

A Short Guide to Preparing and Leading the Intercessions

What are the Intercessions?

Above all they are intercessions. Thanksgiving, adoration and confession all have their places elsewhere in the service.

When we lead the Intercessions, we are leading people in prayer - not praying in front of them - and not delivering notices, party political broadcasts or sermons.

Preparation

Some people prefer to read out prayers that they have written in full. Others would rather pray spontaneously, based on short notes. The right method is the one that works for you: preparation and prayer while writing the Intercessions can be just as Spirit-led as spontaneous prayer while delivering them.

What matters is that you pray for God's guidance before you start writing or note-making.

If you write your prayers out in full, then it can be helpful to read them aloud in advance, to check for inadvertent tongue twisters.

Content

The Lectionary readings will provide an insight into the themes that are likely to be explored in the sermon and hymns.

Think about the week's news and other ongoing world problems, when planning, and also check the news headlines on the day.

Know your congregation: what is likely to be on their hearts and minds this week? E.g. local news; forthcoming church events and current church issues; Baptisms, weddings and funerals. But note that for larger churches with many visitors, there is a need to be inclusive and not focus too narrowly on local issues that meaning nothing to them.

Does your church use a Diocesan, charity or other prayer diary?

How does your church identify (and maintain boundaries of confidentiality and sensitivity around) individuals to be prayed for? People named on prayer lists should have given their permission.

Without losing a focus on intercessing, are there answered prayers from previous weeks for which you can briefly give thanks?

Format

As a general guide to the Intercessions slot in a typical Anglican service, it is helpful to keep to no more than five separate topics, to be covered in about five minutes.

The usual pattern is to pray for the Church, the world, the local community, those in need and ourselves.

These topics will often be covered in a litany of short prayers, with congregational responses in between and one 'Amen' at the end. This format creates a predictable rhythm, which helps the congregation to engage with the prayers.

Responses

Many Anglicans will already be familiar with these responses:

Lord, in your mercy Hear our prayer

Lord, hear us Lord, graciously hear us

Your kingdom come Your will be done.

If the response is new, the congregation must be told clearly what it will be, and given an immediate chance to practise. They are unlikely to remember a new response of more than 5 or 6 words.

Take care not to use the trigger words in your prayer except in the places where you want the response!

Whichever response has been used, it is common to end with the following:

Merciful Father Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The writing process

Gather together your resources and pray for guidance.

Use the Lectionary readings to guide your choice of response.

Start with your five topic headings, and use your resources to help you to make notes on content under each one: names of countries and individuals, events, prayer diary items, etc.

Make sure your prayers are clear and specific, but also that you're praying for something that others can honestly agree with, so that they can say their responses and Amens with confidence.

A bidding ('Let's pray now for X') is not the same as a prayer. Having invited the congregation to pray for X, make sure that you do actually pray for X.

If you decide to leave a silence, in which people are invited to bring their own prayers quietly before the Lord, then people often appreciate specific guidance about how to use it: e.g. 'In a moment of silence, let's bring before God those known to us who are bereaved, asking him to comfort and strengthen them.' Or, 'In a moment of silence, let's each bring to God one person who we long to know Jesus as Saviour.'

Language

If you're clear about whether you are addressing God in prayer, or the congregation in a bidding, then it will be easier for you to be consistent in your use of he/you.

How will you address God in your prayers? Again, it is important to be consistent: don't address 'Lord Jesus Christ' throughout the prayers and then use 'Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son...' at the end.

Decide whether you prefer to use traditional or modern language, and stick to it: don't mix 'thee' and 'thou' with 'you'.

Delivery

You might find it helpful to go into church with someone who will stand at the furthest end of the building while you practise. Ask for feedback on whether you can be heard, how clearly you speak, and your tone of voice: is it calm and sincere, without sounding artificially 'holy'?

Make sure that you and the person leading the service both know which of you is 'topping and tailing' the prayers, and when you're expected to leave your seat to come to the front.

Allow the congregation time to settle before you start speaking. Take a couple of deep breaths.

Speak slowly and clearly. When reading or speaking in public, we have to speak more slowly than we would in ordinary conversation.

If you use silences, then count : 30 seconds is about right.

Pause, after the final 'Amen', before returning to your seat.

The congregation's prayers

There are ways in which the prayers of the congregation can be gathered into the Intercessions, without losing the expected format. For example:

As people arrive in church, you could offer pieces of paper (which might be appropriately shaped for the theme) and pens for them to write or draw prayers, which will later be gathered into a basket or pinned to a notice board, and offered up during the Intercessions.

Alternatively, you might give out pebbles or other small objects. During one of the silences in the Intercessions, people are asked to focus their prayers about a particular topic onto the pebbles, which are then gathered and placed in a basket at the foot of a cross or on the altar, and offered up to God.

As people arrive in church, people are asked to write their names on cards. The cards are given out randomly during the Intercessions: people are invited to pray silently for the person named on the card they have taken, and to take home the card to continue to pray through the week.

One way to involve children or less confident adults in the Intercessions is by inviting them to say the trigger words for the responses, while a more confident person leads the prayers. A light touch on the arm can indicate the right place to say the trigger.

Resources

The Lectionary for the current year.

Doug Chaplin, *Leading Common Worship Intercessions: A Simple Guide*, Church House Publishing, 2009, ISBN 978-0715142004.

Anna de Lange & Liz Simpson, *How to ... Lead the Prayers: A Training Course*, Grove Books Limited, 2003, ISBN 978-1851744940.

Susan Sayers, *Prayers of Intercession for Common Worship*, Kevin Mayhew Limited, 1999, ISBN 978-1840034738.

John Pritchard, *The Intercessions Handbook: Creative Ideas for Public and Private Prayer*, SPCK, 2005, ISBN 978-0281057658.

*Further copies of this Guide can be downloaded from
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