

Diocese of Arundel & Brighton
Diocesan Liturgy Commission



GUIDELINES

for

**THE PRAYER OF
THE FAITHFUL**

April 05

FOREWORD

The *Prayer of the Faithful* – or General Intercessions or Bidding Prayers as they are popularly known – forms an integral and valuable part of our liturgical celebrations, and particularly the Mass. In the *Prayer of the Faithful*, we pray for the needs of the Church, the world, those in need, and for important local issues. As such, it is the prayer of the whole People of God asking for those things which we know only God can give. When well prepared and well read the Prayer of the Faithful moves the mind and heart to communion with the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

I warmly commend these revised Guidelines for use in the diocese in the hope that they will enhance our worship and praise.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kieran". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross-like mark at the beginning.

Rt. Rev. Kieran Conry
Bishop of Arundel and Brighton

Diocese of Arundel & Brighton
Diocesan Liturgy Commission

GUIDELINES
for
THE PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL
(also known as the **General Intercessions**)

History

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy states that: “The prayer of the faithful is to be restored after the gospel and homily, especially on Sundays and holy days of obligation.” [paragraph 53]

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal [3rd Edition – 2005] states that: “In the *Prayer of the Faithful*, the people respond in a certain way to the word of God which they have welcomed in faith, and, exercising the office of their baptismal priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all. It is fitting that such a prayer be included, as a rule, in all Masses celebrated with a congregation, so that petitions will be offered for the holy Church, for civil authorities, for those weighed down by various needs, for all men and women, and for the salvation of the whole world.” [paragraph 69]

Theology

Enlightened and inspired by God’s word, the community of faith exercises its priestly function by praying for all people everywhere. Because the “joy and hope, the struggle and anguish of the people of this age and especially of the poor and those suffering in any way, are the joy and hope, the struggle and anguish of Christ’s disciples”

[*Gaudium et Spes*, paragraph 1], the Church prays not just for its own needs but for the salvation of the world, for civil authorities, for those who are oppressed by any burden, and for the local community, particularly for those who are sick or who have died.

Renewal and Guidance

The restoration of the ancient practice of the *Prayer of the Faithful* was among the earliest changes in the renewal of the liturgy after the Second Vatican Council. Though this is its official title, it is also commonly known as ‘The General Intercessions’ or ‘The Bidding Prayers’. The official name, though, does give us a profound insight into its nature.

These recommendations about the Prayer of the Faithful are guidelines (revised in the light of the 3rd Edition of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal - April 2005) offered to help foster liturgical formation and promote good practice throughout the diocese of Arundel & Brighton.

Preparation

As with all those ministries we exercise on behalf of our Christian communities, it is important to prepare ourselves carefully through prayer. This is at the heart of Christian ministry. If those among us who compose or read the *Prayer of the Faithful* prepare in this way, we will be helping others to pray through our ministry.

The *Prayer of the Faithful* should be composed prayerfully for praying, as its name implies, by the faithful, by the whole assembly. Good practice encourages those responsible for preparing the *Prayer of the Faithful* to look beyond the concerns of the local community alone (i.e. this parish, this assembly) to the needs of the whole Church and to those of the wider world. Essentially, the *Prayer* becomes a powerful sign of the communion of the local assembly with all other communities and with the Universal Church. The composition of

the *Prayer of the Faithful*, as with all aspects of liturgy preparation, takes its inspiration from the scripture readings of the particular liturgy, keeping the following in mind:

The Form and Structure of the *Prayer of the Faithful*

1 Overview: “It is for the priest celebrant to direct this prayer from the chair.” [paragraph 71 GIRM - 3rd Edition]. He or, in his absence, the leader (for example at a non-Eucharistic liturgy), briefly invites the faithful to pray, and at the end draws their intentions together in a brief concluding prayer. The intentions are announced by either the deacon, or a cantor, a lector, or one of the lay faithful, from the ambo or from another suitable place. The assembly, however, stands and gives expression to its prayer either by an invocation said after each intention or by praying in silence. [cf paragraph 71 GIRM - 3rd Edition]. The assembly affirms the concluding prayer of the priest or leader with “Amen”.

2 Introduction: The priest introduces the *Prayer* in the form of an invitation to the whole assembly. This invitation is not a prayer to God or to any of the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. It serves as a bridge between the proclamation of God’s word and the response of the assembly in petition, made with faith and trust in God’s love. The content of the invitation to prayer and the intentions should relate to the mystery being celebrated, the feast or season, or some particular aspect of the word of God proclaimed in the scriptures.

3 Intentions: Both the priest’s introduction and those intentions proposed are addressed to the assembly, not to God. The faithful then pray for the suggested intention in the silence of their hearts and a common response marks the conclusion of the particular intercession.

Opening Phrases

The following opening phrases for each intention are preferred: “We pray for . . .”, “We pray that . . .” and “Let us pray for. . .”. When simply “For . . .” is used, the intention may best be concluded with these words: ‘Let us pray (or we pray) to the Lord’, to lead into the silence before the common response. For example: ‘For those who work for justice in the world. We pray to the Lord. *Silence.* Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.’

Intentions

The reader presents the intentions to the assembly, which first prays silently for each intention and then gives expression to its communal prayer in an invocation said or sung after each intention. E.g. (Reader) “Lord in your mercy: (All) hear our prayer”. It should be stressed that silent prayer alone is also an appropriate response.

The intentions need to be short, clear, pithy and precise. They should reflect our Catholic Christian witness. They should also be objective, inclusive and as wide-ranging as possible in order that people might easily understand and respond to them. Four intentions are usually sufficient, with perhaps five or six on special occasions.

In particular celebrations, such as Confirmation, Marriage or a Funeral, the series of intentions may reflect more closely the particular occasion. [cf. paragraph 70 GIRM – 3rd Edition]. Even on such special occasions, the *Prayer of the Faithful* should have an element of the ‘universal’ about it. For example, not just ‘We pray for Pauline and Simon on their wedding day’ but ‘We pray for Pauline and Simon and all those who marry today’

Response

The response, which may be said or sung, is a prayer evoking a sense of imploring, as opposed to being a statement of praise, thanksgiving or repentance, which are properly integral to other parts of the Mass.

It is essential that all those who are entrusted with the formation of children, young people and those with learning and other disabilities, should give adequate guidance and promote good practice. Please note that intentions should never begin “Dear God . . .” or “Dear Jesus . . .”

Devotional Prayer

The Roman Rite does not, in fact, envisage the inclusion of devotional prayers in the *Prayer of the Faithful*. Following a mediaeval practice in England, the ‘Hail Mary’ has been customarily said after the final intercession. Properly understood, a set of prayers directed to the Father, through the Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit, contains no obvious place for prayers to the Saints. This is why, some years ago, the Holy See wrote to the Bishops of England and Wales advising that such devotional prayer should not have a place in the *Prayer of the Faithful*. The Holy See asked that the, by then, widespread practice be gradually and gently discouraged.

In particular, the inclusion of the Hail Mary would be inappropriate in liturgies that are ecumenical in character.

An example

The following example, written for the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King, can serve as a model:

Priest: My brothers and sisters, God has created a place for all of us in the Kingdom of the Son, whom he loves. We pray to our Father, through Jesus his Son, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, for the needs of the Church and the world.

*Reader: We pray that the Church will become more truly the Body of Christ . . . and embrace all people everywhere: [pause for silent prayer]
Lord in your mercy: (All) hear our prayer*

*We pray for all those whose task it is to lead communities and nations . . . that their leadership may reflect the wisdom and loving care of Jesus, the Good Shepherd: [pause for silent prayer]
Lord in your mercy: (All) hear our prayer*

*We pray for those who are poor or oppressed . . . that, by our prayers and actions, they may experience freedom, justice and peace: [pause for silent prayer]
Lord in your mercy: (All) hear our prayer*

*We pray for our parish community . . . that we may be open to the power of God's Spirit in all we do: [pause for silent prayer]
Lord in your mercy: (All) hear our prayer*

*Priest: Father, in Christ the world is reconciled to you. We pray that the peace of the Kingdom may be ours, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
(All) Amen*

Because, in the dioceses of England and Wales, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King, is also National Youth Sunday an additional intention for young people would also normally be added. It should be noted that the Resources for such Sundays circulated by Agencies do not always follow best practice. In particular the particular theme will often swamp the wider themes that should be brought to prayer in the Prayer of the Faithful. Parishes should make judicious selection from the materials, and also make use of the Cycle of Prayer in identifying other particular themes for the Prayer of the Faithful.

Comment: Feel free to include as an appendix, or refer to the Liturgy Office website or the Diocesan yearbook

Other examples can be found in the Roman Missal, appendix

Questions to ask when composing an intention . . .

- Is it short and succinct, while being accessible to the assembly?
- Does it help people to pray?
- Does the wording of the response make sense after each intention?

Categories – as a rule, the series of intentions is to be:

- a. for the needs of the Church;
- b. for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world;
- c. for those burdened by any kind of difficulty;
- d. for the local community.

[paragraph 70 GIRM -3rd Edition]

Number – usually four, but may be extended to five or six on special occasions.

Preparing to read, and reading, the *Prayer of the Faithful*

Good practice suggests the following ‘Golden Rules’ for the reader:

- 1 Check that the *Prayer* is placed on the ambo in readiness before Mass begins. In addition make sure that the priest’s copy is at the chair. (If there is to be a sung response check also that those involved in the music ministry have a copy). Look at the intentions well in advance. Read them carefully. Consider them prayerfully and reflectively, making sure that pronunciation of difficult names and phrases doesn’t present a problem.

- 2 Arrive in good time, at least 10 minutes before the liturgy begins. This will give you opportunities both for prayer, and to ask any questions that may arise.
- 3 Approach the ambo at the appropriate time: during Mass this occurs after the homily (and Creed). Bow to the altar on your way to the ambo. If there is more than one reader, every care should be taken that the dignity of this special time of prayer is preserved. The readers should approach the ambo together and leave together at the end. During the intercessions each reader should give way to the next with dignity and calm.
- 4 Make yourself comfortable and stand tall. Take time to gather your thoughts. Ensure that the microphone is at an appropriate height for you. There is no hurry. Make eye contact with those whom you are to lead in prayer.
- 5 The priest introduces the *Prayer of the Faithful* at the appropriate time. When the priest has completed the introduction, begin confidently.
- 6 During the reading of the intentions four basic principles need to be borne in mind:
 - a Eye contact remains important throughout – it is an essential tool of communication.
 - b Announce the intentions slowly and clearly. Acquaint themselves with the sound enhancement system being used as all systems are different! Good use of the microphone is vital - not least for those in the assembly who rely on a loop system.

- c Do not rush the reading of the intentions. After each of them, pause for long enough to allow the assembly to make the prayer its own, before saying confidently “Lord in your mercy” or similar. Because we are inviting people to pray, this pause is fundamentally important and could be as long as 10 seconds.
 - d Silence has a pre-eminent place in the liturgy of the Church. Do not be afraid to leave reasonable spaces for silence during the *Prayer of the Faithful*.
- 7 At the end, remain at the ambo whilst the priest concludes the *Prayer*, as this is an integral part of the whole. After you have joined everyone in saying “Amen”, remember to bow to the altar before returning to your place in the assembly.

GLOSSARY

Ambo Also known as the lectern, it is the place from which the word of God is proclaimed during the liturgy. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church states that ‘the dignity of the word of God requires the church to have a suitable place for announcing his message so that the attention of the people may be easily directed to that place during the liturgy of the word’. [paragraph 1184]

Assembly A clearer term than ‘congregation’ because it includes all of those – priests and people – who are gathered together in a single place, usually a church, to worship God.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy ‘Sacrosanctum Concilium’
This important document was the first to come out of the Second Vatican Council and contains the important statement: ‘The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the fount from which all the Church’s power flows.’ [paragraph 10]

‘Gaudium et Spes’ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the world of today, is the longest document of the Second Vatican Council. It examines the link between the Church and the world today. It is notable for its wide range of concerns. Instead of the world being described negatively as a place of sin, the Council describes it as the ‘stage of human history . . . kept in being by its Creator’s love.’ [paragraph 2].

General Instruction of the Roman Missal The official guide to the celebration of Mass prepared for the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world. A revised version of GIRM was published in 2002 in the new 3rd edition of the (Latin) Roman Missal. An English translation of the Missal is presently in preparation, perhaps to be published in 2007. The official translation of GIRM has been published in advance of the rest of the Missal, because of its importance as a teaching document for the Church.

Liturgy The public prayer and worship of the Church.

Liturgy of the Word That part of the Mass which contains the proclamation of God’s word and the homily. It concludes with the Prayer of the Faithful.

These Guidelines were prepared by the Diocesan Liturgy Commission at the request of the Diocesan Bishop and revised following the promulgation of the 3rd Edition of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. April 2005.

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