

Leading Worship

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Aims of the Course

- To encourage reflection on good practice in the leading of public worship
- To introduce the basic skills necessary for leading worship

Introduction

Throughout the Church of England, and in this diocese in particular, more and more lay people are taking part in the leading of worship. Some are licensed Readers, others are part of worship teams, others contribute occasionally on a more informal basis. It is not always possible, or necessary, for all of these people to undertake the extensive training which leads to a Readers' licence. This is not to devalue Reader ministry. Readers are trained to lead worship and preach on a regular basis and are expected to be able to minister in a variety of situations, sometimes at short notice. Many others, however, can offer more limited gifts or time, and this training material is geared to their needs.

This course is designed to be used in a local church, or group of churches. It includes the basic material needed for leaders of a group of people preparing to lead various elements of public worship.

The five sessions can be used in entirety as a course or used individually as required. Although the order of the sessions can be varied, Session One is intended as an introduction to the whole subject of leading worship.

The Sessions

Session One	Introduction to Leading Worship
Session Two	Reading the Bible and other texts
Session Three	Leading intercessions and other prayers
Session Four	Planning a Service of the Word
Session Five	Different approaches to the Ministry of the Word

Leadership of the Course

The sessions can be led by a clergyperson, Reader, Parish Trainer, or any person with experience both of leading groups and of leading public worship. Although the process suggested for each session can be adapted to suit local circumstances, it is important that sufficient time is allowed for discussion and the practice of skills.

It is important that participants are not just told 'how to do it' but encouraged to think for themselves. Each session should last about one and a half hours. Suggestions are given for worship appropriate to the topic and also for making links between the course material and Sunday worship.

Each session ends with a list of useful resources and suggestions for further reading. If possible some of these should be available for participants to look at and borrow. At the end of the course there is a list of books about the church year, including many recent 'official' Church of England books.

Session One

Introduction to Leading Worship

Aims:

By the end of the session participants should have

- reflected on what worship is
- considered the essential characteristics of an act of worship
- thought about good and bad practice involved in leading worship
- understood their church's policy regarding who can lead worship

Opening prayer:

Almighty God, in whom we live and move and have our being,
You have made us for yourself,
So that our hearts are restless until they rest in you;
Grant us purity of heart and strength of purpose,
That no selfish passion may hinder us from knowing your will,
No weakness from doing it;
But that in your light we may see light clearly,
And in your service find our perfect freedom;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
(St Augustine of Hippo)

Exercise 1 - Why Worship?

In 2s or 3 make a list of the reasons why it is important for Christians to worship together

As a whole group, summarise your findings.

Compare them with the list below which was compiled in one church in the diocese.

- To have fellowship with other Christians
- To increase our chances of meeting God
- To help us relate our faith to our daily life and the needs of the world.
- To encourage newcomers and enquirers in the faith
- To convey the significance of the Eucharist (if Eucharistic worship) or other appropriate symbols (i.e. Baptism)
- To re-inforce what happens in our private worship
- To enable us to learn about, and deepen our relationship with, God
- To be seen to be doing it (implicit in being the established church!)

Five Important Features of any Act of Worship

1. Praise. *“The chief end of mankind is to worship God”*

- Jesus once said, If you want to give worth to God, to get into a right relationship with him, then you must “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength”. In other words, all that we have and all that we are should be directed Godwards - an offering of ourselves - heart and mind. In that sense, worship is theo-centric (God centred). We praise God for who he is.
- In the Eucharistic prayer, it says.... “It is indeed right, it is our duty and our joy, at all times and in all places, to give you thanks and praise.” At all times and in all places...ie not just when we feel like it.
- In your church, when the vicar says “The Lord is here”, do people look and act as if they believe that? Do we truly enjoy worship?
- An African visitor to England was told “we English are naturally reserved in your worship and the way we live.” When he was taken to a football match he soon challenged this opinion!
- We praise God because he is God. Someone once described worship as a bit like going to a birthday party: there is excitement at the invitation - there is happiness and laughter. But the party's not for you - someone else is the centre of attention. Someone else gets all the gifts and shares their food - and that is God!!

2. Confession. *Saying sorry so that the relationship can grow*

- In the Anglican tradition there is always a prominent place in our worship for the confessing of sin. The concept of sin is difficult to grasp for many people today. (You've all heard of the story of the old lady who very proudly said to her vicar “Vicar we didn't know what sin was until you came to our parish!!”)
- What are we doing in confession? We are acknowledging that sinfulness is part of the fallen world to which we all belong.
- There is a need for a public expression of confession for the corporate sin of humankind (that includes the church!). “All have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God”.
- We acknowledge the burden of sin which spoils our relationship with God and our desire to put that right.

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3. Thanksgiving. *Thanking God for what he's done*

- What's the difference between this and praise? Praise is worshipping God for who He is. Thanksgiving is more specifically, thanking God for what God has done.
- Thanksgiving is a very important discipline to balance our prayer life and our worship.
- Thanking God for what he's done. The word 'Eucharistic' itself means 'to give thanks' and if you look at the eucharistic prayer in a communion service it is a list of what God has done for us in creation, through Jesus and through his spirit.

4. Intercession. *To come before God with others on the heart*

- To petition God for the needs of his people and his world. A classic definition of Intercession comes from Michael Ramsey. "To be before God with others on the heart that is intercession."
- Intercession may be general - it might be more specific, but as the Bible says "in everything make your requests known before God in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving...."
- Why do we need to ask if God already knows about the situation? God is already ahead of us in the world - we're not begging him to be gracious, because he already is. But there is a mysterious sense in which God chooses to work with us. He invites us to co-operate with him. Simply by being in his presence with others on the heart, we are acting as channels of his grace in the world. It's a risky business, because the danger is that we turn our prayers into shopping lists or information. But in our prayers we are not only sharing our longings with him, we are also tuning in to his longings for the world.

5. Listening. *God's word to us*

- Times of silence allowing God to speak. For most of us this is the hardest part of prayer.
- Some people today feel uncomfortable with silence (always having radio or TV on in background at home). Start with short bursts! Relax your body. If you cannot empty your mind think of a Bible verse or look at a candle or listen to helpful music. For some people silence in church is easier than when they are alone.

All five elements are necessary in both private and public worship.

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The Worship Leader's Task

Leading people in worship, is leading people into a mystery, into the unknown and yet the familiar. It is the spiritual direction which enables the whole congregation to come into the Presence of God and give him the glory. (Patterns for Worship, 1995)

“In church services therefore, I look for dignity, reverence, awe and a sense of ‘otherness’. I do not look for cold informality, nor for pompous, artificial theatricality, but for that quiet, purposeful, natural bearing which becomes a creature deliberately reminding itself of, and attempting to realise the presence of its creator.”

(Jack Burton - The Gap)

“Churches can be glorious places, but don't you wish they were a little more inviting? On Sunday I attended the christening of my one year old Godson, and he was as restless as everyone else.....The priest was a lovely man, with an impeccable dress sense but I was confused from the moment he took to the pulpit. Most of us only ever go to church for weddings and funerals, so sticking to the book is pointless.Church should be a joyous and liberating experience. Little Michael should have been carried in on a fresh fruit platter and we should have sung, 'He's got the whole world in His hands'. The church badly needs a facelift because it is God's theatre on earth and he should be packing them in. Amen. “

(Boy George, The Daily Mail 1998)

Exercise 2 – Reflecting on Worship

Think about an act of worship you have taken part in recently. In terms of the way in which it was led:

what made it a good experience?

what made it unhelpful?

In 2s or 3s, agree on a short statement summarising what you think we are doing when we lead people in worship.

Share your answers with the whole group.

Who can lead worship?

The Church of England has various rules about who can lead public worship.

Canon B11 Of Morning and Evening Prayer in parish churches

1. Morning and Evening Prayer shall be said or sung in every parish church at least on all Sundays and other principal Feast Days, and also on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Each service shall be said or sung distinctly, reverently, and in an audible voice. Readers, such other lay persons as may be authorized by the bishop of the diocese, or some other suitable lay person, may, at the invitation of the minister of the parish or, where the cure is vacant or the minister is incapacitated, at the invitation of the churchwardens say or sing Morning and Evening Prayer (save for the Absolution).

Canon B18 Of sermons in parish churches

1. In every parish church a sermon shall be preached at least once each Sunday, except for some reasonable cause approved by the bishop of the diocese.

2. The sermon shall be preached by a minister, deaconess, reader or lay worker duly authorized in accordance with Canon Law. At the invitation of the minister having the cure of souls another person may preach with the permission of the bishop of the diocese given either in relation to the particular occasion or in accordance with diocesan directions.

3. The preacher shall endeavour with care and sincerity to minister the word of truth, to the glory of God and to the edification of the people.

Each diocese in the Church of England understands the scope of these canons lightly differently. In summary, suitable lay persons can take Morning and Evening Prayer or a Service of the Word (normally at the invitation of the Incumbent). They can also preach at the invitation of the Incumbent and with episcopal permission. There is further advice on this in the *Bishop's Regulations* which can be found at www.lichfield.anglican.org

Session Two

Reading the Bible & other texts

Aims

By the end of the session participants should have:

- understood the reasons for public Bible reading
- thought about the practicalities of reading in church
- practised voice projection

Exercise 1 - Reading the Bible out loud in church

Think of the first time you did a Bible reading in church. (If you have never done this, think about all the times you have listened to other people!) What do you remember about the experience that was:

- good?
- bad?
- Unexpected?

As a group, discuss why we read the Bible out loud in public?

Compare your answers with the list below

Why read the Bible in public?

- It is the Word of God and should be proclaimed
- It is the main way God speaks to us
- Aural proclamation can be more powerful than silent reading
- So that churchgoers become familiar with the Bible's contents
- The preacher has something to base the sermon on
- The Lectionary provides an overview of the whole of the Bible
- We are maintaining an old tradition ie the custom predates the time when most people could read for themselves

What do you think about this comment written by Stephen Neill nearly a century ago?

“The Anglican Church is the greatest Bible-reading church in the world. In no other church anywhere is the Bible read in public worship so regularly, with such order, and at such length, as in the Anglican fellowship of churches”.

(Bishop Stephen Neill, Anglicanism, Penguin, 1958)

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Exercise 2 - Different versions of the Bible

Compare these two versions of John 1:1-14

The Message	The Authorised Version
<p>The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word.</p> <p>The Word was God, in readiness for God from day one. Everything was created through him; nothing - not one thing! - came into being without him. What came into existence was Life, and the Life was Light to live by.</p> <p>The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness; the darkness couldn't put it out.</p> <p>There once was a man, his name John, sent by God to point out the way to the Life-Light. He came to show everyone where to look, who to believe in. John was not himself the Light; he was there to show the way to the Light.</p> <p>The Life-Light was the real thing. Every person entering Life he brings into Light.</p> <p>He was in the world, the world was there through him, and yet the world didn't even notice. He came to his own people, but they didn't want him.</p> <p>But whoever did want him, who believed he was who he claimed and would do what he said, He made to be their true selves, their child-of-God selves.</p> <p>These are the God-begotten, not blood-begotten, not flesh-begotten, not sex-begotten.</p> <p>The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood.</p> <p>We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.</p>	<p>¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.</p> <p>2 The same was in the beginning with God.</p> <p>3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.</p> <p>4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.</p> <p>5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.</p> <p>6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.</p> <p>7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.</p> <p>8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.</p> <p>9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.</p> <p>10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.</p> <p>11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.</p> <p>12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:</p> <p>13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.</p> <p>14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.</p>

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Which version might be more suitable for:

- Christmas Carol Service
- A school service
- A bible study group
- Personal bible reading

Discuss reasons for your choices with the whole group.

Voice Projection

Speaking in public requires physical techniques as well as mental ones. Essentially, people need to be able to hear the reading. To ensure this you need to be familiar with the layout of your church and the acoustics, the sound system (if there is one) as well as your own voice.

Breathing exercises

Public speaking is about physical technique as well as a mental task. It is useful to practice a few simple exercises, which can help speakers to relax and make better use of breathing, which helps with voice projection.

1. Loosening up your body.

Not exactly shake, rattle and roll! But a few limbering up exercises to help your body relax and prevent stiffening! Limber up by rolling your head and neck around and moving your arms to leave a freedom and a more relaxed feeling.

2. Deep breathing.

Discover your diaphragm. Most of our breathing is far too shallow. Completely empty the lungs, take a good few seconds to inhale and exhale and make sure that you are breathing from the full capacity of your lungs. This might well be 'rediscovering' your diaphragm but it will make all the difference when it comes to reading clearly and with far greater confidence. It will also help you to avoid speaking with a nasal or throaty style.

3. Loosening your jaw and tongue.

You may think you're making funny faces when you try to loosen your jaw and waggle your tongue, but so is everyone else! You are simply getting your 'equipment' ready.

4. Practicing

Each person reads in turn. Between each reading spend a few minutes to make helpful and constructive comments to each other so that everyone grows in confidence and skill.

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You could select any passages, here are some suitable ones:

- Song of Solomon 4:16-5:2; 8:6,7
- John 9:1-12
- 2 Peter 1:3-11

Some Practical tips for those who read the Bible in church

- 1) Read the passage aloud to yourself beforehand
- 2) Check that you have at least a basic understanding of the meaning of the passage
- 3) Arrive at church in good time and check when, and from where, you will be reading
- 4) If you are using the Bible of the lectern check that there is a bookmark in right place. Sometimes, a different version may be more appropriate (eg. at an All-age service); or you might use your own copy because you need to write on it. Some people find it helpful to print out the passage in a large font. This allows you to underline points for emphasis or mark pauses etc.
- 5) Check whether the service outline includes specific words for introducing and ending the reading (and if necessary take them with you when you get up to read). If not, decide in advance whether you will say anything. Although it is normal to announce 'book, chapter and verse', sometimes you may need to summarise this (eg. too many numbers!)
- 6) Make it clear who the passage refers to, by changing pronouns to nouns if necessary. (eg Change 'He got into the boat' to 'Jesus got into the boat'). Do not be afraid to change a few obscure words (but do not re-write the Bible!)
- 7) Seek advice over difficult words and check on the pronunciation of proper names. (However, there is not always a 'right answer' and the most important thing is for you to appear confident!)
- 8) Note the punctuation, this will help control your breathing.
- 9) Open your mouth so that the words are heard clearly. Speak more slowly and loudly than you think is natural, but do not put on a parsonical voice. Be yourself!
- 10) Steer a careful course between 'high drama' and reading the passage reverently.
- 11) Try to make eye contact with the congregation at various points during the reading. If you are afraid that you might lose your place in the Bible use a piece of coloured card to move down the lines as you read or your finger!

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12) Enjoy the passage. Ask God to reveal its meaning to you before you begin, so that you can be His mouthpiece in unlocking it for others. Come in strongly and deliberately to seize people's attention.

Useful Books:

Mark Earley and Gilly Myers, *Common Worship Today*, HarperCollins, 2001

The Christian Year: Calendar, Lectionary and Collects, Church House Publishing, 1995
(Also a customised edition each year)

Eugene H Peterson, *The Message*, Navpress, 1993

Michael Perry (Ed), *The Dramatised Bible*, Marshall Pickering, 1989

Session Three

Leading Intercessions and Other Prayers

Aims

By the end of the session participants should have:

- thought about different types of prayer and their place in public worship
- practiced the skill of composing and leading intercessions

Preparation for Prayer

“Prayer is the practise of the presence of God”. (This is the title of a book by Brother Lawrence, 17th century) Prayer comes from a daily walk with God. If it is to be real it has to be part of an ongoing conversation. If it is to be authentic then it has to come from the heart. If it isn't real for you, then how is it going to be real for others?

“The aim of prayer is to open the hearts of the people before God ... and to open the heart of God before the people”.

In other words, prayer is all about developing a relationship. The prayer leader's task is to help the whole congregation unite in its desire to be in the presence of God. In that sense it is 'representative' rather than 'individualistic' (although of course each person brings their own unique way of prayer). Prayers are not an opportunity to preach at the congregation, or put across personal agendas, or even correct the sermon!

Exercise 1 – Types and Styles of Prayers

Make a list of the different ways of praying that you have experienced in public worship. (Eg. intercession, praise, meditation, silent prayer, etc)

Think of some examples of when these:

- have been most helpful, and why?
- haven't worked well, and why?

Intercession

Michael Ramsey writes that intercession is “to be with God with others on the heart”. Intercession is a way of loving people. When we truly love people and care what is happening in the world, we want for them far more than we can actually give. The very best thing we can do for another person is to go before God on their behalf. That doesn't imply in word only, it also commits us to action. Hence, to use a definition of Donald Coggan's: “To pray is to stand to attention in the presence of the King and be prepared to take orders from him”. This dynamic description of prayer is not to everyone's liking because it does not seem to fit in with the image of prayer as a private, internal exercise.

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Prayer itself can be very dynamic. One of the classic questions often asked about the purpose of intercession is why should we ask - surely God already knows the problems? Prayer is not about us begging God to be gracious; He already is - He's already ahead of us in the suffering of the world. But in another sense, it seems that part of God's nature is to work with us - He invites us to share with him in His mission. Simply by being in His presence with others on the heart, we can act as channels of His grace in the world. In our prayers we're not only sharing our longings with Him, but we're also tuning in, if you like, to his longings for the world, and are preparing to listen to his commands.

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.”

What an encouragement! Though none of us are experts, the gift of God's Spirit is already in us, helping us in our prayers. This should give us renewed confidence; the Spirit interprets and moulds our confused and muddled prayers, so that they correspond with the loving purposes of God.

“Someone once said the Prayers of Intercession should be an awesome task, a great privilege and a highlight of the service. Yet the impact that they often have is akin to being savaged with a feather duster!”

(John Pritchard, *The Intercessions Handbook*)

Many congregations have discovered that leading Intercessions is a 'growth area' in church life. Those who have the opportunity to do this find their confidence is increased. Appropriate intercessions also allow the congregation to focus on matters that need prayer and action. It is common to divide intercessions up into several sections. These might include: Introduction, The World, The worldwide Church, Our Country, Our Community, Our Church, The sick, Ourselves.

Exercise 2 – Dos and Don'ts of Intercessions

For each section of the prayer below, discuss what is good and what is not so good about the content of the prayer, and the way in which it is structured and delivered:

Introduction:

President: Let us pray for the church and the world and let us thank God for his goodness.

Leader: Let us pray for the church and the world and let us thank God for his goodness. You can sit down or kneel whichever you prefer I always say you need to be comfortable to pray well, don't you?

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, you promised through your Son Jesus Christ to hear us when we pray in faith.

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The Church

Let us pray for the church

O Lord Jesus Christ, who didst drive forth from the temple those who profaned the holy place, saying to them, My house shall be called the house of prayer - Make us so to love the habitation of thy house and the place where thy honour dwelleth, that with humility and godly fear we may draw near to worship thee; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit one God, world without end. Amen.

Strengthen Peter, David and Hugo our bishops, Michael, and Tony our Archdeacons, and the other one we don't know about yet, and Paul our Dean and Robert our Rural Dean, and Cynthia our Lay Chair and..., and ... and all your Church in the service of Christ, and let us remember people we know who are serving the Church; that those who confess your name may be united in your truth, live together in your love, and reveal your glory in the world. Lord in your mercy

All: Hear our prayer.

Our Country

Leader: Almighty God, the fountain of all goodness, we humbly beseech thee to bless
Shall we keep a few seconds quiet while we think of our poor Queen who has gone through so many difficulties with her family recently (pause for 5 seconds)

Give grace to us, our families and friends, and to all our neighbours; that we may serve Christ in one another, and love as he loves us.

Bless and guide Elizabeth our Queen - bless her, give wisdom to all in authority, and direct this and every nation in the ways of justice and of peace, that men may honour one another and seek the common good. Lord hear us

All: (after hesitation) Lord graciously hear us.

The world

Leader: And let's not forget all those places where there's terrible fighting and famine – The Middle East, Afghanistan, Syria, and you know the others Lord, then there's Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, the poor people being oppressed in Iraq, Georgia, America, Azerb... - I can't say that either, and there are lots of other places as well. Would anyone like to add anymore?

(after pregnant silence) Well, anyway you know them all Lord,
Lord in your mercy.

All: Hear our prayer.

The Sick

Leader: Now it's time to pray for the sick. There's Mrs Worbleton in hospital in excruciating pain and Jimmy Munro who's got chilblains, and dear Miss Twiddlecome who's not as young as she used to be, and the vicar gave me a list of sick people in hospital and folk he very kindly visits - (after pause) I can't seem to find it - (whispered) have you got it, vicar, no, well can you remember who they were? What did you say? Don't worry, get on with it. Well I do know that Steve Jones found a lump, er, down below, so we really need to pray for him. All right.

Merciful Father,

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All: Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Leader: May we just finish by saying the Lord's Prayer together in the old version "Our Father which art"

(adapted from Norwich Diocesan Training Team *Our mouth shall proclaim your praise*)

What issues did you identify that were problematic with these prayers?

- Preparation – the prayers don't seem well organised and prepared. This is distracting and means they might not be as helpful in facilitating the prayer of the congregation as they might otherwise be
- Confidentiality – it is important not to accidentally betray confidences by praying for situations that people do not yet want to share with the whole congregation.
- Focus – there are endless situations that need our prayer! To prepare intercessions, it is necessary to focus on certain things for prayer.

Preparing Prayers of Intercession

Some people can lead prayers at a drop of a hat – a gift which tends to come after a long time of leading prayers. For most of us preparation is one of the key features of leading intercessions. Here are some things that may help in your preparation;

- The context of the service

Know your Sundays. Is there anything special about this week's service?

What's the theme (if any). If there isn't an obvious one why not contact the preacher to see what key phrases in the sermon or readings you could make use of?

- Know your congregation.

What's on people's hearts and minds? What's concerning them in their lives outside of the church? Listen to the news or read the papers. Pray about the real world and what's going on, though try to avoid the danger of sounding like a news report or over-emphasising a personal agenda! It can be very distressing for people to come to church after a national tragedy and discover that no mention is made of it in the prayers.

- Know your Prayers.

You can write them yourself or use one of the many useful resources but always prepare. Go over beforehand, even if it has been written for you, so you can experience how it sounds. Are there too many complicated ideas? Is there a clear structure - order and familiarity help people relax into praying?

- Position.

This can be controversial in some churches. Where are the prayers led from? In most churches there is an accepted position but is it always the best? The Lectern means you can be seen and adds a certain dignity and importance to the occasion.

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It may also be appropriate to lead the prayers from the back or middle of the Church. This may help people to feel included in the prayer, but it may be distracting for some.

You also need to consider whether you will be heard. Another option is the centre front. This may be particularly good for services where you need to be seen (eg when children are present)

- Voice.

When some people lead prayer they get quieter and quieter. Or perhaps they adopt a different voice altogether, a reverential voice! God is not impressed and people often can't hear. It's essential to use a firm, clear voice, similar to that used in the rest of the service.

- Biddings and prayers

Biddings are addressed to the congregation. Prayers are addressed to God. The two shouldn't really be confused but frequently are.

"We pray for the strength that God gives" is addressed to the congregation.

"O God, we pray for the strength that you give" is addressed to God.

Biddings then are short, brief introductions that are addressed to the congregation as a lead into prayer itself. When used rightly they can be a very useful way of helping the congregation to pray (giving them pegs on which to hang their prayers).

- Words and silences

The Spirit teaches us how to pray. Why is it that so often we're keen to shut him out by putting in as many words as we can. Yet the ability to be still corporately in prayer is a real art. The Taize community put it this way: How can we pray together and yet still leave each other free to be still and know God. There's a tension here faced by all those who lead worship.

There are various problems with introducing silence:

- The Congregation panic! "We'll be quiet to pray for ten minutes" can leave people flummoxed. During one particular silence in prayer, the organist was heard to say in a loud voice, "He's fallen asleep again!" The congregation need to know what's happening. i.e. "In a moment of stillness let's bring before God one person you live or work with who needs God's help". Then end the silence with a traditional response.
 - Leader Panics! Leaders usually err on the short side for silences. It always feels longer to you. There's a need to break through the pain barrier.
 - Distractions. These can include babies screaming - toddlers running up and down the aisle, noises outside the building etc! Better not to have too long in silence in the hope it will get better. But we shouldn't be afraid of introducing silence with young people (for example, by experimenting with the use of candles, as at a Christingle service)
- Responses. Congregations often find a refrain helpful in uniting their thoughts and prayers. For example:

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- Jesus bread of life; in your mercy hear us
- Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us

One of the recent trends in the development of new liturgy has been to introduce us to a whole wealth of new responses. (See some of the resource books). If you do use new responses, short responses are probably best. There's nothing worse than trying to

remember the response. If a new response is being used, reinforce it straight away (or make sure it is written down, perhaps on the service sheet).

Example: "When I say the words 'Jesus bread of life', please respond 'In your mercy hear us'"

pause

"Jesus bread of life" ... "in your mercy hear us..."

- Several Voices

The use of different voices, perhaps at different points in the church can be very effective. This depends on the setting and the way in which the voices are used.

- Standard Intercessions.

Common Worship provides for the following sequence of prayers:

- The church of Christ
- Creation, human society, the Sovereign and those in authority
- The local community
- Those who suffer
- The communion of saints

Within this overall structure the rubric allows for a whole variety of ways of presenting the material. For example, using the prayers with or without specific biddings; using different responses; using the prayer as a continuous whole, without the insertion of specific subjects.

Exercise 3 - Prayer in many forms

Choose one of the following topics and prepare appropriate prayers to be used in public worship. (Use the resource books if you like).

- Prayers of penitence and forgiveness for an informal service
- Intercessions for your service or services next Sunday
- Intercessions for a Eucharist during Lent (or any forthcoming season)
- Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession for a service with the theme of Racism.
- A prepared silence

End the session by using some of the prayers prepared in small groups.

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Useful Books

Intercessions

David Adam, Clouds of Glory: Year A, 1998, Traces of Glory: Year B, 1999, Glimpses of Glory: Year C, 1000, SPCK

Raymond Chapman, Leading Intercessions, Prayers for Sundays, Holy days and Festivals - Years A, B, and C, Canterbury Press, 1997 (Quite formal)

Stephen Cottrell, Praying through Life, How to pray in the home, at work and in the family, Church House publishing, 1998

Paul Ihles, The Pleasure of God's Company, A Handbook for leading intercessions at the Eucharist, Kevin Mayhew, 1990

Michael Counsell, More prayers for Sundays, Harper Collins, 1997

Anna de Lange, Liz Simpson, "How to ... Lead the Prayers", Grove Worship Series 169, 2002

Christine Odell, Companion to the Revised Common Lectionary: Volume 1 Intercessions, Epworth Press, 1998 (An invaluable resource from the Methodist church - other books in the series are useful - and even those from a previous series)

John Pritchard, The Intercessions Handbook, SPCK 1997

Michael Ramsey, Be Still and know, Fount 1982

Susan Sayers, Living Stone Series, Prayers of Intercession for Years A, B and C, Kevin Mayhew, 1997, 1998, 1999 (Three separate volumes - essential)

Miscellaneous books of prayers

The SPCK Book of Christian Prayer, SPCK, 1995

David Adam, The Edge of Glory, 1985, Tides & Seasons, 1992, Triangle

George Appleton (Ed), The Oxford Book of Prayer, Oxford University Press, 1985

Tony Castle (Ed), The Hodder Book of Christians Prayers, Hodder & Stoughton, 1986

Michael Councill (Ed), More Prayers for Sundays, HarperCollins, 1997 (Essential – even the book it replaces Prayers for Sundays published in 1994 and based on the ASB is still a useful resource)

Leading Worship

Michael Perry (Ed), Prayers for the People, Marshall Pickering, 1992 (An excellent resource in part replacing the much used but dated CPAS Church Family Worship)

Michel Quoist, Prayers of Life, Gill & Macmillan, 1963 (One of the first 'alternative' resources to come on the market in the 1960s but still very useful!)

Michel Quoist, Pathways of Prayer, Gill & Macmillan, 1989 (More recent but less well-known)

'Triangle' paperbacks series: Praying with... (... St Teresa,... the English Poets, ... the Jewish Tradition etc)

Ideas for Prayer Groups which could be adapted for informal public worship

Henry Morgan (Ed), Approaches to Prayers, SPCK, 1991

Sister Judith Russi, Starting Points: Ideas for Reflecting and Praying Together, Geoffrey Chapman, 1991

Session Four

Planning a Service of The Word

Aims

By the end of the session participants should have:

- thought about the ingredients of a non-eucharistic service
- gained some experience in constructing a service outline

Exercise 1 - Ingredients of worship

Make a list of all the 'ingredients' that you have ever known to be included in a church service. (This session is about non-eucharistic worship so do not include Holy Communion or Baptism.)

In 2s or 3s, decide which of these 'ingredients' you would want to include

- Never
- Occasionally
- Often
- Always

Discuss your conclusions with the whole group.

The shape of Christian Worship

The word *liturgy* means the work of the people and describes the way in which we both offer worship to God and tell the story of what God has done for us, in public worship. The liturgy follows a particular shape because each act of worship is a mini-telling of the journey with God that Christians have made for generations and generations.

It is possible to separate the elements of the liturgy in various ways. Here, it is divided into four distinct parts:

A. Gathering as God's People

Invocation of God's Presence.
Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness
Gloria, Hymn of Praise

God is the creator of all and calls us into relationship with Him. We fall away from God, but are always welcome back. We repent of that which has taken us away from God and recommit to our journey with the Lord.

B. Ministry of the Word

Scripture readings

Sermon

Affirmation of Faith

The Christian community is formed around the Word of the Lord; the Scriptures which tell the story of God's work throughout history for the salvation of the world. The congregation make this their own story and work through what it means for today in this particular place. We identify ourselves with all who are part of this story across time and place and assert that we hold eternal truths in common.

C. Response of the People

Offering

Prayers of Intercession

The Christian community responds to the initiative God has taken in drawing us to Him. We respond as a people, bound together in our shared life. All that we have is from God and he invites us to ask for what we need.

D. Ministry of the Table

Affirmation of Unity and peace

Words of Institution

Prayer of Thanksgiving

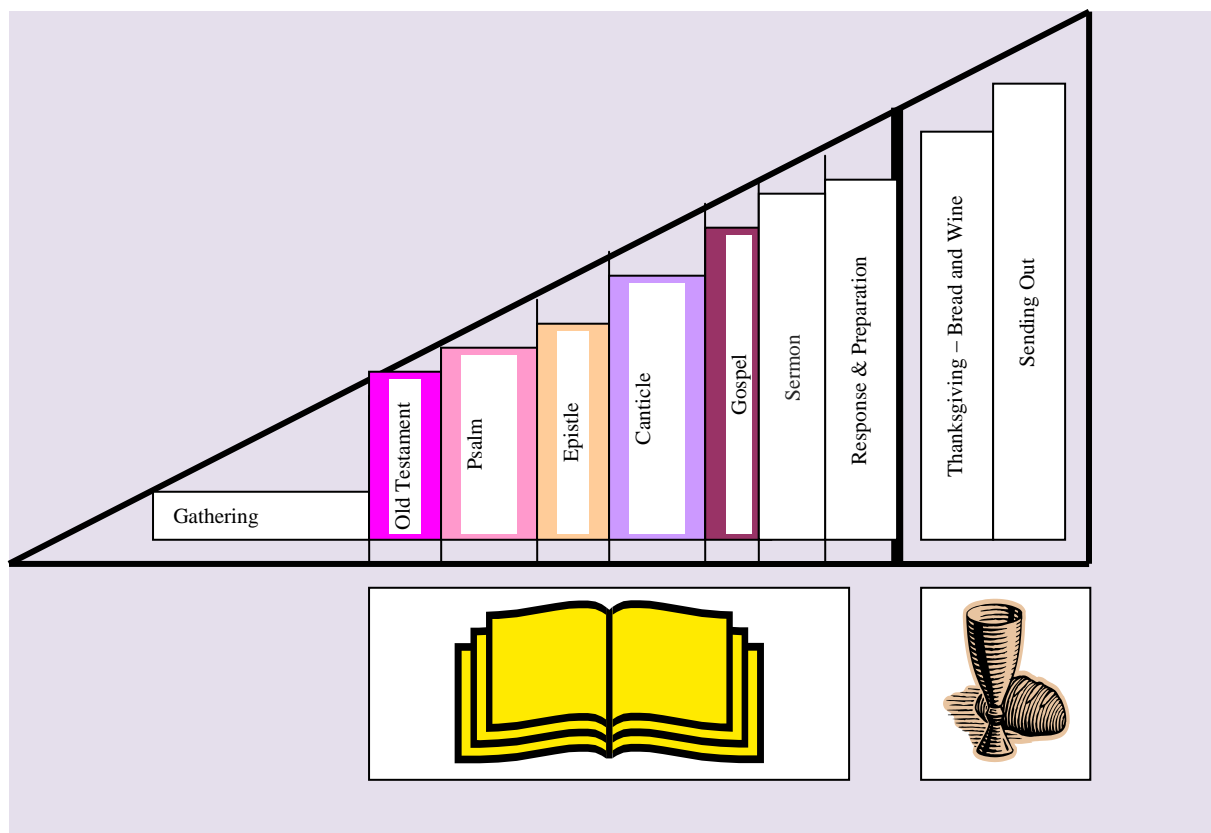
Lord's Prayer

Breaking Bread

The Church exists because the death and resurrection of Jesus has opened a new way of knowing God. We remember and appropriate the sacrifice of Jesus and the triumph of God's love. We sample in part the abundance of life that we will experience when Christ and the church are perfectly united.

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The shape of worship obviously changes depending on whether it is Eucharistic, or a service of the word. If the service is not building up to the breaking of the bread, the climax is the 'breaking of the word', the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus.



The 'Service of the Word' in *Common Worship*

Common Worship provides a shape and format for services of the Word. The framework for these services is distinct from a service of the Eucharist as the emphasis is different. The Anglican tradition has been that public worship on a Sunday is a service of Holy Communion. In some places this is changing, not least because priests may have several parishes and be unable to preside at the Eucharist in each of them every week.

A Service of the Word is unusual for an authorized Church of England service. It consists almost entirely of notes and directions and allows for considerable local variation and choice within a common structure. It is important that those who prepare for and take part in A Service of the Word should have a clear understanding of the nature of worship and of how the component parts of this service work together. Leading people in worship is

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leading people into mystery, into the unknown and yet the familiar. This spiritual activity is much more than getting the words or the sections in the right order. The primary object in the careful planning and leading of the service is the spiritual direction which enables the whole congregation to come into the presence of God to give him glory. Choices must be made responsibly by leaders of this service or by groups planning worship with them, whether the service is an occasional one, or a regular one which may use a service card. (*Common Worship*)

It is clear that the purpose of the framework is to allow it to be appropriated into local contexts. What works in one place may not be suitable elsewhere. Although there are certain ingredients that must be included, there is a lot of scope to prepare a service that is distinct to the particular leader and congregation.

The framework for a service of the word is very brief. It is set out as follows:

Preparation

The minister welcomes the people with the **Greeting**.
Authorized Prayers of Penitence may be used here or in the **Prayers**.
The Venite, Kyries, Gloria, a hymn, song, or a set of responses may be used.
The **Collect** is said either here or in the **Prayers**.

The Liturgy of the Word

This includes

- ¶ **readings (or a reading) from Holy Scripture**
- ¶ a **psalm**, or, if occasion demands, a scriptural song
- ¶ a **sermon**
- ¶ an **authorized Creed**, or, if occasion demands,
- ¶ an **authorized Affirmation of Faith**.

Prayers

- These include
- ¶ **intercessions and thanksgivings**
 - ¶ **the Lord's Prayer**

Conclusion

The service concludes with a **blessing, dismissal** or other **liturgical ending**.

(*Common Worship*)

Exercise 2 – Preparing a Service of The Word

In 2s and 3s prepare a Service of the Word for next Sunday using the framework given above. Consider what you would include where and the different resources you would use.

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Useful Books

Informal Liturgies

Living Worship Series, National Christian Education Council, 1993-1994 (Informal liturgies covering the church year plus other themes. Also the Celebrating Series 1987-1990)

Jim Cotter & Peter Pelz, *Prayer in the Day*, Cairns Publications, 1986, 1989 (Informal 'office' including useful resources for public prayer)

Jim Cotter, *Prayer in the Morning*, Cairns Publications, 1987, 1990 (Informal 'office' including useful resources for public prayer)

Jim Cotter, *Prayer at Night*, Cairns Publications, 1988, 1991 (Informal 'office' including useful resources for public prayer)

Alan Dunstan, *Special Services for Festivals and Occasions*, Kevin Mayhew, 1991

Michael Forster, *High Days & Holy Days and Fasts & Festivals*, Kevin Mayhew, 1993, 1994 (Worship resources for the liturgical year including some useful Lent material and alternative Remembrance Day services)

Roger Grainger, *Staging Posts: Rites of Passage for Contemporary Christians*, Merlin Books, 1987 (Unusual rites of passage - eg. child leaving home, retirement, memorial service for an agnostic - more traditional than the Ward and Wild book below)

Dorothea McEwan, Pat Pinsent, Ianthe Pratt, Victoria Seddon (Ed), *Making Liturgy*, Canterbury Press, 2001

Dorothy McRae-McMahon, *Echoes of our Journey: Liturgies of the people*, The Joint Board of Christian Education Melbourne, 1993 (An excellent resource from the Uniting Church in Australia)

Dorothy McRae-McMahon, *In this hour: Liturgies for Pausing*, SPCK, 2001 (A good resource from the Uniting Church in Australia - including ideas for movement and symbolism)

Philip Newell, *An Earthful of Glory: Biblical Prayers Liturgies and Meditations*, SPCK, 1996 (Liturgies based on Biblical themes - slightly more formal than some of the other resources)

Susan Sayers, *To Worship in Stillness*, Kevin Mayhew, 1991 (A good resource of 'ready-made' informal services)

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Hannah Ward and Jennifer Wild (Ed), *Human Rites: Worship Resources for an Age of Change*, Mowbray, 1995 (An excellent and unusual resource of brief liturgies for a wide-range of occasions eg. loss, abuse, retirement, new home)

Eldred Willey (Ed), *First Light: Prayers from New Christians Communities*, Darton, longman & Todd, 2001 (Liturgies and prayers with a similar style to Iona Material)

Lisa Withrow, *Seasons of Prayer: Resources for Worship*, SPCK, 1995 (Liturgies based on the seasons and the Christian Year)

Session Five

The Ministry of the Word

Aims

By the end of the session participants should have

- reflected on the importance of the Ministry of the Word in worship
- thought about a range of ways of presenting the Ministry of the Word
- gained experience in putting together a simple talk

Many people question whether sermons are as effective today as they have been in the past. Over the years, the church has produced some amazing preachers and orators. But of course, many of them came from a time when people were used to public address not only as a key form of information but also as entertainment. The idea of a sermon, to sit and listen to someone expounding on an idea or concept and explaining why it matters (or should matter to us), was very much in accordance with other forms of communication of the times. Since the mid- twentieth century this hasn't been true in the same way – the technological revolution resulted in huge changes in both means and content of communication.

The sermon fulfils several functions in an act of public worship.

Exercise 1 - Why do we have sermons?

In 2s and 3s, consider what the point of a sermon is. What does it aim to do?

You may have included some of the following points in your discussion:

- Teaching about Christianity, and what it means to be a Christian.
- Opening the Bible to the congregation
- Engaging the minds of the congregation with the journey of faith
- Explaining Christian positions on contemporary and controversial subjects
- Helping us to apply the values of the Kingdom in our everyday lives
- Sustaining the congregation in faith
- Challenging the congregation to grow as disciples
- Making the presence of God real, even in difficult situations

Who can preach?

Who *can* preach and who *may* preach are not always the same thing! In the Church of England there are rules about who can preach regularly in Church. These are usually ordained people and licensed Readers who have been licensed by the diocesan bishop to preach. Others can preach occasionally, normally at the invitation of the incumbent.

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In normal circumstance those who preach at Church services should be properly trained and authorised. In practice this means clergy holding the Bishop's licence and Readers. However such permission is not required for what might be termed 'one-off' occasions and it is quite appropriate for those who are testing their vocation or gifts to speak occasionally.

In many churches some services are entirely lay led, including all-age and young people's worship and special occasions like Mothering Sunday and Harvest Festival. 'Special' Sundays provide opportunities for asking different church members to speak, drawing on insights from their own working life: perhaps a teacher on Education Sunday; someone from the Local Authority Housing Department on Homelessness Sunday; someone from the Careers Service on Unemployment Sunday, for example. This is quite different from expecting someone to exercise a preaching ministry on a regular basis and it is appropriate that those who show signs of a gift in this area should undertake training for Reader ministry.

When members of a worship team take responsibility for a service (possibly in a group of parishes where the Vicar is involved in a communion service elsewhere), a reading from a book or a series of meditations might be used in the 'sermon slot'. Even when an experienced speaker is present this can be a stimulating way of teaching. Informal guest services are often best constructed with several such readings and comments, none lasting more than a few minutes, rather than a sermon.

However, some of you may find yourselves having to produce a 'homily' or mini-sermon! If you are asked to speak or preach for a special occasion, perhaps drawing on a personal experience from work or somewhere you have visited, always start to think about it at least a week in advance. You should link your address with the Bible readings of the day, or another Bible passage agreed with whoever is organising the service. Read through the passages prayerfully and see what God says to you through His Word. Take the opportunity to buy a Bible commentary or borrow one from your vicar or Reader. Be alert to stories from your own past experience or from recent events in the news which will help illustrate a particular passage. Carefully think through your aim and don't be too ambitious! It is best to say one thing well than a whole list of things badly!

What does a sermon consist of?

The term 'sermon' includes less formal exposition, the use of drama, interviews, discussion, audio-visuals and the insertion of hymns or other sections of the service between parts of the sermon. The sermon may come after one of the readings, or before or after the prayers, and may be omitted except on Sundays and Principal Holy Days. (*Common Worship*)

Exercise 2 - Constructing a talk

These are the readings for Second Sunday after Epiphany in Lectionary Year A:

Isaiah 49: 1 – 7

Psalm 40:1-11

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

- Read through each passage.
- Which reading(s) would you concentrate on for a service on this Sunday?
- How might you present the 'sermon slot' on this Sunday?
- What is the main point you would try to make?
- How would you convey to the congregation why this matters to them, today?

No two people will prepare and construct their sermons in quite the same way. This is part of the joy of having so much variety in church leadership – we should have chance to hear how lots of people share the Good News for today, not just the same person week by week. As you listen to different preachers, reflect on the approach they have taken to exploring the Scriptures of the week, and to relating the meaning of that to the everyday lives of the congregation.

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Useful Books

Readings and meditations

EA. Blackburn, *A Treasure of the Kingdom*, OUP

William Barclay, *Through the Christian Year*, Hodder & Stoughton

George Appleton, *Journey for the Soul*, Fount

Daily Readings (Various books drawing on such Christian Divines as Julian of Norwich and St. Augustine), DLT

Martin Draper (Ed).*The Cloud of Witnesses, A Companion to the Lesser Festivals & Holydays*, Collins

Sermons

There are many books on preaching but here are two easy-to-read ones

David Day, *A Preaching Workbook*, Lynx, 1999

Robert Paterson, *Short, Sharp and Off the Point*, Marc, 1987

Help with lectionary themes

Each year more books are published to resource the three-year lectionary. Some give a succinct summary of the readings and can be used as the basis for a talk. Some are published by other denominations (eg Roman Catholic publishing houses Dominican Publications, Twenty-Third Publications). The two books listed last in this section are particularly useful as they include meditations which can be used instead of a sermon without further preparation.

Ronald W Dale, *Windows on Matthew: an anthology to amplify the Revised Common Lectionary Gospel reading for Year A*, Kevin Mayhew, 1998

Mark Pryce, *Literary Companion to the Lectionary*, SPCK, 2001 (Quite 'high-brow' poems and readings!)

Leslie Houldon & John Rogerson (Ed), *Common Worship Lectionary - A Scripture Commentary*, SPCK, 2001

Martin Kitchen, Georgiana Heskins & Stephen Motyer, *Word of Promise Year A; Word of Truth Year B, Word of Life Year C*, Canterbury Press

Naomi Starkey (Ed), *The Ministry of the Word: a Handbook for Preachers on the Common Worship Lectionary*, Bible Reading Fellowship, 2000

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Ken Taylor, Sunday by Sunday: meditations and resources for all appointed gospel readings years A, B and C, Kevin Mayhew, Vol 1 Advent to Trinity, 1999; Vol 2 between Trinity and Advent, 2000.

Stories

Play on words: interactive Bible stories, Kevin Mayhew, 2000

Andrew Brandon, Storytellers: Jesus through the eyes of people who knew him, Scripture Union, 1995

Anthony Geering, Bible Voices: meditations from creation to apocalypse, The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2000 (An excellent collection of brief, punchy readings based on Bible stories)

Lynda Neilands, 50 five minute stories: a resource for teachers, children's workers and parents and 50 Stories for special occasions throughout the year, Kingsway Publications, 1996, 1998

Sketches and dramatic readings

There are many books available but here are a few which contain material which needs little rehearsing

John Bell & Graham Maule, Jesus and Peter, Wild Goose Publications, 1999 (Easy-to-perform sketches replacing and supplementing previous small volumes Eh... Jesus... Yes, Peter...?)

John Bell & Graham Maule, Wild Goose Prints (1-6), Wild Goose Publications, 1985-1990 (Some easy-to-perform and some more complicated scripts)

Derek Haylock, Acts for Apostles, Drama for Disciples, Sketches from Scripture, Church House Publishing, 1987, 1988, 1992 (Slightly more complicated than some in this list but still easy to perform)

Bob Irving, Crosstalk, 1992, In a Nutshell, 1995, National Christian Education Council (Parables for one or two voices)

Tony Thomas, Are you sitting comfortably? Sketches, Skits & Stories, New Way Publishing, 1991

Quotations and illustrations for talks and sermons

William J Bausch, A World of Stories for Preachers and Teachers, Twenty-Third Publications, 1999

Anthony P Castle, Quotes and Anecdotes: An Anthology for Preachers and Teachers, Kevin Mayhew, 1979

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Anthony P Castle, *More quotes and Anecdotes: The essential reference for Preachers and Teachers*, Kevin Mayhew, 1997

George Sweeting, *Great Quotes and Illustrations*, Word Publishing, 1987
Sherwood Wirt, Kersten Beckstrom (Ed), *Living Quotations for Christians*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1974

Useful web sites

The content of these websites can vary enormously, depending on who has contributed material. Many websites are really helpful, but they are certainly not all equally good or reliable!

<http://www.collegeofpreachers.org.uk>

<http://www.javacasa.com/dsp/>

<http://www.sermoncentral.com>

<http://www.sermonillustrations.com>

<http://www.sermonhelp.com>

<http://www.sermonlinks.com>

<http://www.sermonnotes.com>

<http://www.sermons-stories.co.uk>

<http://www.textweek.com>

<http://www.ecusa/anglican.org/worship-that-works/>

Session 6

Alternative / All Age Worship

Aims

By the end of the session participants should have

- reflected on the possibilities for all age or alternative worship
- thought about some ways to meet the aims of public worship in alternative ways.

All public worship was of course originally intended to be for all ages. Children were largely regarded as passive attendees, and so the idea of Sunday Schools developed in the 18th century. This system thrived for much of the 19th and 20th centuries. Today some churches struggle to maintain their Sunday Schools, and some congregations feel that they should meet together as the whole church family for worship, not have separate gatherings for children and adults.

Is there really any difference between giving an all-age talk and preaching?

(Adapted from Peter Graystone and Eileen Turner, *A Church for All Ages*, Scripture Union, 1993, chapter 5)

Many eloquent preachers are terrified at the thought of giving an all-age talk. Those for whom expository preaching has always been the high spot of the service can find it hard to adjust to a 'mixed' audience. Some say it is impossible to address different generations simultaneously; that all-age sermons are really directed at those aged 'about seven'. Other speakers are more positive, glad of the excuse to spell out basic truths to adults. At times the 'real sermon' has been supplemented with a 'children's address', after which children left or settled down to inevitable boredom. Although this practice now feels dated, it is clear that adults gained a lot from it. It certainly helped introduce new ideas into church and encouraged the element of teaching within preaching. Our attention span gets shorter and shorter and few adults, let alone children, can concentrate on the same thing for more than a few minutes. The willingness to listen to long traditional sermons can no longer be seen as a prerequisite for Christian maturity. Even those who see their primary gift as speaking to adults, will improve their skills by exploring how they could present their material to an all-age audience.

How people learn

The last half century has seen huge changes in our understanding about how both children and adults learn. Different people learn in different ways, an obvious truth ignored by many preachers! At an all-age service we might be addressing young children who experience the world through their senses; older children who can retain facts but have not reached the stage of abstract thought, plus adults who can more

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easily handle ideas. But adults, too, learn in different ways according to their personality pattern. (Read more about learning styles in Yvonne Craig, *Learning for Life*, Mowbray, 1994, especially chapter 4). Our increasing knowledge of the organisation of the human brain tells us that the right hemisphere is concerned with emotion, the left with words and speech. One side is usually dominant, which explains why some of us are more emotionally/spatially oriented in our perception, others more verbal/analytical. The former tend to use their feelings to help them handle information and can respond particularly well to stories. They will also appreciate visual patterns and diagrams. The latter make greater use of their powers of reasoning and rely heavily on words. Information like this helps us appreciate why people reacted differently to the rigid teaching methods of the past. For instance, rote learning was obviously ideal for some but unhelpful for others.

So our task is more complicated than just balancing the needs of children and adults. Adults may range in age from eighteen to ninety-eight, and represent many different subcultures. Some will be open and questioning, others bigoted and inflexible. Some may have theological training, others no Christian knowledge whatsoever. Some who are normally at home in the area of logical thought have got into the habit of switching off their reasoning power on entering church. Intellectual competency, previous experience and preferences, emotional temperature and spiritual maturity all affect how much we absorb and what we do with it. Some speakers feel constrained to limit the content of what is presented to children, believing the ability to handle abstract concepts signals the point at which formal instruction should begin. However, although we will obviously be selective, children are unlikely to be harmed by a rich spiritual diet, for they can experience quite profound spiritual truths long before they can articulate them. We all manage to enjoy things we do not understand!

Preparing a talk is like writing a menu. It requires enough choice for everyone to find their special diet, but not so much choice that they never even start to eat. Trying to hear God in a sermon that consists of twenty-five good ideas strung together is like a group of toddlers at a running buffet, over-loading their plates with things they cannot digest and dropping most of them immediately! A better picture is that of a well-planned four-course meal. Everybody shares the same starter; the main course comes with a choice of several veggies; the sweets come in large and small helpings. Everybody starts and finishes together, everyone has been fed, but what has been consumed varies enormously!

What themes are suitable?

All-age talks are harder to prepare than adult sermons and ideally a speaker will have both good theological knowledge and good communication skills. Both can be learnt, and those who begin to show gifts in this area must be encouraged. Training is important, but in the meantime much good resource material is available, and as in any area of life we learn best by doing, and then reflecting with others on how we did!

We must think carefully about what subjects are appropriate for all-age learning - and these are not always the most obvious. Painful topics, perhaps avoided in the past, might actually be extremely helpful, whilst some 'good stories' are actually too sophisticated. For example, children who have known what it is to have relatives, or even pets, die can find a lot to help them in a talk which mentions death and resurrection, but the dramatic obedience which led Abraham to the brink of sacrificing his child is terrifyingly bewildering even though it lends itself to bloodcurdling and memorable storytelling.

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Even if they are familiar, Bible passages need to be read and re-read and preferably slept on for several nights! We need reference books to help us tease out what the passage meant when it was first written; mental effort as we discern what impact the passing of centuries has had on its relevance today; prayer as we decide what aspects are appropriate for this particular congregation at this particular time. Some subjects are unsuitable even for adult sermons, because they cannot be dealt with at the necessary depth in a short time and need to be explored in other ways. Preaching is about glorifying God, proclaiming truth and encouraging people in the Christian life, not about arguing controversial subjects.

One of the major tasks is to help both children and adults handle Scripture. We teach this implicitly by our attitude to the Bible, as well as explicitly by our comments about its content. Hopefully we will speak of it with both reverence and enthusiasm. We will give personal examples both of how the Bible has spoken simply and directly to us, and of where we have struggled to discover its relevance. Though much of what we say will soon be forgotten, our determination to make the Bible work for us today will be obvious to our listeners and may encourage them to develop the same attitude themselves.

Ideas about biblical interpretation have developed considerably during the last century and if we are to have credibility we cannot afford to be defensive about this. The Bible contains many different kinds of writings and the story of how they came together and began to be seen as God's word is very complicated. The Christian teaching in the New Testament was by and for people with a totally different world-view from ours. If we have a high view of scripture we will take as much care in an intergenerational context as in an adult one to discover just how and why a particular passage says what it does. This might involve hard thinking and occasionally we might come across different conclusions from those we have heard in sermons ourselves.

A carelessly literal interpretation in an all-age talk can sometimes do the very thing it is trying to avoid by obscuring the message and thus limiting the power of scripture. For instance, we need to take particular care over references to prehistory such as those found in the first chapters of Genesis. A preoccupation with scientific detail can distract attention from what the stories are saying about the dependence of the whole created order upon God, the relationship of men and women to creation, and the Jewish teaching about the Sabbath. And to give the story of Jonah its true value and thrill, we need to leave people wondering at the forgiveness of God, not wondering whether a man could survive inside a fish if it happened today! We do our children and new adult Christians a disservice if we shield them from the real difficulties in understanding the apparent contradictions and confusions in the Bible. Our aim must be to give individuals the tools to read and interpret the Bible themselves, rather than a list of 'correct answers' to keep with them for ever.

Sometimes we interpret Bible stories literally almost by accident, such as Jesus' parables. From time to time it is worth drawing attention to their purpose with words like: 'Here is a modern version of a story Jesus made up because he wanted his listeners to think about...'. Those who have worked with children for many years can also slip into the habit of reading the most obvious message into a passage, or taking the easiest and most colourful approach. For example, the to illustrate the story of Noah each generation of children decorates the church with rows of 'Mr and Mrs Animal'. We all get pleasure from that, but it does not really encapsulate the vital truth the story contains. If the message about evil, judgement and covenant is too difficult for

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children, perhaps we should leave it for them to encounter later as teenagers and adult; or if we feel justified in keeping the religious zoo at least we should add accompanying words or symbols which say something about God's mercy.

Most congregations today include adults as well as children who are hearing basic Bible stories for the first time. The 'implicit religion' of our nation contains fewer specifically Christian strands than in previous generations, schools teach less about the faith, and even regular church-goers often have only a superficial knowledge of the Bible. From Old Testament times worship has always included the re-telling of the salvation story by groups that include all ages and stages of faith. It seems likely that many Bible stories were meant to be appreciated at different levels at the same time and to mean different things at different times. We need not be surprised or disappointed that some hear only the obvious, others understand the point as it is explained, while some find deeper meanings themselves.

New Stories

It is often helpful to emphasise a Bible narrative by re-telling it, rather than reading it from a translation. Some people dislike Bible stories being embellished. Opinions will always differ about this, but a brief look at some children's religious books and an attentive ear at nativity plays, will show that it happens more often than we realise. Most speakers and teachers 'embroider' the bare bones in the course of story telling. When this is done thoughtfully it makes the Bible vividly real and exciting, but it is most dangerous when we are unaware of it. The 'fly on the wall' way of telling Bible stories can be very effective. That is, the story is told in the first person; by a key character (Jairus describing the healing of his daughter); by a fictitious character (Zacchaeus' wife describing how Jesus came for dinner); or by someone quite absurd (the Christmas story from a sheep's point of view). The first of these is commonly used and can stick closely to the Bible text. The last is so obviously fantastic that what has been superimposed on the Bible can be made obvious to all. The middle example is probably the most difficult to handle well because extra details, even if authentic, can change the narrative and distort the original message. So the most startling adaptations of Bible stories are not necessarily the ones to avoid. By following our made-up story with a summary or Scripture reading, we can point out what the Bible actually says. Children have less difficulty than adults in alternating between fact and fiction; for instance, in a Christian home there is rarely much confusion between Santa Claus and the characters in the Christmas story. Instinctively children pick up what adults really believe to be true. However, there is much that needs to be said about Christian experience that cannot be gleaned from a single Bible story (try thinking of one, for example, whose principle meaning concerns the Christian's responsibility to oppose the destruction of the environment). In these cases a fictional story is a thoroughly desirable way of teaching - it is, after all, what Jesus did. And even when suitable Bible narratives exist, modern-day stories, whether they are biographies or products of the imagination, supplement them in a way that brings home their relevance. People need to see Christianity 'work' in a context they can understand, even if it is as simple as Basil making peace after a playground fight. Stories work deep in people's emotions, not just in their heads. When they do not ring true they are rightly dismissed, but when they present a simple value by capturing the imagination without the 'threat' that direct teaching carries, they change lives.

Unless a story is the message, like a well-told Bible story that can stand by itself, it must not be so overpowering that it outweighs the point it is trying to make. Though we

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can sometimes make use of children's stories, especially 'folk tales' that do not date, it is important to remember that an all-age congregation will include children whose cognitive development has not reached the stage at which they can appreciate complicated allegory. Even the best-known tales need thorough preparation, and a script can avoid the danger of rambling on too long and ensure that the best possible words are used to express key points.

Stories can help us when their characters think and say things with which we identify. Brief personal anecdotes can be much more powerful than the same points made in a dry analytical way. Modern toys and television characters catch everyone's attention and can be written into our own stories. In the nineteen-eighties a series of 'Christian' Mr Men included Mr Holey, Mr Cross and Mr Red Nosey. By the first decade of the third Millennium this has been superseded by stories about the Simpsons and Harry Potter. Congregations are pleased and flattered when stories are written especially for them, however simple. The Yorkshire village of Woolley heard the lost sheep story in the guise of 'Woolley jumper'; a church dedicated to St Andrew had several visits from the clown 'Stan Drew'. When stories are accompanied by illustrations or mime, a lot is happening simultaneously; things to see, things to hear, deeper messages to think about, and it does not matter if everybody does not appreciate everything.

Structure

Once we know what we want to say, we can use our imagination to find a framework: three points beginning with P; three points beginning with A, B and C; pictures and diagrams, particularly those which build up gradually. Notice how easily we remember the number 112445778 compared with 427518471, though the digits are the same. We can use repetition and play on words. Often several different approaches are possible, and finding the most appropriate is a struggle, though when we get there we feel it in our bones! It is vital to check that a framework is doing its job and is not just worming its way in for the sake of novelty. If we send a congregation home remembering three things, they need to be worth remembering. Some of the best talks sound gimmicky but leave serious points behind in the minds of the hearers. By contrast we have all listened to preaching that sounded serious and sensible but upon reflection turned out to contain very little! If we believe that God wants our talk to be sparky because God does not want to be bored, we will discover that the Holy Spirit has a way of helping us make the most amazing connections. But that only happens after the hard graft of identifying the points we want to make!

Illustrations

Within structure we need variety so everyone can 'find their own level'. Abstract ideas must be dished up in concrete forms; spiritual concepts illustrated with specifics. The prophets did this brilliantly. To illustrate his preaching Jeremiah used his linen shorts and wine jars (Jeremiah 13:1-14), a visit to the potter Jeremiah 18:1-6), and a basket of figs (Jeremiah 24:1-10). Amos used locusts, fire and a plumb line (Amos 7:1-9). Jesus also was a 'concrete' preacher and models for us how the most profound ideas can be expressed in imaginative ways 'salt and light' (Matthew 5:13) or the 'bread of life' (John 6). His parables compared abstract spiritual truths with things in the real world; house building (Matthew 7:24-27) and shepherding (Luke 15:1-7; John 10:1-16) and he often left his listeners to apply the truths for themselves (Mark 4:9).

When visiting Athens, though disturbed by the many idols, Paul was quick-witted enough to hook his Gospel message onto a local story of the unknown God' (Acts 17:16-25). Perhaps some ideas around today are like that 'unknown God', open to

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misinterpretation, yet just waiting to be given some Christian interpretation. Sometimes we may have to take this sort of risk in being very positive about things which others are avoiding, often projecting the darker side of themselves on to what is new or unknown. The media gives us a multitude of ideas on which, like Paul in Athens to hang old truths.

The child will not automatically translate concrete ideas to the level of abstract thought, but this does not matter. Abstract concepts, such as God's love, are often grasped intuitively by the young and by those with learning difficulties. Good visual aids carry along those who cannot understand. Some points may be heard by adults and older children while younger ones just enjoy the story. Repetitive language or humour brings back those with wandering thoughts. The 'message' can be repeated and reinforced with stories, puzzles, questions, pictures drama, movement, songs. Several snappy illustrations, drawn from both the child and the adult world, are better than one long rambling story. For instance, a talk about 'Who is my neighbour?' could have a short example drawn from a current situation in world politics, understood only by adults but with names recognisable to many children, and then a brief story about two children at playgroup or school. There is nothing wrong with signposting this by announcing, 'I want to say something to the adults ... and now here is something I want to say to the boys and girls'. The 'last word' of a talk needs careful planning and some say it should not be an illustration but a firm declaration of the 'message'. We can occasionally finish a talk with a question, or leave it open-ended so that the congregation go away thinking for themselves.

Seeing and doing

Remember the old proverb: 'Hear and forget; see and remember; do and understand'.

Seeing and doing should always be on our checklist when preparing all-age teaching.

Pictures and summaries and diagrams are best written large on an overhead projector or an AI flip chart placed in a prominent position.

Four ways to help people see visual aids

Invest in proper equipment

Simplify as much as possible

Use vivid colours

Print words larger than seems natural and don't use capitals.

Four things to beware

The large sheet of paper that keeps falling down

The elaborate working model that does not

Things which take hours to prepare but only last a moment

Items which look huge at home but 'shrink' in church.

Seeing can be combined with doing. For instance, words and pictures can be held in the air, messages scattered around the congregation, strange parcels discovered under chairs. Even in these days of Power-Point and multi-media presentations, the less sophisticated ways are often the most effective. A row of children and adults waving things around at the front is more gripping than the same illustration tastefully presented but hanging inanimately on the wall. A Mothering Sunday talk based round the letters of 'MOTHER' used volunteers to hold up letters. Codes on the back allowed them to be re-arranged to reveal the words HOME, ME and MORE, each of which was used as a 'hanger' for serious points. We can collect items from the congregation, perform simple scientific experiments or get people to 'dress up' simply with hats or masks or single items of clothing.

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It is important for the speaker to be seen and heard. raised position helps, but preferably not too far away. Speakers who like to walk about, perhaps even wandering into the congregation, must take care they do not favour one particular section. Some are good at 'dialogue' sermons and we can all cultivate a question-and-answer technique, though it needs courage to begin. The congregation can be encouraged to join in by talking to their neighbour for a minute or two before sharing their ideas. People often say, 'Children have so much to teach us', yet rarely put themselves in a position to prove their point! To ask, 'What do we call the day when Jesus returned to heaven?' involves only one person in answering - probably a child because adults will be too embarrassed to reply - and probably a child with substantial Bible knowledge, so outsiders will feel excluded! However, to say, 'How do you think the disciples felt after Jesus ascended to heaven? Turn to those near you and make a list of suggestions', has a far more valuable impact. Everyone who wishes will be involved, children and adults will have their opinions respected on equal terms, no-one will get the answer 'wrong', the feelings involved in this real story of real people can be compared with our own experience, and there is plenty, of opportunity for people to be surprised by ideas they would not have thought of by themselves. We must also watch our vocabulary, for some, words date very quickly. What one generation called gramophones, the next called record players. Then it was stereos, hi-fi's, stack systems - do you know what it is today? If we miss such changes we may be failing to hear what is going on in society, a much more serious offence than the neglect of good English! Last year's slang is particularly likely to make teenagers cringe. Even in the 21st century the church lags behind the rest of society in the area of inclusive language. It is no use protesting that the word 'man' means 'mankind' because in most people's understanding it does not! In fact there is much Christian jargon that non-regulars will not understand. The best speakers are those who talk about complicated doctrines in very simple language. Our tone of voice matters, too. Do we sound as if we are enjoying ourselves and passionately mean what we say? Do we speak loud enough? Do we avoid the equal and opposite dangers of sounding patronising as if our listeners are far beneath us, or pompous as if we are delivering an erudite theological lecture? We should not be talking 'down' to people or above their heads, but addressing them 'straight' as equals. St Francis is reputed to have said, 'Go and proclaim the goods news - and if necessary use words.' We might add to that: 'Watch your language'!

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Key Books and Resources

Common Worship, Church House Publishing, 2000 (Essential)
Lent, Holy Week & Easter, Church House Publishing/CUP/SPCK, 1994 (Very useful resource including material for Ash Wednesday, dramatic forms of passion narratives etc)

The Promise of His Glory, Church House Publishing/Mowbray, 1990 (Companion to above and providing very useful material to use from All Saints to Candlemas, including memorial/Christingle/carol services etc)

Patterns for Worship, Church House Publishing, 1995 (Essential)

The Common Worship Lectionary, Oxford University Press, 1999 (Sunday Readings from the NRSV)

Exciting Holiness, Canterbury Press, 1997 (Collects and readings for Saints days - formal but useful, say, for mid-week worship - replaces an ASB version which is still itself useful: The Cloud of Witnesses, HarperCollins, 1993)

Mark Earley and Gilly Myers, Common Worship Today, HarperCollins, 2001

Michael Perham (Ed), Enriching the Christian Year, SPCK/Alcuin Club, 1993 (An excellent resource of formal material for other occasions)

Michael Perham, New Handbook of Pastoral Liturgy, SPCK, 2000 (A comprehensive guide to Common Worship)

Hugo Slim, A Feast of Festivals, Marshall Pickering, 1996 (Easy-to-read background information about the Christians Year)

Kenneth Stevenson, All the Company of Heaven, Canterbury Press, 1998 (A more serious version of the above!)

Simon Bryden-Brook, Take, Bless, Break, Share: Agapes, Table Blessings and other Small Group Liturgies, Canterbury Press, 1998 (Useful resource including a Christians Seder)

It can be useful to collect Prayer Books from other churches in the Anglican Communion. eg The New Zealand Prayer Book, 1989.

The Grove Worship Series are brief and easy to read but never shallow. For example recent books include:

Anna de Lange, Liz Simpson, How to ... Lead the Prayers, Grove Worship Series 169, 2002

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Mark Earey, Leading Worship, Grove Worship Series 152, 1999

Mark Earey, Worship Audit, Grove Worship Series 133, 1995

Mark Earey, Carolyn Headley, Mission and Liturgical Worship, Grove Worship Series 170, 2002

Trevor Lloyd, A Service of the Word, Grove Worship Series 151, 1999

Tim Stratford, Interactive Preaching, Grove Worship Series 144, 1998

Tim Stratford, Liturgy and Technology, Grove Worship Series 154, 1999

Courses in Leading Worship include:

David Burfield, Worship Leaders Training Pack, Methodist Publishing House, 2000 (Contains some useful material but rather theoretical and overcomplicated in its presentation)

Anna de Lange, Liz Simpson, How to ... Lead the Prayers, Grove Worship Series 169, 2002 (see above and session 3)

Iona Community Publications

A Wee Worship Book, Wild Goose Publications, 1999 (An excellent resource, replacing and supplementing the material in The Iona Community Worship Book, 1988 and A Wee Worship Book, 1989)

Cloth for the Cradle: Worship resources and readings for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, Wild Goose Publications, 1997 (An excellent collection of easy-to-use material)

Stages on the Way: Worship resources for Lent, Holy Week and Easter, Wild Goose Publications, 1998 (An excellent collection of easy-to-use material)

The Iona Abbey Worship Book, Wild Goose Publications, 2001 (A useful and flexible resource - but some material repeated from other publications)

Kathy Galloway (Ed), The Pattern of our Days: Liturgies and Resources for Worship, Wild Goose Publications, 1996 (An excellent resource of 'mix-and-match' material)

John L Bell, He Was In The World: Meditations for public worship, Wild Goose Publications, 1995 (An excellent resource of short stories and readings)

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Jan Sutch Pickard (Ed), *Wisdom Dandelions and Thistles: Biblical meditations from the Iona Community*, Wild Goose Publications, 1998 (Poems, stories and meditations)

Anthologies of prayers and readings

Myra Blyth & Tony Jasper, *At all times and in all places*, Marshall Pickering, 1986 (A useful collection of unusual readings)

Myra Blyth & Tony Jasper, *In unexpected places*, Marshall Pickering, 1988 (A useful collection of unusual readings)

Michael Hare Duke, *Hearing the Stranger*, Cairns Publications, 1994

Geoffery Duncan (Ed), *Dare to Dream: a Prayer and Worship Anthology from Around the World Fount*, 1995 (Good resources on the theme of peace and justice)

Geoffery Duncan (Ed), *Shine on, star of Bethlehem: A worship resource for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany*, Canterbury Press, 2001 (Good resources on the theme of peace and justice)

Geoffery Duncan (Ed), *Wisdom is Calling: an anthology of hope: an agenda for change*, Canterbury Press, 1999 (An excellent resource produced in collaboration with Christian Aid - includes, for instance, 'advent candle' liturgies)

Donald Hilton (Ed), *A Word in Season: Prose and verse for use in Christian Education and Worship*, National Christian Education Council, 1984 (A good resource - wide ranging material grouped as seasons and Christian Year)

Donald Hilton (Ed), *A Liturgy of Life*, National Christian Education Council, 1991 (An excellent resource)

Nicholas Hutchinson FSC (Ed), *Praying Each day of the Year* (3 volumes), Matthew James Publishing, 1991 (An unusual collection of quotations and practical ideas)

Adrian Mann, Robin Stevens & John Willmington, *First Fruits: A Worship Anthology on Generosity and Giving*, Canterbury Press, 2001

Janey Morley (Ed), *A Bread for Tomorrow: Praying with the World's Poor*, SPCK/Christian Aid, 1992

H J Richards (Ed), *An Anthology of the Church Year: 500 readings and prayers for worship and reflection*, Kevin Mayhew, 1998 (Quite serious material, good but some of it dryish)

Robert Van de Weyer (Ed), *Celtic Parables: stories, poems and prayers*, SPCK, 1997
Other useful mediations by Eddie Askew, Lionel Blue, J Barrie Shepherd, Frank Topping etc

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Poetry

Gordon Bailey (Ed), 100 Contemporary Christian Poets, Lion, 1983

Jenny Robertson (Ed), A Touch of Flame: an anthology of contemporary Christian poetry, Lion, 1989

Healing

Jim Cotter, Healing - more or less, Cairns Publications, 1990 (Prayers and meditations, including useful material for using with those who have been abused)

Howard Booth, Seven Whole Days: A Health and Healing Worship Book, Arthus James, 1992 (Some formals and informal prayers)

Elizabeth Stuart, Daring to Speak Love's Name, Hamish Hamilton, 1992 (The Gay and Lesbian Prayer Book whose publication was controversial. Contains useful material re HIV/AIDS)

Loss and Bereavement

James Bentley, Andrew Best & Jackie Hunt, Funerals: A Guide: Prayers, hymns and readings, Hodder & Stoughton, 1994

Virginia Sloyan, A Sourcebook about Christians Death, Liturgy Training Publications, 1990

Agnes Whitaker, All in the end is harvest: and anthology for those who grieve, Darton. Longman & Todd, 1984

Love and Marriage

Andrew Best & Jackie Hunt, Weddings: Prayers, hymns and readings to help you plan the day, Hodder & Stoughton, 1997

Bel Mooney, The Penguin Book of Marriage, Penguin, 1989

Michael Perry & Rowena Edlin-White, Design your own Wedding Ceremony, Marshall Pickering, 1997

Feminist Issues

Janet Morley, All Desires Known, SPCK, 1998 (An excellent resource, particularly for 'alternative' collects)

Mary Robins, Desert Flowers: A journey into the feminine in women, men and God, Cairns Publications, 1990

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The St Hilda Community, *Women Included: A Book of Services and Prayers*, SPCK, 1991

Hymns and Psalms

Ian Bradley (Ed), *The Penguin Book of Hymns*, Penguin, 1990 (Stories behind some traditional hymns - useful for preparing a 'Songs of Praise' service)

Jim Cotter, *Through Desert Place* (1-50), *By Stony Paths* (51-100), *Towards the City* (101-150), Cairns Publications, 1989, 1991, 1993 (An alternative translations of the psalms)

Michael Perry, *Preparing for Worship: The Essential Handbook for Worship Leaders*, Marshall Pickering, 1995 (Much useful information, including biblical list to help in the choice of hymns)

Sing His Glory: hymns for the Three-Year Lectionary, Canterbury Press, 1997 (there is an updated edition of this)