

DEVELOPING YOUR SKILLS

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Archdeacon Bob Barrett

# Leading Worship: The Prayers

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Exploring techniques for preparing and leading prayers of intercession, thanksgiving and silence – for formal, informal and blended services of worship.

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## Leading Worship – the Prayers

Exploring techniques for preparing and leading prayers of intercession, thanksgiving and silence – for formal, informal and blended services of worship.

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*This series of Booklets provide practical ideas to help leaders develop their skills in a variety of ministry areas. Experimenting with them, growing your own ideas, discussion with ministry teams will help both you and others grow in skill. Good modelling, evaluation and training will inspire worshippers to worship, pray and grow in their Christian life and ministry.*

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21 Characteristics of a Leader in the Local Church and  
21 Principles for Managing the Local Church.

### **ORDERING “The Church Beyond ... OUR LEADERSHIP”**

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## INTRODUCTION

This booklet helps us explore some techniques for preparing and leading prayers of intercession, thanksgiving and silence - for formal worship, blended services and informal church services.

In preparing and leading prayer we keep in mind that:

### ***THE WHOLE SERVICE IS THE MESSAGE***

***The prayers are a part of the worship journey***

– see Booklet 2: "Worship – Who is it for?"

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**Often we do not ask much . . .  
 . . . because we do not expect much  
 We forget we are asking an all powerful King . . .  
 . . . ask great things, not just little things.**

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## **THE BACKGROUND ISSUES**

### **IT IS TO BE CORPORATE PRAYER**

**A church service is for the people to join in.**

- prayer times are for the **people to pray**
- not the leaders to pray on behalf of the people.
- more "the group" at prayer than individuals at prayer.

**There are a variety of ways to be "corporate".**

- people can listen and say "Amen".
- they can listen and "ride" the prayer- i.e. feel with, reflect on the prayer.
- they can do the praying themselves - out loud; or silently
- they can . . .
  - make up their own thoughts/words to use silently or to speak out loud, or
  - read written prayers

**The congregation needs to be able to add its "*Amen*".**

- There are certain prayers I do not want to add "*Amen*" to!

**Prayer in a church service is different from prayer in a small group.**

- For example:
  - a small group can be "conversational" prayer
  - involve more people
  - be "less clear" (meaning and volume)
- Ideally corporate prayer should be heard by everyone present – or, in practice by as many people as possible (therefore leading corporate prayer involves using techniques which make hearing and participating a possibility).

## IT IS TO BE LED PRAYER

**You are the leader.**

- people look for you to lead
- "the leader is not the pray-er"

**To involve the people we do not just provide a block of time and fill it with words.**

- we focus people's prayer
- we inspire people's prayer
- we guide people's prayer

**Our words, attitudes and manner . . . .**

- give reality to prayer
- build expectancy in prayer
- keep the Lord as central in prayer
- enable concentration
- keeping people "awake" in prayer
- convey freshness and relevance

**We are to encourage people to talk WITH God, not just TO God.**

- Prayer is a two-way conversation.

## IT IS TO COVER A VARIETY OF TYPES OF PRAYER

Each type encourages us to reach out to God and be in touch with God.

Frequently used types of prayer in church service "prayer time" are:

- **Thanksgiving** - giving thanks and gratitude to God
- **Intercession** - asking of God (supplication can be for our needs, intercessions for others' needs).
- **Silence** (for more on silence see the section below) provides opportunity to:
  - listen to God
  - silently thank and intercede
  - silently enjoy and "soak up" God's presence

We should also look for opportunities to use other types of prayer.

- **Meditation** - some focused comments and silence will help
- **Confession** - (more on this in other booklets)
- **Adoration** - adoring the greatness and majesty of God
- **Praise** - often by singing (old hymns and newer songs)
- **Self offering** - people promising, "giving themselves" to the Lord, responding to the encouragements the Lord provides.

It is often important to separate out the types and not to jumble them together. Occasionally some types will blend.

Over months the variety of types can be used - not all in one service.

## IT IS TO INCLUDE A VARIETY OF METHODS

**'Reading Prayers' should be  
understood as PRAYING PRAYERS,  
not just listening to others pray.**

1. Reading from the Prayer Book
  - as leader reading a section
  - or as a whole congregation joining in
2. Corporately spoken - from a Power Point Slide.
3. The leader reading from other resource books.
4. Reading from your previously written prayers.
5. Having two or more people read/lead prayers.
6. Giving biddings - to focus the prayers of the people
  - the congregation can then pray as they feel led
    - all can pray silently
    - some can be encouraged to pray out loud
7. Your own extempore prayers.
8. The pre-written prayers of members of the congregation.
9. The extempore/spontaneous prayers of members of the congregation.
10. Responsive - we pray - the people then respond with a set phrase.
11. Using pictures, symbols and images
  - verbally "painted"
  - on a Projector slide
12. Accompanied by music - 'live' or taped.
13. ....and other types you can creatively develop.

*Week by week we can vary the methods we use  
to encourage the corporate prayers of the congregation.*

## IT IS TO BE **ONE** ELEMENT OF THE SERVICE

We lead our prayers to help the people on the journey of this particular service.

Our prayers are structured to fit in with the theme of the service.

Our prayers link to the other elements of the service: the points and outcome of the sermon; the focus and outcome of the service; the sense of what the Lord is doing/saying.

The time we take must leave room for the other elements to have "their time" - or a service becomes lopsided and incomplete.

We are **not** "doing our thing" independently of service leader, preacher and people.

Check – how much time is set aside in this service for the prayer time you are to lead? Does the overall leader have expectations of you as they fulfil their responsibilities for the whole service?

The prayer time will not be what it should be if it takes longer than the time set aside (and therefore creates problems for the overall leader). In the same way the prayer time will 'miss the mark' if it is too brief and therefore does not give the people time to pray at the depth they would like to or for the topics they are aware of.

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## **PREPARING PRAYERS**

**Prayers should normally be prepared in advance.**

**Topics are chosen to help people relate their worship to their daily life.**

### **THE PREPARATION DECISIONS**

- *We ask ourselves some questions*
- *Use your prayerful-creative-imagination to answer them.*

How do I tie the prayers to the theme and to the expected outcome of the service?

- Discover the theme of the service and the focus of the sermon.

What length of time has been allocated to this element of the service?

- If I go over time the service will go over time or other elements will be affected.

What types of prayer will I use?

- Thanksgiving, intercession, silence, or . . . ?

How will I shape the prayers?

- So those present are inspired to pray in the service?
- So that those present receive inspiration and good modelling of how they could continue praying through the week?

What topics will I choose?

- It is good to include at least some thanksgiving. What have we specially to be thankful for?
  - General aspects of creation and life?
  - Specific events?
- What will be (or needs to be) on the hearts of the people to intercede about?
- What does the world and the church need us to pray about?
- What topics will I include/exclude? Exclude many possibilities so that you can pray at more depth for those topics chosen.

*When choosing topics it is important not to cover everything.  
We do not want to present God with our "shopping list".  
Even when listing topics it is vital  
to give the congregation a real time interval to pray.*

How much silence will I include? For what purpose?

- to listen to the Lord?
- to allow silent personal prayer?
- to relax in the presence of the Lord?

What (combination of) style(s) of praying will I use?

- formal?
- informal?
- a blend of both?
- the Prayer Book encourages the leader of prayer to *"use their own words"*.

What methods will I use? (see later section)

Who will do the out loud praying?

- me?
- others - having been pre warned and therefore prepared their prayers on the topic the topic?
- others - spontaneously from the congregation?

Is the Lord's Prayer to be included in this element?

- how will the people "know" the words?

**Here is one way to choose topics.....**

one inward - regarding us and our Lord

one inward - for an aspect of life of the parish/diocese

one outward - for the needs of our local community

one outward - for the wider world (missionaries/countries)

The theme of the service often clarifies the choice

*Keep this in mind when choosing sections from the Prayer Book,  
or selecting other methods.*

## **PREPARING AND "WRITING" THE PRAYERS**

*Having answered the questions in the previous section we now prepare the flow and content.*

We write so that the congregation know exactly what is happening and they know how they are to join in today.

- ensure they can follow, hear and understand the words and the concepts.

"Write" can include such approaches as:

- Find in the Prayer Book or other books
- Write out fully what you intend to read
- Write some words and phrases to guide your prayers
- Make a list of topics to cover extempore
- Planning the flow & "writing" the joining phrases
- Preparing Power Point Slides

When using prayers from books that we (not the congregation) will speak out we must "make them our own".

- Try reading them out loud (do they flow for us?).
- Change some words to fit the situation.
- Prepare appropriate introductions and endings.
- Mark where you will include silences and pauses.
- Prepare it so you are able to pray it, not just read it!

Books can give us ideas, phrases and words to use.

Having a framework, rather than fully written text, allows for more flexibility - e.g. we can more easily adjust the flow and content to follow the issues raised by the preacher. This however requires a skill often developed after having experience with a more fully written text.

When writing prayers keep in mind the flow - which can be an introduction (who the prayer is to and from); why; the central content (to thank, adore or intercede); conclusion (and adding "in the name of").

## **SELECTING FROM THE PRAYER BOOK**

Get to know the variety of content options available from all sections of all the Prayer Book services and resources.

Some options are quite long - choose carefully what you use/omit.

Vary what you will use, vary the way you use it.

Look for appropriate additions

- silence
- sentences
- prayers from other sources
- extempore additions

## CHOOSING THE EXTEMPORE OPTION

Many people develop ability in extempore prayer by first learning to pray pre-written prayers.

If we can (nearly) pray extempore we will be able to write that "extempore" prayer and "read-pray" it in worship.

We need to be very good at extempore prayer **before** we use it "up front" – ensuring we avoid unnecessary words, repetition, mindless phrases and verbal 'mannerisms' ('um', 'ok', 'just',.....).

To lead fully extempore prayer in public worship we first need to be fluent at extempore prayer in small groups.

Some **dangers** of extempore prayer include:

- Being too wordy
- Falling into cliché
- Stumbling over words
- Narrow topic choice - our "pet" topics
- Losing the "richness of language"
- "Waffling" and being repetitive
- Concentrating on what to say, with the result that our delivery (volume etc.) suffers
- Running thin on inspiration
- Lacking depth

Good notes, with good creative expressions can lead to good extempore prayer.

Extempore prayers are not necessarily more spiritual than other forms of prayer - they are not necessarily quicker nor more appropriate.

Extempore prayer can fit the scene better, be more flexible and let us put our heart into the prayers (we can also learn to lead written prayers with these positives).

## PREPARING THE LEADER

Leading prayer in church should be an overflow of our own personal prayer life.

Our own Christian life, personal state (frame of mind etc.) are vital.

We need to be aware of what is going on in the parish, the diocese (Prayer Cycle and Witness), missionary situations (e.g. NZCMS News; generally for your parish link missionaries); community (newspapers) and world (TV news).

We may be people who feel self conscious and nervous - many good leaders do! We can ask God to be with us, His Spirit to help us - we will experience that assistance!

***When mentioning other people in prayer.....***

Ensure you have their permission (to pray for them, in public and with what detail).

Give the barest minimum details.

Never give confidential information.

Never imply seriousness nor hint at 'secret' information

Do give enough detail for people to pray, (e.g. - recovering from an operation).

However the balance is tricky.

If it is likely to cause difficulty or potentially be misunderstood then omit reference to the person.

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## **LEADING IN THE CHURCH SERVICE**

### **LEADING PRAYERS - GENERAL TECHNIQUES**

Give people the option of sitting or kneeling - "*let us sit or kneel for prayer*" - even though you will remain standing. Note the use of 'we' and 'us' – you are seeking to convey a sense of 'we are doing this together'. (See Booklet 9: Informal Worship – Designing and Leading for additional suggestions on leadership techniques.)

#### **Stand .....**

- you are more likely to be heard
- so you can see everyone (keep your eyes open) – then you will be more aware as to where they are following your instructions etc.
- the people can then see you, which especially helps the deaf and hard of hearing who use lip reading to help them follow.
- Ask those leading sections or speaking out extempore to stand (teach them to keep their heads up and face the majority of the congregation).

Give clear directions - watch - have they understood?

Avoid a sense of rush. Pause between topics and within prayers.

When praying for special people (e.g. missionaries) their photo and location can be shown on a Power Point Slide.

## **LEADING PRAYERS WITH FLEXIBILITY**

Be ready to adjust our plans - to follow the "flow".

Accept that some of our prepared prayers may be omitted

- through lack of time, or
- because they now seem inappropriate for today.

If time is short leave a topic out or shorten a section - but **never** give a sense of hurry.

## **LEADING FORMAL / WRITTEN PRAYERS**

### **If the people are to join in and "speak out"**

Guide people to the right prayer - page numbers and headings.

Pause and then read the first few words definitely and slowly, so that people can get in step with you. Then lead at a volume and pace to keep everyone in unison.

Keep a slow even pace

- go too fast and they cannot keep up
- change pace and a jumble of words results
- If there is a set response:
  - ensure it is clearly understood (if possible put it on the screen)
  - ensure you pause then clearly, deliberately and **slowly** say the preceding lead in phrase.

### **If only the leader is speaking out:**

Vary the pace.

Pause between sections.

Pause within the prayer so that people have time to "ride the prayer".

For bidding prayers - give people time to pray.

## **LEADING INFORMAL PRAYERS - for others to pray out loud**

Always give clear instructions.

Keep our prayers brief - one sentence so that we are able...

- to model brief prayers
- to allow time
- to model style
- to encourage more to take a turn
- to leave other aspects for people to pick up

Develop ways to involve people.

- For example model what you are encouraging them to do: *"Let us give one sentence prayers of thanks"*, pause (briefly), then as an example *"Lord we thank you for your constant love for us."*

Always clearly say "Amen" or similar at the conclusion of other people's prayers - to give your approval and signal someone else's turn.

- If it is not a good prayer or covers a questionable aspect don't say "Amen".
- For questionable prayers perhaps look for a way to 'correct' the emphasis or possible misunderstanding – for example by re-praying for the positive or appropriate aspect.

To encourage general participation

- announce the topic
- allow for silence *"let us pray silently for . . ."*
- invite people to stand and lead if they wish.
- Near the end of the time of prayer give an opportunity for people to bring something they feel appropriate. *"If anyone has something on their heart they wish to lead us in, feel free to pray now."*
- If people may not have clearly heard someone who has been leading from the congregation then repeat the focus of the prayer.

## LEADING WITH THE VOICE

***Inaudible prayers  
are not  
corporate prayers***

Everyone must be able to hear clearly.

Encourage those leading prayers to **project their voices**. This applies to those who lead from within the congregation and those who come up front – and it applies to us.

- a church building is far bigger than a lounge
- standing to pray, lifting the head and facing the bulk of the people makes voice projection more effective
- project to the back - so that people there can hear clearly. If there is a microphone project into it.

Watch speed, volume, variety and diction (clarity).

## ENCOURAGING OTHERS TO PRAY

### ONE WAY TO ENCOURAGE

### CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER....

1. Ring people beforehand and ask them to be ready to lead a section.
2. Make the topic clear - ask them to pray briefly - not for every possible aspect.
3. During the prayers explain what is happening.

*"Today we will intercede in three areas. First we will focus on the Sunday School. I have asked Tom to stand and begin our prayer for the Sunday School . . . Tom . . .*

(Note: not *"Tom will you pray"* or *"Tom is going to . . . "* as people may think you might put them on the spot next.)

4. As Tom finishes say *"If anyone else wants to pray further about the **Sunday School** feel free to do so now, either silently or stand and lead us out loud."*
5. Watch - use eye contact and signals to guide those who may be about to lead in prayer.
6. Proceed to the next topic *"Now let us focus our prayers on our missionaries in Tanzania. I have asked Betty to begin our prayer time for the . . . family."*
7. It may eventuate that one area (needs to) take(s) more time. If an area needs to be omitted do so. If other people were prearranged to lead a part give a clear indication to them (not to everyone) that their section is being cut.

# USING SILENCE PRAYERFULLY

**Silence is an effective and powerful way  
of coming into the Lord's presence  
and bringing our prayers to God.**

## THE PLACE OF SILENCE

It is vital in a worship service to have properly placed silence of the right length - yet we often fill our worship with words and activity. Consequently we can reduce the opportunities where the Lord has a chance to contribute to us.

Silence has a number of uses - some important uses of silence are:

- **to let the individual pray silently** - thanks / intercession / confession / promises to God
- **to listen to God** - giving time for the Lord to speak to hearts and minds
- **to be "touched" by God** - relaxing in the presence of God; soaking up the anointing Spirit of God
- to be quiet in **preparation**
- to **reflect** - e.g. on sins of confession
- to **think through** what has been said - e.g. following a reading/sermon.
- to **meditate** - perhaps by directed thoughts / verses / ideas
- to **respond** - e.g. to the challenge of a sermon
- to give time for one element of the service to **"sink in"** and be complete before moving to the next element

## SILENCE SHOULD ALWAYS BE DIRECTED

So that people know what the silence is for

- If we fail to direct silence people may think we don't know what to do
- people may be confused about what they are supposed to do
  - and therefore they do nothing
  - or accidentally cut across the flow of the service
  - people will just fill in time waiting/day dreaming

To direct silence we explain what the silence is for

- e.g. *"Let us, in silence, recall to mind those things we have failed to do this"Let us pray silently for those things on our hearts"*.
- e.g. *week"*.

If silence is for "listening to the Lord" people will need to know what to do with anything they feel they "hear".

- e.g. *"Let us be silent and seek to be aware of anything God might wish to say to us. After a time of silence I will indicate when it will be appropriate to share a word or a picture"*.
- *i.e. as leader take control of the silence so some people do not speak out too soon and thereby cut across the silence others are seeking to use.*

When leading silences do **not** move around, nor turn the projector on etc.

## AFTER THE SILENCE

Move sensitively on to the next element of the service.

Know that during the silence the Spirit of God may have been "at work".

Silence may produce ideas, pictures, a word or two, prophecy etc. which people need to share - either during the service or later. They must know what to do/when.

During the silence (or at any part of the service) people may also be "touched". They may need to talk to someone, receive prayer .....

If people are visibly affected others may notice. The Leader will probably need to explain what is happening.

## RESPONDING TO PROPHECY, WORDS AND PICTURES

To allow sharing explain carefully *"if anyone has a word, prophecy or picture which is appropriate to share (or which could be for others) now would be the right time to share it."*

If it is difficult to share from the body of the church people could be asked to go to a designated person at the back

- this is important when there are hearing difficulties, or
- when there is uncertainty about something, or
- when questions arise about which people should/could be allowed to share,
- or when content and appropriateness need to be checked

If a "word" is spoken out loud we should ALWAYS respond:

- check the wording - look to other leaders for "confirmation"
- say *"thank you Lord (for that encouragement . . .)"*.
- may be emphasise that this is the Lord speaking to encourage the Christian community
- if the word is possibly "personal" say *"there may be someone here the Lord is specifically encouraging / challenging/wanting to guide/speaking to . . ."*

You may need to help people distinguish what God is saying to one person from what God is perhaps applying to all people (here).

If something shared is (possibly) wrong

- don't "thank God for it"
  - focus on a good aspect, or
  - say something like *"I am not sure if that is what (all) God is saying, let us listen further for clarification"*.
  - try to give a correct perception of the issue at hand (without causing the person who spoke to lose face)
-

## DANGERS TO AVOID

Leading prayer is not **preaching**.

- intercessions are not sermons
- we must not use prayer to "correct" the preacher, nor fill the "gaps" the sermon did not cover.
- prayers are not to summarise the sermon

Leading prayer is not **telling God what "God must do"**.

- it is not telling God what God already knows (but be careful - if we take this to the extreme we will not say anything).
- we pray, allowing God to act in the way only the almighty powerful living Lord knows best.

Leading prayer is not making **announcements** to the people.

Leading prayer is not **demonstrating our fluency** with words, our abilities, or our theological conviction - not "showing off".

Leading prayer is not an excuse for us to **do our own thing** and develop our own themes. We fail God, the preacher, the vicar, the leaders and the people if we do.

Leading prayer is not reading a **shopping list** to people.

Leading prayer is not a **lifeless monologue** - we are not to go on and on.

Leading prayer is not a matter of **quick, thoughtless, simple preparation**.

Leading prayer gives us the responsibility of **avoiding the simplistic**. Watch the "big" issues of war/peace, famine, disasters, and politics. Think carefully about the words you will use. If asking others to lead these areas choose people who can pray carefully, sensitively and realistically.

*In Prayer .....*

*We seek to be in touch with the Living God*

*Focus our praise and adoration*

*Express our gratitude*

*Hear and respond to the Spirit's nudges*

*Intercede in line with the Lord's will and*

*Go out strengthened*

*Empowered for Christian living*

## **TITLES IN THE SERIES:**

Number 1 "Visitor Friendly Worship"

Number 2 "Worship - Who is it for?" – 2001 edition.

Number 3 "Leading Worship - The Prayers"

Number 4 "People Helping Skills"

Number 5 "Preaching and Teaching"

Number 6 "Stewardship - The Financial Area"

Number 8 "Healing - Prayer Ministry"

Number 9 "Informal Worship - Designing and Leading"

Number 10 "Incorporation - Helping Newcomers Into Membership"

Number 11 "Change - Introduce New Things Successfully"

Number 12 "Youth Ministry For the 21st Century"

Number 13 "Handling Hurts in the Church"

Number 14 "Managing Conflict in the Church"

Number 15 "Every Member Ministry – Making It Work"

Number 16 "Criticism – How Do We Respond?"

Please note that Number 7 on Planning is not available in the Electronic Series.

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