

CHAPTER 6

The Gathering of the Community

The people and presiding priest gather in the Lord's name

The objective of the Gathering of the Community, as this title suggests, is to gather those assembled into a community. This prepares them to hear what the Spirit is saying in the Proclamation, and to celebrate the Eucharist. The Gathering in *A New Zealand Prayer Book* has a variety of components from which careful choice needs to be made for it not to feel like a "cluttered vestibule," and for it to fulfill its purpose.

The Gathering establishes the mood of the service. Through discriminating choice from the components it can enhance the sense of celebration and community (rather than introspective individualism). It is worth reflecting how hymns, announcements, the "Collect for Purity," and penitential elements, if used, can achieve this.

In the early church, the greeting established the community. By the fifth century in the West the Collect helped to collect the eucharistic community. There is a growing revival of the tradition that the Collect of the Day is the opening prayer of the Eucharist. The optional "Collect for Purity" may be used for personal preparation prior to the service. It may also suitably introduce sprinkling with water. Such sprinkling could be particularly appropriate in the Easter Season, which is recovering its association with baptism.

The greeting and Collect form the primary elements of the Gathering. Singing together can also powerfully bind people and it is worth noting where hymns or other songs are placed in our Prayer Book. The shape of the Gathering is given as: greeting, song of praise, prayer. Having variety which reflects the liturgical season or particular day assists the Gathering in fulfilling its purpose.

In the course of history devotional material increased and distorted the proportions of this "entrance rite" so that the readings were shortened as the

beginning of the service grew longer. With the *Gathering of the Community in A New Zealand Prayer Book* it is possible to restore the shape of the liturgy, and renew our sense of the community gathering to hear and respond to what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

The entrance

The entrance of the priest and any other ministers is preferably through the congregation rather than merely an entry from right or left in front of the people. It is worth reflecting how much easier it is to gather a community after having moved through it. Furthermore, the ministers, clergy and laity alike, are then seen to come from the congregation, just as those who later read, distribute communion and so on, will do. In planning the entrance, the feeling of the ministers going to a "holy" place and leaving everyone else behind needs to be avoided.

If a cross is part of the procession, the emphasis is not on the ministers being led in by the cross, rather it needs to be on the cross being brought in by the ministers. This means it needs to be placed in prominence for the celebration. If this cross disappears from view after the procession the wrong point is being made. Similarly the symbolism is devalued by having several crosses visible.

The Bible or Gospel Book may also be brought in procession. Traditionally the deacon who would read the Gospel carried it in, holding it high, and placed it on the lectern, or on the altar if it was only to be used for the Gospel reading with a Gospel procession. Such a bringing in of the scriptures parallels the bringing forward of the bread and wine at the Preparation of the Gifts.

Candles, if carried in the procession, need to be seen to honour the cross or scriptures, rather than merely enhancing the entrance of the ministers.

If incense is used during the entrance, it is carried at the front of the entrance procession. The presider may cense the holy table during the opening song of praise. As the holy table is usually censed during the Preparation of the Gifts, this initial censuring may appropriately be omitted.

The greeting

The presider opens wide the arms in welcome and greets the assembly. A single greeting is all that is required. When using *Thanksgiving of the People of God* (page 404) the presider chooses just one of the greetings. From Easter Day up to and including the Day of Pentecost the following appropriately precedes (or replaces) the greeting at every Eucharist:

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

The greeting establishes the relationship between the presider and the individuals present and hence is part of gathering these individuals into a community. Hence it is the presider who gives the greeting rather than delegating this to another. Furthermore, the greeting comes as early as possible. We do not greet someone half way through a conversation. To be greeted by "Good morning" and then have a hymn, theme, scripture verse, announcement of Prayer Book page numbers and only then to hear "Grace and peace to you from God" deprives this greeting of its purpose, and gives the impression that we are only saying this "because it is in the book."

"Grace and peace to you from God."

The Sentence of the Day

Reading the Sentence is optional. Its inclusion can all too easily increase the sense that the Gathering is cluttered and lacks shape and direction. It might normally be omitted.

If it is decided to read a sentence of scripture at the beginning of the service it should call to worship and set the mood (when there is music, this is usually done by the opening hymn). The sentences provided in *A New Zealand Prayer Book* are in several forms. Some proclaim a theme (in which case they need to be set in context by a brief introduction). Others are a brief prayer. This can become confused with the Collect (particularly if the Sentence is read in the alternative position immediately before the Collect). An alternative use for the Sentence is as part of an "Alleluia verse" immediately before the reading of the Gospel.

The Song of Praise

Each Eucharistic Liturgy provides for a hymn after the greeting and presents an option in the text ("Glory to God in the highest," page 405; the Benedicite Aotearoa, page 457; and two options, pages 477 and 478). This first hymn functions as a "gathering song" and also sets the mood for the service (rather than needing to be strictly thematic). It is appropriate that the Glory to God be used for this during the Christmas season and from Easter Day through the Day of Pentecost. It is not used during the seasons of Advent and Lent. If necessary, various metrical versions of the Glory to God are available (which can be sung to well known tunes). Furthermore, during the Easter season it may be more appropriate to sing a joyful hymn which captures resurrection delight more immediately than the Glory to God.

Penitential elements in the Gathering

The sacrament of baptism cleanses from sin and initiates a lifelong process of

repentance and forgiveness. The Eucharist is a dimension of this process, renewing the baptismal covenant, and mediating Christ's sacrifice "for the forgiveness of sins." This rich understanding of the Eucharist meant that for most of the church's history there was no verbal confession and absolution within the eucharistic liturgy. The whole eucharistic action was seen to be reconciling. Penitential practices from private medieval piety, however, were embodied into the first Anglican Prayer Book in 1549 and have shaped Anglican piety to this day.

Modern liturgical renewal is rediscovering the earlier insight that "as we take part, as we break bread and share the cup, our forgiveness is renewed and we are cleansed" (page 403). *A Form for Ordering the Eucharist* (pages 511 ff.) makes clear that verbal confession and absolution is not an essential element of the eucharistic liturgy. Anglican eucharistic revisions in the United States of America, Canada, and elsewhere, have highlighted this rediscovery by making confession and absolution optional within their revised rites.

This in no way diminishes sin, its gravity, or the necessity of repentance. What is being taken more seriously is that penitential elements may be included in the Prayers of the People, and be sincerely expressed in the Peace and the Lord's Prayer. Reconciliation is also celebrated in the breaking of the bread, receiving communion, and so on. Verbal confession and absolution is only one way in which, on particular occasions, reconciliation may be expressed.

Even where the confession as printed in the Prayer Book is used regularly, there can be a variety of approaches, and care needs to be taken that there are not awkward shifts of tone at the beginning of the Eucharist. Furthermore, pages 405-407, for example, present mostly optional penitential material from which a careful choice needs to be made for each occasion.

Although kneeling has been traditional for the confession, it may be worth experimenting with standing. The liturgical season and the position of penitential material in the service may influence the posture chosen for it. Although the Prayer Book provides suggestions, "it is left open to each congregation to decide whether to sit, stand or kneel at the various parts of the service" (page xv).

The Glory to God or another hymn may be sung after the Absolution (page 408). If there is no hymn until this point, this also will provide a different

atmosphere for the Gathering than when a service begins with a hymn. This format could be tried for Lent, for example.

As mentioned above, *A Form for Ordering the Eucharist* (pages 511-514) authorises Eucharists which do not use the confession printed in the Prayer Book, or which use it in a different position. Here, then, are some suggested alternatives.

1. The confession and absolution and its associated material could be omitted. This may require some education.

It is important not to overburden the eucharistic action with words. This becomes a greater risk when another rite is celebrated in the context of the Eucharist (e.g. a baptism, confirmation, funeral, wedding, lighting of Advent candles, Palm Sunday procession, etc.). It is especially appropriate to omit the confession when this happens. It might also be omitted in the Easter Season.

2. The model on pages 459-460 could be followed. The invocations can be addressed to each of the persons of the Trinity, or all three invocations can be addressed to Christ.

This form can easily replace the confession, for example, in *Thanksgiving of the People of God*, once the community regularly uses the following pattern for the Kyries:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

When first introducing this form, if not printed, the leader could say, "please repeat *Lord have mercy* and *Christ have mercy* after me." Some communities

use a chant of the Kyries. In that case this format can be naturally introduced by chanting the invocations.

A theme or the readings that follow may be alluded to in the invocations. Our failings may be confessed (as in both examples on page 459) or God's goodness may be affirmed. Both elements may be included, beginning, for example, with our failure and concluding with God's grace. The two examples which follow are only given in the hope that leaders will be encouraged to prepare their own sentences. The first focuses on affirmation, the second on confession and affirmation.

a) So that through this Eucharist we may come to share in God's eternal banquet, in silence before God we confess our sins.

Silence

Jesus, you came to call us to repentance.

Lord, have mercy. (or **Kyrie eleison** sung)

Lord, have mercy.

You come in word and sacrament
to share your life abundant.

Christ, have mercy. (or **Christe eleison** sung)

Christ, have mercy.

You will come again in glory
to renew the whole creation.

Lord, have mercy. (or **Kyrie eleison** sung)

Lord, have mercy.

God the Creator brings you new life,
forgives and redeems you.

Take hold of this forgiveness
and live your life

in the Spirit of Jesus.

Amen.

b) In silence we recall God's love
and confess our failure to respond.

Silence

We have traveled to a distant country
and squandered our gifts and resources.

Lord, have mercy. (or **Kyrie eleison** sung)

Lord, have mercy.

We have turned our back on love
and sought our own selfish pleasures.

Christ, have mercy. (or **Christe eleison** sung)

Christ, have mercy.

But you wait
and with compassion you run to meet us
and embrace us when we turn to you.

Lord, have mercy. (or **Kyrie eleison** sung)

Lord, have mercy.

Patient God,
may this banquet truly be to us
the sign of your prodigal love
by which we are forgiven and restored
through Jesus Christ.

Amen.

3. The penitential material could be included in the Prayers of the People (pages

411-418). This is the pattern in *The Book of Common Prayer*, and an option in *A New Zealand Prayer Book* (page 730). It allows reflection on sinfulness to be in response to the readings, leads naturally into the Peace, and simplifies the Gathering of the Community (in which the assembly remains standing throughout).

Including penitence in the Prayers of the People necessitates coordination between the presider and the one leading the Prayers, so that the penitential material does not occur at two points.

If the Prayers of the People are in the form of a litany, an example of penitence could be, "We pray to you also for the forgiveness of our sins, and the grace of the Holy Spirit to amend our lives (...pause...) God of love **grant our prayer.**"

If biddings introduce parts of the Prayers of the People ("we pray for the church... we pray for the world..."), an example of penitence could be, "We pray for the forgiveness of our sins." This may be followed by silence and the confession (page 407, if it is known by heart), concluded by the presiding priest with an absolution or a suitable collect. Or the bidding may be followed by an appropriate prayer.

For example: God, the source of all unity,
 your risen Christ gave peace to the disciples,
 look not on our sins but on the faith of your church
 and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom
 now and for ever.
 Amen.

Such a prayer leads naturally into the Peace.

4. A rite of sprinkling with water may be used in the Gathering of the Community. This might be especially appropriate in the Easter Season.

The font filled with water may provide the focus, or a vessel containing

water may be placed before the presider who addresses the assembly in these or similar words:

Dear friends, in baptism we have been buried
and raised to new life with Christ,
may God keep us faithful to the Spirit given to us.

Let us give thanks to God.

It is right to offer thanks and praise.

We thank you, God, for your love in all creation,
especially for your gift of water
to sustain, refresh and cleanse all life.

May this water remind us of our baptism
in which we were born anew
and made members of your forgiven people.

May Christ keep us faithful to our calling,
now and for ever.

Amen.

(There may be a silent moment of confession.) The assembly is sprinkled. An appropriate song may be sung. Either the Collect of the Day, a Song of Praise, or an absolution or prayer for forgiveness follows. For example:

Loving God,
through this Eucharist we celebrate
cleanse us of our sins
so that we may come to share your eternal banquet;
in Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

The Collect of the Day

Along with the greeting the Collect of the Day lies at the heart of the Gathering of the Community. Originally the readings at the Eucharist were preceded by nothing more than a greeting. In various traditions at different times there have been forms of "variable prayers" at this point. It appears that during the fifth century an evolution occurred in the West which resulted in the collect as we now have it. It was used to gather (or "collect") the various members in preparation for corporate worship, and it did this by "collecting" the silent prayers of the community. With the renewal of the corporate understanding of Christian worship, particularly in the Eucharist, the Collect may yield surprising fruit.

The presider invites everyone to pray. All then pray in silence. When they have prayed sufficiently the presider draws the praying together in the Collect. This concludes the Gathering of the Community. An undercurrent of prayerfulness has been established, and all have been drawn deeper into their relationship with God and with each other.

Like a sonnet or haiku, the traditional collect has a particular structure. A collect may have five parts which may be summarised as follows (illustrated by the "Collect for Purity"):

You (Address)	"Almighty God,"
Who (Attribution)	"to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden;"
Do (Petition)	"cleans the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,"
To (Consequence)	"so that we may truly love you and worthily praise your holy name;"
Through (Mediation)	"through our Saviour, Jesus Christ."

The simplest collects have an address (You), petition (Do), and mediation (Through). Those people using the Three Year Series can use the Prayer Book's cross-reference to the Two Year Series for a suitable collect or find this in *The New Zealand Lectionary*. They may also use an appropriate collect from any source (page 691), or they may prefer to produce their own.

In order to write a collect it is best to begin constructing the petition (Do) first. The address (You) and attribution (Who) can then be written in tune with the petition. In contemporary English the attribution (the "Who" section) is now more generally in a "you..." form rather than a "who..." form. For example, "Everloving God, you anointed Jesus..." is preferable to "Everloving God, who anointed Jesus..."

At the Eucharist we gather as Christ's body, and pray in Christ's name, hence the Collect at the Eucharist is traditionally addressed to God or to the first person of the Trinity. In this regard it is worth noting that prayer to Jesus is not a scriptural phenomenon (for an exception see the acclamation in Acts 7:59). Prayer to Jesus grew in reaction to Arianism. Growth of such prayer blurred the understanding of Christ's mediatorial role and contributed to saints acting as mediators in popular piety. Collects in the Prayer Book addressed to Jesus or the Spirit might be used in other services or form the basis of original compositions.

Collects need to have a clear and consistent mediation (the final section) so that the congregation can respond with their "Amen." When collects end abruptly without a clear mediation, the leader's "Amen" often becomes the cue for the congregation's "Amen." This not only gives a disheveled effect, but usurps the congregation's proper role in the prayer.

A useful guide for this conclusion of the Collect is: "this we ask through Jesus (Christ) your Word/ our Redeemer/ our peacemaker ... who lives (and reigns)/ who is alive with you ... and the Holy Spirit, one God now and for ever."

When the Collect is used to gather the community (pages 408, 460, 479) a bidding, indicating the petition, can be helpful before the brief silence. If a theme is being followed this bidding may also indirectly point towards it. Using a synonym of the petition saves a stilted repetition. The bidding is preferably not too narrow, however. What is sought is a broad and deep silent prayer at the beginning of the service.

On the First Sunday in Advent, for example, one could have:

Let us pray (in a moment of silence) that we may be ready for Christ's coming.

Silence.

Almighty God,
give us grace to cast off the works of darkness
and put on the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life,
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility,
so that when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit,
one God now and for ever.

Amen. (page 550)

When the silence before the Collect is first introduced it may help to use words such as "Let us pray in silence that..." Some misinterpret "Let us pray" to mean "Please kneel." As at this point a change of posture is inappropriate, the presider for a while might need to say: "As we remain standing, let us pray..."

During the Gathering of the Community the presider will need hands free for gestures. It is helpful if an assistant or a small, unobtrusive lectern holds the Prayer Book.

Announcing, for example, "The (Sentence and) Collect (for the First Sunday in Advent)" unnecessarily interrupts the flow of the service. When using the Three Year Series, announcing the origin of the Collect is completely incongruous. For example, on The Second Sunday in Advent announcing "The Collect for the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost" would be totally absurd!

After the brief silence, the presider, standing, stretches the hands out in the *orans* position, the classic Christian gesture for prayer. This gesture is customarily used in contemporary worship for all prayers said by the presider on behalf of the congregation. The presider says or sings the Collect in the name of the community. The presider, by the gesture of drawing the hands together at the end of the collect, encourages the congregation to respond with a strong

"Amen."

The Prayer Book requires only a single collect. Having more than one collect makes no sense in the understanding of the collect's function presented here. Where *A New Zealand Prayer Book* gives more than one collect for a day, these are alternatives. If one day has more than one commemoration this does not lead to more than one collect. The alternative commemoration may be included in the Prayers of the People. Furthermore, where several alternative collects are given for a day, one might be used or adapted to conclude the Prayers of the People (see page 412).

Some Questions

The author proposes certain liturgical forms to gather the community and "establishing the mood of the service." As you think about your experience of liturgy can you list alternative suggestions, or ideas that can be added to the suggestions here while taking account of the background information offered?