR

Remember the seasons of the church year e.g. in Advent:

In joyful expectation of his coming, let us pray in the name of Christ.

Come to your church...

Come to your world...

Come to your people...

Come to us...

For major festivals, check in case something different is planned or possible. There are sets of intercessions provided for many of the major festivals which the clergy would be happy to provide for you. They can also be found on the Church of England website or in the books listed later in this booklet.

INTERCESSIONS WITH CHILDREN PRESENT

This can be completely different in style to those for a regular Sunday Eucharist. Children are likely to have a different view of the world!

The bidding sections should be brief and simple, using easy to understand language. Lengthy lists of named people will be meaningless to most of them as will too much detailed world news.

Avoid wish lists — in helping them prepare for prayers, remind them they should reflect the needs of the community and world.

The prayers must relate at some point to the world of the child—include prayers for local nurseries and schools, for parents, for issues affecting children i.e. exam times, new terms, moving school, holidays, the whole world of

social media etc.

Perhaps involve the children in the writing or reading of prayers.

Engage their imagination—think about using movement or symbols i.e. ‘our prayers are like dropping a stone in a pond - as we watch the ripples spread, we pray for those closest to us; look how the circle is widening as we pray for those in our community; as the circle spreads to the middle of the pond, we pray for those who are caught in the centre of...; as the ripples reach the edge we pray for people who are on the fringe of church, society...; the ripples fade but our prayers continue to reach out...’

You might like to try a change of posture—stand; turn towards the door or look out of a window; open your hands or deliberately keep them together .

Create inner spiritual peace e.g. ‘let us be still and find a quiet place in our hearts as together we share our thoughts with God’ or light a candle or play soft music

Try to engage everyone present prayerfully—it is not meant to be a performance for the rest of the congregation to observe.

Small children might prefer to draw rather than write prayers.

RESOURCES

Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England (Church House Publishing, 2000)

Common Worship: Daily Prayer (Church House Publishing, 2011)

Common Worship: Festivals (Church House Publishing, 2008)

Common Worship: Times and Seasons (Church House Publishing, 2006)

New Patterns for Worship (Church House Publishing, 2012)

Church of England website includes prayers for special occasions and world events

www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship.aspx

Intercessions Handbook (John Pritchard, SPCK, 2011)

Second Intercessions Handbook (John Pritchard, SPCK, 2015)

Leading Intercessions (Raymond Chapman, Canterbury Press, 2006)

Leading Common Worship Intercessions (Doug Chaplin, Church House Publishing, 2009)

Intercessions for Years A, B and C (Ian Black, SPCK, 2009)

You might also try resources from

the Iona Community www.ionabooks.com

David Adam (Celtic style)

Susan Sayers

The Northumbria Community

www.northumbriacommunity.org

For praying with children present (also see above)

Worship Together / Festivals Together (Sandra Millar, SPCK, 2012)

Intercessions for Young People (Katie Thompson, Kevin Mayhew, 2001)

Websites:

www.worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk

www.worshipworkshop.org.uk

www.spiritualchild.co.uk

www.flamecreativekids.blogspot.co.uk