

Looking at Liturgy
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1: Introduction

A few years ago, our Primate, Archbishop Fred Hiltz, spoke to a gathering of the clergy of the Diocese of Qu'Appelle in Regina. One of his key messages was the importance to the community of *worship*. Liturgy is central to the life of the Church, as the occasion when Christians gather together to worship God in *common* (rather than individual) prayer. Consequently, said the Primate, it is essential that we plan our worship and lead it well.

A leading Roman Catholic liturgist, Jesuit priest Keith Pecklers, emphasizes the direct connection between liturgy and life: "How we worship is intimately linked to how we live." This is summed up in the historic expression *lex orandi, lex credenda* – "the law of worship establishes the law of belief." We express what we believe in our worship, especially in eucharistic celebrations, from which we go into the world to live our faith as members of the Body of Christ.

Christian worship is, of course, extremely varied in style, both between and within faith traditions. It ranges from simple prayer services to elaborate liturgies in cathedrals and basilicas. There are occasions when improvised, informal worship is appropriate. In most cases, however, we owe it to God and one another to prepare liturgy carefully, as the Primate requested. In this series of columns, we'll consider ways to do that.

The writer looks at worship from the perspective of many years of experience at St. Paul's Cathedral, Regina, which is, by Anglican standards in Saskatchewan, a relatively large church (250 seating capacity) and where liturgical and musical traditions have been carefully developed over several decades – and continue to develop. At the same time, he often leads worship for the summer congregation of All Saints, Katepwa Beach, a historic but small rural church (50 seating capacity). He also participates in liturgy as a deacon. Since there are (alas!) very few in deacon's orders in Saskatchewan (seven of us, in six parishes, in the Diocese of Qu'Appelle and one in the Diocese of Saskatoon), we'll necessarily limit our comments from the diaconal point of view.

Most of our references will be to the 1985 *Book of Alternative Services (BAS)*. The General Synod website notes that "despite its name 'alternative,' [the BAS] has become the primary worship text for Sunday services and other major liturgical celebrations of the Anglican Church of Canada." Of course, many parishes continue to use the 1959/1962 *Book of Common Prayer* for some or even most of their services. It is the BAS, however, which provides liturgical variety and flexibility and the most opportunities for lay participation. We'll refer from time to time, as we have already, to Roman Catholic practices in liturgy, partly because our Anglican traditions are similar, partly because the Covenant between the Diocese of Qu'Appelle and the Archdiocese of Regina calls on us to share our experiences.

Finally, we'll *suggest*, not prescribe, liturgical usages, looking at options and best practices. There is no "one liturgical size fits all." Variety in worship is to be treasured – as long we plan and conduct our services prayerfully and thoughtfully.

2: Reading the Scriptures

The reading of the Bible – proclaiming the Word of God – is a vital part of Christian worship. It is important that reading be done with care, sensitivity and consideration for the listeners, the members of the worshipping community. We serve God and serve God’s people while reading; readers need to be touched by the Word before they can inspire listeners. Preparation should begin a week before one reads, so the reading has a chance to “take root” inside, says Roman Catholic Sister Melvina Hrushka, who has shared with me in giving joint Anglican-RC workshops for readers. A person should “never read publicly what you have not read privately,” she adds. It is important to check the pronunciation of unfamiliar words.

All public speaking requires **volume, slowness, clarity, and expression**. We cannot speak in public the way most of us do in conversation, because we will simply not be heard or understood. Common problems in public reading include: speaking too softly and too quickly; not enunciating words; allowing the voice to drop off at the end of a sentence; reading in a monotone without sufficient expression; and not using the microphone (if there is one) properly. We should avoid having readers who are unprepared or are not comfortable reading in public.

In Morning and Evening Prayer there are usually two lessons, one from the Old Covenant or Testament, one from the New, both preferably read by lay people. At the Eucharist, there are normally three readings: one from the Old Testament; a second from the New Testament – most often but not always from one of the Epistles; and the third from one of the four Gospels. *The Book of Alternative Services* (BAS) states that “lay people should normally be assigned the readings which precede the Gospel.” (The 1959/62 *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP) provides only for Epistle and Gospel readings.) The Revised Common Lectionary adapted for Anglican use is available online on the General Synod website (as is the BCP lectionary). Note that this supersedes the lectionary in the 1985 BAS. Texts of the Sunday eucharistic readings, psalm and prayers are available as bulletin inserts and can be provided ahead of time.

A valuable Roman Catholic resource for readers (“lectors” in RC parlance) is the Canadian edition of the *Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers, and Proclaimers of the Word*, published by Liturgical Training Publications and edited by Graziano Marchesci for the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. It is in three volumes, one for each year of the liturgical cycle (A, B, C). They include the texts of the readings (with the typeface indicating words to emphasize), notes for interpretation of the scripture passages, and helpful tips on pronunciation and reading styles. The Roman Catholic lectionary sometimes differs from the Anglican, but where they coincide the *Workbook* is a great asset. *A Lector’s Guide & Commentary to the RCL*, by L. Ted Blakley, also in three volumes (St. Mark’s Press), does follow the Anglican/Episcopal Common Lectionary. Unlike the Roman Catholic *Workbook*, it does not provide the texts of the readings, but these are available in a companion publication from the same publisher, the *Revised Common Lectionary, Episcopal Edition*.

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3: Proclaiming the Gospel

Proclaiming the Gospel is the focal point of the Liturgy of the Word in the Eucharist. Accordingly, the Gospel reading is preceded and followed by acclamations/responses, which may be said or sung; it is also usually accompanied by some form of ceremonial, ranging from a simple move by the reader to the place of the reading, to an elaborate Gospel procession with servers and incense. Regardless, the proclaiming of the Gospel should be done with care and be the focus of attention of the assembly.

Who reads the Gospel?

If a deacon is present among the ministers of the service, that person should *always* read the Gospel. *The Book of Alternative Services* is specific: it is “the function of a deacon to read the Gospel.” What happens if no deacon is available? The BAS only notes that “lay persons should normally be assigned the readings which precede the Gospel.” The generally-accepted custom, said Episcopal deacon and liturgist Ormonde Plater, is that “in the absence of a deacon functioning liturgically, the presider or an assisting priest reads the gospel.” Lay persons, then, do not normally proclaim the Gospel at the Eucharist.

Where does the reading take place?

The Gospel should be proclaimed from a prominent location in the church. According to *The Book of Alternative Services*, “It is desirable that the readings be read from a lectern or pulpit, and that the Gospel be read from the same lectern or pulpit, or in the midst of the congregation.” However, the custom, introduced in the 1950s, of processing down the centre aisle of the nave to read the Gospel “in the midst of the congregation” should, in my opinion, be discouraged. A Roman Catholic authority has observed that “it is better not to read from the middle of the community because the word comes to us from elsewhere. It is proclaimed; it does not simply arise out of the community.” Deacon Plater once told me that if we want the gospeller to be heard and seen, half-way down the nave aisle is the worst possible location! (Admittedly, wireless microphones, if available, resolve the sound problem.) At St. Paul’s Cathedral in Regina, the deacon normally proclaims the Gospel from the top of the chancel steps, using a wireless microphone; a sub-deacon holds the book during the reading.

The Gospel Procession

The Gospel reader, if someone other than the presider, may first receive a blessing from the presiding celebrant. In processing to the place of reading (and in small church buildings this may not be practical), a common practice is for servers bearing candles to lead the reader, carrying the Book of Gospels, to the place of proclamation during a hymn. Deacon Plater tells us that “traditionally, a cross is not carried in the procession, since in this proclamation the gospel book is the primary symbol of Christ.” There is a practice in some churches of singing the final verse of the hymn *after* the Gospel, giving time for the procession to return and the preacher to move to where the sermon is delivered. However, this is not recommended: nothing should separate the Gospel reading from the homily, says Episcopal priest Patrick Malloy, “so that the preaching would be related directly to the Scripture.” The gospeller returns to his or her place and the preacher gives the homily – presumably related to the Gospel that has just been proclaimed.

Saskatchewan Anglican, April 2016



A Gospel procession at St. Paul’s Cathedral, Regina: the author proclaims the Gospel at the Solemn Eucharist of the Conversion of St. Paul, January 24, 2016.

4: The Prayers of the People

The Prayers of the People, or Prayers of the Faithful, or Intercessions, are the culmination of the Ministry of the Word in the liturgy of the Eucharist. Those who compose and lead the intercessions fulfil a major responsibility on behalf of the community, which, as a “royal priesthood” (I *Peter* 2: 9), offers to God prayers for the Church and the world. *The Book of Alternative Services* (BAS) notes (p. 176) that “a deacon or lay person, rather than the priest, is the appropriate minister to lead the Prayers of the People.” In *The Book of Common Prayer*, however, the priest alone says the intercession.

Leaders of the Prayers of the People need to be sensitive to the needs and concerns of everyone in worship. *Intercessors are not solo performers – they pray on behalf of the assembly.* We keep our own preoccupations for our private prayer. We do not express political or social views. We should avoid personal and poetic eloquence; this may offend or embarrass some of the congregation. We also need to prepare the intercessions carefully and in advance – not arrive at church and improvise!

Intercessions normally include prayers for the Church, the nation, the world, the local community, those in need, and the departed. It is customary to remember the local bishop(s), other clergy (bishops, priests and deacons), and lay ministers. The leader offers intercessions in the form of “biddings,” “petitions” or “intentions,” each followed by a response from the assembly. An opening sentence introduces the prayers and indicates what the response will be. There should be a phrase, such as “*Lord, in your mercy, (hear our prayer)*” to trigger the assembly’s response – they can’t be expected to guess the cue! Biddings/responses need to be brief, clear and easy to follow. We can group special intentions (for example, those who have asked us to pray for them) at the beginning, or incorporate them in the biddings. The intercessions usually end with a collect offered by the intercessor or the presider; good examples are found in the BAS on pages 111, 127, and 130-131.

The Book of Alternative Services is, in my opinion, one of the best Anglican liturgical compendiums. However, there are some weaknesses in the Prayers of the People. Of the litanies on pages 110-128, only #1, #6, #9, #13 (Incarnation), #14 (Lent), and #15 (Easter) have cues for the responses. The others should be avoided unless they can be adapted with clear cues/responses. In any case, we should avoid repeating word for word the sample litanies in *The Book of Alternative Services*, which are intended as a guide, not as a repetitive text (as in the BCP); and we should *not* invite the congregation to follow the text in the book (except for litanies #17 and #18, which incorporate detailed responses). Anglicans arguably spend too much of their worship time following books, rather than listening and looking!

Let’s keep the petitions short. No lengthy rambles or harangues! And let’s keep them down to a reasonable number – six to ten petitions at the most. The intercessor is not there to give a sermon; that is the preacher’s job. Do not make our prayers sound like the television news or the parish bulletin. If we mention specific events, concerns or individuals, let’s do so with restraint and sensitivity. And, as when we are reading the scriptures, check in advance the pronunciation of words, especially names. We may allow a short period for members of the community to offer intentions, either in silence or audibly. We should always remember that we are voicing the *corporate* prayer of the Christian community.

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5: Offertory and Communion

How we prepare and administer communion at the Eucharist will vary greatly from parish to parish. Let me offer some comments based on our experience at St. Paul's Cathedral, Regina.

The Preparation of the Table

Like the Gospel reading, the preparation of the table at the offertory is the prerogative of the deacon. *The Book of Alternative Services* states that "it is the function of a deacon [...] to make ready the table for the celebration, preparing and placing upon it the bread and cup of wine" (p. 183). Since most parishes in Saskatchewan do not (alas!) have a deacon, the presiding celebrant will usually prepare the table, possibly assisted by servers. "Representatives of the people may present the gifts of bread and wine for the eucharist [...] to the deacon or celebrant before the altar" (BAS, p. 192). Our custom at St. Paul's is for two or three lay people to bring forward the gifts of bread, wine and water from the back of the church before the collection is taken up.

Administration of Communion

It used to be (how often we hear this!) that the administration of communion was restricted to the clergy, then additionally to licensed lay ministers. In many parishes, including ours, the clergy now share this ministry with lay communicants, licensed or not – including young people. Although it is often customary for the clergy to administer the bread, at St. Paul's lay ministers usually do so, for the practical reason that wafers are easier to administer to the communicant than a chalice; the priest and deacon administer the wine. Another custom has been that the ministers receive communion first; however, at St. Paul's, they receive communion with or after the congregation. This avoids a distinction between the clergy's communion and the laity's communion; as Episcopal liturgist Marion Hatchett has said, "the "Church is *one* Body taking part in *one* Communion in the *one* Lord."

As our cathedral is a traditional building with a raised chancel, we normally administer communion from two stations on the floor at the front of the nave; this avoids the awkward logistics, and difficulty for the elderly or disabled, of climbing steps into the chancel. Many parishes, however, retain the traditional practice of administering communion to the people kneeling or standing at the communion rail in the chancel. In contemporary buildings, the communion rail (if used) may be at floor level, which avoids this practical difficulty.

Intinction

Intinction is the practice of dipping the wafer in the wine. Intinction is *not* authorized in the Diocese of Qu'Appelle. A pamphlet published by the Anglican Church of Canada, "Eucharistic Practice and the Risk of Infection," points out that the historic use of the common cup for communion "poses no real hazard to health in normal circumstances" and that intinction may actually increase the risk. Those who do not choose to partake of the common cup may receive communion in bread alone and, if they wish, touch the base of the chalice during the words of administration. At St. Paul's, if people wish to communicate by intinction, we politely ask them not to do so for health reasons.

Ablutions

Ablutions is the "church language" word for the cleansing of the vessels after communion. Ablutions should be discreet and unobtrusive. For this reason we recommend against doing them at the altar. At St. Paul's, the ministers gather after communion in the sacristy to consume the remaining elements (or reserve them in the aumbry) and cleanse the vessels. In some churches it may be practical to do ablutions at the credence table.

6: *Ending the Service*

My friend the late Bishop Duncan Wallace used to say that the conclusion of an Anglican service is like that of a romantic symphony: it goes on and on and on. We seem reluctant to bring our liturgy to a close! The post-communion prayers at a eucharistic celebration are frequently followed by announcements (sometimes lengthy), a blessing, the Dismissal and a hymn. To cap it all, the presider will often say another prayer for the clergy and choir (if any) after their departure procession.

The Book of Alternative Services, however, specifies only one action: the Dismissal, to be given by the “deacon, or other leader.” Everything else – prayers, doxology, blessing – is optional. A hymn is not even mentioned. Episcopal liturgical scholar Marion Hatchett said that after the prayers, “the action – the leaving – should come immediately without further words or songs.” So at its starkest, the conclusion of the service after Communion should simply be the Dismissal, sending us into the world “to love and serve the Lord.”

This may be too stark for Anglicans! But we can at least pare back superfluous verbiage which prolongs the service unnecessarily. How many announcements do we really need – if any? The General Instruction of the Roman Missal puts it neatly: “the Deacon makes *brief* announcements to the people, *if indeed any need to be made*, unless the Priest prefers to do this himself” [my emphasis]. Some churches place announcements at the beginning of the service, rather than inserting them at the conclusion.

Although a blessing at the end of the service is optional in the Anglican, Episcopal and Roman Catholic rites, it is a frequent practice in all three traditions. Marion Hatchett, however, considered a final blessing as redundant, “since every person would have just received Communion (the greatest blessing) or would have approached the Altar for a personal blessing.” If there is a blessing (and Bishop Wallace, for one, preferred that there not be), the Dismissal should be given immediately after it as the second part of a single action – not separated by a hymn.

If there is to be a hymn, it is best placed *before* the blessing (if any) and the Dismissal, so that then and there the ministers and congregation may “go forth into the world”. A recommended sequence, then, is: closing prayers, announcements (if any), closing hymn (optional), blessing (optional), Dismissal, and procession out (either to music or in silence). I hasten to add that this does not preclude a social time after the service!

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The deacon gives the Dismissal as the very last act of the liturgy. Here, the author does so at St. Paul’s Cathedral in Regina on July 24, 2016. Server Gillian Engen is ready to help lead the procession out immediately after the Dismissal.