

alternative sources which offer Collects based on the Sundays and the major feasts of the Liturgical Year are:

- *Opening Prayers: scripture-related Collects for Years A, B and C.* Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1999.
- *Celebrating the Christian Year. Prayers and Resources for Sundays, Holy Days and Festivals. Years A, B and C.* (3 Volumes) Compiled by Alan Griffiths. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2004, 2005

The Prayer of the Faithful

Westminster
LITURGY
Commission

The Prayer of the Faithful is one of a series of resources prepared by the Liturgy Commission to support the continuing formation of liturgical ministers in Westminster diocese. Other resources can be downloaded from www.rcdow.org.uk/liturgy

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A resource for those preparing and ministering the Prayer of the Faithful in Westminster Diocese

The Prayer of the Faithful

1. Enlightened and moved by God's word, the assembly exercises its priestly function by interceding for all humanity. 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," the Church prays not just for its own needs but for the salvation of the world, for civil authorities, for those oppressed by any burden, and for the local community, particularly those who are sick or who have died.
2. Thus, even though the intercessions may be quite concrete or particular in content, they should always look beyond the concerns of the local assembly to the needs of the whole Church and of the wider world. They are a sign of the communion of the particular assembly with all other assemblies and with the universal Church.
3. The priest celebrant directs the prayer from the chair. He briefly invites the people to pray, and at the end he draws their intercessions together in a brief concluding prayer with a short doxology. The intentions are proposed by a deacon, a cantor, reader, other minister, or members of the assembly at the ambo or another suitable place. After each intention, the faithful respond by silent prayer or a common response or both. They affirm the concluding prayer of the priest with their Amen.
 - It is appropriate for the Prayer of the Faithful to be included in all Masses.
 - Both the priest's introduction and the proposed intentions are addressed to the assembly, not to God. They are invitations or biddings to the faithful, who normally will first pray silently for each intention and then give expression to their common prayer in an invocation sung or said together after each intention. Alternatively the prayer after each intention may simply be offered in silence.
 - These intentions should be short, clear, and objective enough for the faithful to understand and respond to them without difficulty. They should express the prayer of the entire community. There should be a significant pause after the intention has been read, while the assembly prays before the response is sung or said

- using the same responsory or refrain to conclude the times of silent prayer - again, this perhaps especially appropriate during the principal liturgical seasons.
- by including a particular intercession in the Prayer over a number of weeks - perhaps particularly appropriate during the time of first communions, or during the preparation or celebration of a parish mission.
- In addition to such a strategy helping mark the seasons and assist the congregation in prayer, it helps reduce the workload for those responsible for the preparation of the Prayer.

Resources

1. *Collections of 'Bidding Prayers'*

Because the Prayer of the Faithful should express the circumstances of the Church and world at the time of the particular liturgy, it should not be taken direct from a compilation of such prayers. However such collections may be a prompt, suggesting themes which might otherwise be overlooked.

2. *Special resources*

Sometimes when there is a special collection, or a particular 'theme' to a day - for example World Mission Sunday or Education Sunday - outside organisations will prepare and circulate suggested texts for the Prayer of the Faithful. It is usually sufficient to include a single intercession for the success of a particular collection or activity. This is especially so on Sundays. On other occasions when a Mass is celebrated to mark a particular event then it is more appropriate for the different aspects of the theme to be presented in the biddings. Even in such a case the universal nature of the Prayer of the Faithful should not be neglected. The Prayer is a sign of the communion of the particular assembly with all other assemblies and with the Universal Church.

3. *Collects*

The Collects of the *Roman Missal* may sometimes be suitable for use as a concluding collect for the Prayer of the Faithful. Two

Faithful to the tradition of the Church

It is the practice in some parishes to include the Hail Mary in the Bidding Prayers. However this is not envisaged by the Roman Rite, and does not respect the nature of the Prayer of the Faithful which is addressed to the Father, in the Son and by the Spirit.

Other times should be found (outside of the liturgy) for devotional prayer to Mary. The parish should also make full use of the opportunities for liturgical prayer which honours the particular role of Mary in God's saving plan: for example the Saturday Masses of Our Lady.

Rather than include the Hail Mary in the Prayer of the Faithful, it would be more appropriate for us to acknowledge her key role in our lives, and to show our respect for her, by including a final intercession such as:

- Let us join with Mary, Mother of the Church, as we pray in silence for all who are in particular need.

Ministers

- The Priest presider leads the Prayer of the Faithful. He introduces the prayer, and concludes it with a collect prayer.
- The 'biddings' are led by a deacon or lay minister of the word
- The refrain or response may be led by a cantor
- Preparation of 'Biddings': these should be prepared by a team or by an individual familiar with the structure of the Prayer of the Faithful and with the life and concerns of the local community and the needs of the world

Preparing the Prayer of the Faithful

Although a different set of Biddings will usually be prepared for each Sunday, it may be helpful to think about how the Prayer will be offered over a series of Sundays (or weekdays). As noted above a certain consistency of approach will help the congregation's offering of the Prayer. This might be achieved by

- using the same concluding Collect over a series of Masses - perhaps particularly appropriate during the principal liturgical seasons.

- The response they are to evoke is petition rather than praise, thanksgiving, or repentance.
- On particular occasions, when other Sacraments or particular rites are celebrated in conjunction with the Mass, the range of intentions may be more closely concerned with the occasion; but even so, the intercessions should always include some general or universal intentions.
- For each intention, the invitation to pray and the response may be sung or the entire intention may be sung or even spoken while music is played.
- The Roman Rite does not envisage the inclusion of devotional prayers in the Prayer of the Faithful. As is traditional with liturgical prayer, the Prayer of the Faithful is addressed to the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit.
- Those who read the intentions return to their place only after the completion of the concluding prayer.
- Sample formulas for the Prayer of the Faithful are given in Appendix III of the Roman Missal.

From Celebrating the Mass - A pastoral guide to the celebration of Mass.
The Bishops of England and Wales. 2005

Additional Guidance

The Bishops emphasise the dignity of the Prayer of the Faithful (the Bidding Prayers). It is a priestly prayer, offered to God the Father by the baptised, for the salvation of all.

The care we take in preparing and offering this prayer is one of the ways in which we show our respect for its dignity.

A single prayer

The Prayer of the Faithful includes a number of intercessions, but fundamentally it is a single prayer. The unity of the prayer can be indicated in a number of ways

1. Respecting the given pattern of intercessions.

The Church asks that we pray first for the Church herself; then for the world, then for those in particular need. Knowing the pattern of the prayer the faithful can relax into its familiar flow, and pray more easily and deeply.

2. Structure of biddings.

The prayer can be structured in the following ways.

EITHER a single sentence, either very brief, or somewhat longer:

- Let us pray for the Church
- Let us pray that the bishops may be courageous in their spiritual leadership during the General Election campaign.

OR an introductory very brief clause giving the general theme, and a brief follow-up sentence which proposes a particular aspect for the prayer:

- Let us pray for the Sick: that they may be consoled by the Lord.
- Let us pray for the children of the parish: that they may enjoy peace and relaxation during their summer holidays.

3. Just a few representative biddings

Keeping the number of intercessions to the four or five that is recommended, and keeping each invitation to pray brief helps the congregation to hear and understand, and remain focused on

what it is asked to do. The Prayer of the Faithful can not mention everything we want to pray for: instead we name a representative few themes that express our care and concern for all peoples.

Offered by the congregation

It is important for all to remember that the biddings which are read by the reader or deacon are not the Prayer: they are only the invitations to pray. Therefore once the invitation has been given it is necessary that a significant time of silence be made available during which the congregation can do what it has been asked to do – pray!

This time of silent prayer following each particular bidding may be brought to end by merely announcing the next bidding. But it is more common for the silence to be ended by a simple refrain or responsory:

- *Responsory:*
Minister: Lord, in your mercy. All: Hear our prayer
- *Refrain sung by all:*
Through our lives and by our prayers, your kingdom come.
(Iona)

Offered to the Father

The Prayer of the Faithful, as a whole is directed to the Father. This is indicated in the opening words of the priest: for example, let us turn in prayer to the Father of mercies placing before him our needs and the needs of the world. The concluding prayer is also addressed to the Father as, for example, in

Father, we come before you with faith and love
to praise your goodness
and to acknowledge our need.
We ask you to hear the prayer we make
in the name of Jesus the Lord.

However the individual biddings are addressed not to God - Father, Son or Spirit. They are invitations addressed to the congregation that they might pray to God for particular intentions. It is correct for the intentions to begin: 'let us pray'. It is wrong for the intentions to begin, for example: 'Lord, we ask...', or 'Father, we bring before you...' If one wished, one might phrase an intention: 'Let us pray that the Lord Jesus will....'