

Leading Intercessions in Church



Why ask lay people to lead intercessions?

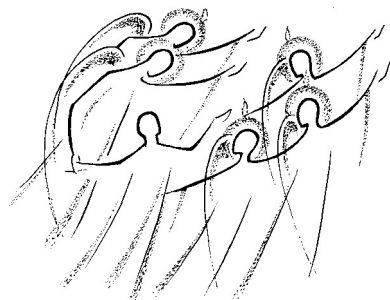
Worship is something in which we are all engaged and involved. Lay people, taking a vocal, leadership role in services send out very positive messages to the rest of the congregation about the importance of every church member playing their part. Using a variety of people will hopefully bring a variety of approaches and insights to this part of our worship.

How?

You can't just arrive at the service, stand up and lead intercessions. You need to have an idea of the theme of the worship, so you need to have read the passages of Holy Scripture beforehand to link your prayers to the shape of the worship. You also need to be aware of events that are happening or breaking both locally, nationally and internationally, but use them to shape the theme of your prayers, not to be a rereading of the News at Ten!

Most importantly, you need to **PRAY**. Pray that you understand the theme and that God will guide you to lead prayers effectively.

Be aware that leading prayer is not at all like praying privately or silently: it should not weave in and around themes, return to things previously mentioned, change tack abruptly as you think of something new. When we pray alone, this is the Spirit prompting us in new and exciting directions, but when we do this out loud, it just descends into an uncoordinated mess, as others will have difficulty following your stream of consciousness. For this reason, your intercessions should be:



- Planned
- Succinct
- Short
- Relevant

Specifics

You do need to be aware of what is happening in the world, and sometimes it is appropriate to build these into your intercessions—a good example would be Grenfall Tower, or the Hurrricanes or an Act of Terrorism

The prayer is collective and should always be “We pray...” You are leading others, not inviting the world to hear your own prayers. When you lead intercessions in the first person (*‘Lord, I just wanna say...’*), it is very exclusive. Also, don't keep repeating “Father, Father, Father, Father this, Father that...”: you don't want to sound like the prophets of Baal (see 1 Kings 18:22-39)

The bidding prayer at the beginning gives you an opportunity to set the tone of the prayers as well as being a signal for those who wish to sit or kneel for prayer. One of the classic bidding prayers indicates the manner in which we pray:

“In the power of the Spirit and in union with Christ Jesus, let us pray to the Father...”

Intercessions should always address the Father primarily. Phrases at the beginning of each petition can be:

- Heavenly Father
- Lord God
- Loving Father and so on

Once you have chosen one form of address for God, stick with it.

Who/What should I pray for?

Traditionally, we pray for:

- The Church
- The World
- The Community
- The Sick
- The Dying
- Space for our own prayers, praises, petitions

However, you can pray in any form you want to.

Other prayer ideas:

- Spoken Intercessions
- Visual Intercessions (Play music, show pictures)
- Prayer Tree
- Stone / Pebbles
- Clay
- Prayer Strings with Knots
- Bubbles blown into the air
- Ribbons placed on something
- Candles placed in sand

Be creative!

If we pray for the Church, we **MUST** pray for our Bishops: Robert, Nick and Sarah. If we pray for any of the other churches, then we must pray for them all. A form of words which is appropriate is:

“We pray for Justin (& John), Our Archbishop(s), Francis, Bishop of Rome, Bartholomew the Ecumenical Patriarch and the leaders of the Reformed Churches”



As your Vicar, I also greatly appreciate being prayed for at every opportunity.

Intercessions need not be a litany of the news, but should be directed more towards common themes of the week. When praying for something, **DO NOT** be tempted to ramble on about it: bring it before the people and let them pray about it in their own way:

“We pray for the situation in [wherever] and pray for the hand of peace to calm tensions there at present”

Everyone can then have their own private focus and God can sort it out how He wills. I recommend no more than 4 or 5 petitions, rounded off with a response. There are a couple in the Service sheet, but if you are introducing a new or slightly different response, begin your prayers with:

“The response to ‘Let us pray to the Lord’ is ‘Lord have mercy’”

And then say the response so that the congregation can repeat it back to you.

However, if you really cannot think of anything to say: **say nothing**. I’m not going to pretend that leading silent prayer is easy or a cop-out because it is actually harder, but the space that silent prayer affords and be very powerful.

Sometimes, just the headings “We pray for the Church... We pray for the world.. etc” can be enough, punctuated by only the response

ie “Lord hear us, **Lord graciously hear us**

Be aware of the names of the people on our notice sheet who have requested prayers but please **RESPECT CONFIDENTIALITY**

You may know of people who are sick, dying, having a ‘hard time’. Some people will tell you their problems, but do not expect the whole of Plymouth to hear about them during the intercessions.

Rather than saying ‘We pray for N as she faces a hard time at the moment’ better say ‘We pray for all facing their own trials at this time’.

Use of the Hail Mary or the prayers for the faithful departed:

*“+Rest Eternal Grant unto them, O Lord
And let light perpetual shine upon them
 May they rest in peace **and rise in glory”***

are strongly encouraged.

The last section involves a little moment of silence to offer personal prayers. Long enough to allow prayer, but not long enough for anyone to fall asleep in.

At the very end, do not use an ending such as “*Merciful Father, accept these prayers...*” because there isn’t enough space on the sheet for that, and many people don’t know it. I suggest that you close with a bidding to which the unequivocal response is “Amen”

*“Heavenly Father, trusting in your love and mercy, we lay these prayers before you, which we ask in the name of Jesus, the Lord. **Amen.**”*

If you are praying in a Mass, then you might arrange with the priest to have the Intercessions “topped and tailed” so the priest leads with the opening and takes over after the moment of silent prayer.

Practicalities

Except for when you are leading the intercessions, you should be as unobtrusive as possible. Sit at the end of the pew so you don’t have to disturb other people. Anticipate. By the time we have finished the Creed, you should be ready to begin. I advise setting off at the line “we believe in the Holy Spirit”, for it is she who is sending you to lead prayers anyway! Being in position will give you plenty of time for one last ‘arrow prayer’ for support.

Don’t worry about the microphone, or switching it on, or moving the lectern after you have finished. As you return to your seat, give thanks to God privately that you have done His work in leading the people of God in prayer.

Resources

There are many printed resources on the bookshelves, and if you want to use them as a guide, please do. Fr. Simon and Tracey and others all have experience in leading prayer and are happy to help you. The internet is a resource, but be careful as there are some sites with strange ideas! The one resource we cannot do without is the Holy Spirit. As we keep reiterating, the best and only way to intercede is to pray yourself first for the Holy Spirit to give you inspiration, and it will come.

If you make a mistake during your intercessions, do not worry: keep going. If you do not draw attention to yourself, no-one will notice. **Never** stop and apologise.

Summary

To help you remember all of this, here are five ‘P’s;

- **Pray** First and last
- **Prepare** Thoughtfully
- **Practice** Thoroughly
- **Position** In good time
- **Pronounce** Clearly

I hope you will enjoy leading prayer in Church. Your contribution is appreciated and valued.



Fr. Simon