

Guidelines for Writing the Prayers of Intercession (“Prayers of the People” or “Prayers of the Church”)

CONTENT

There are several general prayer categories to consider as a “checklist.” Keep in mind that the prayers are an integral part of worship and should be done with much thought, time, care and personal prayer. Prayers reflect the wideness of God’s mercy for the whole world:

- **for the church universal, its ministry, and the mission of the gospel** – for all the baptized, bishops and pastors of the church, other pastoral leaders, missionaries, preaching and teaching, church schools, the unity of Christians
- **for the well-being of creation** – care of the earth and sea, harvest, the whole environment, the cosmos
- **for peace and justice in the world, the nations and those in authority, the community** – for leaders of government and international organizations, regions and/or people experiencing natural, political or economic crises, elections, promotions of justice and peace
- **for the poor, oppressed, sick, bereaved, lonely** – the poor, the homeless, the unemployed, the lonely, exiles and refugees, the sick, infirm and the dying, prisoners, those persecuted for the faith
- **for all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit**
- **for the congregation, for local and specific concerns** – city, neighborhood, and seminary issues, musicians, artists, ushers, readers, staff, strangers/guests in worship, up-coming events, hardships facing the community, etc.
- **the faithful departed** -- members of the parishes, those close to the community, relatives, community friends who have recently died, commemoration of a saint

When reflecting on these five general categories, it can be helpful to consider the **liturgical day/season**, the texts for the day, and other liturgical texts that may be appointed for the day. For example, the intercessions written for Lent (a time of baptismal preparation) would be distinguished from those written for Advent (a time for welcoming the light); Pentecost Sunday would be distinct from Christ the King; and so on.

From season to season, a certain variety should be present in language, responses, needs that are voiced. They should reflect cultural as well as global concerns yet they should not be so specific that a particular assembly could not understand or respond to the bid. The writer needs to **be aware of the social, cultural and economic diversity of the community** on whose behalf these prayers are being offered. “The intercessions are a welcome location to experiment with inculturation of the liturgy. Different Christian community may find their own tone or style appropriate.” (Gail Ramshaw, *Ordo*, ed. Lange, p.79)

The Prayers need to **avoid political slant** to either the right or left.

TONE

The prayers should be **succinct but not terse**; they may reflect the images and actions of readings but not spiritualize realistic needs through an overextended use of scriptural metaphor. The petitions are neither exhortations nor confessions. Petitions should avoid a preachy tone -- that is, petitions that get too long and try to manipulate people's behavior. The prayers are not a “make-up” or second sermon.

To avoid a preachy tone, you might use the simple formula:

For the whole church on earth....

For the people of God in *Name of Country*...

For (*whatever else you want to include in the prayers*)....

This avoids saying what, exactly, is hoped as an outcome of the prayer and thus avoids setting out a social, political, or finger-wagging agenda for the world. "The intercessions are not to be deist, assigning to ourselves the solution to our problems." (Ramshaw, *Ordo*, ed. Lange, p.80)

THE PRAYERS ARE OF ALL THE PEOPLE

As prayer of a gathered community, petitions are regularly voiced in the first person plural.

ADDRESS

The Prayers of Intercession are usually addressed to God, the Creator, the first person of the Trinity. The prayers stem from the bidding prayers voiced at the Good Friday Service. These are the prayers of the people as they look upon the suffering Christ. The suffering in the world is Christ's suffering. The prayers are a plea to God the Creator. Other attributes or names for God may be used in the response, for example:

"Hear us, merciful God."

"Reveal your saving power."

"Hear us, shepherd of Israel."

The petitions may be **addressed directly to God**:

"Let your blessing rest upon seedtime and harvest, the commerce and industry of our people.

Give them just rewards for their labor and protect them from all danger.

We pray . . ."

Or the petitions may be **addressed first to the assembly**:

"Let us pray for the holy church of God throughout the world, for its leaders and ministers, that God will guide it and preserve it, we pray . . ."

Care should be taken that all the petitions for a given Sunday are addressed either to God or to the assembly, not moving back and forth.

The petition for those in need should allow for the naming of the sick or dying and for other intentions:

"Let us pray for those who are sick or recovering from illness (especially . . .)."

Likewise, when a prayer is offered for people or regions in crisis, or during the petition remembering the faithful dead, one may allow for the naming of specific groups or areas:

"Let us pray in thanksgiving for those who loved and served God in the church who now rest from their labors (especially . . .)"

"Let us pray for the people of (especially...)"

RESPONSES: BESEECHING AND THANKSGIVING

The response may be either for a thanksgiving (Bless we the Lord, **thanks be to God**) OR for those things for which we are asking (God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**). Other responses may be used.

EXAMPLES

Fine examples of prayers are to be found in the Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship* (pp. 99-120) and the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* (pp. 383-393). The outline is also described in the ELW *Leaders Desk Edition* (pp. 21 and 177-178).