



Diocese of Monmouth · Esgobaeth Mynwy

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Worship Leader

Session 3 – Group Course

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Session 3: Leading public prayers

Introductory Reading

Prayer is at the heart of all worship and at the heart of all our prayer is our recognition that God is revealed to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Although we do on occasion address our prayers directly to Christ or to the Holy Spirit, our tradition in worship is to address our prayers to God our Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit. This tradition in fact helps us to understand the richness of our relationship with a Trinitarian God and the different ways in which we can encounter God in worship as our creator, redeemer and guide.

Prayer is at the heart of our relationship with God and prayer helps us to discern what God wants us to do and to be. Prayer is transformative as it helps us to grow in holiness and to be more Christ-like in our thoughts, words and deeds.

Worship helps us to recognise that there are different types of prayer. Simply put, there are times for saying, 'sorry God', times for saying, 'God be praised', times for asking, 'please God', times for saying 'thank you God' and times for saying 'may God bless'. In our worship there are therefore prayers of confession, songs of praise, prayers of petition or intercession, prayers of thanksgiving and prayers of blessing. This is true of all public worship and can be clearly seen in the Eucharist, in Services of the Word and in Morning and Evening Prayer.

And just as there are different types of prayer addressed to God in our worship, so there are different vehicles through which this prayer is offered. Within the Anglican tradition there are psalms, canticles, collects, hymns, prayers of confession and absolution, prayers of thanksgiving, and prayers of intercession.

Psalms come from the Old Testament and were used in the ancient worship of Israel. Canticles are most often drawn from the Bible or other ancient writings. Some, like the Magnificat, may have been hymns in the early church. Collects are prayers provided by the Church in Wales (mostly shared with the Church of England) that focus the theme of the day, marking particular seasons, festivals and saint's days. We express these prayers through words, in music and in silence, and we do so standing, kneeling or sitting. Other denominations and traditions share much of these forms and traditions while expressing them in different ways and with different emphases.



When individuals are asked to lead prayers in church it is almost always a request to lead the intercessions. Prayers of intercession or petition have occurred in Christian worship from the beginning.

In the earliest known Eucharistic liturgies, prayers of intercession followed the readings and the sermon, as in modern liturgies, and may well have consisted of a number of biddings, focussing the prayer of the people on a particular theme, read by the deacon that were followed by periods of silent congregational prayer.

In historic Anglican liturgies, intercessions are traditionally read by the priest, but modern liturgies are more flexible in form and allow for intercessions to be led by members of the church congregation. In either case they are the prayers of the people and of the Church, not of one individual. Various forms of pre-prepared intercessions are available but many feel that it is important for those leading intercessory prayer to be creative and to use their own prayers if at all possible.

Traditionally, intercessions have been offered for the Church, the world, those who are sick or in trouble and those who have died or are bereaved. In some forms of intercession, there is also a section for prayers for the local community. In the Order for the Holy Eucharist (Church in Wales 2004) it is suggested that the person leading the intercessions prays for:

- The Church, universal and local, including the bishop and clergy;
- The created order, the nations of the world, our own nation;
- Those in any kind of need;
- The local community;
- The communion of saints.

The service suggests that silence is kept after each bidding and that there be an appropriate response after each section of the prayers, most commonly:

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

As an alternative to this order, provision is made for the use of one of four printed forms or one of the Shorter Litanies from the order of Morning or Evening Prayer.

Although there is an opportunity to give voice to the concerns, hopes and fears of the congregation when leading intercessory prayer, it will also be important to do so in the setting provided by each particular service. Therefore, the form and context of intercessory prayer will reflect the different seasons of the Church's year,



the style and context of the liturgy and the people present. There will also be different degrees of formality and intimacy depending on the form and intention of the worship.

However, particularly in the Eucharist, this part of the service is designed to enable the church to focus on the needs of others. It is petition. We are praying for others and words that have been used for this purpose in traditional liturgies have included, 'strengthen', 'bless and guide', 'comfort and heal', 'give grace to', 'remember those'. We are asking God to act in the lives of others.

Therefore, we need to be specific about our concerns and be careful to name those in need. If there is a Diocesan Prayer Diary or denominational equivalent, then it is appropriate to use it. It is good to name individuals in need of our prayers but wise to make sure that they have given their permission before doing so. When the prayers are set within a non-Eucharistic service such as a Service of the Word, there will be more freedom and it is important, in that context, to consider adding prayers of thanksgiving to those of intercession, giving thanks to God for his gifts.

As usual, practical details are important:

- If you have been asked to lead intercessions give yourself plenty of time to prepare.
- Read and prayerfully reflect on the scriptures set for the day.
- Check with the person who is leading the service to see if they have any particular form they would like you to follow or any themes they would like you to reflect.
- Work with a clear structure.
- Don't pray on behalf of the congregation, pray with them, inspiring and inviting their prayers to be offered with yours.
- Keep the prayers short and simple. Avoid preaching at the congregation or trying to provide a theological treatise. Use short words where possible and don't make the prayers complicated.
- Make the requests particular and topical, rooting them in the needs of the church, world and community, but be careful about telling God what he should do.
- Don't assume a political or moral stance that might be divisive or exclude individuals or groups of people.
- Avoid giving news bulletins or notices in the prayers (eg. *We pray for the church lunch which will take place on Tuesday from 12.30 – 2*).



- When praying for those who are sick or in need by name, give space for the congregation to also pray for others who are known to them.
- Don't rush the prayers and allow time for silence if it is appropriate.
- Use language which is as simple and specific as possible. Be inclusive.

Group Work Discussion

1. Gathering

Spend a few minutes in silence, offering any worries or concerns from everyday life to God, and acknowledging God's presence among you as you meet together.

**Lord of heaven and earth,
as Jesus taught his disciples to be persistent in prayer,
give us patience and courage never to lose hope,
but always to bring our prayers before you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

2. Reflecting

Ask for a volunteer to read the set of less than ideal intercessions on the next page, carefully prepared from intercessions heard in church at different times!

Identify the mistakes that are being made and why they are problematic.

In pairs, create your own list of helpful tips, a set of dos and don'ts, for those leading intercessions



Dear Heavenly Father Jesus Son of God

I want to thank and praise you that thou art begotten not made, coequal, uncreated, omnipotent, omniscient, immutable and unchangeable.

Anyway, Lord, as you know very well, we have our Church Fete on Sunday and Mavis always works so hard making all the cakes so please make sure it doesn't rain. We don't want to get flooded out like these poor people in Bangladesh last week and while we think of them Lord Jesus please have mercy on them too even though they are all Muslims.

And as we are thinking Father about people who are suffering at the moment I want to mention Jeff especially Lord Jesus cos as you know he has just gone in to hospital again and had his piles sorted out. They've been giving him terrible trouble again despite that special cushion the Wardens gave him to sit on in the pews. Anyway Gladys and I went to see him on Friday and he sends his best wishes to everyone here today and said he will see us at the Fete so that is nice.

On the subject of the Fete we are happy that the MP is coming and Lord we ask you to bless him and his Party for all their good work especially with the elections coming up. May your will be done and the right candidate be re-elected. Lord we heard about the Good Samaritan this morning, help us to remember that he could only help the poor man because he had the money to do it and it hadn't all been taken off him in tax and given to these scroungers.

Please bless our Vicar, Father, she works very hard even if she doesn't always get to visit the people who are sick. Please help her not to be so tired and help her have the energy to visit all the people who need Home Communion. This week if possible.

And Lord Jesus I just want to say that we were all very sorry to lose Frank this week. His funeral is in church on Wednesday at 2pm and Mavis and the team are putting on a buffet in the Hall afterwards so please do stay for that. We hope that he will get to go to heaven soon. And please forgive the Bishop, Lord, for all these silly ideas about ministry areas that they were going on about at the meeting last week. We know you love them Lord and their heart is in the right place but some of us have been living round here for 50 years and we know what works and what doesn't as of course thou knowest also.

Anyway the Vicar was saying I go on far too long in the prayers, so I'll stop now and we'll finish with the response printed in your service sheets.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer.
Amen.



3. Exploring

In pairs, choose one of these services to write a set of intercessions for:

- A family Harvest Festival
- Midnight Mass
- Mothering Sunday
- Morning Prayer Service
- Evening Prayer at the end of a Lent retreat

Use the structure from our introductory reading as a guide to help you:

- The Church, universal and local, including the bishop and clergy;
- The created order, the nations of the world, our own nation;
- Those in any kind of need;
- The local community;
- The communion of saints.

As a group, share your intercessions, praying them through in turn, as if part of a service.

4. Responding and Concluding

- a. Each share briefly one particular thing you have learned from this session.
- b. Plan your preparation for the next session.
- c. Finish by saying the Grace together, or some other form of prayer.

