

Arundel & Brighton Diocesan Liturgy Commission



THE PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Guidelines

December 2016

These recommendations about the Prayer of the Faithful are offered to help foster liturgical formation and promote good practice throughout the diocese of Arundel & Brighton.

FOREWORD

The Prayer of the Faithful, or Universal Prayer (or Bidding Prayers, as they are popularly known) forms an integral and valuable part of the celebration of the Mass. These prayers provide an opportunity for the community to pray for the needs of the world, for the Church, for those in need and those who have died, as well as for issues of local significance.

It is important that careful preparation is given to these intercessions, for they assist the community in praying for those things that only God can give.

I am grateful to those who have prepared these revised guidelines and I commend them for use in the diocese in the hope that they will enhance our worship and praise.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Moth". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Rt. Rev. Richard Moth
Bishop of Arundel and Brighton

GUIDELINES for THE PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

(also known as the Universal Prayer or General Intercessions)

History, Renewal and Guidance¹

In the First Letter to Timothy, the early Christians are urged to devote themselves to prayer for all people, with particular mention of civil rulers.² They followed this recommendation, and the Prayer of the Faithful was part of the liturgy of the early church. The form of the intercessions developed and differed with the liturgical practice of the church in the East and West, but, by about the 6th Century, the Prayer of the Faithful had disappeared and only a short “Kyrie eleison” response remained, reflecting a decline in the people’s participation in the Eucharist.

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. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) stated that “The prayer of the faithful is to be restored after the gospel and homily, especially on Sundays and holy days of obligation”³, thus reclaiming the role of the baptised in praying for the needs of the world.

Although 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 – the prayer of the faithful, the baptised, and a universal prayer for all people in need, joining our prayers to those of Christ, praying with and through him.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal states that “In the Universal Prayer or Prayer of the Faithful, the people respond in some sense to the Word of God which they have received in faith and, exercising the office of their baptismal priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all. It is desirable that there usually be such a form of prayer in Masses celebrated with the people, so that petitions may be offered for holy Church, for those who govern with authority over us, for those weighed down by various needs, for all humanity, and for the salvation of the whole world.”⁴

¹ For a history and theology of the Prayer of the Faithful, see www.saintjohnsabbey.org/liturgy-answers/what-history-theology-behind-prayers-faithful/ by Michael Kwatera OSB.

² 1 Timothy 2:1-8.

³ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 53.

⁴ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* 69, and cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 53.

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",⁵ 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.

The Prayer of the Faithful in the liturgy also commits us to action in daily life. Our prayer for God's salvation must be accompanied by our working for it.

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, the whole assembly.

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, and so it is highly recommended that reflection on those scripture readings is an essential part of the prayerful preparation for those who compose and read the Prayer.

Good practice encourages those responsible for preparing the Prayer of the Faithful to look beyond the concerns of the local community alone (i.e. beyond 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.

Those who compose the Prayer of the Faithful should keep in mind the following guidelines on the form and structure of the Prayer.

⁵ *Gaudium et Spes* 1.

The Form and Structure of the Prayer of the Faithful

Overview

“It is for the priest celebrant to regulate this prayer from the chair.”⁶

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 stands and gives expression to its prayer either by an invocation said after each intention or by praying in silence. The assembly affirms the concluding prayer of the priest or leader with “Amen”.⁷

- **Introduction**

The priest introduces the Prayer in the form of an invitation to the whole assembly. This invitation is not a prayer to God, nor 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.

- **Intentions**

Both the priest’s introduction and those intentions proposed are addressed to the assembly, not to God. The reader presents each intention and the faithful then pray for the intention in the silence of their hearts. A communal response (spoken, sung, or silence) marks the conclusion of the particular intercession.

(See below for advice on composing intentions.)

- **Concluding Prayer**

The concluding prayer, said by the priest, is normally in the form of a collect prayer, which collects the silent prayer of the assembly into a spoken prayer addressed to God. The assembly gives assent to this prayer by saying “Amen”.

⁶ GIRM 71.

⁷ Cf. GIRM 71.

Composing Intentions

The intentions need to be short, clear 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.

• Categories of Intentions

As a rule, the series of intentions is usually to be:⁸

- a. for the needs of the Church;⁹
- 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.

In particular celebrations, such as Confirmation, Marriage or a Funeral, the series of intentions may reflect more closely the particular occasion.¹⁰

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.'

The Prayer of the Faithful is not the time to announce news which may shock the community (e.g. a significant world event or a notable death in the community). In such cases, it would be appropriate to make an announcement at the beginning of Mass, after which the Prayer of the Faithful can support the community's prayer for the particular situation.

• Opening Phrases

The following opening phrases for each intention are suggested:

"Let us pray for...", "We pray for...", "We pray that...", or simply "For . . ."

• 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 should be stressed that silent prayer alone is also an appropriate response – the silence of the assembly actively praying together.

⁸ *GIRM* 70.

⁹ N.B. It is good to pray for the leaders of the Church, but remember that the Pope and bishops are always prayed for in the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass. The Church includes all of us.

¹⁰ Cf. *GIRM* 70.

- **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?

Additional resources

For background information, and resources to help those preparing the Prayer of the Faithful:

www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Documents/Intercessions.shtml

For links to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, other documents, information and resources:

<https://abliturgy.wordpress.com/resources/>

Children and Young People

It is important that anyone involved with the preparation of the Prayers of the Faithful has a good understanding of the basic principles underpinning their theology and use, as outlined in this document. This is particularly the case for teachers and others who are concerned with the formation of our children and young people, and those with learning and other disabilities, so that all have accurate guidance and information.

Please note that intentions should never begin “Dear God, . . .” or “Dear Jesus, . . .”, because they are addressed to the assembly, as noted above.

Devotional Prayer

The Roman Rite does not envisage the inclusion of devotional prayers in the Prayer of the Faithful since, as a set of prayers directed to the Father, through the Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit, it contains no obvious place for prayers to the Saints. The Holy See has discouraged such additional prayers.

There has, however, been a longstanding and worthy practice in England of praying the ‘Hail Mary’ after the last intercession in the Prayers of the Faithful and there will be some occasions during the year – for example, the months of May and October, and the Marian Feasts – when the inclusion of the ‘Hail Mary’ may be deemed particularly appropriate.

The inclusion of the Hail Mary would be inappropriate in liturgies that are ecumenical in character.

Special Days of Prayer

During the year there are several days of prayer for particular intentions, and resources are often provided for these, including sample intercessions for the Prayer of the Faithful. These will sometimes need adapting according to the guidance outlined in this document, but it is also important that the particular theme on any of these days should not swamp the wider themes that should be brought to prayer in the Prayer of the Faithful. Parishes should make judicious selection from any materials provided, and also make use of the Cycle of Prayer¹¹ and the Diocesan Ordo in identifying other particular themes for the Prayer of the Faithful.

It is also worth making such resources available to families, schools and parish groups for times of prayer during the week.

Prayer of the Faithful in the Roman Missal

Examples, including intercessions for the seasons of the liturgical year, may be found in Appendix V of the *Roman Missal*, pp. 1515-1527.

Preparing to read, and reading the Prayer of the Faithful

Good practice suggests the following 'Golden Rules' for the reader:

1. 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.
2. Check that the Prayer is placed on the ambo before Mass begins.
You may also wish to 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.
Check the pronunciation of any difficult names.

¹¹ See www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Calendar/Cycle/Index.shtml

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. There is no hurry.
Ensure that the microphone is at an appropriate height for you.
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.
Good use of the microphone is vital - not least for those in the assembly who rely on a loop system. (Make sure you are familiar with the sound system beforehand, if possible.)
 - 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 (and pray yourself!), 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.¹²
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.

¹² See www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Preparation/Silence.pdf

GLOSSARY

Ambo

Also known as the lectern, it is the place from which the word of God is proclaimed during the liturgy. 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.’¹³

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.’¹⁴

‘*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.’¹⁵

General Instruction of the Roman Missal

The official guide to the celebration of Mass prepared for the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world.¹⁶

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.

¹³ CCC 1184.

¹⁴ SC 10.

¹⁵ GS 2.

¹⁶ See the front of *The Roman Missal*, or www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/GIRM/Documents/GIRM.pdf



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