

INTERCESSIONS

A SHORT GUIDE TO PRAYING IN CHURCH

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Thank you for agreeing to lead prayers at Christ Church. Your partnership in this ministry is greatly appreciated. We have prepared this guide to help you get better acquainted with your responsibilities.

1. WHAT IS PRAYER?

Prayer is an expression of thanks or a solemn request addressed to God, a god, or an object of worship. In the Christian faith, it is a somewhat wide-ranging form of communication to and hearing from God. It requires aligning our hearts with the will of God and it requires the humility to remember which of us in this communication is God and which is not. Every example of prayer in the Scriptures, including that of Jesus himself, accordingly takes on this form and tone (e.g., 1 Sam 2:1-10, 2 Kgs 19:15-19, Psalm 51, Jonah 2:1-9, Matt 6:9-13, John 17:1-26).

2. WHY DO WE PRAY?

There are three main reasons why Christians pray:

1. *It restores what is right.* From the fall of humanity into sin in Genesis 3 (the disobedience of Adam and Eve), there has been a great distance between humans and God. Prayer is an important verbal communication that we are committed to signalling the restoration of that relationship through God in Christ.
2. *It is good for us.* Even those theologians who most robustly believe in the sovereign and unchanging nature of God (e.g., John Calvin) find that the act of humbling oneself to dependence on God through activities like prayer are helpful in terms of Christian formation and growing into the likeness of Christ.
3. *It is effective.* James 5:16-18 says: “Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.”

3. WHAT ARE INTERCESSIONS? WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

Intercession is the action of intervening on behalf of another. In terms of the liturgy, the intercessions are important as prayers of the people on behalf of the church. They are also important as the hinge of the liturgy, moving us from the *Liturgy of the Word* to the *Liturgy of the Eucharist*.

Leading the intercessions is a public act of ministry. As such, it is important to note that there is a difference between private prayer and leading corporate intercessions. Whilst you are leading the intercessions, you are leading God’s people in prayer in some sense, as well as praying on their behalf. As an act of leadership, the way that you pray will be different from your own private prayer. In this way, the corporate act of intercession is the sum of the individual thoughts and prayers. It is a public ministry of the church entrusted to individuals. It is not a right.

Given the seriousness of this task, some people prefer to read prayers that they have written, while others prefer to base them on short notes. Given the length and complexity of these prayers, you are encouraged to prayerfully think through your prayers well in advance and, if possible, write them out.



4. WHAT IS THE CONTENT OF THE INTERCESSIONS?

As you prepare to lead the intercessions, begin by praying for guidance for yourself and your preparations. Start with the main categories and the weekly wrap (more on this below) and use other resources to help you to make notes on content. Make sure your prayers are clear and specific, but also that you are praying for something that others can assent to, so that they can respond with confidence.

In general, the shape of the intercessions follows a 5-part pattern: 1) the Church, 2) the world, 3) the local church community/family/friends 4) the sick, and 5) the departed. This is a good model of intercessory prayer and can (or even should) be used even in your private prayer life. At Christ Church, we add a little more specificity to this basic model and ask intercessors to pray for:

- the Church (including the Diocese in Europe, our Diocesan Bishop, Robert, his Suffragan, David, often shortened to our bishops Robert and David), and clergy (presently Patrick, Mike, and Robert)
- Annual Ecumenical Cycle of Prayer for the Nations of the World
- Diocesan concerns
- any other specific prayer concerns
- Christ Church: activities and events
- the sick and any others who are in need
- the departed and those in mourning

Under these general headings, you might like to include other categories as well:

- the universal Church, its members and mission
- this nation and all in civic authority
- the diplomatic community
- Queen Elizabeth the Second, as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England
- the welfare of the world
- concerns of the local community

You will find the specific petitions for each of these categories on the weekly wrap (usually emailed out on Thursday, but also available on our church's website each week at www.ccv-site.org/web/media/wrap.pdf). General suggestions can be found in *Common Worship* (the black prayer book, pages 101-110) or *Common Worship Daily Prayer* (the red book found at the front of the Church—just ask to have a look!). As you read other prayers and consider the categories of content for the prayers, you might want to write down specific phrases or ideas that you feel should be included. Such notes can help you as you begin to write out the prayers.

5. WHAT IS THE FORM OF THE INTERCESSIONS?

Once you have the content of your prayers gathered, you will need to begin fashioning the prayers themselves. Again, make sure your prayers are both clear and specific. The prayers should be between five and seven minutes in length. Less can be more.

You will want to begin the prayers by inviting everyone to pray with you. It is common to begin a prayer by thanking God for his many provisions to his people, but this will vary with the form of prayer you choose. You then proceed to make your specific intercessions.

In the Anglican tradition, after each category of intercessions, it is common to use a bidding statement (call) and response. *Common Worship* indicates two:

INTERCESSOR: Lord in your mercy... or
PEOPLE: **Hear our prayer.**

INTERCESSOR: Lord, hear us...
PEOPLE: **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Whichever response has been used, you should end the intercessions with the following, so that those praying with you will know the intercessions are concluding:

INTERCESSOR: Merciful Father...
PEOPLE: **...accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The above may be prefaced by:

INTERCESSOR: Rejoicing in the fellowship of [*N and*] all your saints, we commend ourselves and the whole creation to your unfailing love.

It is permissible to invite the congregation present to add specific names either silently or out loud after praying for the sick and the departed and those who mourn. If this is your intention, leave a short silence in which people are invited to add names.

6. HOW SHOULD WE READ THEM?

The intercessions typically follow shortly after the sermon. So be ready! Before you start you will hear the celebrant say something like: "Let us pray for the Church and the world and let us thank God for his goodness..." As he begins to say this, you should make your way to the front of the church and take your place at the microphone. You may wish to make a small bow or nod of the head towards the altar as you arrive and leave the sanctuary. A lectern is available, so please make use of it for your notes. You can begin your prayers as soon as you are comfortable. When you are finished, quietly make your way back to your seat.

While we do use a microphone on Sunday mornings at the main service, you will still need to project your voice. Practice before the service, if possible. It may feel that you are speaking loudly but you need to project your voice so that those at the back are able to hear. At the same time, be careful that your tone does not come across as harsh. This will come with practice over time. Ask someone for feedback.

Whatever you do, DO NOT adjust the microphone. There is no need, however tall or short you may be, if you speak into the mic directly. It picks up voices well.

A lot more information about reading out loud in church, especially related to the microphones and voice projection, can be gained by watching a video produced by our church on reading the Bible in church: www.ccv-site.org/web/index.php/worship/reading-in-church. Check it out!

Thank you again for your willingness to serve in this way. Please let us know if you have any questions. We are grateful to be partnering in ministry with you.



CHRIST CHURCH
THE ANGLICAN/EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN VIENNA