



Let us Pray: Notes for Intercessors

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Wow!
and thank you

So you have been asked to lead the prayers at the Sunday Eucharist? If you are new(ish) to this, *don't be alarmed*. If you are experienced, take time to review your approach. Leading us in prayer like this is a privilege and can certainly be daunting. *Thank you for doing it*. It is a ministry to us all – please remember just how much we appreciate it.

What should I do?

Stay calm. Allow time for preparation. *Pray* them (this may sound obvious). If you are new to leading the prayers, rehearse them (you might consider using a tape recorder or someone you trust who is able to offer feedback).

What does 'the book' say?

Common Worship is the prayer book of the Church of England. The advice it gives about the intercessions is rather limited. On page 174 it says: "The prayers usually include these concerns and may follow this sequence:

A copy of Common Worship may be consulted in the Vestry and online – go to the Links page of our parish website – address above - and follow the links to 'Common Worship'

- The Church of Christ
- Creation, human society, the Sovereign and those in authority
- The local community
- Those who suffer
- The communion of saints

These responses may be used

(Intercessor) *Lord, in your mercy*
All **hear our prayer**

or
Intercessor *Lord, hear us*
All **Lord, graciously hear us**

And at the end: *Merciful God*
All **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen."**

Common Worship gives additional advice on pages 281- 287). You are not bound to follow this sequence or use these responses. Below, are some more ideas and suggestions.

Are there any golden rules?
Yes!

Rule 1: The intercessions must last no longer than four minutes!

Rule 2: Love God and do (say) what you like (*St Augustine*)

Rule 3: The intercessions must last no longer than four minutes!

Rules 1 and 3 are too often broken. In leading the *prayers of the people* we are **not**

- Giving a sermon
- Telling people what God thinks
- Telling God what's what
- Giving our view on hot issues

Can I get help?

Yes, of course. If you need to, talk with others on the Intercessions team, or with any of the clergy. Be sure to look at the readings for the day (Old Testament and Gospel). If in doubt, the duty vergers or the parish secretary will be able to confirm the readings for the day. There are numerous books that offer help – too many to name here. If you are near a bookshop such as Mowbray's on Margaret Street W1 (just north of Oxford Circus) you'll find a good selection.

Some thoughts for those leading us in prayer

What are we doing?

We are a Christian community, part of the Christian Church. Our prayers are

- made to God (Father, Mother, Creator)
- through Jesus Christ (the Son, the Word Made Human, Redeemer)
- in the power of the Holy Spirit

Practical things

What happens is *corporate* prayer – the corporate prayer of our community. We shall be praying along the lines that you lay before us. It is important that we hear what you are saying, so those leading intercessions need to be audible. Speak clearly and slowly. Our PA system is good, and a clear speaking voice will be picked up. Feel free to steady yourself by holding on to the Lectern if you need to.

- the PA system

- be ready: you are on after The Creed

Get to the lectern quickly, so there is no delay after the Creed - lurk in the wings. Have everything to hand, preferably on one piece of paper. *Remember that you are speaking to God on our behalf.*

Some people will bow to Altar as a sign of respect before (and sometimes after) they have offered the prayers. This is a matter of personal choice, either way.

Using the radio mic and a different location

If you prefer, you can lead the prayers from towards the back of the aisle, facing the altar, but be sure to arrange with the verger to have the radio mic.

On a few occasions the prayers have been offered by two people. The choice is yours. They can be sung (by you) if you are confident and able. And the responses can be sung to your said prayers (for this option please involve Lil so she can rehearse and lead any sung response). We are open to new approaches. Please check this and other out-of-the-ordinary styles beforehand with whichever priest is presiding that day.

Please give us a structure, so we can relax into it and pray....

A clearly defined structure to the intercessions will help people participate prayerfully. A useful framework is this, starting from ourselves, reaching out to others, the world (creation) and to the future:

- **For ourselves** (e.g. that we may dedicate ourselves to God, practice the art of loving, forgive ourselves and others, serve others, be signs of God's Kingdom)
- **For others** (e.g. other people, cultures and traditions and societies. You can include the names of individuals known to us, here)
- **For the world** (e.g. specific places needing our prayers; for right stewardship of our small, precious planet, for justice and peace)

It is customary to pray also for **the Church** (this is the whole church of Christ – not just the CofE). At St James we often also include prayers that are respectful of other faith traditions.

Feel free to depart from this pattern, or order, if you wish to (but remember that many people are helped by a framework that is broadly familiar – see some of the survey responses below). You might also wish to include some of the following:

- Our life and witness at St James (and people who work here, for example, and the members of the PCC and Church Wardens from time to time)
- Peoples' lives in their *work places/homes*

And be sure to remember that *thanksgiving* and *praise* should be included. We should thank God for 'all the blessings of this life' and for all the good things of life.

Ending each section with a line to which all respond

A congregational response is a good way of marking out the structure, and bringing silences to an end. If you are using a congregational response (see page 1) it is a good idea to introduce it clearly at the beginning. (Another response that is used locally is **'Lord, you are with us'** Response: *Answer our prayer*).

Some intercessors at St James like to avoid any congregational response, instead using silence "so that we can make the prayers our own". This carries some risks, and can lack structure. It should be used only occasionally. Making a congregational response *also* allows us 'to make the prayers our own' and vocally gives others a role in what you are doing.

Silence – let us know when, and why

Silence does have a place, and a powerful place when used well. It helps if you give us guidance on this, clues really. For example: "God (Father), we now bring before you in the silence of our hearts those who are known to us to be in need" (but when you do this, be sure to give us some silence! A practical tip is to count slowly – and silently - to 10).

"Dear God, we pray for all those afflicted by sections, and sub sections... Avoid intercessionary overload..."

Watch your language! Most effective of all is simple, clear everyday language. God is unlikely to be impressed by complex phrasing and long words. His/Her interest is in what our hearts really desire. So, speak from your heart. Prayer is intimate.

It's important to be up to date with the news, both national and local events. But don't try to match CNN or BBC News 24. You don't have to mention every event, every region, every item of hot news. In fact, please don't.

Don't forget to get personal...

You may wish to check with others or any of the clergy for people to be included from our community. Feel free to refer to the prayer requests in the prayer corner. To be prayed for can be very powerful. Keep your ears to the ground about your sisters and brothers who may appreciate being remembered in this way.

"And by the way...!"

Avoid the temptation to teach during prayers: prayers are from the people to God, not vice-versa.

There are no experts in prayer. Never be anything other than human in the presence of God. Prayer is not a technique - it is a dialogue of love.

We surveyed views amongst our SJP community on the intercessions *here is a summary of what was said*

We asked

If someone was preparing the intercessions for the first time, what friendly advice would you give them?

Comments included...

- Keep it simple. Be selective – don't try to pray for everyone and everything
- Speak slowly and clearly. Take time to pause
- You are not praying your own prayers, but leading us in ours
- Speak from the heart
- Go strongly enough to take everyone with you
- Headings [groupings] help us focus
- Remember you are praying in God's strength, not just your own
- Please include members of our community and others known to us
- Connect with the sermon or the readings for the day if possible
- Use inclusive language

We asked

What do you find most unhelpful about the intercessions?

Comments included...

- Sometimes they are too long [this point came up in most responses] – a mini sermon
- When the intercessor tells the Almighty what the Almighty already knows

- When they are mumbled, or too elaborate or 'trying' to be too topical
- Long lists – of countries and crises
- Being given details of people's ailments ("I'd hate mine being read out!")
- When they add to the burden of the world without celebrating our Christian hope
- Over imaginative use of language – sincerity better than originality
- Whilst I appreciate the global issues (war-zones, hunger zones etc) I am deeply convinced about the need to ask guidance in our individual lives, help with our personal dilemmas, blind spots and blockages – to pray for a change in heart

We asked

What do you find most helpful?

Comments included...

- A meditative quality
- Naming members of our community who need our prayerful care
- A kind of neutrality – or universality – rather than a very personal style
- The traditional structure works well – too much departure can break the flow of the entire liturgy
- Pauses and pacing – so I can participate
- Sticking with the customary responses – its familiar and supports me in my praying
- When phrases describe the many faces of God, e.g. Generous God, Forgiving God
- The prayers being short

Twenty five people returned the survey questionnaires. Many said how much they appreciate what the intercessors do – there is a widespread *appreciation* of the ministry of intercession during our Eucharist – so do remember that you are being lovingly supported when you lead us in our prayers. *Thank you* for doing this, and for being part of our community.

These notes were first produced in February 2003 by Hugh Valentine and later revised. Comments for future revisions to Hugh please, c/o the Vestry or via hugh@st-james-piccadilly.org

*O God,
 Lead us from death to life,
 from falsehood to truth.
 Lead us from despair to hope,
 from fear to trust.
 Lead us from hate to love,
 from war to peace.
 Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe. Amen.*
 (Prayer for World Peace)