

Prayers of the People

Overview

This short course on Prayers of the People is about intercessory prayer in public worship. On completion of this course participants should be familiar with the litanies in our books of worship and be able to describe the core structure of the Prayers of the People. Participants will know where to find resources to help develop Prayers of the People and understand how to adapt litanies to add original content or write original intercessions in ways that link the Prayers of the People into the liturgy and help the congregation participate.

Introduction

It has been the role of laity since the introduction of the Book of Alternative Services (BAS) to lead the Prayers of the People in the Anglican Church of Canada. Prayers of the People are public prayers, not private prayers. The way you lead Prayers of the People needs to take account of the difference. You are leading God's people in prayer not praying on their behalf.

As a leader you need to be heard and understood, so it is important to speak clearly and in plain language. The structure of your intercessions is important if you are to have full congregational participation. If intercessions are too long or members of the congregation do not know when to respond their attention will drift. Your intercessions need to have a familiar enough structure that it invites participation; it is as simple as using a familiar introduction and response at the end of a prayer.

Prayers need to be relevant to the wider community and cover current issues and concern. The corporate act of intercession is the sum of individual thoughts and prayers, combined with the words and prayers spoken from the front. The link to individual thoughts and prayer is most easily made with silence. Silence can be very powerful. It allows time for individuals to add their particular concerns to the public prayer.

Our worship services have many opportunities for Prayers of the People. In the BAS a place for public prayer exists in the Eucharist, in Morning, Mid-day, and Evening Prayer and in Compline. There are public prayers for the Candidate in baptism services and in our Book of Occasional Celebrations there are opportunities for public prayer at services to celebrate the ending of a marriage, the commissioning of lay ministries, the blessing of a family, the blessing of a home, and the blessing of seeds at planting, farm animals, fisheries, forests, and mines. There is even a public prayer for the environment. All these examples only serve to show how important and widespread the opportunity to lead prayers could be. Even for Layreaders in BCP churches we see more lay involvement on public prayer. It wasn't always this way.

History and Development

Intercessory prayer has its roots in the word intercession. It comes from two Latin words, inter, which means "between" and cedere, which means, "to go." In the context of prayer it means we make sure we bring others into our times of conversation with God. In our intercessions we are not trying to change God's mind or convince God to act. God knows the needs of his creation. The worshipping community's prayers show we believe that Jesus Christ and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit can affect people and events in the world. Our prayers should consider our understanding of human need and the Gospel vision for God's Kingdom.

Prayers of the People were included in the Eucharist from the earliest times. After Pope Gregory (590-604) the priest's Eucharistic prayer included prayers for the living and dead and the responsibility for the prayers shifted to the clergy. The protestant reformation saw new liturgies developed and introduced that moved the prayers out of the Eucharistic Prayer to their own place between the Sermon and the Eucharistic prayer. Our Book of Common Prayer follows this tradition with Prayers of the People between the Sermon and the Confession. The rubrics of the BCP call for the priest to lead these intercessions.

Liturgical revisions in the late twentieth century in the national churches of the worldwide Anglican Communion reintroduced lay-led intercessions. The Anglican Church of Canada adopted these liturgical revisions with the BAS. The rubrics of the BAS provide some guidance on the intention of the liturgists with respect to the Prayers of the People.

"The leader of the Prayers of the People should use creativity and discretion in the planning of the intercessions and thanksgivings, and scope should be provided for members of the congregation to add their own petitions. The suggested forms are examples; these may be modified as local customs and needs require. The use of silence in the intercessions is optional." (BAS page 183)

A deacon or lay member of the community leads the Prayers of the People after the following model. Intercession or thanksgiving may be offered for

*the Church
the Queen and all in authority
the world
the local community
those in need
the departed.*

A short litany may be selected from pp. 110–127. Other prayers are found on pp. 675–684. These prayers may be modified in accordance with local need, or extempore forms of prayer may be used. (BAS Page 190)

Creativity, discretion, congregational participation, flexibility, and the use of silence are all noted as important in the prayers. There is also a six-part structure and litanies and prayers available to guide those leading the prayers. The intent was never that prayers simply be read from a book. Prayers of the People need the context of the worshipping congregation added by a leader to truly be from the community.

Resources

There are many resources available to help anyone interested in writing Prayers of the People. Links to online resources and a bibliography of printed resources is at the end of the notes. The BAS has helpful litanies on pages 110-129, 675-683, & 691. One book I have found useful in my time as a Layreader and Deacon is *Leading Intercessions* by Raymond Chapman. Layreaders in my parish find *Prayers of Intercession for Common Worship* by Susan Sayers helpful. Another good resource is the Vanderbilt Divinity Library Lectionary and Prayer Resources. Choose the prayer link in the upper right side of the page and you will find great introductory and closing prayers for intercessions that link with the lectionary readings for Sunday. The Diocese of Springfield has links to Prayers for just about every Sunday in the three-year lectionary and St Paul's Episcopal Church in Fayetteville has Prayers of the People for each Sunday. Textweek.com, a great resource for all things about worship has a section on resources for prayers and litanies themed for each Sunday. Use these resources as a source, as examples, or as a guide to prayers you develop for your congregation.

A Model to Follow

Raymond Chapman's structure for Prayers of the People is a useful model. He starts with a brief invitation to prayer based on the Gospel for the Principal Service for Sunday, festivals, or special occasions. His intercessions connect with the lectionary Scripture readings creating links within the service. His Prayers of the People follow five suggested headings of subjects. This can be adapted to the six headings of the BAS easily as shown in the model.

Introduction

The prayers begin with a brief invitation based on the Gospel read in the worship service. At the end of the introduction the corporate response may be identified for the congregation, for example, Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

1. The Church

The first prayer is always on behalf of all Christians for the Church as the Body of Christ on earth and for Christ's people in their lives of service.

2. The world

Pray for human needs in the world that God created and Christ came to save so that creation may fulfil God's divine purpose. This prayer can be expanded to include the Queen and those in authority, or it can be added as a separate intercession.

3. The community

Pray for the concerns most near to us: families, friends, and neighbours. This is the opportunity to pray for more specific concerns. We also pray here for our local community.

4. The suffering

God's compassion reaches out to every one, particularly those who suffer. This intercession offers our own compassion and desire to help people, known and unknown, who are suffering.

5. The Communion of Saints

Prayers for the dead have been part of our liturgy since the earliest days of the Church. When we remember the dead we recall our own mortality and affirm our belief in resurrection and eternal life and to the fellowship of all Christians, living and departed.

Conclusion

The prayers of intercession conclude with sentences that gather the petitions together and offer them on behalf of the whole congregation.

Our BAS includes a rubric on p191 that allows a penitential intercession in the Prayers of the People to replace the Confession. If this approach were used in your parish then an additional penitential intercession would be appropriate. The prayer would express a community's confession of what they have done and what they have not done in their lives that displeases God and pray for forgiveness.

Suggestions for Leading Intercessions

Here are some suggestions for anyone leading intercessions¹:

As you prepare

1. Pray for guidance as you prepare.
2. Read the scripture passages for the day
3. Check if there is a particular theme for the service that should be picked up in the intercessions.

¹ Adapted from Raymond Chapman, *Leading Intercessions* Enlarged Edition, Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2006, pp243-244, John Pritchard, *Leading Intercessions; creative ideas for public and private prayer*, Liturgical Press: Collegeville MN, 2004, pp 1-2, and David Jaspar, "Leading Intercessions in the Eucharist," Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway. May 2016, <https://church.scot/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Leading-Intercessions-in-the-Eucharist.pdf> (accessed March 9, 2017).

4. Have a clear structure but do not be afraid of variety in your intercessions. Our prayers should reflect God's depth and diversity.
5. Find out about sickness, trouble, or recent deaths in the community. Respect confidentiality; not everyone wants their concerns mentioned publicly.

As you write

6. Avoid personal opinions and expressing judgement. We are all sinners and God loves all God's children. The oppressors need prayer as much as the oppressed.
7. Write down what you want to say fully or in notes, being sure to insert any special needs in the appropriate places so everything flows smoothly.
8. Address biddings to the people and prayers to God; the two are often confused.
 - Bidding: "We remember the loss of life in the storm..."
 - Prayer: "God, we pray for ..."
9. "We pray for..." is a better way to start a prayer than, "We pray that..."
10. We pray to God the Father, through God the Son, and by or in God the Holy Spirit.
11. Pray about the real world. Show how the hour in worship connects with the other 167 hours in the week. Keep up to date with the news, both national and local, and who from the community needs prayer.
12. Make your prayers specific. Use examples from life, news reports, and specific people. Word pictures and images can help.
13. Do not make intercessions too particular; God does not need all the details and it is easy to cause offence by missing something or forgetting someone.
14. Do not take too long. One letter-sized page of typed intercessions offers a good balance for the service.

As you lead

15. Include supplementary information in the practice of your local church, for example cycles of prayer, or specific prayer requests.
16. Take advantage of silence to give real time for prayer; do not panic after a few seconds of silence. Silence allows brief transitions from corporate to private prayer, where we spend time individually with God.
17. Responses are good because they involve people, but the responses need to be short enough to remember and people need to know when to respond after prayer or silence.
18. Use your natural voice adapted only so people can hear you clearly and audibly. Clarity and good projection are important.
19. Be reverent and confident. You are leading prayer to a loving God in the presence of other Christians. You are with family.

Resources

Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada. Anglican Book Centre: Toronto, 1985.

Book of Common Prayer. Anglican Book Centre: Toronto, 1962.

Chapman, Raymond. *Leading Intercessions* Enlarged Edition. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2006.

Sayers, Susan. *Prayers of Intercession for Common Worship*. Kevin Mayhew Ltd: 1999.

Pritchard, John. *Leading Intercessions; creative ideas for public and private prayer*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004.

The Diocese of Fredericton Prayer Resource links

<http://anglican.nb.ca/wp/prayer/resources/>

The Diocese of Springfield Prayers of the People

www.episcopalspringfield.org/prayers-of-the-people/

The Vanderbilt Divinity Library Lectionary and Prayer Resources

<http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/>

St Paul's Episcopal Church Fayetteville, Arkansas

<http://stpaulsfay.org/sunday-schedule/prayers-of-the-people/>

Textweek.com

www.textweek.com

Anglican Liturgical Texts online: <http://www.anglican.ca/about/liturgicaltexts/>

Texts in PDF format:

- **[The Book of Alternative Services](#)**, despite its name “alternative,” has become the primary worship text for Sunday services and other major liturgical celebrations of the Anglican Church of Canada. 2010 marks the 25th anniversary of its publication. Note: Includes the addition to the Baptismal Covenant requested in [resolution C001](#) of Joint Assembly 2013.
- **[For All the Saints](#)** is a resource to accompany the Calendar of Holy Persons in the BAS. It includes propers for memorials, commemorations, and saints' days, along with biographical information and primary source readings.
- **[Occasional Celebrations](#)** is a collection of resources for certain pastoral and seasonal occasional services, including additional funeral rites, celebrations of new ministries, and home blessing rites.
- **[Supplementary Eucharistic Prayers, Services of the Word, and Night Prayer](#)** is the most substantial addition to the BAS. Authorized by General Synod in 2001, it contains additional rites for Sunday services.
- **[The Book of Common Prayer](#)**, 1962 version, is a revision of the 1918 Canadian Book of Common Prayer.

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