

# Make Preparation

Liturgy Planning Notes

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*“He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready.  
Make preparation for us there.”*

MARK 14:15

# Foreword

I have been working with liturgy planning teams in the Faculty of Divinity at Trinity College, Toronto, for several years. The student body is divided into several teams of six to eight people who are responsible in rotation for planning most of a week's liturgies. Much of our energy goes into choosing hymns because, in Anglican tradition, the themes of the readings and seasons historically have been reflected in hymnody, whether in informal hymn-singing before and after services in early Anglicanism, when only the liturgical texts in *The Book of Common Prayer* were sung during the service, or in the later hymns of Isaac Watts and the Wesleyan revival. However, it is possible to raise awareness of the themes in other ways—for instance, through iconography or other art forms, or simply through appropriate decoration, such as pumpkins and coloured leaves at Thanksgiving. We have been fortunate in having the committed collaboration of the musicians of the college, so we try to learn collaboration by doing it.

Because liturgy has been a lifelong passion for me, I have tried to use our planning sessions as the platform for allied reflection on the history, development, spirituality, and theology of our models of formal worship. Unfortunately I did not keep track of my interventions of this kind, which were frequently spontaneous, and probably said the same things twice to one group and not at all to others. With these notes, I have tried to gather those reflections (and more) so they may be made available in a more organized way.

The two common threads that run through what follows are *planning* and *collaboration*. We are, in fact, talking about an art form for which a group is responsible. There are strong similarities to drama, in that a group of people, from director and principal actor to humblest stagehand, conspire (literally *breathe together*) to achieve a common end. Those responsible for planning liturgy must try to learn to breathe together, remembering that in some languages the same word stands for both *breath* and *spirit*. Good

liturgy is deeply rooted in the tradition, but it also speaks to and from the present moment. Coming to terms as a group with that duality is a form of spirituality.

The concept of time provides an example of that coming together of the tradition and the present moment. There are two words for time in the New Testament, *chronos* and *kairos*. I once heard a gifted preacher distinguish between them beautifully. The pragmatic Western mind says, “The meeting will begin at eight o’clock.” That’s *chronos*, time divided into measurable, consecutive units. The aboriginal mind is more likely to say, “The meeting will begin when we are all here.” That’s *kairos*, the fulfilled time, the time when the conditions for meeting have been completed. *Chronos* is linear and moves from step to step. *Kairos* is circular and embraces the various components of the event more or less at once.

One of the great problems in liturgy rises from the attempt to determine exactly when things happen. Christian liturgists and theologians have wasted a great deal of time trying to determine exactly when the consecration takes place in a celebration of the eucharist. At one moment the bread and wine are merely bread and wine. And then a second later they are the body and blood of the Lord. In what exact moment does this change take place? The question is based on *chronos*.

Because the church, the company of Jesus’ followers, is the basic symbol of the eucharist, there is a sense in which the bread and wine have been the sacrament from the moment they were selected to give expression to the church as the embodiment of the reign of God—perhaps from the moment they were gathered on the hillsides and vineyards.<sup>1</sup> This is not

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1. *Didache* 9 includes, “We give thanks to you, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you made known to us through your child Jesus, glory to you for evermore. As this broken bread was scattered over the mountains and when brought together became one, so let your Church be brought together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom; for yours are the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for evermore.” From *Prayers of the Eucharist Early and Reformed*, R.C.D. Jasper and G.J. Cuming, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 14f.

to relativize or denigrate the sacrament but to recognize the sacramental nature of the world. This is why the Byzantine Orthodox can apparently treat the elements at the time of the great entrance with the dignity we would expect to reserve to a later point after the recitation of the institution narrative.<sup>2</sup> The *kairos* time of liturgy has more in common with a circular mosaic or with a rose window or with a mandala than with the items of an agenda. Good planning is at the service of liturgy as *kairos*.

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2. See Glen Olsen, "Time and Expression in the Eucharist," in *Worship*, July 2006, vol. 80, no. 4, 310–26.

# Some Principles of Planning

There is no such thing as unplanned liturgy. All liturgy is planned, either well or poorly. The word *liturgy* is derived from Greek words that carry the weight of *people* and *work*. The term originally referred to a public duty, even perhaps a benefaction on behalf of the community. As a work, it was necessarily structured. One cannot bake bread or care for a garden without performing certain actions in a constructive order: do not start on the bread before you buy the yeast ... do not plant the seeds before you turn the soil.

From about the time that the Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek (third to second century BCE), the word *leitourgia* was applied to the services that were performed in the Jerusalem temple. It thus acquired in the Jewish-Christian tradition a theological, devotional, and ecclesiastical significance. It is the sequence of actions that are performed on any given occasion to honour God and to enable people to draw near the sacred.

I once attended a liturgy that, as best as I can remember, began with this sequence of events: a processional hymn, an informal greeting from the sanctuary steps ("Good morning! Welcome to All Saints"), a formal greeting from behind the holy table ("The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ"), the Collect for Purity, the *Gloria in excelsis* (said, not sung, by all in unison), the collect of the day (said by all in unison), a simple instruction of children gathered at the sanctuary step, a second hymn during which the children withdrew, and an anthem sung by the choir. The readings of the day followed.

Clearly this introductory rite (for such it was) was planned, but questions may be asked about the principles on which the planning was based. All the elements of this liturgy may be defended separately (some more than others), but not necessarily in the pattern and sequence in which they appeared together.



Why two greetings from different locations? If the nature of the congregation requires an informal greeting, why not attach it to the traditional formula and weave them together?

*The Book of Alternative Services* of The Anglican Church of Canada (on which this particular liturgy was based) assumes that a “full” Sunday celebration of the eucharist normally begins with a greeting, an act of praise, and a prayer called the *collect*. The rubrics recognize that the *Gloria in excelsis* has been a traditional act of praise for many centuries, and so has the *Kyrie eleison* (which in its origins actually has more in common with the affirmation “God save the Queen” or with “Amen, brother!” in a southern gospel meeting than with the penitential mood it has frequently evoked). However, the possibility of other hymns and canticles is recognized. In any case, why would one *say* the *Gloria in excelsis* when there are plenty of singable tunes? (It is like saying rather than singing “Happy birthday to you” while someone blows out the candles on their cake.) There are also metrical paraphrases of the *Gloria in excelsis* in the hymn book *Common Praise*, which may be sung to familiar melodies. In any case, why have the *Gloria in excelsis* at all when the opening section of the service already contains two hymns and an anthem?

If the purpose of the children’s focus is instruction, why not include it in the service of readings that follows, so that children may recognize from an early age that our education as Christians is intimately related to the stories and wisdom that comprise our Bible and its proclamation in church? Or why not allow the children to have a complete liturgy of the word on their own and then join the congregation for the table liturgy?<sup>1</sup>

Why was an anthem included in the opening part of the liturgy, and without apparent thematic relationship with what preceded and followed it? Anglicans are the beneficiaries of a rich and wonderful choral tradition, which was designed over centuries to focus and augment the rest of the liturgy. Why abandon this heritage?

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1. See Chapter 7, “Planning the Peace,” for a description of the involvement of children in the Peace and the table liturgy in a particular congregational setting.

It may be helpful to think of liturgy as an event. It is not abstract; it is a concrete “happening.” Further, it is an event composed of a number of events—there is the event of gathering, the event of reading and interpreting the scriptures, the event of praying for the world and the church, the event of greeting one another in the Peace of Christ, the event of bringing bread and wine and, after praying over them words of commemoration and supplication, eating and drinking the holy food, and there is the event that concludes the event through the dismissal of the community.

Within the event of the liturgy as a whole, there is a structure of smaller events. The meaning of the liturgy is not contained in some esoteric and hidden wisdom or even in the beauty of the music and architectural setting in which it is performed; the meaning is embedded in the structure. The task of liturgical leaders is to plan this event and the sequence of events of which it is composed so that the community may experience in its own terms and fashion the aspects of Christian tradition, challenge, and commitment that it emphasizes on any given occasion. There is no single way to perform the liturgy, but there is an underlying structure, which can support the many ways in which it may be shaped.

The challenge of planning, then, is not about stringing together a collection of disparate elements simply because they are part of our tradition or reflect a pastoral impulse of the moment. Liturgical planners must ask themselves a number of important questions and consider a number of possible answers.

1. First, a general question, but one that must be asked many times: what is the purpose and goal of a particular part of the liturgy? The general purpose and goal of the opening section of the liturgy is to bring the congregation together as a community, focused in praise and prayer. But what is the goal of each part?
2. Second, and more specifically, what is the theme of the day? What are we trying to lift up in praise and prayer (and sometimes in lament) on this particular occasion? What do the readings say to us? What challenges do the events of the local community and the world present?

The ancient custom of singing hymns like *Gloria in excelsis* <sup>2</sup> suggests that the praise of God is the glue that bonds us. However, even that noble tradition must be nuanced on occasion. We may still praise God at funerals and memorial services, but in a more muted way. Advent, with its awareness of both judgement and eternity, demands its own particular tone, and so does Lent. I suspect that, in many places, the opening hymn of praise on the Sunday after the destruction of the World Trade Center had a different quality from the one sung at most Christmas Eve services a few weeks later. Planners need not only to *think* about the theme of the day but also to *feel* it.

3. Out of all the possibilities available to us, how can we best bring a community together? Our hymn books, the psalter, our collections of canticles—there are many resources, and it is the job of planners to be familiar with them. Liturgical planning is an art form and it is the job of artists to know their media.

In addition, liturgical planning needs to be collaborative. It should involve at least the partnership of priest and musician, but others (e.g., lay readers, readers, members of a worship committee) may be involved as well. It is not a job for one person to do in isolation.

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2. I have not mentioned the so-called Collect for Purity (“Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open ...”) that follows the opening greeting in *The Book of Alternative Services* eucharistic rite as an option. Before the Reformation this beautiful prayer was part of the preparation of the clergy before the liturgy began. It was included in the early prayer books as part of the preparation of the whole congregation. The doctrine and worship committee responsible for *The Book of Alternative Services* intended to omit the prayer at this point in the book, but it was included by an act of the House of Bishops on what seemed at the time to some to be sentimental grounds. Its suitability for private devotion or vestry use cannot be questioned, but its presence immediately after the greeting interrupts the intended flow of greeting, praise, and prayer proper to the day.

Finally, a good test of the results of careful and reflective planning may be summed up in the word “simplicity.” If the purpose of the rite, the theme of the day, the coming together of the community, are all realized in subtle simplicity, the liturgy will speak to hearts and minds and wills.

# Planning the Gathering

In Chapter 1, “Some Principles of Planning,” I referred to the “introductory rite.” Sometimes I call it the “gathering rite.” This word *rite* requires some attention. My handy paperback dictionary defines *rite* as, “a religious or other solemn ritual,” which then begs the question on the meaning of *ritual*. The dictionary defines *ritual* as a series of actions used in a religious or other ceremony, and as a procedure regularly followed.

I would prefer to define a rite as a repeatable action of some significance. Rites began as religious actions in that long-ago world when the boundaries separating religion, tribal identity and kinship, fertility of land and people, and seasons of the year were blurred, if they existed at all. People acted out these rhythms in which life was experienced in dance, drumming, painting, singing—all activities that were eventually spun out as what we call *art*. Rites were the repeatable forms in which these activities were expressed.

Rites, like art’s expressions, continue to flourish in that area of life we call *religion*, but they have secular forms as well. The administration of an oath in a courtroom is a ritual. It is a simple activity that changes the status of the principal actor within the given context. After the administration of the oath witnesses are bound to tell the truth and may be subjected to serious sanctions, not available before the oath-ritual, if it can be determined that they are lying.

One of the most ancient forms of rite is connected with moments of change in the life of an individual or a community. It is possible that the earliest rites of humanity were associated with the disposal of the bodies of those who had died. Bearers left the camp with the body and returned without the body. This very practical double procession, still embedded in

some of our funeral practices, enabled the community to accept and move beyond a moment of transition.

Rites associated with change are called *rites of passage*. They cover actual events of passage from one stage, condition, or quality of life to another—puberty, marriage, the birth of a child, death, migration, these are all moments of passage—providing a bridge over the time of instability that cuts across the onward flow of ordinary life. It is in the moment between the *before* and the *after* that the sacred is experienced.

Rites of passage may also be performed at a later point in the life of an individual or community in order to recover the sacred power that once upon a time enabled new life to begin. Passover, for instance, is the commemoration of the escape of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. It incorporates two earlier rites of passage—the first grain harvest of the year, when the old sourdough was abandoned, and the shepherds’ springtime sacrifice of a lamb and the sprinkling of its blood on lintels and doorposts. (The doorway of a home or shop is itself a location of passage. One of the rites associated with Chinese New Year involves putting strips of paper on which expressions of hope for good fortune have been written on the doorposts and lintels. Even a modern elevator may have the inscription, “going up and down in safety,” fastened to its doorframe.) The annual celebration of Passover uses these ancient rites to renew the participants in the liberation that is the focus of the festival. As the exodus once renewed the life and hope of a people, so may their descendants now be renewed. Scholars have similarly speculated that John the Baptist chose to baptize in the Jordan river not for reasons of convenience but because the Jordan was the last obstacle experienced by the liberated Hebrews as they entered the promised land. To be baptized in the Jordan had political significance: it identified the repenting neophyte with the nation’s realization of its destiny and the possibility of its renewal.

Arnold van Gennep, the scholar who pioneered work on the rites of passage early in the twentieth century,<sup>1</sup> identified a threefold structure that

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1. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, tr. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960).

consists of *separation*, *transition*, and *incorporation*. Marriage rites provide good examples. A man and a woman are *separated* from their families and extended community; they cross (*transeunt*) to a new relationship by promises and symbolic gestures such as the exchange of valuables; and they return to their community as the same people, but different.

This is the important point about rites of passage: afterwards you are the same but different.

From the point of view of this threefold analysis of ritual, the Christian eucharist is a rite of passage. A community of followers of Jesus is identified and separated (although not isolated) from the surrounding populace. This community enters a process of transition, informed by the solemn announcement of the biblical record of liberation and healing and by the observance of a ritual meal in which the kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus is modelled, realized, and anticipated. The community is then reincorporated in the world of which it is part, with a mission to actualize its *raison d'être*. There is a sense in which the community is gathered in order to be dismissed. The dismissal, from which *mass*, one of the traditional names of the eucharist, is derived, is the return of the community to its vocation and calling, i.e., its mission. Like Peter, James, and John on the mount of Transfiguration, the Christian community is not intended to say, "It is good for us to be here," and remain in a state of separation in a timeless doorway.

Not only is the eucharist *as a whole* a rite of passage, but it is also composed of a series of rites of passage, of which the gathering rite is the first. The gathering around the word and the holy meal are equally rites of passage, as we shall see.

One of the frequent features of the transitional phase of Christian rites of passage is silence. Silence is not merely absence of speech or other sound; it is that moment of pause that marks creativity. Glenn Gould once said that the essence of playing the piano is not mastering the art of striking the keys but celebrating the rites of passage between the notes. Four times *The Book of Alternative Services* suggests silence in the eucharist: before the collect, which concludes the gathering rite, after the sermon, after the Lord's

Prayer, and before the prayer after communion. In the latter two cases, silence is *required*, not merely suggested. *The Book of Common Prayer* similarly enjoins silence between the eucharistic prayer and the Peace. Time and again these suggestions and rubrical requirements are ignored as presiders sail on with the program of the day.

The important point is that planning should include sensitivity to the moments of transition. Our liturgical texts take for granted that silence may be the suitable way to observe the moment of transition. In this case planners should consider the length of silence that may be appropriate for a given congregation. A period of silence that would be appropriate in a religious community might cause giggles among young people at a camp service.

Silence is not, however, the only way in which transition may be observed. Some liturgical texts include penitential prayers in the opening rite, presumably with this point in mind. I was once at a conference where an Indian theologian, describing worship in his *ashram*, spoke of the importance of an opening *mantra* or brief hymn-prayer recited by the presider that rooted the congregation to the place where they sat and where they would remain until the end of the liturgy. Later in the conference a film was shown depicting liturgy typical of a particular African community. The African worship began with powerful, energetic, and expressive dancing, with appropriate drumming and chant. Someone later asked the Indian theologian how he reacted to the vitality and movement of the African liturgy in contrast to the immobile rootedness that he fostered. "Oh," he replied, "they are exactly the same thing." It is celebration of the moment of separation from the ordinary and openness to transformation. It sets the stage for movement from who we have been to who we are becoming.

Liturgical planners should give close attention to the gathering of the community. It is not just a way to get things going. It sets the stage for what follows. The formula, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ..." is a solemn and biblical greeting that distinguishes (separates) the community. In my opinion these (or their Easter counterpart) should be the opening words of the liturgy and a hymn should follow. In the Western liturgical tradi-



tion, as I observed in my earlier notes, *Gloria in Excelsis* has traditionally filled this role, but there is no reason why other hymns of praise should not be used.

There is a problem in the pattern I recommend—greeting, praise, prayer—where congregations and choirs expect a processional hymn. It is true that a strong hymn has community-building qualities and it is possible to defend the singing of a hymn before the opening greeting. However, a stronger case may be made for a greeting to come first. Informal greetings, if needed, should follow the Grace or its Easter equivalent.

The opening hymn should be chosen with care. It should set the stage for all that follows. Further, when the greeting precedes all else the opening hymn becomes the transitional element in the gathering rite. It is followed by an invitation to prayer and silence and then by a prayer. Some think that the prayer is called the “collect” because it *collects* or gathers up the prayers the people have offered in silence.<sup>2</sup> However, according to the Latin dictionary compiled by Lewis and Short, one of the meanings of the Latin word *collecta* is “a meeting, assemblage,” so we may think of the opening prayer as completing the assembly of the community for the worship that follows, as well as gathering up the silent prayers of the congregation.

After the collect the congregation may be seated for the liturgy of the word.

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2. See J. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite* (New York: Benziger Brothers Inc., 1951), vol. 1, 361.

## Planning the Word

At first glance it might appear to be unnecessary to spend much time and effort planning the liturgy of the word. The readings and psalm are supplied by the lectionary, which has been officially adopted by The Anglican Church of Canada. The preparation of a sermon is largely, if not exclusively, the task of the preacher. What else is there to do?

There are, of course, some minor decisions to be made. For instance, the lectionary sometimes provides alternatives, and the planners must decide which route to take. The choice should not be controlled only by such issues as brevity. A decision should be based on the relationship of all the readings to each other and on the extent to which a reading is likely to speak to a particular congregation at a particular time. The Revised Common Lectionary, for instance, provides three sets of readings for Christmas Day, associated historically with midnight, dawn, and noon. However, one of the sets of readings includes the story of the shepherds and it may be more appropriate for the service at which most children are present, whatever the time of day may be.

Beyond this, however, there are deeper issues to be faced, some of them remote and some more immediate. It is now expected that lay members of the congregation will read lections and lead in the recitation and singing of the psalm. Although *The Book of Alternative Services* notes that it is the function of a deacon to read the gospel and prepare the table, and that lay persons should be assigned the readings that precede the gospel, the rubrics governing the reading of the gospel identify the lector only as “Reader.”<sup>1</sup> It is a fact that in many places (Trinity College chapel being

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1. See *The Book of Alternative Services*, © 1985 by the General Synod of The Anglican Church of Canada, 183 and 188.

one of them) one or both of these diaconal functions is now performed by a lay person.<sup>2</sup>

The assignment of the task of reading the scriptures in the assembly to lay people lays a heavy burden of responsibility for training on those responsible for liturgical planning. The reading of the Bible in church is not a perfunctory act realized by mere recitation of the words. There is an assumption that as this text once spoke in power to an ancient gathering of God's people, so it may speak in power today. Planning the liturgy of the word begins with choosing and training readers.

Another example of remote planning involves the choice of a location in the building where the reading will take place. Traditional Anglican churches frequently had a pulpit—usually a walled platform—on one side of the sanctuary area, and a lectern (often decorated with the image of an eagle) on the other side. Pulpits have been removed from many church buildings. (There were witty complaints that their eminence suggested that the occupant spoke from a position six feet above contradiction.) The lectern, a more modest piece of furniture, is used for the readings and sometimes for the sermon.

During the last 40 years we have become used to the relocation of the holy table to suggest that it is the centre of a gathered community. The same principle applies to the reading of the Bible in the assembly of the people of God. Just as the text of the eucharistic rite used to be read at a distant altar, much of it by a priest facing the wall, so the readings at the eucharist used to be read from the altar step, both physically and symbolically at some distance from the people.

Canon 15 of the Council of Laodicea (late fourth century) implies a raised platform, called an *ambo*, for the reading of the scriptures.<sup>3</sup> In its earliest form the ambo, known as the *bema*, was a dais in the centre of the church

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2. Note the practice in the chapel of Trinity College, Toronto.

3. See "Ambo" in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 10.

building. Such platforms, corresponding to similar arrangements in many synagogues, have influenced the design of some modern churches and renovations. Their effect is to bring the reading of the story and the wisdom of the biblical record into the heart of the assembly. Long-range planning includes decisions on the location of the readers and whether the reading desk should be used for all three lections or if the gospel book should be carried in solemn procession to some central place in the building.

In my opinion the gospel procession should be subjected to some review: is it intended to suggest that the gospel reading is more important than the others and that it somehow brings us closer to Jesus than, for instance, Isaiah 61 on which Luke tells us Jesus' ministry was based, or than Romans 8 which reflects Paul's theology of the consequences of Jesus' ministry? Does it make good sense on a solemn occasion when the book is carried by the deacon who is surrounded by acolytes, but little sense when a solitary minister walks into the centre of the nave? In any case, consideration should be given to giving the Bible (or lectionary book containing readings from the Bible) a place of prominence on the same longitudinal axis as the holy table, and to keeping the Bible or lectionary book "enthroned" with honour in such a place between the end of the readings and the dismissal at the conclusion of the liturgy.

It is important that all those planning a liturgy—any part of a liturgy—should be familiar with the readings of the day. Their themes provide the framework and invisible architecture of the occasion in a pattern that finds a parallel in variations on a musical theme. To illustrate: musical variations, whether in the classical tradition or in more modern music like jazz, involve first the simple statement of a theme; then, as variations develop, the embellishment of the theme with surrounding patterns of notes that frame and enhance it and explore its possibilities; and then, in a further stage, the omission of the theme itself so that the listener is aware of it because of the shape of the frame from which it has escaped. The theme is heard in its absence rather than its presence, and perhaps more effectively.<sup>4</sup>

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4. I am indebted to an illustrated radio lecture on the CBC by Robert Harris for this analysis of variations.

The readings are the primary source of the theme of the day. Part of the task of liturgical planners is to so expand and surround the theme that the participants “hear the music” even when it isn’t being played. The choice of hymns and other music has a major role in this process. The Revised Common Lectionary provides a psalm for each Sunday (it is usually a reflection on the reading from the Hebrew scriptures), but there is wide latitude in the choice of music and in the way in which cantor, choir, and congregation will be involved in its performance. Whether it is sung to an ancient plainsong melody or an Anglican chant or in some more contemporary form makes a difference. The final rubric on p. 187 in *The Book of Alternative Services* provides even more room for choice and decision-making: the second reading may be followed by silence, a psalm, a canticle, a hymn, or an anthem. The question for planners is, “What will really lift up the theme of the day?”

The questions I have asked in regard to music may be applied to other art forms. For instance, the four traditional liturgical colours (white, red, green, purple) are not absolutes—the arrangement adopted by Anglicans in the nineteenth century became general practice in the Roman Catholic church only after the Reformation (although there is evidence for an earlier origin). A wider range of colours may be suitable (blue is used in Advent in some places). Icons may be used to highlight the occasion. Even balloons are appropriate on some festival occasions and in some congregations! Water should be visible and even touchable on days when it holds a significant place in the readings or the liturgical activity (e.g., on baptism Sundays). Weddings and funerals have their own symbolic traditions. Liturgical art should sharpen awareness of the themes that are presented in the ministry of the word.

# Planning the Word: The Sermon

Every eucharist takes place in a tension between the past and the present: each celebration is rooted in the tradition of the church and looks back not only to the process of its formation as a particular rite but ultimately to Jesus' participation in the synagogue worship of his people as reported in the gospels, and to his meals with his followers (especially the last such meal) in which he modelled the standards of the reign of God. A sense of this deep tradition encourages a conservative approach to the texts and the performance of our rites. When I hold up my hands in prayer, I am following an injunction written as early as the first epistle to Timothy.<sup>1</sup> The use of archaic language fosters this sense of deep historical rootedness.

At the same time, every eucharist is a unique event, existing in and for this present moment. No two celebrations of the eucharist are identical. Even if the same people come together in the same place and with the same texts on consecutive days, they bring different moods, concerns, emotions. The world will have changed (a new war? a fragile peace? the sickness or death of a friend?) and the moment of the event will belong to itself.

All liturgical planning demands sensitivity to these two poles of liturgical time: the tradition and the present moment. An unhealthy imbalance will result if one pole takes over and displaces the other. A liturgical celebration that is dominated by the tradition of the past may have a certain charm for those with nostalgic tastes, but it lacks the immediate vitality of the thrust of our worship. Why would one insist on worshipping in an archaic

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1. 1 Timothy 2:8.

language when it was not the language of Christian origins and is scarcely in use elsewhere in our culture today? We may understand Islamic insistence on the use of the Arabic of the Quʿran, but it is a subject on which Christianity has held a very different position from the start. Translation into the vernacular has been a Christian practice ever since the sayings of Jesus (originally in Aramaic) were communicated in Greek and assembled in the biblical gospels. The principle was presumably established on the day of Pentecost as it is described in the Acts of the Apostles. Liturgy, the work of the people, is more than recreating what the people did in another time and place, however interesting or even beautiful it may be.

On the other hand, a liturgical celebration that is shaped only by the inspirations and insights of the present congregation (or by those of their leader) is likely in the long run to exhibit a lack of depth. One of the functions of liturgical texts and practices is to provide stability. They acquire layers of meaning in the course of time. When today's flash of brilliance is institutionalized, the situation may be even worse. A versicle and response or form of dismissal that was once engaging or even electrifying runs the risk of becoming lackluster and perhaps a drag over a long period of time. You then have yesterday's inspiration masquerading as the deep tradition. Uncritical and unbalanced emphasis on the present moment opens the liturgy to the possibility of becoming an instrument to promote sectional concerns and commitments, or perhaps opinions on which there may legitimately be disagreement and debate.

These general principles apply not only to the liturgy as a whole but also to the sermon. The sermon at a celebration of the eucharist is normally based on the readings assigned for the day. (There are justifiable exceptions to this rule.) The readings are themselves the deep tradition—it doesn't get much deeper—but they are also the point at which the tradition impacts with the unique circumstances of the people now assembled. The task of the preacher is interpretation. The discipline of interpretation is called *hermeneutics*, from the Greek word for interpretation or explanation.

Hermeneutics, as we have come to understand it, is more than mere translation of an old text into the current vernacular. It is more even than the restatement of the original in today's terms and images. Hermeneutics

involves the statement *now* of the original underlying principle in terms of present challenge, vision, aspiration, and spiritual need. When this happens, the original text is released from its historical context and finds new and vibrant life today.<sup>2</sup>

There are many ways in which the preacher may plan toward this goal, and they belong to the discipline of homiletics, which is closely related to liturgical studies. However, the hermeneutic principle may also be applied to the liturgy as a whole. Much of the liturgical revision that has transformed Western Christianity since the 1960s has involved the restatement of the theology of ancient texts in terms and images more accessible in the present day. Compare, for instance, the traditional (and beautiful) collect for the first Sunday in Advent with a collect proposed by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy for the same Sunday in Year A.

### **Traditional**

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, now and ever.<sup>3</sup>

### **Contemporary**

God of majesty and power, amid the clamour of our violence your Word of truth resounds; upon a world made dark by sin the Sun of Justice casts his dawning rays.

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2. See my article “Eucharistic Food—May We Substitute?” in *Worship*, September 2002.

3. The Anglican Church of Canada, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1962, Canada, 95.



Keep your household watchful and aware of the hour in which we live. Hasten the advent of that day when the sounds of war will be for ever stilled, the darkness of evil scattered, and all your children gathered into one.

We ask this through him whose coming is certain, whose day draws near: your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever.<sup>4</sup>

I do not wish to denigrate the magnificent traditional Advent prayer, but I do want to point out that it tends to deal in generalities, frequently remote, while the modern prayer, although hardly longer, spells out more of the details of both our condition and our hope not only for eternity but for this world in which we live. In a society increasingly tempted toward polarization in wealth, health-care, and education (I write of Canada), we know what the dawning of the Sun of Justice would mean. In the face of global terrorism and perpetual conflict in the Middle East (to name but one theatre), not to mention the proliferation of nuclear weapons, we know the meaning of the clamour of violence. The prayer that we may be watchful and aware of the hour in which we live is a prayer against complacency and for a recognition of responsibility in the present context, which is where the concrete effects of the “armour of light” must be found. The contemporary prayer does not reject the “last judgement” theme of the traditional collect, but it insists that however eschatological the spirit of Advent may be, it has powerful implications for human life and Christian witness right now.

The task of fresh interpretation is not yet fully accomplished. For instance, the eucharistic prayer found in *Apostolic Tradition* appears in many denominational and provincial liturgical texts, often with little attention

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4. International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *Opening Prayers* (UK: Canterbury Press Norwich, 1999), 2.

paid to the hermeneutic principle.<sup>5</sup> The task of asking what the underlying principle of ancient prayers may have been, especially Jewish prayers of blessing and thanksgiving, and the attempt to state that principle in terms of present challenge and spiritual aspiration, has yet to be adequately addressed. It will be a very remote form of planning, but it deserves to be mentioned in a collection of notes on the planning process.

All of this applies with equal force to the sermon. The job of the preacher is not only to say what the text meant *then*, or what it might mean now if illustrated with contemporary images and situations, but how the underlying principle (the *spirit* of the text) might be expressed so that it addresses the current situation. This, I believe, is what the sayings about a patch of new material on old cloth and new wine in old wineskins are about: Jesus rejected the position of religious conservatives who held that only the traditional form and understanding of the law had force. He didn't break the law (although he was accused of doing that), but he bent it by interpretation to meet present need. Thus, "the Sabbath was made for people and not people for the Sabbath."<sup>6</sup> The new interpretation could not be forced into the container of the old

The sermon is seldom designed by a planning group, although the contribution of a group is not impossible. Long ago, when I was a university chaplain, a group of student leaders in the chaplaincy community gathered with me late on Thursday afternoons to eat pizza and study the readings of the next Sunday. What they found in those readings, they said, they needed to have explored and expanded before they came to the Sunday eucharist. My job was to listen and respond.

This raises the interesting difference between an artist and a professional. A professional does things for us that we cannot do for ourselves. At the time I wrote these notes, I had recently had eye surgery. There is no way

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5. For an example, see Eucharistic Prayer 2 in *The Book of Alternative Services* of The Anglican Church of Canada, 196f.

6. Mark 2:21–27.

that I could have done that for myself or even that the surgeon, for all his skill, could have done it for himself. A professional learns to do what people otherwise find impossible.

On the other hand, an artist paints, sculpts, sings, acts, writes, etc., not instead of his or her audience but so that other people may be capable of forming new insights of their own. The artist opens the doors of perception to insights that he or she may not have imagined. When I plan a sermon (which I regard as an art form, however poorly I may do it), it is not my job to tell people what to think or feel, but to so present the subject that they may think and feel and act in new ways discovered by themselves. A sermon should never be quite complete, wrapped in pretty paper and tied with a ribbon. It should launch people on a trajectory in which they will find their own conclusions in the light of the text of the day. The sermon should open the possibility of the listeners completing it for themselves.

So the sermon needs planning, not only in terms of the hard work of study and reflection that leads to understanding but also in the cultivation of a disposition to interpret. We take it as given that the gospel of the kingdom has something to say about the difficult conditions of our own circumstances. Planning the sermon involves finding that word of judgement and hope and making it available.

# Planning the Prayers of the People

We do not have a great deal of information about the worship of very early Christians. A handful of references and documents give us a shadowy picture of people reading the Jewish Bible and emerging Christian writings, and giving thanks over bread and wine that they share. The first detailed picture of Christian worship was written by a man named Justin, who later died for his faith. He lived in Rome about 150 CE, nearly 120 years after the time of Jesus.

Justin has provided us with descriptions of Christian worship as it took place in Rome around the middle of the second century. His descriptions, intended to persuade suspicious pagans that Christianity was honest and harmless, are clear and simple. He says that when someone has been baptized he is brought to the brethren (sic), “where they are assembled, to offer prayers in common, both for ourselves and for him who has been illuminated and for all men everywhere, with all our hearts.”<sup>1</sup> He then goes on to describe the kiss of peace and the presentation of bread and a cup of water and wine to the president who offers praise and thanks. He similarly describes an ordinary Sunday eucharist where all arise together after the sermon and offer prayers, after which bread, and wine and water, are brought to the president, who offers prayers and thanksgivings.<sup>2</sup> It used to be customary to project our own pattern of worship back onto Justin’s, paying little attention to differences. Scholars are now asking if our interpretation of Justin has been anachronistic. However, there are enough

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1. “Apology” I.lxv, from Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford University Press, 1947), 93.

2. *Ibid.*, I.lxvii, Bettenson, 94.

similarities that we can see a correspondence between his pattern and ours.<sup>3</sup> His description of the prayers of the people is particularly helpful.

Notice that although Justin is very specific in identifying the roles of reader and president, he tells his readers only that the prayers of intercession are “common” and involve all standing together. We do not know the structural organization of this part of the ancient liturgy. Was it like a Baptist prayer meeting, in which people took turns offering prayer as they were inspired? Was it composed of a formula with which all were familiar? Did it involve the use of the Lord’s Prayer? (We have later evidence of the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer at this point in the liturgy.) Certainly, in the course of time the role of leading the common prayers was assigned to different ministers, notably the bishop and the deacon. But the common nature of the prayers at the time of Justin is easily overlooked. They were the prayers *of the people*.

A major responsibility of those who are assigned the task of leading the prayers of the people is to actually make the prayers a common experience rather than another form of clerical control. Often we hear a leader say, “The prayers of the people are on page 110 in *The Book of Alternative Services*.” They are not. The intercessions are in the hearts of the people (potentially, at least) and it is the job of the leader to get them out, to evoke them and help the worshippers to give them shape and feeling. Thomas Aquinas, the great medieval theologian, defined prayer as “the interpretation of desire.” What goodness should we desire and long for, in ourselves, our friends, our society, our broken world? When we pray for someone, we are giving voice to our desire for their ultimate good.

Two important aspects of the prayers of the people (or the intercessions, if you prefer) are covered by the words *compassion* and *priesthood*. Compassion means “suffering with.” It is the Latin form of the Greek word

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3. See Paul F. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (London: SPCK, 2004), 61–77.

*sympathy*, but it suggests a greater degree of involvement and a deeper level of feeling. Compassion involves standing with others in their suffering and not merely feeling sorry from a distance. As such, it is for Christians one of the attributes of God. The cross of Christ has been interpreted as an outward sign of God's compassion. When we pray for others, we stand with them in their hopes and fears, and we also open ourselves to the possibility of them standing with us.

Coming before God with and on behalf of others is a *priestly* ministry. Christian priesthood is not limited to those who have been ordained. The author of 1 Peter describes the Christian community as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation."<sup>4</sup> (The ministers we call *priests* for complicated etymological reasons are, in fact, the elders or senators of the Christian community.) An English writer has said that intercession "is understood in the New Testament as a priestly ministry. It has a double movement. It is about entering the depths of the human predicament, and it is also about standing before God holding those predicaments in stillness."<sup>5</sup> These two movements correspond to compassion and priesthood.

### **Steps to be considered in preparing the Prayers of the People**

Immediate planning by the individual or group responsible for leading the prayers of the people should involve two elements: first, awareness and sensitivity to the issues of the day, both global and local; and second, familiarity with the readings and themes of the day. It should also involve awareness of the resources that are available, such as the collection of models of intercession on pages 110 to 128 in *The Book of Alternative Services* and in many other sources as well. (Such models should never be used without adaptation to the concerns of the moment and the makeup of the congregation.) Some steps:

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4. 1 Peter 2:9.

5. Robin Green, *Only Connect* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1987), 43f.

- 1 Think of the people you want to help pray. Your attitude to them will come through when the prayers are read in church. If you are angry with them or compassionate, if you are one with them or superior and withdrawn, if you are loving or indifferent, it will probably show. If you are trying to enable and help them, they will sense it. If you are laying a trap on them, they will feel it.
- 2 Read the lections and psalm of the day. If possible, read them aloud so that you hear them as they will be heard in church. It will not be necessary for you to include material from the readings and psalm in the prayers, although it might be helpful for you to consult the preacher and ask if there are themes or concerns he or she will address that should be included in the people's prayers. However, the readings and psalm are the context in which the prayers will take place, and often symbols and images that appear in the readings and in the psalm will flow naturally into the prayers. The liturgy should come together, not mechanically but like a symphony.
- 3 Choose the subject matter from the events and concerns of the day. Issues of war and peace and concern for sick and distressed people in the parish community are equally important. Check the subject matter you have chosen for balance (joy/concern, general/local). Check it also against the list on page 190 of *The Book of Alternative Services*.
- 4 Choose the form. Litany? Biddings and responses? Biddings and collects? With or without music? Will you adapt one of the model forms provided? Or will you design a new form? Make sure the form is appropriate to the people and the occasion. Provide for a few moments of silence in which personal and private concerns may be wordlessly offered (or in which people may add their own petition aloud, if that is appropriate to the congregation). Modern worshippers find it very hard to keep silence, but it is an important part of prayer. Learn to foster and nurture it.
- 5 Write the prayers. If you are using a fixed form, like the litanies on pages 110 to 128 in *The Book of Alternative Services*, write the material you will insert in the litany and the adaptations you will make. Make

sure the people will be able to follow the flow and that the special concerns of the day will not come as a confusing surprise. Make sure the people know what their response will be and what words will signal that it is time to make it. Don't be afraid of literary devices if they come naturally to you, e.g., metaphor, irony, etc. But don't be too clever. Double-check for length (not too long).

Try to give the prayers a "shape." They should have a beginning and a conclusion and some cohesion of thought in between, e.g., the petitions may return more than once to the central theme of the season or day as it addresses particular hopes and fears. The ending is important: one of the serious shortcomings of *The Book of Alternative Services* may be its failure to provide consistently for a concluding prayer, with the result that the people are often left "hanging" when the prayers are done. The first litany models the use of a concluding prayer.<sup>6</sup> Litanies 3, 5, 8, and the litany for Advent also "come together" at the end, but some litanies seem to just stop. When necessary, write your own concluding (collecting) prayer, or use source material like the collects

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6. The first litany and its concluding prayer are taken from the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the principal liturgical text of the Byzantine (Orthodox) Church. It is well known to those familiar with the tradition of *The Book of Common Prayer* where it concludes the intercessions at Morning and Evening Prayer, unfortunately without its doxological ending. A similar prayer, written by Bishop Lancelot Andrewes (1555–1626) appears on his tomb in Southwark Cathedral. It reads, "Thou, O Lord, art the helper of the helpless, the hope of the hopeless, the Saviour of them who are tossed with the tempests, the haven of them who sail; be thou all to all. The glorious majesty of the Lord our God be upon us; prosper thou the work of our hands upon us, Oh! prosper thou our handiwork. Lord, be thou within us; to strengthen us; without us to keep us; above us to protect us; beneath us to uphold us; before us to direct us; behind us to keep us from straying; round about us to defend us. Blessed be thou, O Lord our Father, for ever and ever." It would be a simple matter to put this prayer into modern speech, although there is no reason why it cannot be used as it is.



prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy and published as *Opening Prayers*.<sup>7</sup> Another resource for conclusions is the prayers that appear after each psalm in *The Book of Alternative Services*. Check the prayer that corresponds to the psalm for the day to see if it is suitable, or look for one that sums up the thrust of your prayers. Or, as already suggested, write your own: you may find it a powerful spiritual exercise as well as a venture into the creative dimension of liturgy as art.

- 6 Check the prayers you have written for integrity. Ask yourself, “Can I really say these words with a straight face? Is this what I really feel and believe or what I think people expect me to feel and believe.” Ask yourself, “Will these people be eager to say ‘Amen’?” Ask yourself, “Will they be able to say ‘Amen’?”

### **The Prayers of the People should be**

- the prayers of the people rather than the prayers of a leader in the presence of the people;
- an expression of what we are worried about and what we are excited about, an expression of joy and an expression of concern;
- about real matters and not just a list of subjects. Don’t just pray for the government; pray for those who are wrestling with the current crisis of unemployment or the problem of gun control (or whatever the anxiety of the day may be). Don’t just pray for all those in public service; pray for those who are risking their lives in combatting the forest fires in a specific part of our country when that is a matter for concern, or who are providing relief and protection in troubled parts of the world;

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7. International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *Opening Prayers* (UK: Canterbury Press Norwich, 1997).

- both general and local, i.e., they should refer to global issues affecting the whole world and should also refer to the little worlds of the people gathered. For instance, about Southeast Asia (at the time I write) and also Uncle Jim Jackson's 90th birthday;
- both worldly and churchy. The great theologian Karl Barth talked about sermons being based on the Bible *and* the day's newspaper. Malcolm Boyd asked if God turned first to the religion section on opening *Time* magazine. Barth's and Boyd's principle should apply to the prayers of the people. It is a Christian principle that God is passionately interested in the world even when the world isn't very interested in God;
- representative but brief. Complicated matters may be referred to but it is not necessary for every detail of information about them to be exposed. Robin Green says that "the lectures to God that we hear so often at this stage of the Eucharist are little more than a sign of deep mistrust." He refers to a three-minute obituary that was addressed to God on the Sunday after actress Joyce Grenfell's death. "God," he says, "does not need to be told all the facts!"
- arresting: people should be *challenged* to pray about issues;
- a response to the word.

### **The Prayers of the People should *not* be**

- a sermon. Our prayers should be evoked, not exhorted, drawn out rather than imposed. Sermons and intercessions are related, but their goals are different;
- the announcements. It may be enough to pray for the community life of the parish. It may even be all right to pray for God's blessing on a parish supper soon to be held. It is not necessary to include the fact that the parish supper will be on Tuesday at 6:00 p.m. in the par-

ish hall and that people who are willing to help should contact Mrs. Smith;

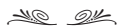
- an opportunity for moralizing, lecturing, editorializing, politicking, or propagandizing. There are legitimate disagreements among Christians and the intercessions should not be used to promote the position of one party. A personal example: I am far from enthusiastic about abortion, but it is an area, for me, of some moral ambivalence. If pressed, I would say that I am against abortion but I am pro-choice (you can't get much more ambivalent than that). So I objected strongly when a member of the congregation where I used to worship used the prayers of the people as an opportunity to promote a Right to Life position. I do not object to his holding that position; it is, in fact, the position I once held. I object to his using the prayers of the people to present that position, before God, as the only one to be held and to demand that I say "Amen" to his opinion. (I would equally oppose the use of the prayers of the people to promote a Right to Choice position.) The same principle may apply to such issues as capital punishment and war. It is possible to hold the anguish represented by these subjects before God in stillness without insisting on the solution we have personally adopted. This principle applies to the use of the prayers of the people for advertising of any kind;
- an autobiographical disclosure. Sometimes people reveal intimate details of their own life and spiritual development in the course of the prayers of the people. This can be intensely embarrassing for others present. Very, very occasionally it "works," but the arguments against it are greater than those in favour;
- long; they should not take over the liturgy. Conciseness and brevity are important dimensions of the liturgical art. There is a real risk in some places that the prayers of the people will dominate everything else, and this must be avoided. Five or six well-designed petitions may be enough;
- a monologue in which the people have no part. The people should be given an opportunity to participate. Normally this should take the

form of a response at the end of each section of prayers. It should also take the form of an opportunity to add one's own prayers, usually in a time of silence but sometimes aloud (depending on the size and nature of the congregation). These prayers are the prayers of the people and the people should not be merely an audience;

- inaccessible: if the congregation is expected to respond to biddings they should be given a simple, easily-memorized formula (not more than four or five words) and their entry points should be absolutely clear. Nothing detracts from the people's involvement in the prayers like the embarrassment of confusion;

This sounds like a formidable list of rules and regulations. It isn't. It is merely the framework of discipline that must govern every worthwhile and creative activity. The intercessor is one of the church's liturgical leaders, along with bishop, priest, deacon, director of music, readers, servers, and greeters. It is important for all of these people to work within a suitable style of leadership. Spatial imagery may help here.

I once read in a text on sermons that one of the temptations of preachers is to behave as though they were *over* the word while the people were *under* the word. The word then becomes something like the traditional schoolmaster's pointer, which is always in danger of functioning symbolically as a weapon. Good preaching, said the text, results when preacher and people are together under the word, under its capacity for challenge and nurture. Something similar applies to liturgical leadership. There is sometimes a temptation to lead from *above* the assembly, and from *outside* the assembly. Liturgical vestments and sanctuary chairs with authoritative ornamentation can encourage this mistaken attitude. The true goal of the liturgical leader is to lead from *inside* the assembly and from *below* the assembly, coaxing, carrying, bearing, supporting the worshipping community. As Jesus said, whoever wants to be greatest must be the servant of all. Leading others in prayer is a beautiful form of service.



It is my opinion that religion rises from the need of people to *do* something in the face of the ambiguities that counter the even flow of everyday life. This response to life's ambiguous moments probably first found expression in rituals, like funerals, and then in myths which explained the origin of a people and their relationship with their environment. Rituals and myths allow moments of access to an overarching sacred realm, and the possibility of bringing sacred power back to this fragile environment in which we live. Eventually the divine figures of the sacred world are seen as continuing sources of power with whom mere mortals may engage in commerce. Sacrifice, the giving of things of value (animals, blood, grain, wine, oil), is one form of such commerce. So is taboo, the negative aspect of ritual, in which certain places, practices, foods, are avoided. Prayer is another related form.

There is much resistance to this mechanical understanding of religion in the Bible, especially in the Hebrew prophets. Isaiah 58, where the taboo of fasting is questioned and a taboo on injustice is proposed, is a good example. However, a commercial understanding of religion is still with us. An Anglican nun, a woman of great wisdom and spiritual depth, once said to me that she believed her community had prayed a very sick member back to health. Did she really believe that God ignored his/her many children who were equally sick but did not have a community to pray for them? Many people behave as though they believed in a commercial approach to prayer. If I pray hard, so-and-so will not die. If I go to church every Sunday, I will pass my examinations.

I believe prayer is not about getting; it is about becoming. The central theme of Jesus' message is God's kingdom, the creation of an underground and subversive commonwealth in which the ordinary and accepted standards of power, domination, and exploitation are reversed. To be a Christian is to put yourself on a path that leads, however hesitantly, toward that kingdom. Prayer is openness to God's reign. When I pray for peace, I am praying for God's reign. When I pray for justice, I am praying for God's reign. When I pray for sick people, I am naming their place in a com-

munity of care and compassion that anticipates and models God's reign. Our relationship with the holy is not mechanical, as our relationships with those we love are not mechanical. It is a matter of belonging to one another in the coming reign of God.

# Penitence and Reconciliation

The *Didache*, a very early non-canonical Christian writing, contains the words, “But every Lord’s day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure.”<sup>1</sup> Clearly a liturgical expression of penitence has deep roots. However, the career of public expressions of repentance in Christian worship is complicated and not easy to follow.

In general, early Christian worship seems to have emphasized praise and supplication, sometimes dealing with post-baptismal sin by the imposition of discipline (exclusion from communion, a period of membership in an “order” of penitents) rather than by prayers that parallel our prayer book forms of General Confession. However, by the eleventh century it had become standard practice for the presider to confess his sinfulness to the deacon at the beginning of mass and for the deacon to respond in kind. This was eventually extended to include a larger number of participants.

In 1548 an *Order for the Communion* in English was published in England, to be inserted in the (still) Latin mass immediately after the priest’s communion. It included a warning addressed to the unrepentant, followed by the invitation, “Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins,” by the general confession made familiar in later prayer book editions, by an absolution, by the comfortable words, the prayer of humble access (“We do not presume”), and finally the communion of the people. The sheer volume of this material testifies to the Reformation period’s sense of guilt and concern with repentance. Most of it remained intact and in the same location in *The Book of Common Prayer* of 1549, but was transferred in

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1. “Didache14,” *Early Christian Writings*, tr. Peter Kirby. Website version.

somewhat expanded form to a point between the intercession and the *Sursum Corda* in the 1552 revision, the prayer of humble access being inserted between the *Sanctus* and the prayer of consecration. Much the same pattern continued in the revision of 1662 and passed into subsequent Anglican liturgical texts.

The liturgical texts associated with the Second Vatican Council retained a form of general confession in the opening or gathering rite of the mass, although in a form that includes the people who were virtually unnoticed in the pre-Council (Tridentine) rite. Order One in the Church of England's *Common Worship* follows the contemporary Roman Catholic pattern; Order Two does not.<sup>2</sup> A degree of ambivalence may be detected here.

And so *The Book of Alternative Services* of The Anglican Church of Canada provides several different models of confession and absolution. There is an invitation, confession, and absolution on page 191, between the Prayers of the People and the Peace. However, a rubric refers to the Penitential Rite that appears on pages 45f which may precede the gathering of the community. The Responsive Intercession, which may be used as the basis of the Prayers of the People, also contains a form of general confession. To complicate the matter further, a rubric that precedes the form of confession and absolution on page 191 makes it clear that this form is optional rather than obligatory. In short, confession and absolution may appear at any of three places in the liturgy, or not at all.

It would be an exaggeration, however, to say that there would be no expression of penitence whatever if the forms of general confession were omitted. The Lord's Prayer, always recited after the eucharistic prayer, is mandatory and contains what may be the most pointed and sobering expression of penitence: "forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." This double-edged sword of penitence may be emphasized in some seasons and muted in others, but it remains the bedrock of liturgical ex-

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2. See *Common Worship* (London: Church House Publishing, ©The Archbishop's Council, 2000).



pressions of repentance. It provides a standard against which all our expressions of penitence may be measured and defined. To forgive and to be forgiven are intimately, inescapably, related. Forgiveness is not a merely vertical matter, between God and me. It is equally horizontal and involves not only my relationship with those whom I have offended but also my treatment of those who have offended me.

So liturgical planners have a number of decisions to make concerning the subject of penitence. The penitential rite may be used before the eucharistic liturgy begins. Or the form of invitation, confession, and absolution on page 191 may be used (probably the preferred choice if a form of confession and absolution is to be used at all). Or a form of the prayers of the people which includes an act of penitence may be used. Or a penitential rite as such may be omitted, not because the congregation is presumed to be sinless but because the whole of Christian life is worked out within a climate or envelope or atmosphere of forgiveness. Jesus told the paralyzed man who was let down through a roof in Capernaum that his sins were forgiven *without even being asked*.

There is a sense in which every eucharist begins where the baptism liturgy ended, with the congregation's cry, "We receive you into the household of God ... share with us in [Christ's] eternal priesthood." In the second eucharistic prayer we give thanks, "that you *have made us worthy* [italics added] to stand in your presence and serve you," and in the third eucharistic prayer we give thanks because we have been delivered from evil and made "worthy to stand before [God]." Forgiveness is not something that is earned by intensity of penitence. It is a given—in every sense of that word—to be claimed and received and not merited. Even a celebration of the eucharist without a formal penitential rite (except for that brief petition in the Lord's Prayer) is an affirmation of the pervasiveness of grace.

In any case penitence and forgiveness find their fulfillment in the Peace. Peace—*shalom* in Hebrew—is not merely absence of war and distress. It is total well-being for time and eternity. It is the underlying goal, the *final cause* as scholastic theology would put it, of the whole eucharistic rite.

## Planning the Peace

Christians are exhorted five times in the epistles to greet one another with a holy kiss or a kiss of love.<sup>1</sup> It is, in fact, a sacramental act left over from the age in which the number of outward and visible signs of grace was not limited to seven (or even two). Christians celebrate the presence of Christ in a number of ways in the liturgy—in the word, in silence, in the sacrament, and in one another. The Peace is a precondition for holy communion: only those who accept one another may approach the table of fellowship. It is for this reason that the Peace has often enjoyed a close relationship with the Lord's Prayer and its emphasis on the dependence of forgiveness on forgiving. In the Roman rite the Peace and the Lord's Prayer may have migrated together from the conclusion of the liturgy of the word to a point just before holy communion.<sup>2</sup> In most other rites (including new Anglican liturgies) the Peace follows the readings, sermons, and prayers of intercession.

In spite of the clear biblical mandate for the Peace, the rite has often generated some discomfort. By the end of the first Christian millennium the Peace had ceased to be a congregational act in general use and was restricted to the clergy. In some Eastern rites a double handclasp replaced the kiss. Elsewhere a small board was introduced that was kissed by the priest and then passed among the congregation for each participant to kiss, thus avoiding messy personal contact. Where the Peace has been revived in the twentieth century, it has often become a handclasp or a hug rather than touching with the lips (although among some Russian Orthodox it is cus-

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1. Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:26, 1 Peter 5:14.

2. See Footnote 1, p. 59.

tomary for people to kiss friends and family on returning from the reception of holy communion, in a gesture distinct from the formal Peace).

Not long ago in the “News from Lake Wobegon,” a feature in the radio program *A Prairie Home Companion*,<sup>3</sup> Garrison Keillor said that his fictional local Lutheran church had a much smaller congregation than usual on the previous Sunday because it was the beginning of the deer-hunting season and most of the men were away in lodges in the forests. However, the Peace had taken much longer than usual that Sunday because the women, who made up most of the congregation, were much more demonstrative in displaying the signs of friendship and affection and were prepared to spend time on their gestures of goodwill. Keillor said that the men usually shake hands quickly and stiffly, not making eye-contact but looking awkwardly off to the side. We can see how a growing reticence overtook an ancient practice.

If we want to stress the Peace as a guarantee of the profoundly interpersonal nature of Christian communion, we must make sure that it is proposed in forms that are congenial. These will vary from congregation to congregation, not only in different places but also at different times. The priest at a wedding may greet the congregation with the traditional formula and then invite the bride and groom to engage in a ritual which probably finds its roots in the Peace although it is equally valued in secular circles. Here the kiss of the principal worshippers—bride and groom—may be generous and unfettered and other lovers may find themselves caught up in the atmosphere of the day. The situation is very different at a funeral and must be watched carefully to prevent the outbreak of unbearable emotion. On such occasions the Peace is a moment when friends and family may gather near and around the principal mourners, touching, perhaps hugging, and offering soft words of compassion and support.

In some extroverted congregations, where people know and like each other well, the Peace may almost become a social event on its own. There is

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3. In the fall of 2003.

nothing intrinsically wrong with this so long as the focus of the period of exuberance the opening notes of a strong offertory hymn will bring the people back to the central agenda.

In the eucharistic liturgy in *The Book of Alternative Services*, the invitation to confession and to communion, the confession itself, and the absolution may precede the Peace. This pattern stresses the Peace's dimension of reconciliation. At least twice in my life I have deliberately sought out someone in the congregation from whom I felt estranged, finding in the Peace a rich moment of restoration.<sup>4</sup>

Where people are more shy and reserved, participation in the Peace may require more encouragement. The presider may walk among the people, greeting especially those who might find it difficult to approach others, the infirm and the elderly as well as the shy and retiring. If a congregation is fairly small, the presider may greet everyone present. Elsewhere it may be helpful if some people (greeters? ushers? wardens?) are designated to move among the worshippers to make sure that no one is ignored and no one is asked to betray the restraints of their own personality.

On a recent visit to England I attended the Sunday eucharist in a small-town church. It was the practice there for children to go directly to a church school in the parish hall when they arrived for worship. However, not long before the time for the Peace I heard a commotion behind me. The children had arrived and they went to the chancel step and surrounded the priest as he greeted the congregation. The children, some of them very small, then moved down the aisle of the church, solemnly greeting everyone with words of peace. When they reached the west end, some of them were selected to return to the chancel with the offering plates and the gifts of bread and wine. The children were, in fact, ministers in the liturgy. The Peace was inclusive as an inter-generational act and not merely a ritual sometimes stiffly performed by adults.

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4. I note in passing the importance of the moment of silence that *The Book of Alternative Services* prescribes between the invitation and the confession.

When Thomas Cranmer designed the first Anglican liturgies, he seems to have chosen a structure with a series of upward movements—from the Collect for Purity to the Creed, from the exhortations to the Sanctus, from the Prayer of Humble Access to the Gloria, in short from negative to positive.<sup>5</sup> He brought the whole of the liturgy to a conclusion by incorporating the Peace in the final blessing. “The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God almighty...” Dramatically, the idea was brilliant, although it loses the important connection of verbal expression of the Peace to the network of real relationships *among* people, reducing it to a declaration by the celebrant. One may, however, wonder if this liturgical innovation contributed to the development of the practice of shaking hands with the presider at the door, no matter how long or inconvenient the lineup or how cold the wind blowing through the open entrance. I do not encourage this practice, but I have noted that in some parishes where the Peace is taken seriously at its most traditional point in the liturgy (i.e., after the word service), the congregation becomes less obsessive about the handshake at the door. Having done it once, it is not necessary to do it again.

Greeting one another with God’s peace is biblical and traditional. It is not enough to say the formula, “The peace of the Lord be always with you,” and then invite people to greet one another randomly and without attention, perhaps addressing friends and ignoring strangers. Some local shaping of the form of greeting is necessary so that the action is meaningful and comfortable. Beneath the Peace is a fundamental Christian law: you shall love your neighbour as yourself.

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5. Richard Buxton, “The Shape of the Eucharist: A Survey and Appraisal,” in Kenneth Stevenson, ed., *Liturgy Reshaped* (UK: SPCK, 1982), 83ff.

## Planning the Offertory

The word *offertory* is a Western term, referring originally to the presentation of bread and wine for the eucharist, and then later in history to the collection of money for the support of the church's ministry, especially to the poor. In its most basic form the offertory is purely functional: the bread and wine have to get to the table somehow if they are to become the focus of the church's thanksgiving. Justin (about 150 CE) reports simply that after the readings, sermon, prayers, and kiss of peace, "Then is brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of water and wine. And he takes them and offers up praise and glory...."<sup>1</sup> Nothing could be simpler.

Placing bread and wine on the table has, however, teased the imagination and convictions of Christians for centuries. In Eastern Christianity, and especially in the Byzantine rite, the actual preparation of the gifts takes place privately before the liturgy proper begins. The prepared elements are carried to the altar after the liturgy of the word and the prayers in a procession of solemn pageantry amid clouds of incense and while the choir sings a hymn describing the event in terms of the heavenly temple, "We, who mystically represent the Cherubim and sing the thrice holy hymn to the life-giving Trinity, let us lay aside the cares of life, that we may receive the King of all."<sup>2</sup> The gifts are treated with honour and respect that might be restricted to the consecrated elements, suggesting that the events of the eucharist, although necessarily sequential, are also a mosaic.

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1. Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford University Press, 1947), 93.

2. *The Orthodox Liturgy* (New Jersey, © 1974 by Nikon D. Patrinos), 31.

Dom Gregory Dix, an Anglican Benedictine monk, in his celebrated study *The Shape of the Liturgy*, suggested that offertory, consecration, breaking of bread, and communion correspond to Jesus' actions of *taking*, *giving thanks*, *breaking*, and *giving* bread and wine to his followers at his last meal with them, originally expressed in seven gestures and then contracted to four. This attractive hypothesis, now challenged, was responsible for the elevation of the offertory in the minds of many, especially Anglicans. But the truth is that the actions of the eucharist are more homely than the majestic worship they may foster. The offertory is actually the preparation of the domestic table for a ritual meal. Probably the first of the actions of the table liturgy is more closely related to Jesus' command to his disciples to prepare the Passover meal.<sup>3</sup> When deacons spread a white cloth on the table (the *corporal*) they stand in that household tradition.

The use of bread and wine, the basic foodstuff of a Mediterranean table, has spoken powerfully to Christian sensibilities. In early days the bread and wine came out of the domestic supply of members of the community. It was common stuff and spoke eloquently of the humble status of many early Christians as well as to their common identity in a spiritually subversive movement. We must never forget the prophetic condemnation of a "high" cult when it replaced the "common" cult of personal responsibility and social justice.<sup>4</sup>

The provision of bread and wine speaks to many of the sanctification of the ordinary and common. People bring bread and wine out of their ordinary lives in faith that their ordinary lives may be transformed. The notion that God is to be found in ordinary life rather than at some infinite distance is reinforced. Because bread and wine are manufactured commodities, requiring harvesting, grinding, crushing, tending, baking, their use at the Lord's table gives dignity and even new meaning to human labour. All this is offered.

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3. Mark 14:15.

4. See Isaiah 1:10–20, Amos 5:21–24, Jeremiah 6:19–7.7, Jeremiah 7:21–23, Micah 6:6–8, etc.

It is precisely the notion of offering that has caused anxiety and even controversy among Anglicans. The Reformation mentality, in reaction to medieval notions of the sacrifice of the mass offered for the living and the dead, included an intense sense of the impropriety of any offering that even appeared to be numerically additional to the offering of the cross. Those influenced by Calvinism understandably argued that humanity in its state of total depravity (as they believed) had nothing to offer except the reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice of a righteous life. The first *Book of Common Prayer* (1549) continued to provide for the preparation of the table with bread and wine, to which was added an offering of money for the poor. However, in the second *Book of Common Prayer* (1552) only the rubric covering the offering of money survived. In both books the sentences to be said at the time of offering are heavily weighted in the direction of fiscal responsibility. The offertory seems to be shifting from the preparation of the table to the offering of money, a shift which eventually found expression in extravagant alms basins and a somewhat ceremonialized presentation of cash. Presumably those who used the second *Book of Common Prayer* placed the bread and wine on the table before the liturgy began, or else brought them at the customary time in accordance with tradition rather than rubric. In any case, rubrical provision for the placing of both money and bread and wine reappeared in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* and was expanded in the Canadian *Book of Common Prayer* in 1962.<sup>5</sup>

In the twentieth century, attention to the offertory revived not as a sacrificial act in itself but as an affirmation of the salvation and transformation of the whole fabric of life in the sacrifice of Christ. In practice this took a number of forms. In some places all those who intended to communicate

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5. The sentences in the Canadian 1962 *BCP* are less oriented to the collection of money. Provision is made for the bread and wine to be brought to the priest by the churchwardens or other representatives of the people. An optional offertory prayer or anthem based on verses from 1 Chronicles 29 is provided.



transferred a wafer from a general supply to the vessel over which the thanksgiving would be recited. This often took place at the church door, but sometimes in a procession of the whole congregation to the sanctuary step. In some places members of the congregation took turns baking the bread, which was presented at the appropriate point in the liturgy.

The presentation of the bread and wine by representatives of the congregation is now a common practice. In some places the whole congregation is encouraged to follow their representatives and stand around the holy table during the eucharistic prayer and distribution of communion. The money offered may be brought to the sanctuary area at about the same time as the bread and wine, and so may food provided for later distribution to those in need. I once saw the money, the bread and wine, and a large supply of tinned and packaged goods all placed together on a cart that was drawn up the aisle by children. Some years ago I arranged a service for a national church committee in a prominent Toronto parish. I told the parish secretary that I would come by at a certain time to see where they kept the bread and wine. She replied that they did not keep bread and wine. The elements of the eucharist were always provided anew by one or more of the participants.

*The Book of Alternative Services* provides “prayers over the gifts” to be recited when the offerings have been brought to the holy table. These prayers frequently ask that God will accept, “all we offer you this day,” which includes “ourselves, our souls and bodies,” as well as bread, wine, money, and food. Unfortunately, some people have noted that many of the prayers provided are rather weak in content and that it might have been better to supply a smaller number of stronger prayers associated with certain themes and seasons. The prayers do, however, give the offertory a definite shape and resolution. They avoid the implication found in some medieval offertory prayers that the sacrifice of the mass is in some mystical way a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ. They also avoid a Jewish *berekah* formula (“Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation . . .”) used by Roman Catholics and some others at the time of the presentation of the bread and wine, which seems to anticipate the eucharistic prayer, itself possibly based on just that original Jewish pattern.

Liturgical planners must consider the alternatives. The bringing of the gifts is a subtle matter with a number of themes to be emphasized—the natural order, human labour, human hunger, the call to live in righteousness and justice. The nature of the particular congregation must be taken into account, as well as the architecture of the building. The offertory is an opportunity to emphasize the involvement of the whole of creation in the process of redemption. As Paul put it, “the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.”<sup>6</sup> The offertory richly symbolizes the place of humanity within the created order and the effect on both of the transforming power of grace.

Liturgical planners will have to consider what kind of ceremonial performance of this aspect of the liturgy would be most appropriate to a given congregation and in a particular architectural setting. They will also have to consider the very nature of the commodities being offered.

A discussion of planning the offertory must include two other issues. They are the nature and quality of the bread and wine that are prepared, and the role of the offertory as the first step in a series of actions that constitute a symbolic meal.

Early Christian art indicates that the young church used bread at its eucharistic celebrations that was identical to the bread consumed in domestic meals. However, for centuries the Western church has attempted to elevate the bread used at the eucharist by separating it as much as possible from ordinary bread. Jungmann describes the practice of an eleventh-century monastery in the Black Forest where the grain was selected kernel by kernel, the mill where it was to be ground was cleaned and then hung about with curtains, the monks responsible for milling and baking wore albs and humeral veils, and at least three of the bakers had to be in deacon's orders or higher.<sup>7</sup>

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6. Romans 8:19. See also Wisdom 19:6 with its notion of the renewal of creation.

7. Jungmann, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 35.

In fact, the Western church adopted a form of eucharistic bread that is conspicuously unlike bread that one might encounter in any other circumstances. In no way do the wafers commonly used suggest the “staff of life” on which whole societies have relied for their nourishment. Such bread could never be eaten as a substitute for ordinary bread, still less for its agreeable wholesomeness. It is difficult to imagine an emergency so dire that it might be consumed for its paltry food value alone. It is not bread as we mean that word in any other sense.

In many places wine has been used that would never be part of an ordinary meal today, certainly not in Mediterranean countries and the wine-producing areas of central and eastern Europe, North and South America, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, where table wines are appreciated as an accompaniment to food. Heavy, sweet wines, often fortified with brandy, are frequently chosen for the eucharistic celebration because they are less likely to become sour during storage than lighter table wines. (There are times when consuming what remains is a serious menace for a diabetic priest.) They are wine, it is true, but they are not the beverage of an ordinary table, especially at a time of celebration.

The food used at the eucharist should carry symbolic freight as profound as bread and wine in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cultures. It should come to the table of the Lord with the same intimations of nurture, fellowship, generosity, dignity, and solemnity. The eucharistic table symbolizes (makes present) the vision of the kingdom of God that is central to Jesus’ gospel. The particular symbols we use should enhance and reinforce that vision. Liturgical planners have some serious questions to ask themselves.

A final obligation for liturgical planners is the determination of the quantity of bread and wine that will be needed. Planners, especially the presider but possibly sacristans as well, should be sure that the amount of bread and wine provided will be sufficient for the number of people who form the congregation at any given celebration of the eucharist. It is better to have a little more than enough rather than too little. It is true that the prayer book tradition and *The Book of Alternative Services* provide for a second consecration if there is insufficient bread and wine, but this appears to be an Anglican peculiarity, unknown in the ancient churches. Consecration

is effected by thanksgiving, memorial, and supplication, and not by the recitation of an abbreviated formula, even one as historic as the institution narrative.

Reservation of the sacrament has become relatively common in Anglican circles in the last few decades in spite of the judgement of Article XXVIII, “The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper was not by Christ’s ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped.” Today the primary and ostensible reason for reservation is communion of the sick. The practice of reservation has led some to avoid the problem of providing a quantity of bread and wine appropriate for the size of the congregation by consecrating a large quantity of bread and wine at one celebration and then distributing it as communion at subsequent celebrations.

While the communion of the people at such a celebration must be regarded as “valid,” the practice must at the same time be categorized as an abuse. The eucharist is a holy meal and not merely an opportunity for persons to participate on an individual and private basis. A general distribution of communion from the aumbry or tabernacle ignores the central dynamic of eucharistic celebration: the sharing of food and drink brought to this table across all boundaries of class, wealth, race, gender, and worthiness, with thanksgiving, remembering, and dedication for the future. If priests find themselves a little short of communion bread (and wine if it is reserved), it would be appropriate to make up the difference from the aumbry on a given occasion, but deliberately organizing the communion of the people with a view to dependence on bread and wine consecrated at another celebration should be avoided.

The profound simplicity of the eucharistic banquet should be reflected in the use of a single cup and a single plate (or other vessel) of bread at the time of the great thanksgiving. If it is apparent that more vessels will be needed to meet the size of the congregation an additional pitcher or other vessel of wine should be placed on the holy table. Other cups and plates should be kept in readiness on a side table, to be brought to the altar before the communion rite.

In some places it is becoming customary for the congregation to gather in a circle around the holy table for the eucharistic prayer and the communion which follows. This movement of the congregation requires careful planning and interpretation. If the bread and wine of the eucharist are brought from the rear of the church building at the same time as the collected alms and gifts of the people, the people may be encouraged to follow the bearers. Arrangements will have to be made for those who are unable to stand throughout the great prayer and the time of communion. If the people will be expected to sing the *Sanctus/Benedictus* and perhaps another hymn, consideration must be given to the books or leaflets they will have to bring with them. Only thoughtful consideration and careful planning will avoid confusion during what should be a moment of tranquillity and beauty. This matter will be addressed in further detail in later notes on the time of communion.

# Planning the Eucharistic Prayer

For centuries in the Christian west traditional liturgical texts provided only one eucharistic prayer. This was not the case in the east. Byzantine Christianity has three eucharistic prayers and some churches of the middle east have many. At the time of the Reformation and the foundation of the Prayer Book tradition, Anglicans adopted the traditional Western standard. There were variations in the eucharistic prayers from one edition of the *BCP* to another, and eventually from one “province” of the Communion to another, but there was an assumption that only one text would be provided for use within a given jurisdiction.

When the second Vatican Council revised the rites of the Roman Catholic Church, a number of eucharistic prayers were provided. As Anglicans increasingly experimented with liturgical reform they recognized the wisdom of the Roman Catholic change in policy. One cannot say everything there is to be said about thanksgiving for creation and redemption, or about the content of the supplication that follows the act of remembering the Lord, in a single prayer. The need for different emphases at different times has been honoured in the provision of proper prefaces to be inserted in the eucharistic prayer, but they tend to be very other-worldly, turned in on the church’s tradition and piety and focused mostly on the themes of the various seasons of the Christian year. Less attention has been paid to the possibility of a relationship between the great prayer and the readings that have preceded it, and still less to the particular needs of the congregation and the troubles and hopes of the world beyond the church’s door.

*The Book of Alternative Services* of The Anglican Church of Canada provides six eucharistic prayers, and The Anglican Church of Canada has adopted three additional supplementary prayers. (The *BAS* also contains two eucharistic prayers in archaic English.) It would be easy for a presider to

treat them as simply options from which a more or less random selection may be made. This attitude misses the opportunity for textual artistry, for the capacity of one section of the liturgy to resonate with another, building a structure that is greater than the mere sum of its parts.

It is, I suggest, the responsibility of those planning the liturgy to be familiar with the themes and images of the various eucharistic prayers and to select a prayer that is most suited to the occasion.

First, it should be noted that all the eucharistic prayers in the *BAS* conform to a west Syrian pattern in which thanksgiving for creation becomes thanksgiving for redemption, which in turn becomes remembering the Lord, at which point the flow of the prayer changes direction toward supplication. The supplication is introduced by a prayer for the gift of the divine Spirit to bless this food and meal, and to enable the community in which it will be shared to be the sign of God's purpose and reign. Not all eucharistic prayers follow this pattern. In many the prayer for the gift of the Spirit precedes the memorial, putting the weight of emphasis (in the opinion of some) on the words of Jesus that immediately follow as the centre and essential element of the rite rather than treating the whole of the prayer as a unified blessing of the God who blesses those who bless. (I note in passing that the so-called "words of institution" do not appear to have been more or less an invariable part of the prayer until the fourth century and even after that one classical prayer omits them entirely. One does not have to recite that particular formula in order to remember.)

All of this means that in the selection of a eucharistic prayer we are looking for expressions of thanksgiving for creation and salvation and for forms of supplication that "fit" or vibrate sympathetically with the readings and concerns of the occasion.

The first eucharistic prayer in the *BAS* is based on *Apostolic Constitutions VIII* (a late fourth-century Syrian text) and its rich expression of the history of salvation. However, in its stress on a "this worldly" experience of grace it looks back to the *Didache* (an early text that has been variously dated between 60 CE and the third century) where emphasis is on the gift of life and insight and on the eucharist as a foretaste of the ultimate real-

ization of God's reign rather than on a memorial of Jesus' death.<sup>1</sup> *Prayer 1* recalls not only Jesus' death but also the liberation of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt, as well as Jesus' ministry of healing, his association with the rejects of his society, and his proclamation of good news to the poor. *Prayer 1* is particularly suitable when the readings and the circumstances of life suggest concern for the healing of both individuals and society and identification with the whole prophetic tradition.

*Prayer 2* is based on *The Apostolic Tradition*, a third-century text associated with a bishop named Hippolytus, which may reflect second-century practice in a particular church setting. *Prayer 2* is often chosen because of its brevity, which is a poor reason for its selection. The prayer has considerable ecumenical significance because it is the basis of eucharistic prayers that appear in a number of denominational liturgical texts. With its themes of, "a holy people," won through the sacrifice of Christ and prayer that all who share in the eucharist may be gathered into one, *Prayer 2* has a strong ecclesial emphasis. It is not surprising that the specimen eucharistic prayer in the original text appears to have been associated with the ordination of a bishop and that much of the work is dedicated to Christian initiation. The offering of thanksgiving that, "you have made us worthy to stand in your presence and serve you," makes the prayer particularly appropriate on these occasions. Use of the prayer makes little sense in settings where the congregation kneels throughout the eucharistic prayer, while thanking God for enabling them to stand.

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1. "Didache 9" includes, "We give thanks to you, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you made known to us through your child Jesus, glory to you for evermore. As this broken bread was scattered over the mountains and when brought together became one, so let your Church be brought together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom; for yours are the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for evermore." From *Prayers of the Eucharist Early and Reformed*, R.C.D. Jasper and G.J. Cumming, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 14f.



*Prayer 3* is based on Prayer B in *The Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church (U.S.A.). It is the only eucharistic prayer in the modern language section of *The Book of Alternative Services* that has been designed to include a proper preface and thus to give a thematic emphasis to the liturgical celebration. Proper prefaces, which highlight certain seasons, festivals, and occasions, were much more important before the adoption of a number of eucharistic prayers because they provided the only opportunity for variety. The proper prefaces in *The Book of Alternative Services* are cast in the form of a Jewish *berekah*, beginning in each case with the words, "Blessed are you, gracious God." The prayer stresses the themes of creation, prophetic proclamation, and the effects of the salvation offered by the revelation of God in the Christ. ("In him, you have brought us out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life.") The prayer ends on a note of ultimate hopefulness, praying for the reconciliation and renewal of all things. It may be particularly appropriate when eschatological passages of scripture are read during Advent.

*Prayer 4* is also based on a prayer in the Episcopal Church's *Book of Common Prayer*. It is actually a series or string of prayers, not unlike some forms of synagogue prayer. In the Episcopal Church's original text the paragraphs of the prayer are separated by responses, each of them different from the others. The version in *The Book of Alternative Services* provides a single, unvarying response of praise for each segment of the prayer, making it possible for a congregation to participate without dependence on the written text. The prayer places a strong emphasis on creation and the natural order, especially as understood from a modern point of view. The role of Jesus as the Christ is set firmly within the prophetic tradition. The supplication following the institution narrative offers prayer for the work of God's Spirit not only to effect the consecration of the bread and wine but to renew the created order and bring about the age of peace and justice. *Prayer 4* was deliberately designed to avoid gender-specific language.

The presider's edition of *Prayer 4* (in the altar book) includes music for a sung-through presentation. This music is based loosely on the Byzantine chant tradition. A Russian-style *Sanctus/Benedictus* is included that

complements the presider's chant much better than settings that are more traditionally Western in character.

*Prayer 5* is simple and direct. Although *The Book of Alternative Services* avoids prayers focused on special groups, this prayer was composed at least in part with children in mind. Like *Prayer 4* it has a sung-through musical notation in the altar version of *The Book of Alternative Services*.

*Prayer 6* was composed by an unofficial ecumenical group of Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Methodist scholars. It is based on the eucharistic prayer in the liturgy of St. Basil of Caesarea and closely parallels *Prayer IV* in the post-Vatican II Roman Missal. Like the first eucharistic prayer in the *BAS*, *Prayer 6* celebrates the impact of Jesus' ministry on the broken people of his own time. ("To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation, to prisoners freedom, to the sorrowful joy...") Provision is made in the prayer for expansion of the supplication that follows the memorial of Jesus' life and death by including specific and contemporary subjects for intercession. When this expansion is fully realized the prayer, already very dense, may become too lengthy and consequently rather clerical. Unless particular care is taken by liturgical planners, the supplication may appear to duplicate unnecessarily the Prayers of the People that will have concluded the liturgy of the word. Obviously, the prayer is suitable for ecumenical occasions (like the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity) and for other celebrations when an affirmation of the deep roots of the church's doxological and theological liturgical tradition is appropriate.

The choice of the eucharistic prayer should be made in advance. The eucharistic prayer should not be chosen by the presider between the vestry and the sanctuary or during the offertory hymn. The prayers reflect the various colours and intensities of the Christian picture and should be chosen to highlight and focus the principal themes of the day.

# Planning the Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer, which follows the eucharistic prayer in *The Book of Alternative Services*, would seem to offer little challenge to liturgical planners beyond the choice of a translation in contemporary or in archaic language, or whether the prayer will be sung or recited in spoken voice. There are, however, some subtleties that need attention.

The Lord's Prayer has been part of the eucharistic liturgy at least since the fourth century. There is some reason to believe that in some places at least it originally concluded the Prayers of the People. John of Syracuse wrote to Gregory the Great (540–604) to ask why he had moved the Lord's Prayer to a position right after the eucharistic prayer. It appears that Gregory saw a close connection between the Lord's Prayer and the eucharistic prayer and seems to have entertained the notion that the apostles themselves consecrated the bread and wine by reciting the Lord's Prayer.<sup>1</sup>

In the practice adopted by Gregory, the Lord's Prayer is recited after the eucharistic prayer, without interruption and with the same solemnity. In some other rites the breaking of the bread preceded the Lord's Prayer, linking it much more closely with the communion rite. In either case the Lord's Prayer provides a bond between the great prayer of thanksgiving, commemoration, and supplication, and the sharing of the bread and wine, which follows it. The petition for daily bread covers both physical and spiritual nourishment as well as compassion for the world's victims of poverty who do not have enough daily bread or its equivalent.

1. See Gordon P. Jeanes, ed. and tr., *The Origins of the Roman Rite* (UK: Grove Books Limited, 1991), 48f.

Liturgical planners should choose between the two translations with pastoral care and sensitivity. A conservative congregation may be much more comfortable with traditional language, especially during a period of transition from *The Book of Common Prayer* to contemporary rites.

Whether the Lord's Prayer is recited in spoken voice or sung, it should be offered with great solemnity as the fullest explication of Christian spirituality, albeit in a profoundly simple form. It may, I believe, be argued that in his teaching Jesus was creating an oral law for simple and unsophisticated people, paralleling the more refined and complex oral law promoted by the Pharisees. Jesus' oral law is summed up *didactically* in the double commandment to love God and one's neighbour as oneself; it is summed up *devotionally* and *liturgically* in the Lord's Prayer.

*The Book of Alternative Services* provides musical settings of the Lord's Prayer, one by McNeil Robinson for the contemporary language translation, and a traditional Anglican tone composed by John Merbecke in the sixteenth century for the prayer book translation. An arrangement for the contemporary language translation of a setting by Nicholas Rimsky-Korsakov may also be found in *Common Praise* (744). These are all printed in the hymn book *Common Praise* with harmonized accompaniments. However, the Robinson and Rimsky-Korsakov settings are particularly suitable for unaccompanied singing by a competent choir and congregation. Liturgical planners should decide on selection of translation and on the use of music with great care and with sensitivity to the ethos of the congregation.

## Planning the Communion

A one-word rubric in *The Book of Alternative Services* calls for silence after the eucharistic prayer and the Lord's Prayer. This silence should be regarded not as a break in the liturgy but as a solemn moment of transition from the great prayers to the time of communion. The silence joins two intimately related moments in the liturgy; it does not separate them.

Liturgical planners (especially the presider) should decide in advance whether one of the optional sentences provided in *The Book of Alternative Services* will be used in conjunction with the breaking of the bread and, if so, which one. (Note that they are optional, not compulsory.) The presider breaks the bread. If there are one or more loaves of "ordinary" bread (as distinct from wafers) the bread should be conspicuously broken into many pieces, emphasizing symbolically the unity of the many in the one.<sup>1</sup> Ministers of communion in addition to the presider may assist in the breaking of the bread. Cups and plates that have been kept on a side table should, if they are to be used, be brought to the presider by one or more persons appointed for that task. Wine that has been consecrated in a flagon or decanter is poured into the additional cups. The presider invites the people to communion with the solemn proclamation, "The gifts of God for the People of God."

All of this demands careful planning and assignment of roles. It may require rehearsal.

Distribution of communion used to be a fairly simple and standardized affair. The people came and knelt at the communion rail and the presider, often assisted by another ordained minister, moved down the rail placing

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1. 1 Corinthians 10:17.

bread into each communicant's hand while reciting an assigned formula. In practice, the formula was often abbreviated. An assistant similarly took the wine to each communicant. If the congregation was large, ushers regulated the flow of communicant traffic by moving slowly backwards down the aisle of the church, indicating to one pew of people after another that their turn had come.

This familiar pattern may, of course, continue to be followed, whether the rite is traditional or contemporary in form, but it is not without options. In France I have several times encountered a pattern in which the congregation comes up for communion from the back of the nave first; people join the end of the line as it reaches them—the last literally becoming the first and the first last. This turns the movement toward communion into a procession, itself an ancient and primal liturgical gesture that underlines the corporate dimension of the church.

Today there are many possible arrangements for the distribution of communion, reflecting subtly different but compatible theological interpretations of the church as community. Communion may be given at “stations” to congregants who stand to receive from the distributing ministers. Sometimes the congregation forms a circle around the holy table before the eucharistic prayer, when there are at least two options. If the congregation is small the bread and cup may be passed from one communicant to the next, highlighting the shared nature of the sacramental meal. In a very beautiful gesture members of the community literally feed one another. Because this is a very time-consuming mode of distribution it is not suitable for large numbers of people. It is usually better for the presider and one or more ministers of communion to take the elements to each communicant. Ministers of the cups may work in pairs, each of them presenting a cup to alternate communicants. This calls for decision-making, planning, assignment of roles, and explanation when first adopted as a local practice.

The communion of the presider and other members of the sanctuary party offers a number of options. The Canadian *Book of Common Prayer* specifically directs the presider to receive communion first and then to deliver the bread and wine to bishops, priests, deacons, and the people, in that order. *The Book of Alternative Services* is less precise but seems to assume

something similar. However, in very recent years a practice has appeared in which the presider and sanctuary party receive last. This is presumably based on the principle that the presider is host and that hospitality demands that guests be served first. On the other hand, secular etiquette in some circles demands that guests not begin to eat and drink until the hostess (sic) has picked up her knife and fork. In any case it is theologically open to discussion whether the presider, rather than Christ, is the host.

If planners decide that the sanctuary party will receive last they will have to give close attention to detail. It is possible to create confusing situations in which no one knows who has received and who has not and to whom what person should be offering what element.

There is a much more historic tradition that the presider does not give himself communion (women were not contemplated at the time when it was the norm). The principle is that the sacrament is never *taken* but is always *received*, and that the presider is not host but is equally guest.

Robert Taft has written on this subject more than once and his argument is theological rather than merely practical.

In this pristine vision of the Eucharist, Holy Communion is not just the sacrament of personal communion with the Risen Lord of each of the baptized individually. It is rather the sacrament of our communion with one another in the Body of that Risen Lord to form the one Mystical Body of Christ, a body at once ecclesial and eucharistic. That this was the meaning of eucharistic *koinonia* in the Early Church has been shown beyond cavil. The sense of this was so strong that in an earlier age none of the clergy concelebrating the Eucharist, not even the pope of Rome nor the patriarch of Constantinople, served themselves Holy Communion: rather, they all received it from the hand of another. As I have shown elsewhere, this remained the general rule in most communion rites of East and West right up through the Middle Ages: Holy Communion was not just *taken*, not even by the higher clergy, but *given*

and *received*. For communion is at once a ministry and a gift and a sharing. As such it was *administered* to each communicant by the hand of another as from Christ.<sup>2</sup>

This tradition may, of course, be equally honoured when the leaders of the liturgical celebration receive after everyone else.

Liturgical planners are responsible not only for arranging the reverent and efficient distribution of holy communion but also for the actualizing of the fundamental theology implied in that action. For it is the church itself, the people, which is the primary symbol of the Christ and especially in the sharing of holy food, an action in which the empire of God is both anticipated and realized.

If a hymn or other piece of music is sung during the time of communion, planners should choose it carefully. The text should, as much as possible, complement both the eucharistic moment and the theme or themes of the day, or at least should not jar with them. A hymn should not be chosen simply because it is someone's favourite.

When the congregation forms a circle around the holy table there is the problem of what should be done about books. They are necessary for most hymns but a nuisance at the moment of communion. Chants in the style of Taizé provide a happy alternative.<sup>3</sup>

If the congregation forms a circle around the holy table planners must make a choice on what the people will do after communion. They may return to their pews or they may remain where they are until the dismissal. In either case directions should be clear and the pattern from one celebration to the next should be consistent.

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2. See Robert F. Taft, SJ, "Is There Devotion to the Holy Eucharist in the Christian East?" in *Worship*, May 2006, vol. 80, no. 3, 228f.

3. See the list of Taizé chants on pages 920 and 921 in *Common Praise*.



Ministers of communion should be trained to be sensitive to the particular sensibilities of some communicants. Some people are unwilling to drink from a common cup, especially since the SARS epidemic some years ago. Some communicants dip their wafer in the chalice (intinction) and then consume the two elements together. Serious questions have been raised as to whether this practice is actually more hygienic than drinking from the cup because fingers may easily come into contact with the contents of the chalice leaving bacteria behind. In any case, it is quite unsuitable when leavened bread is used. Some, including those who do not wish to receive alcohol, prefer not to receive from the cup at all, remaining at the place of communion until the cup has passed by (perhaps with hands joined across the chest as a signal to the minister) or returning to their pew immediately after receiving the bread. The anxieties of communicants must be respected because no one should be afraid of receiving at the Lord's Table. On the other hand, unsuitable practices (like intincting for oneself) may sometimes have to be challenged pastorally. There is no ultimate solution to this problem.

Ministers of communion should also be made aware of the special needs of some communicants, especially those who are allergic to wheat products. It is common now for rice wafers to be provided for them and ministers of communion need to know the identity of those so afflicted and the location of the wafers when they are needed. This applies especially to liturgies with a large number of communicants.

Planners should decide in advance how bread and wine remaining from communion will be consumed. They may be placed on a side-table and consumed by assigned people after the dismissal. Or they may be consumed immediately after communion, providing an opportunity for silence or perhaps a solo or choral musical offering

Eating and drinking together in mutual acceptance is central to our understanding and actualizing of the gospel. Planners should try to make it a time of quiet simplicity, unhindered by awkward surprises and moments of embarrassment.

# Planning the Dismissal

It has been said that we Christians come together to be dismissed. The liturgy is not an abiding place: like the mountain of the Transfiguration it is not a place to stay. We gather for renewal and we are sent to challenge and change the world to be the commonwealth of God that Jesus announced and that he embodied in his actions of compassion, care, and fellowship. This is the meaning of apostolicity—being sent with a commission. The dismissal is not about cossetting holy thoughts for another week; it is about justice and healing and feeding the hungry and housing the homeless and including the marginalized and pursuing peace and the transformation of the world in which we live. The dismissal is about the world and the proper role of a Christian within it.

The dismissal really begins with the prayers after communion because communion is the climax of the eucharistic liturgy. The post-communion rite in *The Book of Common Prayer* begins with the Lord's Prayer because that is where Thomas Cranmer put it in the 1552 *BCP*, presumably because he saw it as an affirmation of discipleship re-established. Subsequent editions of the *BCP* in the 1662 tradition have followed the same pattern. *The Book of Alternative Services* follows an older and wider tradition in which the Lord's Prayer precedes communion and the process of dismissal.

The post-communion rite in *The Book of Common Prayer* is centred on a prayer of thanksgiving and commitment. Perhaps the central words are, "here we offer and present unto thee ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a holy and living sacrifice unto thee." The sacrifice of the church is not merely the commemoration, recalling, and re-presentation of the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, but is the offering of the whole church, head and members, by the whole church, head and members, in holy and redemptive living.

*The Book of Common Prayer* rite continues with the *Gloria in excelsis* and a blessing. The whole of the rite, as it seems to have been envisioned by Cranmer, moves from penitence and self-abasement at the beginning (“Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit” followed by the ten commandments and the repeated, “Lord have mercy”) to the worship of the heavens.

The blessing in *The Book of Common Prayer* incorporates the Peace, transferred from its traditional place between the liturgy of the word and the offertory or from its Roman position before communion. It also includes an almost-hidden subtlety: the priest prays that God’s blessing will be, “among you and remain with you.” The people already enjoy the divine blessing and it is not something that is transferred to them by the priest, as implied in “be upon you”, but is a condition of being already given to them and renewed in what has gone before. Presiders should probably avoid altering the blessing to suggest that it is something the priest mediates to the people. The people are already blessed and need to live in that realization. Now may God’s blessing continue and expand in the life situations to which the people will return.

*The Book of Alternative Services* calls for the congregation to stand for the prayer after communion. Although *The Book of Common Prayer* takes kneeling for granted as the normal posture for prayer, it would not be inappropriate or inconsistent with the book’s theological trajectory to consider standing for the concluding rite. Those who ate the first Passover were told to wear their sandals and hold their pilgrims’ staffs in their hands. They were to be ready for the first stage of the great trek to freedom.<sup>1</sup>

The concluding rite should foster a sense of expectancy. It is not a conclusion but a new beginning. Liturgical planners should consider ways in which to give expression to that state of mind. Sometimes beautiful but elaborate organ postludes undermine that more dynamic mood of hope and purpose.

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1. Exodus 12:11, “This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord.”

*The Book of Alternative Services* provides some options. First, as noted, there is provision for silence between the time of communion and the final words of dismissal. The Prayer after Communion may then be said by the presider, followed by congregational recitation of an anthem based on Ephesians 3.20, "Glory to God, whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine...." (We should note that this doxology has the same effect on the pattern of the liturgy as Cranmer's transfer of the *Gloria in excelsis* from the opening rite to the conclusion.) Alternatively, the priest and people may exchange the words of a versicle and response, "All your works praise you, O Lord ...", followed by congregational recitation of a prayer of thanksgiving.

It is important to note that both the doxology, "Glory to God," and the prayer of thanksgiving emphasize the effect of grace not only in the present but in the future. The former affirms the power of God working in the believer to achieve unimaginable results. The second prays that we who drink Christ's cup may bring life to others and give light to the world. Both of these forms of prayer after communion have great strength, looking to the future and the unfolding of human life and freedom. Liturgical planners must decide which form is most appropriate for their own setting and whether the forms should be alternated or perhaps used during specific periods of the church's year.

A word about announcements is necessary at this point. It used to be the custom in many places for the announcement of coming events in the life of the church and wider community to be made before the sermon. As the liturgical movement came to stress the continuity of the proclamation of the word in the readings and the "breaking" of the word in the sermon or homily, this became increasingly recognized as inappropriate. Some congregations have experimented with placing the announcements before the liturgy begins. (I know a parish where it was customary for each member of the congregation who had an announcement to make to come to the pulpit before the opening rite. On one occasion it was 35 minutes before the actual liturgy started.) Others have felt that the announcements belong properly to the dismissal rite because they provide some definition of what people are being sent to do. Sometimes they are made at the

opening of the dismissal rite, immediately after communion, and are followed by post-communion prayer. This has the effect of setting the stage for departure, suggesting a shift to a totally different and outward-looking atmosphere. Elsewhere, the announcements are made after the post-communion prayers, immediately before the actual words of dismissal, (e.g., “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.”) Planners should consider which model is most appropriate to their context.

Finally, the congregation is dismissed. The question is who should do this. Traditionally the dismissal has belonged to the deacon, whose liturgical function seems to have begun as a sort of stage director, not unlike the “animator” who is now a common feature in Roman Catholic liturgies. In this case, it is appropriate for the deacon, if there is one, to speak the words of dismissal. On the other hand, it is my personal opinion that the minister who greeted the congregation when they assembled should also tell them when the time of assembly is over. The one who says “hello” should say “goodbye.”

The dismissal should suggest finality. The whole of the liturgy takes place in between the bookends of greeting and dismissal. As it is inappropriate for informal greetings and liturgical directions to precede the opening greeting (they may just as easily follow it), so it is inapt for announcements and invitations to coffee to follow the dismissal. The liturgy should be a unified event, incorporating informal information as well as the words and actions of the deep tradition.

In some places the clergy and choir process to the back of the church and the words of dismissal are recited from that location behind the congregation. This seems to me to be somewhat lame and anticlimactic. I suggest it would be better for the minister who dismisses the congregation to remain in full view while he or she brings the liturgical event to its formal conclusion.

The dismissal rite, which looks at first glance very simple and straightforward, is open to many subtleties. There is plenty of scope for liturgical planners to ask themselves what they want to stress and emphasize and to arrange the drama of the final moments of the liturgy accordingly. It is im-

portant for them to remember that the *conclusion* of the liturgy is not the *end* of the liturgy. The rite concludes like any piece of performative and dramatic art, but the liturgy—the work of the people of God—has not ended because it must continue in the lives of those who offer themselves, their souls and bodies, to be a holy and living sacrifice. This is the basis of the prophets' critique of the cult practices of ancient Israel. The liturgy had become an end in itself rather than the means to the end of holy living in the expression of compassion and the pursuit of justice.<sup>2</sup> Liturgical planners should be sensitive to this principle.



In conclusion, I want to stress again that there is no such thing as an unplanned liturgy. It may be poorly planned, without an attempt to meet the needs and aspirations of a specific congregation at a specific time and place; it may be selfishly planned to meet the personal liturgical and spiritual concerns of the planner; it may be planned by one person without consultation with representatives of the larger community; worst of all, it may be planned “on the fly,” with decisions being made as the rite unfolds. Even deciding not to plan would be a perverse form of planning. Best, it should be planned in a process of education, reflection, and consultation that involves at least the presider and the leading musician, if possible accompanied by some members of the worshipping community who can offer counsel from the point of view of their own position in the pews.

Obviously not all the suggestions in these notes can be brought to bear on every detail of every liturgy. The result would be a neurotic standstill. But they may all be used from time to time, for critical evaluation of present practice and for creative celebration in the future.

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2. See Micah 6:8 and Amos 5:21–24.

As Liturgical Officer of The Anglican Church of Canada,  
Paul Gibson contributed significantly to the development of  
*The Book of Alternative Services* and the hymn book of  
the Anglican Church, *Common Praise*.  
He also served the central organization  
of the Anglican Communion.