

CHAPTER 8

The Prayers of the People

The people and presiding priest pray for the world and the church

A deacon or lay person leads the Prayers of the People which include intercessions for the universal Church and the local Church; the world, our nation and all in authority; the concerns of the local community; those in need; the departed (with commemoration of a saint when appropriate); and ourselves and our ministries (page 411).

Prayers need to be general enough so that individuals can feel they can "slot in" the concerns they bring to a service. A period of silent prayer can assist in fulfilling this need. Abstractions such as praying for "peace" are better made more specific with something like "... and for God's guidance for the leaders who meet for disarmament talks this week." The leader of the Prayers needs to say sufficient to engage the assembly in petition, but not so much that it sounds like a second sermon, or gives detailed instructions to God.

The whole assembly is involved in the Prayers through the use of versicles and responses. Through their regular use, communities will quickly memorise the responses on pages 411-412. ("God of grace **you hear our prayer**" is so easily confused with "God of love **grant our prayer**" and "Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer**" that it is possibly better to avoid using the cue "God of grace.")

In smaller communities, members of the congregation may be encouraged to share concerns aloud briefly. The congregation can participate in such prayers when those praying aloud conclude with a versicle from pages 411-412 to which all respond.

Leading the Prayers is a ministry. It requires sensitivity and inclusiveness. It is appropriate that leaders of prayer be provided training. It is unhelpful if the Prayers are over lengthy and intrude into the natural flow of the service.

The readings and the concerns of the community and of the world form the primary resource for the preparation of the intercessions. In commemorating

some people on the Calendar some communities may prefer to use the Collect for the week in the Gathering of the Community. The Collect of the saint's day may then conclude the Prayers, or the saint's name may be used with the memorial of the departed. Intercessors may be able to use writings of persons in the Calendar as a resource for the Prayers of the People.

There are various cycles of prayer including the "Anglican Cycle of Prayer," the "Partners in Prayer," and diocesan prayer cycles. Some parishes have their own cycle and pray week by week for particular local people and ministries. It is appropriate to pray for the diocesan bishop at each Sunday Eucharist.

Praying for individuals in need is an important ministry. Care needs to be taken, however, that the Prayers do not degenerate into gossip. If there has been a death or crisis it may be better to introduce this before the Prayers, rather than use the Prayers as a form of community announcement. Confidentiality can be preserved by praying in words such as "... for a person who seeks the prayers of this community."

The primary focus of the Prayers of the People is intercession and supplication. Thanksgiving and penitence may have their place, but if a confession occurs at the beginning of the service, penitence is not repeated here. Reasons for thanksgiving may be announced before the Great Thanksgiving or specific thanksgivings may be incorporated within the Great Thanksgiving (particularly using the form on pages 512-514).

The intercessor needs to be clearly audible. He or she can move to the place from which the Prayers are led when the presider stands to break the silence following the sermon (or at the end of the creed if one is used). The presider may introduce the Prayers of the People with an invitation related to the occasion, or the season, or the proper of the day. An example of an invitation to prayer is given on page 411. The presider's invitation to prayer could relate a phrase or theme from one of the lessons to the intercessions. In this way the Prayers of the People are linked with the Ministry of the Word. For example, "God calls us to love one another. As a sign of that love, let us pray for the Church and for the world, giving thanks for God's goodness."

The intercessor may need to give a brief direction indicating the posture,

people's response, or page number (if one of the Prayer Book forms is being used).

Within the service no posture is indicated as being particularly appropriate for the Prayers. Some communities may wish to follow the ancient tradition of all standing for the Prayers on Sundays and in the Easter Season. These might kneel on weekdays, particularly in Lent. Such communities might then be seated for the Preparation of the Gifts before standing again for the Great Thanksgiving. Other communities may choose to kneel or sit for the Prayers, in which case the presider's concluding collect can alert them to stand for the Peace.

If desired, an appropriate collect may be prayed to conclude the Prayers of the People. It is traditional that it is the presider who prays this collect and doing so clearly indicates the transition from the Prayers to the Peace. Intercessors can return to their place as people begin to exchange the sign of peace.

The collect which concludes the Prayers may have a brief conclusion such as "This we ask through Christ our Saviour." This distinguishes it from the more significant Collect of the Day which can have the long doxological conclusion (e.g. "... who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and for ever.")

Silence is an important ingredient in a service. If music is made by the spaces between the notes, this is similarly true of prayer.

Litany

A litany is a series of petitions to which the people respond with a fixed refrain. If the litany is spoken it is best to have a cue to lead in the refrain. For example,

*Grant, faithful God, that all who confess your name may be united in your truth, live together in your love, and reveal your compassion in the world. God of love **grant our prayer.***

*Guide the people of this land, and of all the nations, in the ways of justice and peace; that we may honour and serve one another. God of love **grant***

our prayer.

Using a particular response regularly can help to give a seasonal flavour to the Prayers of the People. For example, a community might more regularly use "Lord, hear our prayer **and let our cry come to you**" during Lent.

There may be a moment of silence between the petition and the cue for the response. For example,

*Give us all a reverence for the earth you have created, that we may use its resources wisely, in the service of others, and to glorify you. ... (Silence) ... God of love **grant our prayer.***

Particularly on solemn or festal occasions a litany may be sung. The music from Taizé provides helpful musical settings. Other settings are also available. These usually give a musical cue for the people's response. A litany could be sung during the entrance procession, for example, on Sundays in Lent (or on an appropriate festival). If desired, this procession could involve the whole community. If the liturgy began with such a litany the Prayers of the People would be omitted from their usual place in the Eucharist.

Bidding prayer

The bidding prayer is a very ancient form of prayer and it is still regularly used in the Good Friday liturgy.

A call to prayer is followed by the community's silent prayer which is gathered up in a collect. For example,

Let us pray for God's people throughout the world, for this gathering, for our bishop, and for all who minister in Christ's name - that God will confirm the church in faith, increase it in love, and preserve it in peace.

(Silence)

*Holy God,
by your Spirit
the whole body of your faithful people
is governed and sanctified.
Receive our prayers, which we offer before you
for all members of your holy Church,
that in our vocation and ministry
we may truly and reverently serve you
through our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Let us pray for peace, for good will among nations, and for the well-being
of all people ... (Silence) ... (a collect and so on).*

Such a series of biddings and collects could be concluded with a doxology such as:

Let us give thanks for all God's goodness.

*You are worthy, O God,
to receive honour and blessing and praise.
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
now and for ever. Amen.*

There are several variations on this bidding prayer pattern. The biddings may be read by a deacon or other person appointed, with the presider saying the collects. Each bidding could be said by a different person (giving variety) but the collects by the same person (providing stability).

The leader might remove the mediation (the "through ..." part of a collect) from each collect. The mediation is then replaced with a versicle and response. Using the example given above:

*... that in our vocation and ministry
we may truly and reverently serve you.*

God of love grant our prayer.

The collects could be omitted completely. In that case the versicle and response come immediately after the silence.

The Prayer Book Provisions

The Prayer Book provides a list of concerns to bear in mind in producing one's own intercessions (page 411). As well as encouraging congregations to prepare their own intercessions, the Prayer Book provides a variety of resources which can be used either as printed or imaginatively adapted.

Pages 413-415. This follows six headings: the Church, the world, the community, those in need, those who have died and those who mourn, ourselves and our ministries. After particular prayers, usually two fixed petitions with the people's responses are given. It is possible to use only one of these fixed petitions under each heading. There is provision for the naming of saints (page 414). The Virgin Mary, the patron of the parish, a saint mentioned in the readings, a "lesser" saint whose calendar date falls on the Sunday being celebrated, or a "major" saint whose observance is being transferred, may be named at this point. This form of the Prayers does not need a concluding collect as two alternatives are provided for all to pray together. In communities that are less familiar with this form, a momentary pause after the particular prayers can alert the congregation that the printed response is about to be used.

Pages 416-417. A monologue form of prayers is now usually avoided. Hence it is better if a versicle and response is used after each paragraph. As the response will be constant throughout, people do not need to follow the printed text in their books. In this case it is better to conclude with a collect rather than the form which requires people to join in with "Merciful God, you look ..." (page 417).

Pages 463-464. This form can be adapted by having two people lead the prayers. One reads the lighter type, the other the bold type. Particular intercessions can be inserted - care needs to be taken in doing this with this particular form.

Pages 482-483. This shorter form may be particularly appropriate at a weekday Eucharist. Again, particular intercessions can be inserted.

Other forms are found on page 50 and page 162. The form on page 163 could also be used or adapted. Prayers for Various Occasions are provided on pages 138-142. An index to the Collects is provided on pages 143-146. At the end of each of the *Daily Services* (pages 58-95) and of the *Daily Devotions* (page 104-137) there are other collects which can be used.

If the leader wishes to use a number of collects as the form for the Prayers then it is best to use the form of a bidding prayer where each collect is introduced with an invitation followed briefly by silent prayer. This forms a more rounded time of prayer than the practice of delivering a series of unconnected collects.

Some Questions

Review the practices that you are familiar with during the Prayers of the People. How do these differ from or bear resemblance to the proposals listed here?

How is the understanding represented in the text similar to and different from the understandings that you have experienced?

Have different ideas and practices come to mind as you have thought through these questions?