

Chapter two: The Service of the Lord's Day

This chapter has comments on the following services:

THE SERVICE OF	Prayers before the Service
THE LORD'S DAY	The Gathering of the People of God
	The Service of the Word

STRUCTURE

Constructing a liturgy is in many ways like constructing a building. Any order of Christian worship has a theological foundation; its primary purpose is to glorify God. This foundation is not of our own making. It has been revealed in the life of God: Father, Son and Spirit, the God of the scriptures (see Note (i), LB 76, PB 54). On that we build, with all the wisdom and experience of the prophets and apostles, the holy men and women of all ages — and our own.

Any building has a basic framework, without which it would fall down. Note (iv) sets out the four major divisions of the service, which form the primary framework: The Gathering of the People of God; The Service of the Word; The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; and The Sending Forth of the People of God.

An architect is not made redundant by the framework; it is the basis of his or her art. There is full scope for creativity in materials, design, decoration. So also for the leaders and planners of worship. *Uniting in Worship* sets out a framework within which you are invited to respond to God's grace and to create a place for prayer. It also provides many resources to do this.

In the pages following, PB = People's Book and LB = Leader's Book, the numbers referring to the page.

Word and sacrament

What is characteristic of Christian worship is neither a service of the Word, nor the sacrament of the Lord's supper, but both. Looking back, we can see how church history has divided what God has joined together. The mediaeval church made the sacrament a thing in itself, and celebrated it on every conceivable occasion. The place of the Word was severely diminished. The Reformation was in part a reaction against that. But equally, and for a complex of reasons, the reformed churches swung to the other extreme, and overdid the Word to the diminution of the sacramental means of grace. But Word and sacrament belong together. Both faithful preaching and the obedient breaking of the bread are signs of Christ's living presence. '... the right administering of the Sacrament cannot stand apart from the Word. For whatever benefit may come to us from the Supper requires the Word: whether we are to be confirmed in the faith, or exercised in confession, or aroused to duty, there is need of preaching.'

(John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, xvii, 39)

'The eucharist, which always includes both word and sacrament, is a proclamation and a celebration of the work of God.'

(*Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* — the 'Lima Document', World Council of Churches, 1982 [paragraph E.3.])

A service for all seasons

'The Service of the Lord's Day' is not 'just a Communion Service'. It is a basic shape for services of any kind. It does indeed have the framework of the Lord's Supper, but we have followed the pattern encouraged by the Reformers — Luther, Calvin and, later, Wesley — that on non-sacramental occasions the service should follow the same order, obviously omitting the service at the Lord's Table. On days when the sacrament is not observed, we gather, we hear the Word, we respond, we are sent forth. Instead of The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving (over bread and wine), a Thanksgiving prayer (see, for example LB 609–622) is offered, still celebrating the 'mighty works of God', and leading into intercession. Other items in the service also remain: the offering, the notices and concerns of the church, and so on. The diagram shows the two routes, using the same basic service.

This is the framework and the two major constructions of the service:

THE GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

response

with the sacrament:

Affirmation of faith (Creed)
Offering
Notices and concerns

Prayers of the People
(Intercession)

without the sacrament:

Affirmation of faith
Hymn
Offering
Notices and concerns

Prayers of the People
(Thanksgiving and Intercession)

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

THE SENDING FORTH OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

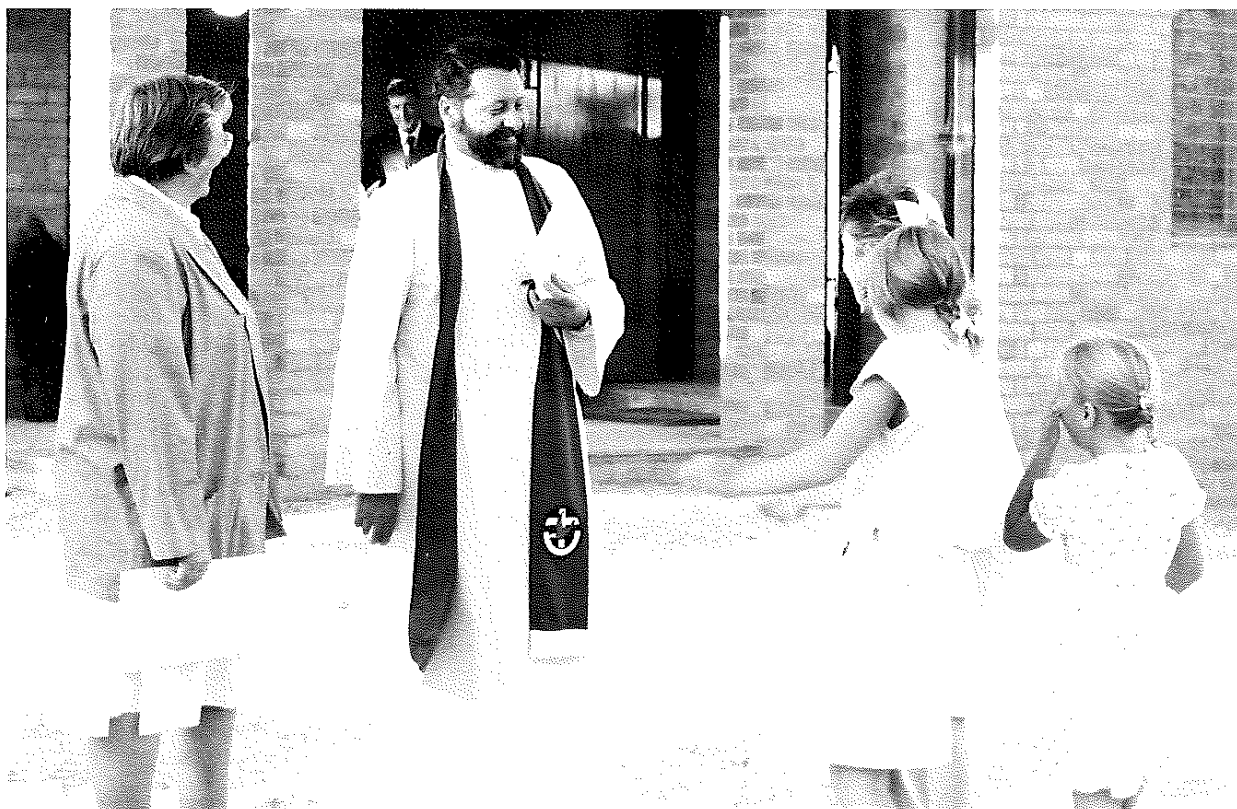


Photo: Church and Nation

PRAYERS BEFORE THE SERVICE

These short prayers are mostly drawn from tradition (though expressed in contemporary English) and are intended to offer thoughts leading to prayer in quiet moments before worship. A much greater selection exists in the Treasury of Prayers in PB 211ff. Each prayer may also serve a second use at a particular point in the service, and these are indicated in the rubrics. The leader needs to beware of doubling up material already provided later in the service, however.

[A] is an 'arrow prayer', simple yet worthy of repetition like a mantra — or, to use a Christian word, a litany.

[B] was originally a prayer for use by ministers in the vestry before the service, and may still serve as such. (Again, a larger selection is found in the PB 206–207.) Its usual name is 'The Collect for Purity', a collect being a short poetic form which 'collects' thoughts together. It came into Protestant use via the *Book of Common Prayer* (1549), having been translated from the Latin by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. There can hardly be a better prayer for the purpose.

[C] is familiar as the 'Prayer for illumination' in Holy Communion Two (Uniting Church Worship Series, *Holy Communion*, 1980). Such prayers serve as an invocation before hearing the Word. More may be found in LB 597–599.

[D] is based on a prayer used by the Church of South India, originating much earlier in the Syrian Orthodox tradition. It draws on the imagery of the Emmaus Supper in Luke 24, and is thus a preparation for communion.

[E] is a modern version — from *An Australian Prayer Book* — of one of Cranmer's original compositions for the 1548 Order of the Communion, the first English liturgy. Called 'The Prayer of Humble Access', it is a petition for worthy reception of the bread and wine at communion, and uses the very direct language of John's Gospel.

Note that there are vestry prayers with the minister or leader of worship, and prayers with the choir at PB 206–210. It was frequently said of Richard Baxter, the great Puritan minister, that he entered the church to conduct the service with the air of one who has just come from the presence of God.

The Lord's Day

The Lord's Day is Sunday, the distinctive day of Christian worship, the day of the Lord's resurrection. Private prayer, and even certain forms of community prayer, like the 'daily office', can occur anytime, but — to use an old tag — the Lord's People come together on the Lord's Day. Further, it is characteristic of Christian worship that we come together for the Lord's Supper. Many human beings pray. Many religions are religions of a book. But what Christians do with book and table makes us the unique people we are.

The richness of meaning of the Lord's Day can be found among the resources in the Leader's Book; for example, Adoration: prayer 10 (p. 567), prayer 26 (p. 573); Thanksgiving: prayer 1 (p. 610).

The first rubric may be read as encouraging the carrying in of a Bible at the beginning of worship. It is a powerful symbol. We are a people who gather around God's Word, and that Word (so the *Basis of Union* says) is normatively the Word of scripture. Not the Word of the New Testament only, but the whole witness: Old and New Testaments. This custom goes back to the earliest Christian worship. No doubt it originates in the welcome Jews still give the bringing in of the Torah scrolls. It was preserved by Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and practised by the Scottish Kirk — where the Bible deliberately preceded the preacher as a reminder of whose witness he was. A church which calls its clergy 'ministers of the Word' would do well to adopt it.

Whether the Bible should be carried out again at the end of the service is an interesting question. When the Word has been read and proclaimed, are not the people the bearers of the Word as they leave? Perhaps the Bible should remain on the lectern until the people gather around it next time.



Photo: Eddy Marmur

THE GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Here the service proper begins. 'Gathering' describes what is happening: people arrive, ushers welcome visitors, others prepare to exercise their gifts in the service.

Processions of clergy and other leaders best occur before the Call to Worship, because such ministers are part of the congregation, and we cannot really begin until they are there. A processional hymn is already worship.

1 CALL TO WORSHIP

The opening words of the liturgy are not about human affairs. This is not a church business meeting. Therefore the first words ought not to be about us and our relationships — 'Hi!' or even 'Good Morning!' — but the significant call: 'Let us worship God'. It says simply why we are here. There are other moments for affirming our humanity. For now, we have one purpose that unites us.

We also have the custom, derived from Calvin and later Puritan teaching, of reading some verses of scripture. At best, they focus what we are doing: at worst, they just add words. A selection may be found in LB pp. 558–563.



Photo: Eddy Marmur

Christians and the first day of the week

Now on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. (John 20:1 RSV)

When the Day of Pentecost was come, they were all together in one place. (Acts 2:1)

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them... and he prolonged his speech until midnight. (Acts 20:7, 11)

On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come. (1 Corinthians 16:2)

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day...

(John the Divine, Revelation 1:10)

We all hold this common gathering on Sunday, since it is the first day on which God, transforming darkness and matter made the universe, and Jesus Christ our saviour rose from the dead the same day.

(c. 155 A.D., Justin Martyr, *to the Emperor*)

Now, to get rid of this great pile of ceremonies, the Supper could have been administered most becomingly if it were set before the church very often, and at least once a week.

(John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, xvii, 43)

Rather it [the Lord's Supper] was ordained to be frequently used among all Christians in order that they might frequently return in memory to Christ's Passion, by such remembrance sustain and strengthen their faith, and urge themselves to sing thanksgiving to God and to proclaim his goodness; finally by it to nourish mutual love, and among themselves give witness to this love, and discern its bond in the unity of Christ's body.

(John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, xvii, 44)

Setting the mood

An introit, which may be better sung by everyone rather than by a choir only, may be used at the beginning to set the mood appropriate to a season. Certain key biblical words or phrases can provide a starting point for choosing suitable pieces: for example, for the four Sundays of Advent, a setting of 'Maranatha' ('O Lord, come quickly'; Revelation 22:20); for Christmas/Epiphany, a verse of a Christmas carol or hymn; in Lent, a setting of the *Kyrie eleison* (Lord, have mercy); for Easter (and the fifty days following), an Alleluia; for Pentecost Day, 'Come Holy Spirit'. More general themes may be used at other times: of worship, or invocation.

Silence is golden

What helps create a prayerful atmosphere in a congregation? Usually, some moments to reflect, to 'rest in God', and this is best done in silence — a precious commodity. Certainly there should be times during the service for this, both before and after certain items; prayers and readings, for example. More subtly, there is the pace at which the service is led — not a breathless rush from item to item, but a relaxed move through the service, bearing in mind the high moments, and the plateaux, matching pace to the flow of the service. Keeping silence does not mean that at other moments you can't make a joyful noise! Only when there has been some silence can an outburst of joy be recognised.

2 HYMN

The hymn here is usually of adoration and praise. In penitential seasons, like Lent and Advent, a more solemn note might be struck, a quiet opening rather than a triumphant one.

3 GREETING

It will take a few weeks to get people used to the idea of remaining standing after the hymn, but this sets the scene for the greeting. Again, it is a worshipful greeting, not just a social one, and is connected with the Call to Worship.

When the people sit, the 'introduction to the theme of the service' mentioned in the rubric may follow. This may begin quite personally — taking time to welcome visitors (members don't need welcoming: they are the welcomers) — but moving on to help the people focus on the prayers to follow, either by mentioning their theme: adoration and confession; or by explaining the day or season: Easter, Pentecost, Hospital Sunday or whatever. The purpose is not to educate, but to help people pray better. If you take your lead from the readings for the day, be careful of imposing a theme on them: there is seldom a single theme.

And leave a moment's quiet before moving on.

4 PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

If the opening hymn was of adoration, strictly speaking there is no need for a prayer of the same kind. However, adoration is a neglected theme in worship, and the Commission on Liturgy has taken some trouble to supply examples to help us recover (and write) prayers which express the sheer love of God. One example is printed (LB 83); alternatives and models, LB 564–576.

Then a prayer of confession is offered. What are we doing in such a prayer? It is no accident that we use the same word in, for example, 'Let us confess our faith [in the words of creed]'. That is, confession is an acknowledgment of God's grace and faithfulness; although we are unworthy to come before the Lord, because of God's loving mercy, we can do so with full trust. The emphasis is on God's love, not on our individual sins. If particular sins are a burden on the conscience, and are a block to worship, they should be dealt with in another context. (See 'A Service of Reconciliation', LB 427/PB 96.)

So, after a pause for recollection, a *general* prayer of confession is offered. There are (at least) four ways of doing this. The first is free (or extempore) prayer. The second is to say a prayer together. One is printed (LB 83/PB 59). Other texts for all to say together may be found in PB: for example, 'The Great Litany', PB 164, 'A Litany for Lent', PB 194, 'A General Confession', PB 236. The third possibility is for the minister, or two people, to offer a prayer they have prepared, or to choose one from the section in LB [577–579, 580–585]. The fourth alternative is to use the 'Kyrie' responses, (Lord, have mercy, etc.). An explanation is given on LB 586–590 with a number of examples.

The kyries have a great variety of musical settings, ancient and modern. See: *Sing Alleluia* settings for Communion texts, Taizé music books, World Council of Churches conference and assembly worship books. A

combination of spoken and sung words works quite well, but the cue for everyone to join in the response needs to be clearly given.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

The prayer for forgiveness should always be answered by the assurance of the gospel's promises. The scriptures (for possible quotations, see LB 84, and more at 591–592) declare that forgiveness is offered to those who, being penitent, turn to Christ.

On that authority, the minister of the Word (or the leader responsible for the Word at this point — the Uniting Church does not confine this act to ordained ministers) declares the forgiveness of sins. It is a preached and applied word, in the same way as the text of a sermon is: the listener hears in the leader's words the Word of God.

This is not to take on a role unjustifiable in Protestant theology. Note the careful wording of the Declaration in the text (LB 84 — last three lines). It is Christ's word which is declared, not the minister's. By Christ's word of grace we are forgiven.

5 DOXOLOGY

A burst of praise ends this opening cycle of worship: adoration, confession, assurance, and thanks. Two possibilities are offered in the text (both LB and PB): the angels' hymn, 'Glory to God in the highest', which has been sung at this point since the 4th century, and another doxology (the word means 'giving glory') with a musical setting in the *Australian Hymn Book*. There are other doxologies in AHB (for example Nos 573–575, 577). A final verse of a well-known hymn which expressed praise of the Trinity would also serve. The 'Glory to God' has many musical settings for congregational use; a good choir might use a classical setting.

Thus prepared, we are now ready to hear God's Word for the day.

Now the Minister delivers some word of Scripture to console the conscience; and then he pronounces the Absolution in this manner:

Let each of you truly acknowledge that he is a sinner, humbling himself before God, and believe that the heavenly Father wills to be gracious unto him in Jesus Christ.

To all those that repent in this wise, and look to Jesus Christ for their salvation, I declare that the absolution of sins is effected, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

(John Calvin, *The Form of Church Prayers*, Strasbourg, 1545)

Extempore Prayer

It is worth noting that most prayers in *Uniting in Worship* are intended as models — certain prayers are printed in the text (including of the PB) and may be used there; others may be found in the anthologies at the end of LB; but it is hoped that a study of the examples might lead people to compose their own, using the contents to guide them. Free (extempore) prayer is always an alternative in our traditions, but free prayer is not without structure and logic — and again, each prayer in the text gives a guide to the purpose of that prayer at that point. This is no threat to creativity: it focuses it.

We might say that three skills are called for in leaders of prayer: the ability to read the prayers in *Uniting in Worship* well, to write and offer their own, and to pray extempore.

The so-called 'children's address' arrived in worship services earlier this century, a response, possibly, to the particular care of children needed during the First World War. A 'children's segment' was incorporated into the main service, quite apart from whatever worship might occur (at the appropriate levels of understanding) in Sunday school.

The main problem with a 'children's address' is: to whom is it addressed? If such a segment has any part in worship at all, it must be directed to the whole people of God, each of whom will draw from it (as they do from hymns, prayers, readings and sermon) at their own level of understanding. It ought to follow that each age-group will recognise that there are elements of the faith into which they have yet to grow: so, the younger into hymns expressing aspects which require greater experience of life; the older into rediscovering from the young the essential attitudes of those who enter the kingdom of heaven (not least, for example, as old and young together participate in Holy Communion).

The ministry of lector

The vital thing at this point in the service is that the scriptures be heard. The one skill needed in the person who reads is that they read well. A reader does not need an ABC accent to read well, nor the voice of an actor. They do need to have prepared well, to be aware that this is a sacred ministry and high responsibility, and to do the task to the best of their ability.

Announcing a reading

We can be very long-winded when it comes to proclaiming the scriptures. 'Hear the Word of God as it is recorded in . . .' followed by details of every verse including the ones omitted; followed by 'May God bless to us

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

'AN EARLY WORD'

The first rubric gives a place to what has been frequently a wandering item in Protestant worship: the address to younger members. This order gives it its proper place: in the Service of the Word, usually early, before younger members leave for their Christian education groups.

The point to notice is that whatever is said to one age-group in the congregation (and some would oppose such an exercise), it is a ministry of the Word, and should be based on scripture as much as the sermon is. It should not be a moral, or an entertaining tale. It should not even be instruction, since this is worship, and Christian education as such takes place elsewhere in most congregations. However, it may be an opportunity to explain or introduce some aspect of the faith which assists the congregation to worship more intelligently; for example, a word about a symbol in a window, a piece of major furniture (pulpit, table, font), an action (pouring water, standing to sing a hymn), a type of prayer (thanksgiving, confession, intercession), some part of the church's vocabulary (Amen, Hallelujah, salvation, love, Advent, Lent.) This a church-directed, worshipful word.

INTRODUCTION TO THE READINGS

This little instruction is worth some careful thought. How many people in your congregation could easily find their way around the Bible? If the reading began 'And he said to Ahab . . .', would they know which Testament it came from, and who 'he' was? Our lectionary simply lists readings by chapter and verse (based on *Revised Standard Version* versification — versions differ) and often a reading will begin part-way through a story. The person reading should look carefully at the context of the lesson, and compose a succinct sentence (at a stretch: two) which helps the listeners focus on the passage.

So, Year A, Sunday 26, Matthew 21:28–32. In the *Revised Standard Version*, the reading begins 'What do you think?', a question put by Jesus. A parable follows. A simple introduction like this might help: 'Jesus is teaching in the Temple' or, 'In the Temple, Jesus tells the parable of the two sons'.

Or, Year B, Sunday 31, Deuteronomy 6:1–9. This is a very important passage, but it takes some time to get to the point. 'In Deuteronomy, chapter 6, Moses instructs the people to teach every generation the first and great commandment.'

THE READINGS

The Commission on Liturgy recommends that the readings proceed as a single section, commencing with a response (which also serves as a short prayer for illumination), and concluding with another response (two are printed: LB 86, PB 61). Recently some have borrowed from other traditions the habit of interleaving readings with different responses, especially 'This is the Word of the Lord'. It seems better to leave that declaration until *all* have been read. The second alternative conclusion, 'Lord, may your Word live in us' is unique to the Uniting Church, and a



Photo: New Times

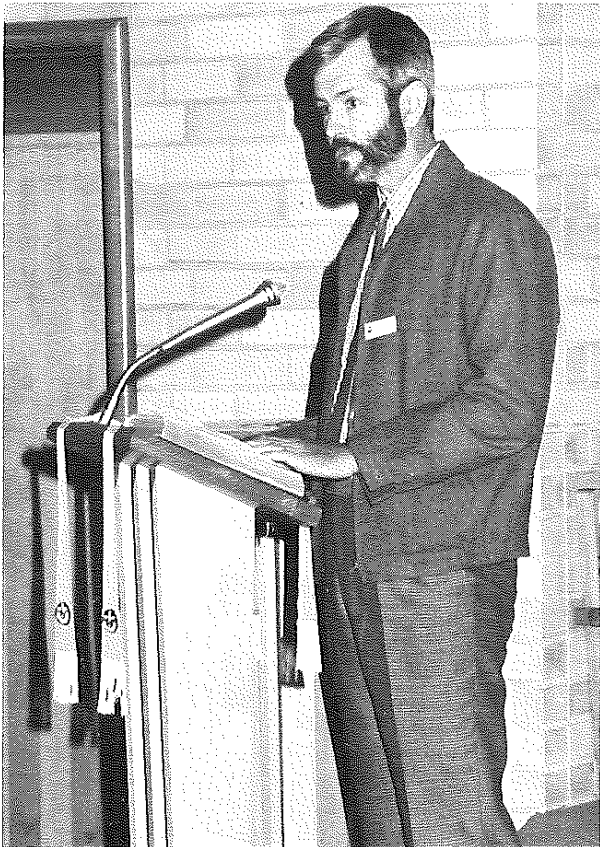


Photo: Eddy Marmur



this/these readings, and . . .'. If people are following the reading in their Bibles, then they will need verse references (and time to find the place). If they are not, are verse references necessary — especially if they are listed on the day's notice sheet? The reading should commence simply, 'A reading from the prophet Isaiah', or 'We read from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 6', followed, as suggested above, by a one-sentence introduction to set the context. In between the various readings, there is no need for further words, not even an Amen. Just read the passages. At the end, one of the prayerful responses provided. With a minimum of our words, God's Word can stand out more clearly.

very appropriate prayer. The Word is not read for its own sake but, that hearing it, we may do it (Luke 8:15).

The psalm is now restored to our congregations, to our great benefit. We need to have the language of the psalms in our vocabulary. The translation is that made for the Episcopal Church in the U.S.A., modified at a number of points for inclusive language, but without damage to accurate translation of the Hebrew. The full psalter is not printed in the PB: just the selections provided in the lectionary.

GLORY BE . . .

Older settings of the psalms provided for the 'Gloria' to be sung at their conclusion. A modern version and several musical settings are found at PB 146–149.

The justification was that the church needed to take the psalms up into the fullness of praise of the Holy Trinity, but questions may now be raised about this argument. God has not changed between Old and New Testaments. The praise of God in the psalms is not the praise of a God other than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The issue of whether all the psalms are suitable for use in worship, or suitable for use in a Christian context, is a different one. One of the strengths of the psalms is that they do not hide the thoughts and feelings, worthy and unworthy, of those who cry out to God. The God whose mercy we know in Jesus Christ is the God who hears and forgives. We do not need to 'christianise' the psalms (or reject our Jewish heritage). The 'Gloria' is not necessary — but as a short burst of praise, it is a valuable inheritance.

11 PREACHING OF THE WORD

Of books on this subject, there is no end, so little comment is needed here. See also the chapter on the lectionary and the Christian year.

Sermons are, of course, acts of worship too, so they may begin with a prayer, or the daring (and prophetic) claim that they are preached 'in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit'. They may also end in prayer, or with an ascription of glory (examples, LB 600–602).

It may be good to leave a time of silence after the sermon. People tend to rush on to the next item, but if the preacher indicates some particular theme of the sermon, or question, or need, on which people might fruitfully ponder for a few moments, they will not feel awkward about the silence, and will learn something of prayer. And let leaders and musicians refrain from turning pages during the silence . . .

RESPONSES TO THE WORD READ AND PREACHED

The rubrics here direct the leader to follow a different course through responses to the Word to the final section of the service, the Sending Forth, according to whether or not the sacrament is celebrated. See the diagram above. The commentary in the remainder of this chapter will follow the path of a non-sacramental service.

There is good reason for dividing the service at this point, even though several of the items appear twice. The elements that follow are responses to the living Word, quite apart from the sacrament.

The first response is to affirm the faith, for example, in a creed. Such

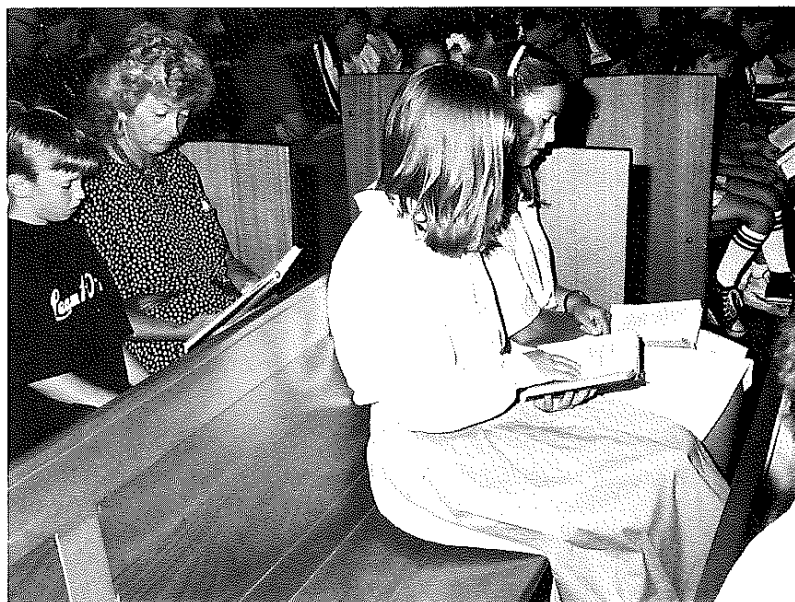
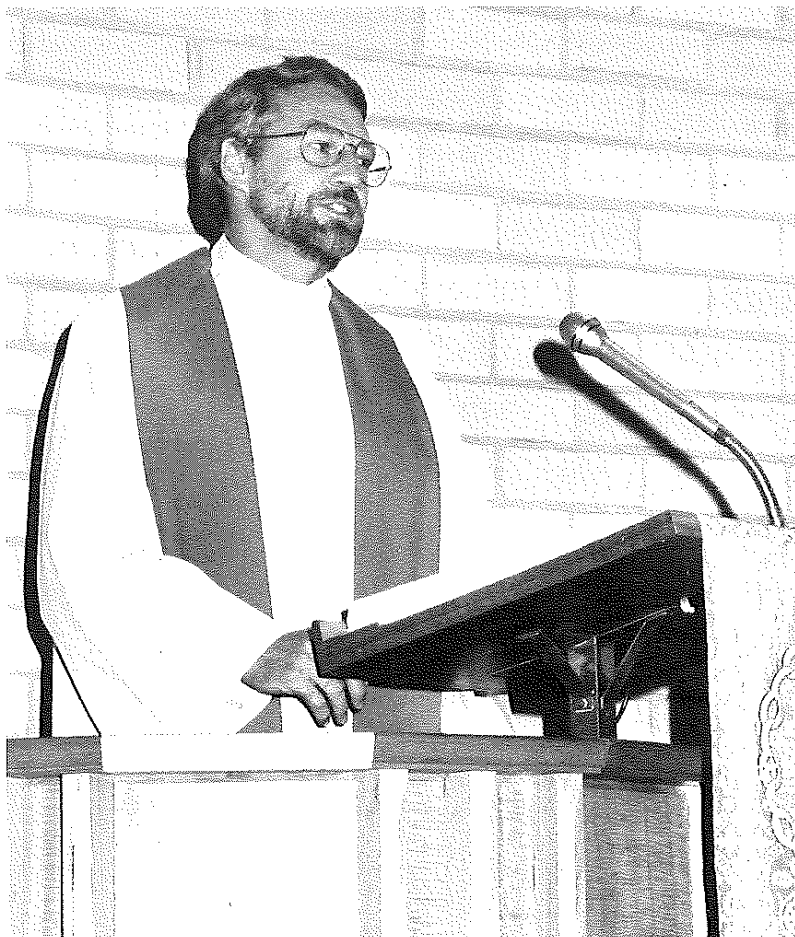


Photo: Eddy Marmur

Saying the psalms

The psalms [PB only: 245–356] are printed so that they divide at the mid point of each verse. In most cases, this will open up the poetic form of the original Hebrew. The Hebrew does not rhyme words, it rhymes ideas. The theme in the first sentence is echoed, paralleled, or affirmed in a different way in the second sentence, and so on. The two halves may be read by two sides of a congregation, or by choir and congregation, or by the reader with the congregation responding with the part in *bold type*.

The corporate reading of psalms (and prayers) is sometimes marred by being done too quickly. Encourage people to listen to each other, to say the words slowly, consciously offering them as their own. Good choirs know how important it is for individual singers to tune their ears to what others are doing; thus harmony is achieved and the words are heard.

A good deal of effort is being put into finding accessible ways of singing the psalms again. Congregations with good choirs will have a great advantage here. It would have struck the original authors as very odd that their poems are merely said!

Both the *Australian Hymn Book* and *Sing Alleluia* have an index listing the psalms which are set.

A creed or not a creed

We may ask: is a creed necessary at Holy Communion? Historically, the creed entered the liturgy in the middle ages; for a thousand years of the church's history, it was only used at baptism. Most modern Great Prayers of Thanksgiving in fact summarise the faith in a credal way, so that the creed itself is not required further 'to guard the faith'. One of the several hymns based on the ancient hymn *Te Deum* may also provide for this aspect of worship. At the end of the day, worshippers should be able to answer affirmatively the question: did we celebrate the faith as we have received it? (See 1 Corinthians 15:1–7.) Beware cheap substitutes and watered-down versions.

Te Deum

The ancient hymn with this unpromising Latin title provides a good vehicle for saying or singing the Trinitarian faith. It is a creed in poetic and prayerful form.

The ecumenical translation for reading is found in PB 152 #17. It is versified and set to music in *AHB* 1, 86 and 113 and *Sing Alleluia* 40.

Honour the Lord with your substance
and with the first fruits of all your
produce.

(Proverbs 3:9 RSV)

Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and
the power, and the glory, and the vic-
tory, and the majesty; for all that is in
the heavens and in the earth is thine;
thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and
thou art exalted as head above all.

(1 Chronicles 29:11 RSV)

If the dough offered as first fruits is
holy, so is the whole lump; and if the
root is holy, so are the branches.

(Romans 11:16 RSV)

affirmations are (like the hymn) an offering of 'right praise' or 'doxology'. The second response is the offering of material gifts, usually a collection of money. The third is a sharing of the life and concerns of the Christian community. The fourth is an offering of prayer for the church and the world. What needs to be kept very clear is that each of these offerings is a response to God's goodness. They are not signs of our wisdom, generosity, sensitivity or piety.

12 AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

A distinction should be made here. The *Basis of Union*, paragraph 9, gives unique authority as statements of the Catholic Faith to the two confessions known as the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds. They are commended for use in worship as acts of allegiance to God the Holy Trinity. When we confess our faith, these two creeds have first claim to be used, and we must not set them aside on the grounds that they need careful explanation.

There are also a number of present-day statements which highlight aspects which the modern church wishes to affirm; social justice, for instance. Many of these (see PB 130–134) are based on confessions of 20th century churches and councils. They have the authority of their sources, but they do not claim to state the fullness of the faith as the historic creeds do, and should not therefore replace the creeds. The intention of the Commission on Liturgy is that the creeds should be used when a confession of faith is required in the sacramental life of the church. The Apostles' Creed is used at baptisms and confirmations because it began life as a baptismal formula and retains the 'I believe' form suitable for personal commitment; the Nicene Creed has a traditional place at the eucharist. Other confessions (including a number culled from the Bible itself — PB 124–130) may be used on other occasions.

13 HYMN

The choice will no doubt reflect the central theme of the sermon or be an appropriate response to it. If no Creed or Affirmation is used, it will have followed immediately after the preaching — or rather, as the rubric suggests, after a brief silence for meditation.

14 OFFERING

It is time to think carefully about what we do at the Offering. Some time in the last century, steps were taken to dignify the collection as a more solemn thank-offering. Prior to that, the offering for the poor was taken up at the end of the service. To take up the collection during the service meant organising a team of lay people and instructing them in how to carry out their duties with courtesy; the plates were brought in procession to the Table as the people stood. All this was done for sincere reasons, but the result was to place a heavy emphasis on one item in the service, and to make it dangerously human-centred. That is, it is difficult not to see the Offering as a demonstration of our generosity.

Serious thought was given to reverting to the name Collection for this action — partly because that was a biblical title for it, for example, the King James Version of 1 Corinthians 16:1; and partly because it has no

theological overtones. Paul's purpose in calling for a collection was to raise monies for the relief of the poor in Jerusalem, and that kind of aim ought to remain uppermost in our minds. The offering has now become a major source of church finance — for local as well as outside needs. This should not obscure the fact that — as the old chorus sung at this point affirmed — 'All that we have is Thine alone'; our offering is only part of our stewardship of God's gifts, given as a grateful response for our blessings and out of concern for others' needs as prompted by the gospel.

Thus the first prayer (LB 605) which was specially written for this purpose, takes up the biblical theme of 'first fruits', which is what our offering is: a part of what we have is offered to God as representative of the whole of what we have and are. It is not a token given away while we retain the rest: it is a sign that all we have is God's, and we are stewards of God's wealth.

Further comment is made on this point in the next chapter, regarding the Offering at Communion.

15 NOTICES AND CONCERNS OF THE CHURCH

Care must be taken that the 'intimations' do not take so long that people can't absorb their content, or that the flow of the service is destroyed. On the other hand, this is properly a part of the liturgy: the offering of our concern for those beyond our local community (leading to intercession), and announcements concerning the life of this congregation and community, which are part of our obedience to the gospel. They should lead into the Prayers of the People, which are both local and universal.

16 PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

(a) Thanksgiving

There is a Lutheran custom that, even when the Lord's Supper is not observed, a communion hymn is always sung. This is to remind people that the fullness of Christian worship is experienced when the church gives thanks and breaks the bread. A similar thought is in mind here: all our services should be 'eucharistic', that is, they should include thanksgiving. So on those Sundays when the sacrament is not celebrated, the Prayers of the People should contain thanks and, moreover, the great themes of Christian praise which also occur in the Great Prayers of Thanksgiving at the Table. Those prayers are not only thanksgiving over bread and wine, they rehearse the 'mighty works of God'; they express the church's universal praise for all that God has done as set forth in the scriptures and known in the life of the church.

A number of prayers — which may begin with the response familiar from the Lord's Supper ('Lift up your hearts'), making this link clear — are listed at LB 609–622.

(b) Intercession

Intercessions can be one of the more difficult parts of public prayer. They can degenerate very quickly into a 'Cook's Tour' of the world's problems, implying that God either is not aware of the issues, or will work some magic at our request. Leaders (who, we hope, will frequently be lay

Now concerning the contribution for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside, and store it up, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem

(1 Corinthians 16:1–3 RSV)

Of his [the Father's] own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

(James 1:18 RSV)

Other verses, which may be used to introduce the Offering, are at LB 603–4.

A litany of thanksgiving is found at PB 170–171. For a church anniversary, the people could respond with the litany on PB 204–205. Note the difference between prayers of Adoration and of Thanksgiving: in the first, we give praise for who God is; in the second, we give glory for what God has done.

Examples of intercessions are found in LB 623–634, arranged under various subject headings, and there are further topics (a large supply!) listed in LB 634–640. The people may be invited to turn to PB 172–190 for responsive prayers (litanies) which easily allow for the insertion of local or particular concerns.

Examples of concluding Collects are at LB 645–648. One which may be said by all is at LB 645 (#2) and in PB 212 (#3). Many of the prayers in the 'Treasury of Prayers' are collects. The Collects of the Day are found arranged according to the lectionary and church calendar in the section LB 146–346.

Commemorations of the faithful departed remind us that 'while death is the end of human life, it marks a new beginning in our relationship with God' (Funeral Service, LB 456). And 'in you, Father, we are one family in earth and heaven' (LB 641, #1 — from the *Methodist Service Book*, U.K.). This is part of what it means to believe in the communion of saints, the living and the dead in Christ. And this prayer is a ministry to the bereaved, who need times to remember and to give thanks (see especially LB 642f, #3, #7 and #10). See the whole selection of examples LB 641–644.

'An embarrassment of riches'

One of the problems of *Uniting in Worship* is that it is so rich in resources. There is a serious danger of overeating. Leaders must take care not to put too much into one time of prayer, and not to choose too many prayers even in the name of congregational participation. People need time to reflect, to make the word their own. Silences and a relaxed manner of leadership are helpful.

One way through this is to plan a cycle of prayer, so that every concern is not prayed for every Sunday! The World Council of Churches publishes an ecumenical prayer cycle, *For All God's People*, listing nations and churches with the requests of the local Christians and some examples of locally-written prayers. This can save us from praying only for nations in the news. A local presbytery might like to draw up a cycle (52–53 Sundays) which lists its parishes, special committees, local institutions, including prayers for other presbyteries, synods and the assembly. Then all the parishes can share their common concerns and their common prayer. Other bodies also publish such cycles.

people) need to think carefully about what they are asking and what they expect from God, in the light of the scriptures.

The rubric gives four areas for prayer (PB 69, LB 131), ranging from the international to the local. Then it gives some responses which may be said or sung (PB 70, LB 132), and suggests that the prayer may conclude with a commemoration of the faithful departed and a collect. Collects are very succinctly written prayers which sum up or 'collect' our thoughts, and so provide an appropriate conclusion to more discursive prayers.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

There are several places where the Lord's Prayer may be appropriately said. The Commission on Liturgy has suggested that on non-sacramental Sundays, the familiar custom of using the Lord's Prayer as a summary of all Christian prayer might be followed — so it concludes the Prayers of the People, as here. At the Lord's Supper, however, the Lord's Prayer has frequently concluded the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving, where the petition 'give us this day our daily bread' gains a special emphasis.

THE SENDING FORTH OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

The two routes through the Service of the Lord's Day — via the sacrament or otherwise — now come together again. The fourth section is common to both. It is a unique feature of this service that this section is separate — the Approach-Word-Response pattern which has become familiar recently. It balances the opening section, The Gathering of the People of God.

The Sending Forth is intended to make a point about the relationship of worship to mission. Often our services end introspectively; that is, they turn us inward upon ourselves. Blessings are often followed by slowly-sung Amens, which blunt the biblical sense of a blessing received in order to send God's pilgrim people onwards in their journey.

This service calls for a new attitude in the closing moments of worship. No longer a muted Amen, followed by personal prayer, and sitting after the minister has departed. But, eyes open, ears alert to receive the assurance of God's presence, to hear the evangelical charge, to respond with thanks, and to follow the minister out of the church-building into the world.

17 HYMN

A hymn which calls for commitment to mission would be appropriate.

18 WORD OF MISSION

This is not intended to be a second sermon, even a short one! But it is a charge. It may be given in a scriptural verse (see LB 659); some thought may be given by the preacher to an appropriate summary-verse from the day's texts. A visiting preacher may be asked to give this word, with the local minister giving the blessing. Such a word may well appropriately come from the deaconess or deacon. It may take the form of a short sentence — the division of Word of Mission and Dismissal (section 20) is somewhat arbitrary. The aim is to make explicit the theology of mission mentioned above: the Word read and preached sends us forth.



Photo: Eddy Marmur

At the end [of the Lord's Prayer] is added, 'Amen'. By it is expressed the warmth of desire to obtain what we have asked of God. And our hope is strengthened that all things of this sort have already been brought to pass, and will surely be granted to us, since they have been promised by God, who cannot deceive.

(John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xx, 47)

The efficacy of prayer consists in our learning also to say 'Amen' to it — that is, not to doubt that our prayer is surely heard and will be granted. This word is nothing else than an unquestioning affirmation of faith on the part of the one who does not pray as a matter of chance, but knows that God does not lie, since he has promised to grant his requests. Where such faith is wanting, there can be no true prayer.

Martin Luther, *Exposition of the Larger Catechism*, 1529

19 BLESSING

The LORD said to Moses, Say to Aaron and his sons, 'Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The LORD bless you and keep you: The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you: The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them'.

(Numbers 6:22–27 RSV)

And [Jesus] took [the children] in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them.

(Mark 10:16 RSV)

Then [Jesus] led [the disciples] out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them.

(Luke 24:50 RSV)

We have suffered from a weak and unbiblical view of blessing in recent years. No scriptural writer would regard a blessing as a mere form of words. It is a ministry of the Word: a Word which does not go forth void. It is the task and responsibility of a Minister of the Word to invoke God's blessing: we are not the same after the blessing; we are empowered for God's work. So it is perhaps best 'enacted' by the Minister raising both hands (see Luke 24:50 RSV) and looking around the whole congregation, actually seeing the people whom God is blessing. Some may wish to trace the sign of the cross in the air — make it a generous gesture, not a hurried geometrical sign — because it is in the cross that Christians find God's promises fulfilled.

Blessings from the scriptures are listed in LB 661–666 — these are options to the two printed in the text (PB 71/LB 133). There are also introductory sentences appropriate to the seasons of the Christian year (LB 664–666). If the prayer known as 'the Grace' (2 Corinthians 13:14) is used, the Commission on Liturgy offers the suggestion that 'evermore' be the final word (see LB 661, #4,5). No doubt individuals may have other preferences, but in an age of endless variation, it may help to have one standard form! It is important also to follow accurately the grammar of a biblical blessing: to say 'the grace . . . is with us' or some other variation, is to destroy the special nature of the blessing, and frequently to substitute something weak and sentimental.

20 DISMISSAL

This is the alternative way of concluding if a Word of Mission is not used at #18. That is, leaders may choose whether they wish to give a charge, and let the Blessing be the last word; or whether they wish to pronounce the Blessing, and let a responsive sending-forth and affirmation of Christ by everyone conclude the service.

The very last Dismissal (LB 668, #7) was written by the Congregationalist/UCA theologian Dr H. F. Leatherland. It states perfectly the vital link between worship and mission.

Amen

This comment is not meant to dismiss the singing of Amens. Amen, however, is a congregational word. It is the one word, as it were, which ought never to be said by the leader. It is the people's way of saying, 'Yes, Lord, that is what we wish to say'. If the majority of the congregation can sing, then sing it — but perhaps choose music with a single Amen and on a rising note and a crescendo! This, however, will only work if the Blessing is the last act of the service. If a Dismissal is used, the Amen is redundant — it makes no sense to say 'In the name of Christ' and to sing the Amen which affirms it. The organist has a chance to prepare for the postlude, a piece of music which lifts the heart and sends us away singing.

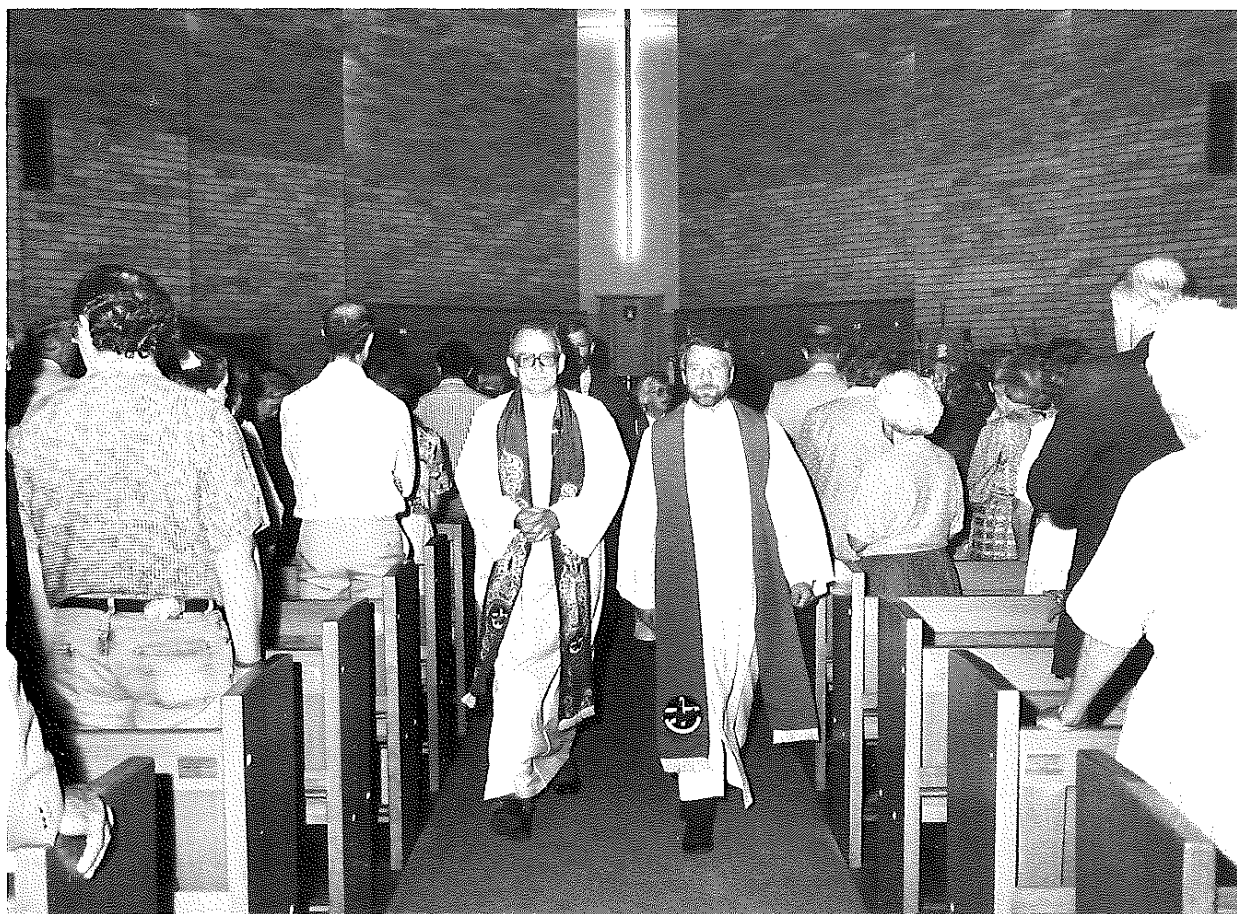


Photo: Eddy Marmur

