

Crafting and Praying the Prayers

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Crafting and Praying the Prayers is designed to help those whose calling it is to compose and pray The Prayers for Sunday worship. Each of four basic prayer forms is explained and examples are provided. Some guidelines for composing The Prayers and a brief note on prayer posture are offered. A short annotated bibliography of helpful items completes this resource.

Paul Bosch wrote the original material which forms the underlying framework for **Crafting and Praying the Prayers**. The material is adapted from the **Customary** which Paul created while Dean of the Chapel at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary. Donna Seamone wrote the four prayers which illustrate the various prayer forms. André Lavergne edited the material for publication.

Paul Bosch provided the accompanying artwork. It shows the figure of St. Apollinare in the orans prayer posture and wearing an alb, chasuble and pallium-stole. It is taken from the mosaic in the apse dome in the 6th century Church of St. Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna, Italy.

Crafting and Praying the Prayers appeared in a slightly different form in sections 5 and 9 of **Gathered for Worship**, a volume of worship texts and helps for presiding ministers published by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (1995).



References to "LBW" are to the Lutheran Book of Worship (1978)

The Prayers of the People

The Prayers of the People in Christian worship represent one of the chief moments when God's Word and God's world engage. As such, they are among the most important responsibilities of the people in Christian public prayer. In the service of Holy Communion, the Lutheran Book of Worship calls them simply "The Prayers" (LBW, page 65, rubric 22). But they may be known by a variety of other names: The Prayers of the People; The Intercessions; The Petitions. Because they are so central to Christian worship, The Prayers or Intercessions should never be omitted or overlooked, even in the most austere or simple of services.

Because The Prayers represent one of the most important moments in the people's "sacrifice of praise," they should be composed and/or selected with great care. Books of intercessions, and bulletin inserts such as *Celebrate*, can provide helpful models, but in the best circumstances, the assisting minister at each service always a layperson will compose at least some petitions directly addressed to the circumstances of the individual parish. The following notes are intended to provide helpful guidance to those whose high calling it is to give voice to the people's prayer.

Scope, Sequence and Form of The Prayers

A broad scope is suggested for The Prayers in LBW (page 65, rubric 22). We are to pray at each Eucharist "for the whole church, the nations, those in need, the parish, and special concerns... (optional) congregational petitions and thanksgivings... (optional) prayers of confession...thanks for the faithful departed." The Prayers each Lord's Day, however brief, should address the entire scope of concerns suggested here. Moreover, the sequence of concerns in rubric 22 should be borne in mind: from the most universal (the church throughout the ages) to the most local and specific. It is as if our focus narrows, as we pray, from the most all-embracing to the most local and particular.

While congregations are often more familiar with the use of litany-type prayers, it is neither necessary nor desirable that every congregational prayer should be of this type. Other forms should be considered. The Prayers in Christian worship may take at least four forms: collect-type prayers, litany-type prayers, bidding prayers, and pastoral prayers.

Collect-Type Prayers

The Prayers may consist of a series of brief collect-type prayers. See LBW, page 42 and following, for models of classic collect-type prayers. After each collect-type prayer, the people add their endorsement of the prayer with a simple and vigorous "Amen." Congregations must be trained and encouraged to respond to collect-type prayers with this heartfelt "Amen." Moreover, worship leaders, and those who craft the prayers, must give a clear doxological cue as to when the "Amen" should come: "...through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Example of a Collect-Type Prayer

P O God Our Creator, you have graced us with the gift of life and a world to live in. Empower and strengthen the witness of your church that, true to its calling, it may proclaim your radical and boundless love, in word and deed. We pray in Jesus' name.

C Amen.

P Saving God, you nourish and sustain us by Word and Sacrament. Strengthen all the people of our church, especially N. (Christian name - synod bishop) and N. (Christian name - national bishop) our bishops, and our pastors and teachers. Grant that, sustained in you, our service and witness in this land may be full of faith and love. We pray in Jesus' name.

C Amen.

P O God, Source of our life, you have adopted us in the waters of baptism and made us your own in love. We pray that we may embrace our lives and the lives of others with courage and compassion, unafraid of joy and pain, sickness and health. May your care be made known in our care. We pray in Jesus' name.

C Amen.

P God of Justice, you revealed your power in the servanthood of Jesus. May those who govern the nations use their authority in wisdom, kindness and peace. Awaken in all who govern a thirst for justice that embodies your care for this earth and the human community. We pray in Jesus' name.

C Amen.

P Liberating God, you are the hope of the weak and the needy. Rescue those who suffer poverty, injustice or oppression when they cry out. Open the ears of our hearts to hear and quicken in us the fire to respond in love. We pray in Jesus' name.

C Amen.

P Compassionate One, you are a well-spring of comfort and healing. Grant comfort, healing and release to those who suffer illness, distress or grief. Awaken in us boundless compassion and use us as agents of lovingkindness. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

P God of All Generations, we thank you for the gift of the lives and the loving service of all who have died. Keep us in the bonds of love with all the saints throughout the ages and bring us to the fullness of your reign. We pray in Jesus' name.

C Amen.

P O God of Love, hear the prayers of your people. Enliven us by your Spirit, to live into the fullness of your reign. We pray through Jesus, our life and our hope.

C Amen.

Litany-Type Prayers

The Prayers may take the form of a litany-type prayer. Litany-type prayers are characterized by a ritual "give-and-take" between leader and people, and consist of a brief petition, followed by a ritual verse-and-response between leader and people. The leader's verse functions as a kind of "cue-line" for the people's response. The leader may say, for example, at the end of each petition, "Lord, in your mercy," and the people may respond, "Hear our prayer." This is but one example of a litany-type prayer; there are others.

In litany-type prayers, it is prudent for the leader to indicate to the people what their proper response is to be in a given situation. An example: "Let us lift our prayers to the throne of grace, saying God have mercy." Further, each of the petitions or thanksgivings in a litany-type prayer should address a single issue or concern. That is, each petition should be brief, simple, and focused on one issue only. The ritual "give-and-take" in litany-type prayer is obstructed when a single petition is made to address a whole host of issues and thoughts, before moving to the expected verse-and-response refrain. Again, litany-type prayer petitions should be brief and simple. As well, the people's response in a litany-type prayer should be consistently and invariably the same. That is, the people always respond, for example, "Hear our prayer" each time the leader's "cue-line" verse ("Lord, in your mercy") is heard.

The best liturgical forms are always what might be called "pre-literate." It should not be necessary for worshippers to bury the nose in a text, in public worship. Indeed, it should not be necessary to be literate or even sighted, to participate. The people's responses should be brief, memorable, consistent, and, so to say, incantational.

Example of a Litany-Type Prayer

A Let us pray for the whole people of God and for all people according to their needs, saying: "Hear our prayer."

A For the whole church, that, true to its calling, it may witness to the radical and boundless love of God and proclaim God's love in word and deed.

A O God of love and mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A For all the people of our church, for N. (Christian name - synod bishop) and N. (Christian name - national bishop), our bishops, for all pastors and teachers, that strengthened by Word and Sacrament, our witness in this land may be full of faith and love.

A O God of love and mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A For all the baptized, that we may embrace our lives and the lives of others with courage and compassion, unafraid of joy and pain, sickness and health. May our care be a sign of God's care.

A O God of love and mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A For those who govern the nations of the world, that they may use their authority in wisdom, kindness and peacefulness. Awaken in all who govern a thirst for justice that embodies your care for the human community.

A O God of love and mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A For all those who suffer poverty, injustice or oppression, that you would rescue them when they cry out. Open the ears of our hearts to hear, and quicken in us the fire to respond in love.

A O God of love and mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A For all who suffer illness, distress or grief, especially those we name silently or aloud ... , that you would grant them comfort, healing and release. Awaken in us boundless compassion and use us as agents of lovingkindness.

A O God of love and mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A For the saints of every time and generation, that you would keep us all in the bonds of love and bring us to the fullness of your reign.

A O God, of love and mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

P O God of Love, hear the prayers of your people. Enliven us by your Spirit to live into the fullness of your reign. We pray through Jesus, our life and our hope.

C Amen.

The Bidding Prayer

The so-called bidding prayer represents still another form of public prayer used among Christians. See the classic Good Friday bidding prayer in the LBW/ME, pages 139-142. In a bidding prayer, the leader invites ("bids") the people's prayers for a specific cause or concern; there follows a brief silence, during which the people are presumably praying silently. Then the leader summarizes the people's prayer, usually in a brief collect-type prayer, and the people respond "Amen." Then the leader invites the people's prayer for a second specific cause or concern. This is again followed by silence, then by a collect prayed aloud by the leader, and so on.

Two worship leaders may share in the leadership of a bidding prayer. One voice (the Assisting Minister, for example) may announce the bids or invitations to pray, and a second voice (the Presiding Minister, for example) may offer the collect, in each case. Note that, in using the bidding prayer form, the (silent) prayers of the people are "collected" or summarized in the leader's prayer, which, again, is cast in classic collect form, to which the people announce their assent by means of the concluding "Amen." Litany-type responses are not necessary or appropriate when using the bidding prayer form. Congregations should be instructed that their heart-felt and vigorous "Amen" is always a sufficient and appropriate response to prayer offered on their behalf by worship leaders.

Example of a Bidding Prayer

A Let us pray for the witness of the whole church. *Silence for prayer.*

P O God, you have graced us with the gift of life and a world to live in. Empower and strengthen your church that true to its calling it may witness to your radical and boundless love, in word and deed. We pray in Jesus' name.

C Amen.

A Let us pray for all the people of our church. *Silence for prayer.*

P Saving God, you nourish and sustain us by Word and Sacrament. Strengthen all the people of our church, especially N. (Christian name - synod bishop) and N. (Christian name- national bishop) our bishops, and our pastors and teachers. Grant that, sustained in you, our service and witness in this land may be full of faith and love. We pray in Jesus' name.

C Amen.

A Let us pray for all the baptized. *Silence for prayer.*

P O God, Source of Our Life, you have adopted us in the waters of baptism and made us your own in love. We pray that we may embrace our lives and the lives of others with courage and

compassion, unafraid of joy and pain, sickness and health. May your care be made known in our care. We pray in Jesus' name.

C Amen.

A Let us pray for those who govern the nations of the world. *Silence for prayer.*

P God of Justice, you revealed your power in the servanthood of Jesus. May those who govern the nations use their authority in wisdom, kindness and peacefulness. Awaken in all who govern a thirst for justice that embodies your care for this earth and the human community. We pray in Jesus' name.

C Amen.

A Let us pray for all those who suffer poverty, injustice or oppression. *Silence for prayer.*

P Liberating God, you are the hope of the weak and the needy. Rescue those who suffer when they cry out. Open the ears of our hearts to hear and quicken in us the fire to respond in love. We pray in Jesus' name.

C Amen.

A Let us pray for all who suffer illness, distress or grief. *Silence for prayer.*

P Compassionate One, you are a well-spring of comfort and healing. Grant comfort, healing and release to those in need. Awaken in us boundless compassion and use us as agents of lovingkindness. We pray in Jesus' name.

C Amen.

A Let us pray for all those who have died. *Silence for prayer.*

P God of All Generations, we thank you for the gift of the lives and the loving service of all who have died. Keep us in the bonds of love with all the saints throughout the ages and bring us to the fullness of your reign. We pray in Jesus' name.

C Amen.

A Let us pray for whatever else we need. *Silence for prayer.*

P O God of Love, hear the prayers of your people. Enliven us, by your Spirit, to live into the fullness of your reign. We pray through Jesus, our life and our hope.

C Amen.

The Pastoral Prayer

The final prayer-form is familiar to worshippers from so-called "free-church" traditions as the "pastoral prayer." Because this form of prayer has the character of an extended "solo" by a worship leader, it is less appropriate for services of Holy Communion than the previous three forms. A "pastoral prayer," that is to say, is uncongenial to the participatory character of Holy Communion. It is, however, a useful and appropriate prayer-form when Holy Communion is not celebrated. See LBW, page 75.

Unlike a collect, the pastoral prayer may have a scope that is unlimited. It may range over a wide variety of topics, issues, causes, and concerns. It may be read from a book or manuscript, or it may pour forth spontaneously, *ex corde* ("from the heart") and even *ad lib* ("freely invented in the moment"). The people's response to a "pastoral prayer" is a simple and vigorous "Amen" at the conclusion of the prayer. See examples in LBW, pages 75 and 129. Note that the "pastoral prayer" form is not appropriate at Morning Prayer or Responsive Prayer, where a series of collect-type prayers is traditional. Collect-type prayers are more suited to the meditative and communal nature of these Offices.

Example of a Pastoral Prayer

P O God, in you we live and move and have our being. You have blessed us with the gift of life and a world to live in. In you we are blessed and we offer praise and thanks. Empower and strengthen the witness of your church throughout the world, that true to its calling it may embody your radical and boundless love. Strengthen all the members of the Body of Christ. Grant that, nourished and sustained by Word and Sacrament, our service and witness in this and every land may be full of faith and love.

You are the Source of our life, O God. You have adopted us in the waters of baptism and made us your own in love. May we embrace our lives and the lives of others with courage and compassion, unafraid of joy and pain, sickness and health. May your care be made known in our care.

May those who govern the nations of the world use their authority with wisdom, kindness and peacefulness. Awaken in them a thirst for justice that embodies your care for this earth and for the human community. Rescue those who suffer poverty, injustice or oppression when they cry out. Open the ears of our hearts to hear and quicken in us the fire to respond in love. Grant comfort, healing and release to those who suffer illness, distress or grief. Awaken in us boundless compassion, and use us as agents of lovingkindness.

We give thanks for the lives of all who have died. Keep us in the bonds of love with all the saints throughout the ages. In your love and compassion, hear the prayers of your people. Enliven us, by your Spirit, to live into the fullness of your reign. We pray through Jesus, our life and our hope.

C Amen.

Composing the Prayers: Some Guidelines

In services of Holy Communion, any of the four types of prayer (a series of collects, a litany, a bidding prayer, or a "pastoral prayer") may be used at the time of The Prayers. Christians, especially Christian worship leaders, lay and ordained, may take delight in such an ample "tool chest" of prayer possibilities! Simple prudence, however, suggests that prayer forms not be mixed during the Intercessions. Moreover, authors should beware of injecting personal prejudices, biases or partisan opinions into the public prayers of the people. The Intercessions in Holy Communion are not the place for the display of any political "party line." That would be to corrupt our public prayers into a spiritual "lobby." All the faithful present should be able to endorse The Prayers to say "Amen!"

Writers of The Prayers should not feel the need to be "poetic" or "gimmicky" in composing The Prayers. Avoid the "faddish" and the "folksy." Stay away from expressions of the market-place, or TV talk shows. Avoid especially the current jargon of theology. The best liturgical prayer is simple, brief, and modest; it can be metaphoric and allusive, but without any self-conscious literary posturing.

Praying the Prayers: the Orans



The custom of kneeling for prayer is an ancient and worthy option, especially during Lent (and perhaps Advent). However, the kneeling posture may sometimes undermine the mood of expectancy and praise we wish to communicate. Among Jews, it has always been customary to stand for prayer, with head and hands uplifted, palms open and out, in a marvellously expressive gesture of praise. This posture is called the orans (Latin for "praying").

"Charismatic" Christians have long been familiar with the orans gesture. Moreover, the orans posture may be seen depicted from the artwork of the ancient catacombs and sarcophagi to the painted crosses of contemporary El Salvador. (In both of these cases, the figures are frequently those of women.)

The orans can model two important theological convictions: that we are made in God's image, and that we share in Christ's resurrection (in German: auferstehung: "the standing up" of Christ!).

As well, we may recall that the orans is already familiar to us, in the West, as the traditional posture adopted for the Hymn of Praise ("Glory to God") and at the start of the Great Thanksgiving: "The Lord be with you... Lift up your hearts!"

Worship leaders, then, ordained and lay, are urged to use the orans posture in leading public prayers, as at the Intercessions, the Prayer of the Day and Post-Communion Prayer.

Praying the Prayers: A High Calling

We do well to devote time and energy, contemplation and prayer to the work of crafting and praying The Prayers. Indeed, it is a high and noble calling to give shape and voice to the people's highest hopes and deepest yearnings. Let us honour this awesome and humbling responsibility.

Resources for Crafting the Prayers

The following resources are intended to help those who give shape and voice to The Prayers.

1. ***Intercessions for the Church Year*** Composed by a variety of authors through Reign of Christ, 1999. [Winnipeg: ELCIC.] These intercessions were provided to the parishes of the ELCIC through Communique and may be downloaded from the ***Lift Up Your Hearts*** web site <http://www.worship.ca/>. Prayers were provided for every Sunday, major festival, and, often, for a variety of special occasions, people and stations in life. Out of publication after 1999.
2. ***Prayers for Sundays and Seasons*** Compiled by Peter J. Scagnelli. [Chicago: Archdiocese of Chicago/Liturgy Training Publications, various.] This annual publication offers the intercession keyed to the readings, two collects, citations from the Roman Lectionary for Mass and the Revised Common Lectionary, introduction to the Lord's Prayer and much more. A great resource, companion to ***Sourcebook for Sundays and Seasons***.
3. ***Intercession for the Christian People***. Edited by Gail Ramshaw from submissions by many authors from the ecumenical community. [New York: Pueblo Publishing, a Liturgical Press imprint, 1988.] A collection of litany-type prayers which follows the three-year ecumenical lectionaries. While the litany form of the intercessions is fairly constant, the range of expression from the more prosaic to the more poetic is quite marvellous.
4. ***With All God's People***. Published by the World Council of Churches. [Geneva] ***With all God's People***, the ecumenical prayer cycle of the World Council of Churches is posted annually to the Web. Helpful in the preparation of the Sunday Prayers of the People, this resource provides an ordered way to pray for the churches of the world in the course of a year.
5. ***Together We Pray: General Intercessions for Sundays, Solemnities, Feasts and Other Celebrations***. Edited by Robert Borg. [Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993.] Keyed to the three-year Roman Lectionary, this volume provides nicely composed prayer petitions for Sundays, festivals and other occasions. The introductions and conclusions to each set of intercessions, largely drawn from images in the Gospel texts, are especially useful. The volume is recommended as a model for those whose vocation it is to craft the prayers.
6. ***All Desires Known: Expanded Edition***. Composed by Janet Morley. [Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1992.] This volume is a

lovely collection of prayers, psalms and poems composed by a woman who "understands the Christian life to be about the integration of desire: our personal desires, our political vision, and our longing for God" and who seeks, in her crafting of prayers, to integrate her faith and her feminism (preface, page xi). While the author cautions that all of the prayers might not be appropriate to every circumstance or community, we do well to hear the voice her work represents, and to contemplate the model of inclusive language it proposes. Recommended as a valuable resource for those who prepare worship and as an aid to private devotion.

