

Guidelines for Leading Prayers of the People / Intercessory Prayer

Definitions

Prayer: a time of conscious opening of ourselves to being with God and communing in God's Spirit.

Intercessory prayer: opening ourselves to God and God's Spirit with the intention of seeking blessing/ healing/ help for a specific situation or person and joining our prayer with the prayers of Christ.

Why do we offer these prayers?

Prayers of the People are part of our response to the Word. Our response flows out of the Word, we hear the challenge & are stirred into action by that and do a series of things in response: make an offering, offer prayers, give expression to our sense of community (notices are an expression of our community, this is what we're doing).

Prayers of the People traditionally have two parts – thanksgiving and intercession. We name what we are thankful for and we place before God the difficult situations in our world, in our church and in community and lives of individuals.

Luke 11 and other passages about prayer point us towards an engaged, relational sense of prayer, we're not separated from God in our prayer rather our praying is entering into the spiritual relationship that God has with us. God answers prayer with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Praying changes us as we open ourselves to being in relationship with God.

It is a time to be conscious of our unity with others throughout the world and to open ourselves to be part of the larger picture of God's love.

Preparing:

- Leading Sunday worship intercessory prayer is about creating the right space and form for public intercessory prayer to take place.
- Be yourself, bring your love of God, your joy in the offering of worship, your creativity and personal style to your leading of worship.
- Find out the theme of the service, speak to the liturgist or preacher if you have not been contacted already; there may be some obvious prayer points based on the theme of the service.
- Read the lectionary readings, they are provided in the Olive Press in the preceding week and can also be found in the monthly Olive Branch.
- Check out the lyrics of the songs, they might give you some images that are useful to help link in with the themes.
- Set time aside to be informed of issues for the world and the church by reading the papers or web-based news.
- It's a good idea to arrive half an hour earlier than the starting time. Ensure that the sand bowl & tapers or other resources for response (*see next section*) are available in the chapel space.
- You are invited to join with the minister and others involved in leading worship to pray in the Tower Room and prepare yourself for the important role you have as a leader of prayer.

Who/what do we pray for?

- Prayers are usually offered for:
 1. the world – Christ came because 'God so loved the world' so we pray giving expression to God's love for the world. We pray for God's creation, for all living things, nations and races
 2. the Church – we are a part of the body of Christ around the world. We pray that the church on earth may more fully represent and embody the Kingdom of God in the world, the new creation coming into being. As the Uniting Church we particularly pray for unity among Christ's people. We can bring the failings of the church before God and we can pray for our leaders, our members and our ministries, both locally and more widely.
 3. the community – the people, individuals, stories that shape our lives. We need to make space in our prayers for specific people and situations as well as creating a sense of the bigger picture of our relationship with God.
- We give thanks for the good things that are happening, for the people, organisations, groups who are making a difference.
- We pray for justice, hope, peace, faith, love, communion.
- We pray for difficult intractable situations because this names what we care about and describes who we are.
- Our prayer says that 'we don't know what to pray for, we don't know what the answer is, we bring these things to you God'.
- We pray for ourselves, that we might be able to do whatever it is that needs to be done.
- We pray with hope – looking forwards rather than backwards. There is no need for confession; we have already been reassured that we are forgiven.

Shaping the prayers

- On most Sundays, the leader will offer a spoken prayer on each of these areas, and take the candle to the back of the church for members of the congregation to light tapers during the last hymn, during communion, or at the end of the service. You may like to offer something more creative, and/or include a time of silence during the spoken prayer (see 'Responses' section).
- Generally you will need to tell the congregation how the prayer will "work". For example: You may say something along the lines of "This is the time we bring our joys and concerns to God. Today I will share a spoken prayer, and after that I will take the candle to the back, you are welcome to light a taper and offer your personal prayers during the last hymn or at the end of the service".
- Think about the images of God that you use in your prayer and for any responses that you choose. There are rich and diverse images of God in our tradition that can be drawn upon. Please make sure that the language used for the people of God is inclusive of all. Avoid the use of mainly male language for God. The document "Meditation on 100+ Names of the Divine" is very useful, available on our website or email saide.cameron@bigpond.com. There will be times when it is appropriate to conclude with the Lord's Prayer, to be discussed with the liturgist &/or preacher.
- Your opening words bring the congregation into an awareness of God's listening and loving presence. One example is: "Loving God, we know that you care for each of us and for every person in this world. Hear us as we bring our joys and concerns to you, as we share with you the griefs and burdens of this broken world."

Responses

- Taper Lighting is the usual form of response offered for personal prayer both after Holy Communion & during the last hymn or at the end of regular worship.
- The sand bowl & bowl of tapers are usually located on the table in the Tower (west) side chapel.
- If a particular theme has been developed for worship there may be other responses that the congregation can be invited to make.
- Silence - you will have to cue people into this and give direction gently eg., "now in the silence let us pray for...".
- Other possible symbolic action options include
 - floating petals in a bowl water or the Baptismal font,
 - placing pebbles in a bowl,
 - writing prayers on a flame, dove, tear drop and bringing them forward eg
 - for Pentecost 2013 we wrote on coloured flames and attached them to black poster paper
 - during Lent 2013 we walked the Lenten Path at various times
- Shared (communal) response
 - if it is spoken - will it be available on screen or will you teach it beforehand? You will need to cue the congregation for each response by word or gesture.
 - if it is a symbolic gesture - how and when? Remember to cue.
- A song, eg a Taize chant between each section, you will need to provide a cue either by gesture or in words which can be printed in the Olive Leaf on paper and the screen, eg. "We pray for the world as we sing . . ."
- Instrumental music between each section, then cue, eg "As we listen let us pray for the world"
- A Congregational prayer to say together at some point - there are resource books with such prayers available in the resource library in the Tower Room. This will need to be included in the order of worship and on the slides.

Things to watch for:

- This is public prayer and should be compassionately confidential and not gossipy.
- Use language that can be listened to and which the congregation can easily relate to.
- Remember that the focus is thanksgiving and intercession; the congregation has already joined in prayers of Adoration and Confession, and will be inspired with words of Sending Out at the end of the service. You don't have to do it all!
- God doesn't need lengthy explanations: God knows.
- Take your time and move on gently.
- Be aware of the length and flow of the service - you may want to adjust the time of prayer accordingly (you can check with the liturgist or minister).

Resources: Prayers of the People workshop, 21/10/15 facilitated by Ian Ferguson; Lacuna Manual; The Intercession Handbook; Bread for Tomorrow ed. Janet Morley; Be Our Freedom Lord - T. Falla; Prayers Encircling the World; Echoes on the Journey - D. McRae-MacMahon