



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 re-reading 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 the death of a member of the Royal Family, a Tsunami or Earthquake.

The prayer is collective and should always be **“We pray...”** When you lead intercessions in the first person, it is very exclusive. You are leading us all in prayer, not parading your piety before the congregation (see Matthew 6:1)

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. In the Mass, usually the priest will open with this bidding prayer, or you may use it. 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 and the Dying
- Uniting our prayers with the company of heaven and asking the intercession of Mary
- Allowing space for our own prayers

However, you can pray in any form you want to. Other prayer ideas might include Spoken Intercessions, Visual Intercessions (Playing music, showing pictures), a Prayer Tree, using Stones or Pebbles, Clay, Prayer Strings with Knots, Bubbles blown into the air, Ribbons or flowers or shells placed on something or Candles placed in sand: Be creative!

If we pray for the Church, we **MUST** pray for our Bishops: Robert and Nick. 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, Our Archbishop, 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 Iraq 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. 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.

Be aware of the names of the people on our notice sheet who have requested prayers, but ALWAYS 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’ unless they have asked to be on the sheet by name.

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.

At the end, please 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.”

Don’t forget that many newcomers to church don’t know classical Anglican prayer endings and for reasons of space they can’t fit on the Mass card, so please avoid them.

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. In the black legillum book there are four or five stock Intercessions for when inspiration really does not strike; it also contains a number of useful openings and closing prayers and a broad outline; also, we 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 re-iterating, the best and only way to intercede is to pray yourself first for the Holy Spirit to give you inspiration, and it will come.

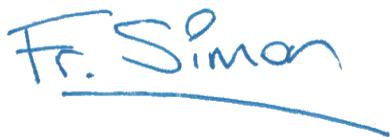
If you make a mistake during your intercessions, do not worry: keep going. If you do not draw attention to yourself, no-one will notice. **Never stop and apologise.**

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 Rundell SCP
Vicar