

CHAPTER 5

Preparation

The Eucharist is a celebration of the whole community. Hence, representatives of the whole community appropriately plan and evaluate its liturgical life. Such a worship committee can include regulars from the various service times, representatives from servers, choir, music group, ushers, and also the vestry (so that the committee can report to that body). It can spend some time on studying liturgical principles before beginning to plan the community's worship.

The worship committee can discuss the worship environment, worship times, baptism preparation, how best to celebrate the liturgical year in this particular context, and so on. As well as this, different planning groups can organise a service week by week. Only those who are part of the particular service (always including the presider) would be members of its planning group.

Planning groups create liturgy out of the interchange between two agendas: the liturgical material (liturgical season, feast, appointed readings etc.) and the present experience of the community (local, world events etc.). A community may find a particular Eucharistic Liturgy appropriate to a particular liturgical season. Some communities will use one Liturgy more regularly so that its responses are memorised or because it fits with a musical setting this community normally uses. Other decisions will not have to be made week by week as it is disconcerting to congregations if there are too many surprises and there is never a familiarity built up, and a sense of "common prayer." Education and study of liturgy is an essential component to all this preparation.

A pew leaflet can give all the information needed for a service including page numbers from *A New Zealand Prayer Book* and hymn and song numbers. In a brief moment before the service, any new songs can be learnt, or changes made to the regular structure can be announced.

Preparation also involves regular training and rehearsal of servers, readers, leaders of prayers, musicians, and those who administer communion. The presider will be well prepared. Regulars may prepare at home, maybe reading

the scriptures and praying either alone or with others. Someone may be baking the bread that will be used.

Before the service, all the books for the service need to be in place with the variant material marked, particularly for the presider. Vessels and linen are placed on the credence table. The bread and the pitcher or carafe of wine is on the gifts table which may be in a central aisle or near the entrance. Contributions of food for those in need may be placed beside it. Some communities may choose to place the collection plate here too, with people making their offering as they enter.

All who have a leadership role gather well before the celebration so that final preparation can be completed.

A check list

Each community may produce its own check list for planning. Such a list could include questions such as the following:

- * On this occasion, do any changes need to be made to the liturgical space (colour, banners, seating)?
- * What will there be while the congregation assembles (taped music, silence, performed music, choruses)?
- * Is there a rehearsal time beforehand? Who will lead it?
- * When will the notices be given (before the service, before the Sermon, before the Peace, before the Dismissal, at the end of the service)?
- * How will the ministers and choir enter? An entrance procession is relatively recent in Christian history. If it is used can the greeting be said before this formal entrance and the procession enter during the singing of "Glory to God in the highest" (or Kyries, or other hymn, with the Collect for Purity omitted)?

* Can the Gathering of the Community be varied to set the tone of the service (quiet and penitential in Lent, rejoicing in the Easter season)? Can it be simplified when there is a baptism, funeral, wedding, imposition of ashes, sprinkling of the community with water (*asperges*)? Is the Daily Office an appropriate alternative Gathering?

* How will the readings be introduced? Is it helpful if several voices take different parts in a dramatic reading? Can a reading be acted out?

* Would it be appropriate to have drama, or liturgical dance, or a talk to the children, or a story, or a musical offering by choir, musicians or soloist? When?

* Is a Creed particularly appropriate for this occasion? Nearly all our eucharistic prayers repeat a lot of credal material. Does the feast suggest a renewal of baptismal vows?

* What is done with the collection during the service? Why?

* Is it more appropriate not to have a blessing on this occasion? The eucharistic action is the main source of blessing and priestly blessings only grew when more and more people at the service did not receive communion. Will blessings be reserved for certain liturgical seasons and feasts?

* Is the final hymn sung before the Prayer After Communion or before the Dismissal of the Community? Is the Dismissal actually the dismissal or is it followed by a "walking out" hymn? It is worth reflecting that none of the Eucharistic Liturgies provide for a hymn after the Dismissal (and that this is also the case in other revised Prayer Books).

As planning for the service progresses there will be another set of questions about the overall service to keep in mind. Such a list may include questions such as the following:

Is there a balance between word, prayer, singing, and action? Is the worship directed to God? Is there enough silence? Is there too much passivity? Is there a balance between receiving and responding? Is one posture maintained for too long? Is the structure clear? Are the hymns or songs too close together? Is there a variety of people taking part? Is the service inclusive of all present, the differently-abled, elderly, different cultures, children, single people, the bereaved, members of broken families? Is there any recognition that this service occurs in Aotearoa-New Zealand? Does the material produced locally fit in well with the inclusive language style of *A New Zealand Prayer Book*?

Some Questions

Are there circumstances within the worship community where you are involved that mean your context is radically different from the one described in the opening paragraphs?

How significant are these differences?