

Leading Intercessions

Private Prayer and Public Worship – there is a difference!

In some traditions, the intercessory prayers are called 'the prayers of the people'. This helps us to realise what is happening at this stage of the service. Although one or more people will actually say the prayers, they are speaking on behalf of the whole church community.

Public praying is **not** saying one's private prayers publicly. Nor is public worship simply a larger version of a housegroup. A Sunday service will include newcomers and strangers as well as regular members of the congregation whom you hardly know. You need to be able to draw their concerns and their occasions for thanksgiving into the prayers too.

Personal sincerity, concern and conviction of God's goodness are a good starting point but in themselves they are not a guarantee of intercessions that will speak for the whole assembly.

So **prepare**.

Spontaneous or informal prayers are all very well in a small group but for public worship articulate and well thought-out phrases are more likely to take the congregation along with you. Few people can do this without a prepared script.

Preparation, preparation, preparation

Not just **what** you are going to say but **how** you will pray it. This is especially true if you want to do something creative like using slides or a sung response.

The "regular" outline for our intercessions is that on page 281 of *Common Worship*

Some Hints when Preparing Intercessions

See also the "do's and don't's" below.

- Read the readings beforehand so you have an idea of the theme of the service. The readings for each Sunday can be found on the rotas page. You may wish to ask the preacher what the theme is. You may be able to add in some phrases which relate to this or to the readings.
- Whatever form of intercession you use, you may like to begin with the words: "In the power of the Spirit and in union with Christ, let us pray to the Father".
- Although some like to pray for the governments of countries represented in our congregation, that is a possibility and not a requirement.

- The diocese also provides a Prayer Diary - see Resources (below). Where possible, prayers should be included for our sister chaplaincies in the diocese, and for other parts of the worldwide Anglican communion.
- Try not to be too vague in your requests. Rather than simply "We pray for A", "We pray for B", make a specific request (e.g. Grant.... Give.... Help....). But beware of telling God what to do! (It is perhaps a good discipline to ask ourselves what exactly we are asking and expecting God to do in a specific situation.) And remember, you are not preaching, but praying!
- Always remember you are praying on behalf of the congregation, not just praying your own prayers. Avoid expressing your own opinions or preaching a sermon!
- There have been several requests for opportunities of giving thanks to God during the services. It has been decided that the best time is during intercessions. Please include a specific time for prayers of thanks, either at the beginning or at the end of intercessions. However, the main focus is on intercession rather than thanksgiving as this is the only place in the service where we pray for the needs of the world.
- There should be the opportunity for the congregation to pray personally, either silently or aloud.
- There have been many positive comments from the congregation about periods of silence and/or opportunities for personal prayers during intercessions. It is strongly recommended that you include such times and that you make it clear when these periods begin.
- Don't forget troublespots that have faded from the news headlines.
- It is also suggested that on the Sunday nearest to a country's National Day, we pray for that country but this is optional. There is a list of National Days available.([national-days](#))
- Include one or more of the charities we support, and remember the need to care for the environment.
- Do not be afraid of structure. It does not hamper the working of the Holy Spirit, but enables the flow of the Spirit, just as water flows better through a carefully dug channel than through a rough ditch.
- Do not be afraid to name names! But be sensitive – God knows why someone needs prayer or wants to give thanks. Remember, the person leading the intercessions is doing so **on behalf of** the people. Names called out are appropriate in a prayer group but less so in public worship.

Some Do's and Dont's

to be recommended:

- let thanksgiving come to the fore
- study the readings for the day
- be aware of what is going on in the world, in the community and the congregation; make use of the Diocesan Prayer Diary
- arrive early to be available for prayer requests and to look at the intercessions book in the porch
- do not be afraid of using silences
- if possible insert into your prayers phrases which pick up on the theme of the sermon, the readings or the hymns.
- Watch your language: avoid churchy jargon that the in-crowd understands but others may not.

to be avoided:

- telling God what is happening in the world or what he should do about it
- preaching a sermon
- expressing opinions about what is going on in the world. Will everyone be able to say Amen to what you have said?
- "shopping lists" (God understood as Santa Claus)
- going on too long or grandstanding. Remember you are there to express the prayers of the whole congregation, not ride your own hobby horse. (Remember Matthew 6:7. **Four** minutes is ample time)
- muddled language: the prayers should be addressed to God (using "you" throughout). It is not a series of instructions for the congregation, nor an extension of the notices – if you need to tell people which Mrs Jones you are praying for, say so at the beginning, before you start the prayers.

Being Creative

- use a different response to the usual ones. NB If you do so, try to have the response shown on the beamer or give clear instructions at the beginning
- do not feel you have to use an “official” opening or closing formula. You could use words that pick up a phrase from the readings.
- have more than one person share in leading
- use a sung response (examples below)
- ring the changes with the order of concerns.
- use candles, pictures etc

- pray for the frontline (where people are the rest of the week). The intercessions should challenge sometimes!

Further reading

These two sites are full of helpful advice and theological insights about intercession.

[Notes from the Diocese of Lichfield](#) (with links to resources from the [Anglican Church in Canada](#))

Additional resources that may be useful when preparing intercessions are:

- [Suggestions for intercessions](#)
 - [Church of England resource of topical prayers](#)
 - [Diocese in Europe Prayer Diary](#)
 - For ways of using the traditional pattern of intercessions see <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/topical-prayers/leading-prayer-through-intercessions>
 - [Common Worship](#)
 - For a full list of National Days see: <https://www.officeholidays.com/national-days>
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Examples of sung responses

(NB most of these are best sung unaccompanied)

- 1.Kum ba yah - sung quietly, with intercessions between the verses
- 2."If you believe and I believe and all God's people pray" - after sections of the intercessions.
- 3.Taizé chants
 - O Lord, hear my prayer
 - Bless the Lord, my soul
 - Confitemini Domino
 - Wait for the Lord
 - Ostende nobis etc, etc

Some Taizé chants can be repeated quietly by the congregation or a group, or they can hum a note between the verses, while the intercessions are spoken over the top. This can be very effective.

4.Kyrie eleison (Ukrainian setting and others)

5.Iona songs

- Don't be afraid
- Wonder and stare

- Send out your light etc, etc.

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