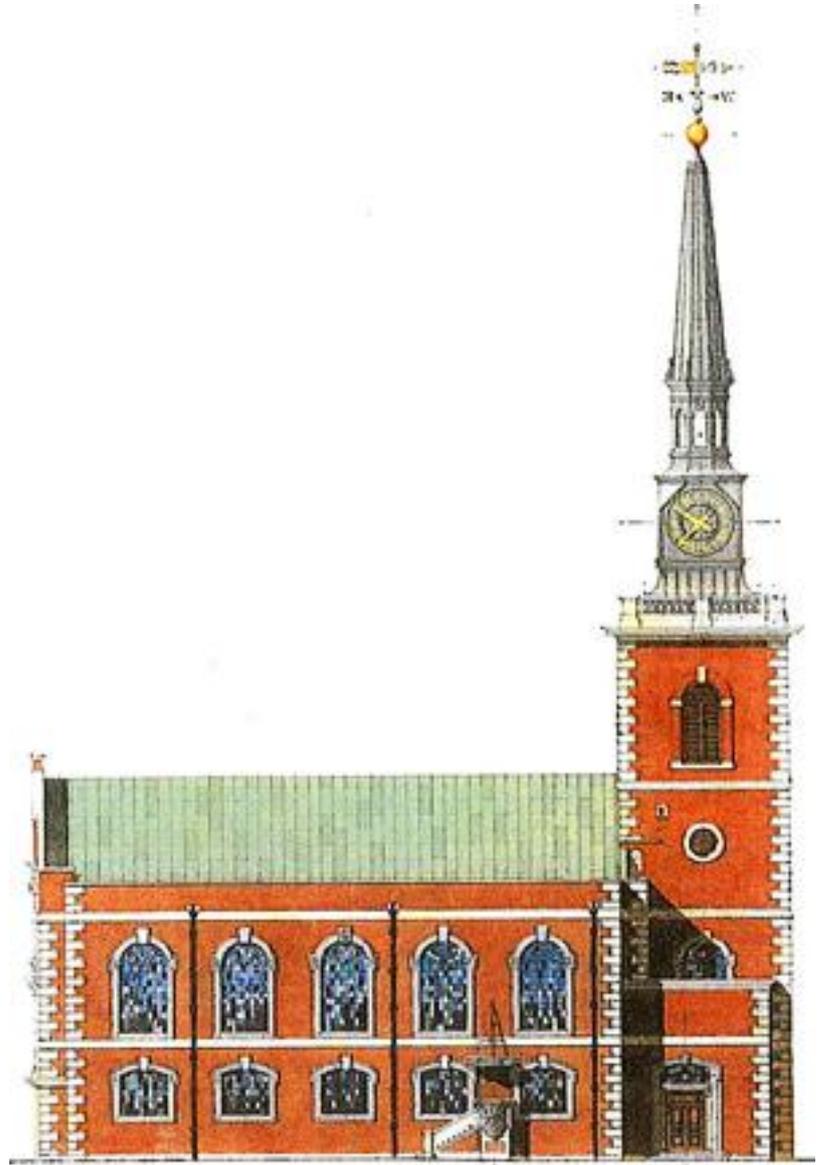


LET US PRAY!



Some notes for intercessors at the Sunday Eucharist

Wow!
(and thank you)

So you have been asked to lead the prayers at the Sunday Eucharist? If you are new(ish) to this, don't be alarmed. If you are experienced, take time to review your approach. Leading us in prayer like this is a privilege and can certainly be daunting. *Thank you for doing it.* It is a ministry to us all – please remember just how much we appreciate it.

What should I do?

Stay calm. Prepare in advance – generally this means in writing. On the day **pray** the prayers (this may sound obvious): don't *read* them, or *recite* them or *present* them, but *pray* them. Have God in your sights, not the rest of us.

What does 'the book' say?

Common Worship is the prayer book of the Church of England. The advice it gives about the intercessions is rather limited (see page 174 and additional advice on pages 281- 287 – copies available in the Vestry).

Are there any golden rules?

We're afraid there are...

- **Rule 1** The intercessions should last no longer than four minutes!
- **Rule 2** Love God and do (say) what you like (*Augustine*)
- **Rule 3** See Rule 1

Rules 1 and 3 are too often broken. In leading the *prayers of the people* we are **not** ...

- giving a sermon
- telling people what God thinks
- telling God what's what
- giving our view on hot issues

Can I get help?

Yes, of course. If you need to, talk with others on the Intercessions team, or with any of the clergy. Be sure to look at the readings for the day – these are usually sent in advance by rota secretary. The parish secretary will also be able to supply the references. They are also given in each Sunday's order of service for the following Sunday. There are numerous books that offer help in preparing intercessions (try Mowbray's on the top floor of Hatchards, Piccadilly). Be discriminating – some books are old fashioned, or favour very traditional forms and others are more closely aligned in style to our style of worship and thought. *See Resources page 6.*

Some points for those leading us in prayer

What we are doing

We are a Christian community, part of the Christian Church. Our prayers are

- made to God (Father, Mother, Creator)
- *through* Jesus Christ (the Son, the Word Made Human, Redeemer)
- *in the power of* the Holy Spirit

They are not your private prayers, said aloud

These form our **common prayer**. They are not your private prayers, said aloud. Try to discern the needs of the community and 'the signs of the times'. You are speaking to God, not to us. Address God directly ('you' rather than 'let us ask God'). Don't cover every story or current hot topic. In fact, don't 'cover' any story or topic. Keep it simple. Practice the discipline of saying less and communicating more.

Allowing us to respond verbally involves us – it weaves us into what is being asked of God

Please involve the rest of us by getting us to make a said or sung response. A congregational response is a good way of marking out the structure, and bringing silences to an end. If you are using a congregational response (see below) it is a good idea to introduce it clearly at the beginning. These common responses may be used -

Intercessor (*Lord*), *in your mercy*/All **hear our prayer**

or

Intercessor *Lord/O God, hear us*/All **graciously hear us**

The usual formula for indicating the end of the intercessions is: *Merciful God accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.* You can also simply use 'Amen' and return to your seat.

Sometimes the intercessor offers no congregational response, instead using silence "so that we can make the prayers our own". This runs the risk of misunderstanding the nature of 'common' prayer: we assent to them *by making a shared, vocal* response. In fact making a common, shared congregational response is the way to make the prayers our own. Weave in silence by all means, but please keep a formal versicle response where you say a phrase we know which triggers a common verbal (said or sung) response.

Practical things
The PA system

As has been said, this is our **common prayer** as the church in this place. We shall be praying along the lines that you lay before us. It is important that we hear what you are saying, so those leading intercessions need to be audible. Speak clearly and slowly. Our PA system is good, and a clear and relaxed speaking voice will be picked up. Feel free to steady yourself by holding on to the Lectern if you need to. Don't get too close – it causes an audible 'popping' as your breath hits the diaphragm. If you hear that, simply back off a little.

Be ready: you are on after The Creed

Get to the lectern smoothly and promptly, so that there is no lengthy delay after the Creed – be ready in the wings. Have everything to hand, preferably on one piece of paper. A practical point: don't have the papers stapled as turning them may strike the microphone or cause a distracting rustle.

Remember that you are speaking to God on our behalf. Don't use a single word which is not addressed to God.

Variations on a theme

Occasionally two people have led the prayers. And the **responses can be sung** to your said prayers (for this option please involve Lil so she can advise on responses and if need-be rehearse any sung response). 'Hand Prayers' are another option – but please check this and other out-of-the-ordinary styles beforehand with the priest who is presiding that day. As a community we like variety and familiarity (now, isn't that confusing).

Please give us a structure, so that we can relax into it and pray....

A clearly defined structure to the intercessions will help people participate prayerfully. Here is an example which starts from ourselves, reaching out to others, the world (creation) and to the future -

- **For ourselves** (e.g. that we may dedicate ourselves to God, practice the art of loving, forgive ourselves and others, serve others, be signs of God's Kingdom)
- **For others** (e.g. other people, cultures and traditions and societies. You can include the names of individuals known to us, here)
- **For the world** (e.g. specific places needing our prayers; for right stewardship of our small, precious planet, for justice and peace)

Feel free to change or reverse the order. The point here is about a structure of some sort. It is customary to pray also for **the Church** (this is the whole church of Christ – not just the CofE, not just St James's). At St James we often also include prayers that are respectful of other faith traditions. And keep in mind that God is likely to be concerned for the whole world and our ordinary lives and try to convey that what you pray for on our behalf.

Feel free develop your own structure but remember that many people are helped by a framework that is broadly familiar – see some of the 'customer' feedback below). And be sure to remember that *thanksgiving* and *praise* should be included: it is good to thank God for all the good things of life, and for one another.

One of the most common mistakes is to go on too long and say too much. Four minutes should be your maximum.

Silence? Let us know when, and why

Silence does have a place, and a powerful place when used well. It helps if you give us guidance on this, clues really. For example: "God, we now bring before you in the silence of our hearts those who are known to us to be in need" (but when you do this, be sure to *give us* some silence! A practical tip is to silently count to 10).

"Dear God, we pray for all those afflicted by sections, and sub sections..."

Watch your language! Most effective of all is simple, clear everyday language. God is unlikely to be impressed by complex phrasing and long words. His/Her interest is in what our hearts really desire. So, speak from *your heart*. Prayer is intimate. It is not another Freeview channel.

Avoid intercessionary overload...

It's important to be up to date with the news, both national and local. But our common prayer is not a news bulletin. Avoid turning intercessions into **info-cessions**. You are not there to *inform* but to offer our common prayer to God.

Don't forget to get personal....

You may wish to check with others or any of the clergy for people to be mentioned in the prayers by name. To be prayed for can be very powerful. The clergy will provide names only where they believe the person has no objection to being named aloud. There is no real need to give a reason ("we pray for Albert who has broken his ankle"). We can assume God knows all

this. Consider using a formula something like this: ‘Let us now name aloud or silently before God those known to us who need our prayers’. Then be silent, allowing us to do just that. After that silence (in which people in the church may speak aloud the names of people to pray for) you can name any you have or have been given.

“And by the way...”

Resist the temptation to teach during prayers: prayers are *from* the people to God, not vice-versa. Don’t assume everyone is liberal, progressive or shares your own political preferences. Criticism of people – certain world leaders spring to mind – has no place here. Praying for them does. Reflect God’s courtesy.

There are no experts in prayer. Never be anything other than human in the presence of God. Prayer is not a technique - it is a dialogue of love

What the consumers say (comments made at various times by members of St James’s)

We asked

If someone was preparing the intercessions for the first time, what friendly advice would you give them?

Comments included...

- Keep it simple. Be selective – don’t try to pray for everyone and everything
- Speak slowly and clearly. Take time to pause
- You are not praying your own prayers, but leading *us in ours*
- Speak from the heart
- Go strongly enough to take everyone with you
- Headings [groupings] help us focus
- Remember you are praying in God’s strength, not just your own
- Please include members of our community and others known to us
- Connect with the sermon or the readings for the day if possible
- Use inclusive language

We asked

What do you find most unhelpful about the intercessions?

Comments included...

- Sometimes they are too long [this point came up in most responses] – a mini sermon
- When they are mumbled, or too elaborate or ‘trying’ to be too topical
- Long lists – of countries and crises
- Being given details of people’s ailments (“I’d hate mine being read out!”)
- When the intercessor tells the Almighty what the Almighty already knows
- Over-imaginative use of language – sincerity better than originality
- Whilst I appreciate the global issues (war-zones, hunger zones etc) I am deeply convinced about the need to ask guidance in our individual lives, help with our personal dilemmas, blind spots and blockages – to pray for a change in heart

We asked

What do you find most helpful?

Comments included...

- A meditative quality
- Naming members of our community who need our prayerful care
- A kind of neutrality – or universality – rather than a very personal style
- The traditional structure works well – too much departure can break the flow of the entire liturgy
- Pauses and pacing – so I can participate
- Sticking with the customary responses – it’s familiar and supports me in my praying
- When phrases describe the many faces of God, e.g. Generous God, Forgiving God
- The prayers being short

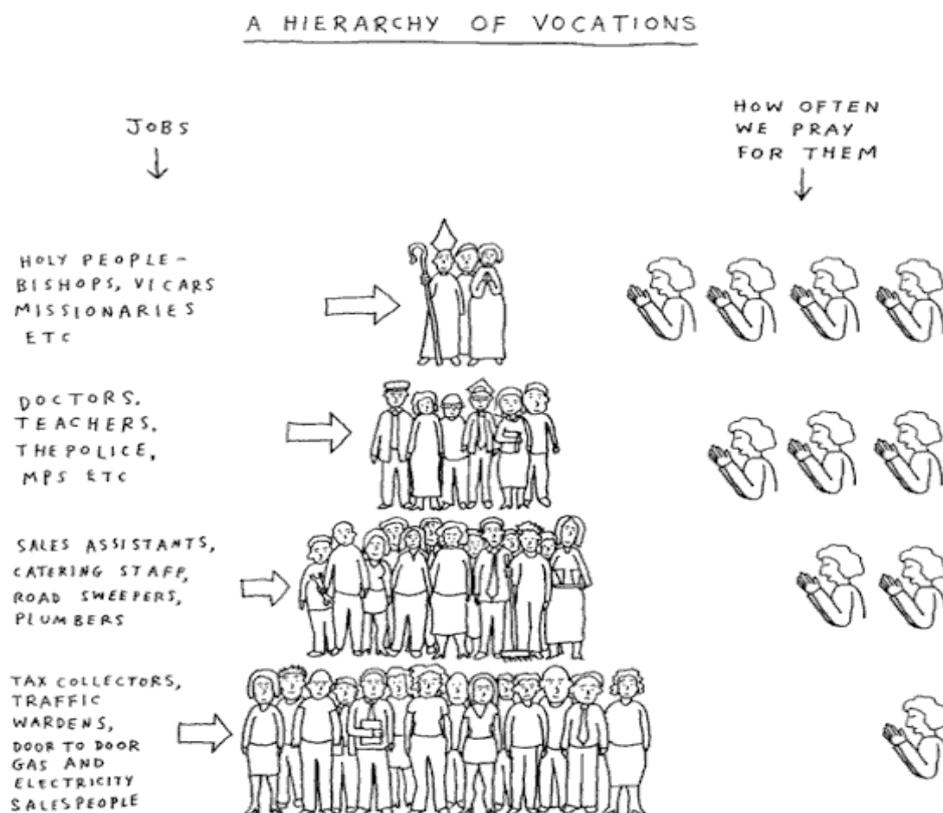
Resources

The website and blog **lay anglicana** (www.layanglicana.org) is a great resource and has sections devoted to preparing and leading the intercessions.

Here are two books which have been found helpful -

- **Leading Common Worship Intercessions: A Simple Guide** by Doug Chaplin
- **Intercessions for Years A, B & C** by Ian Black [The lectionary – the table of readings for each day – follows a three year cycle]

It is surprisingly common (not at St James's as it happens...) to hear far more prayers for clergy and the church rather than for God's people and the world, a tendency gently mocked by the cartoon below.



Inclusive language

Our intercessors team will have been members of our community for some time and so are likely to be familiar with the case for inclusive language. It is not set out here. There is now a wealth of helpful material on the use of inclusive (and non-triumphalist) language in liturgy.

Now here is a nice blank page for all your notes, jottings, ideas, even shopping lists....

We undertook an online survey of views about intercessions in 2012. The report can be found on the publications page of our website www.sjp.org.uk/reports-publications.html

Rule 1: The intercessions should last no longer than four minutes!

Rule 3: See Rule 1



Riot against intercessions that went on too long

Leading intercessions is an important ministry and forms a key element within the Sunday celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Thank you again for doing this, and be sure to ask for any help you might need (see contacts, below). In summary - keep it simple; keep it short; speak from the heart; be yourself; address every word to God alone.

Contacts

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You will find resources and links at

sjp.org.uk

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