

Common Worship

Church House Publishing

Pastoral Services

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Contents

- 1 Authorization
- 3 Introduction
- 8 Wholeness and Healing**
 - 8 Contents
 - 9 Theological Introduction
 - 12 Introductory Note
 - 13 **A Celebration of Wholeness and Healing**
 - 26 **Laying on of Hands with Prayer and Anointing
at a Celebration of Holy Communion**
 - 42 **Supplementary Texts**
 - 48 **Prayer for Individuals in Public Worship**
 - 51 **Ministry to the Sick**
 - The Celebration of Holy Communion at Home or in Hospital 52
 - The Distribution of Holy Communion at Home or in Hospital 74
 - Laying on of Hands with Prayer and Anointing 92
 - 94 **Prayers for Protection and Peace**
- 101 Marriage**
 - 101 Contents
 - 102 **The Marriage**
 - The Marriage Service 102
 - The Marriage Service
within a Celebration of Holy Communion 116
 - Supplementary Texts 135
 - 173 **An Order for Prayer and Dedication after a Civil Marriage**
 - 184 **Thanksgiving for Marriage**
- 195 Emergency Baptism**
- 200 Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child**
 - Supplementary Texts 207

214	Funeral	
214	Contents	
216	Ministry at the Time of Death	
236	Before the Funeral	
255	The Funeral	
	The Outline Order for Funerals	257
	The Funeral Service	258
	The Funeral Service	
	within a Celebration of Holy Communion	274
	Supplementary Texts	293
	The Outline Order for the Funeral of a Child	297
	The Outline Order for the Funeral of a Child	
	within a Celebration of Holy Communion	298
	Resources for the Funeral of a Child	301
318	After the Funeral	
	The Burial of Ashes	323
	An Outline Order for a Memorial Service	331
	An Outline Order for a Memorial Service	
	within a Celebration of Holy Communion	332
	Memorial Service: A Sample Service	335
345	Resources	
	Prayers for Use with the Dying and at Funeral	
	and Memorial Services	346
	Bible Readings and Psalms for Use at Funeral	
	and Memorial Services	383
	Psalms for Use at Funeral and Memorial Services	392
	Canticles for Use at Funeral and Memorial Services	406

417	Alternative Services: Series One
417	Contents
418	A Form of Solemnization of Matrimony
430	Burial Services
	An Order for the Burial of the Dead 430
	An Order for the Burial of a Child 447
	The Penitential Psalms 452
462	General Rules
463	Authorization Details
465	Copyright Information
466	Acknowledgements and Sources
471	Index

Authorization

Common Worship: Pastoral Services comprises

-  alternative services and other material authorized for use until further resolution of the General Synod; and
-  material commended by the House of Bishops.

For details, see page 463.

Canon B 3 provides that decisions as to which of the authorized services are to be used (other than occasional offices) shall be taken jointly by the incumbent and the parochial church council. In the case of occasional offices (other than Confirmation and Ordination), the decision is to be made by the minister conducting the service, subject to the right of any of the persons concerned to object beforehand to the form of service proposed.

Introduction

We are all on a journey through life. One of the presuppositions on which the Church of England's Pastoral Services are based is that we do not travel alone. Where is God in relation to that journey? He is both the starting point and the ending point, the Alpha and the Omega. Not only that but, as the Psalmist says, in all our rushing around between the beginning and the end, he is there too.

Where can I go then from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I climb up to heaven, you are there;
If I make the grave my bed, you are there also.

Psalm 139.6,7

An accompanied journey, with questions

So the journey we take is an accompanied one. God is with us every step of the way. Sometimes the realization of that presence is conveyed to us through the presence of God's people on the journey. As on a medieval pilgrimage, different people on the road have different backgrounds and a variety of family relationships. They engage in different occupations and have varied functions in relation to others on the journey. Not all are travelling at the same speed. Some spend their time specifically helping others along and ministering to them; some imagine their own burdens are too great for them to be able to help others.

The Church is a pilgrim church, a body of people on the move. Even though some people, for example on the funeral and bereavement journey, may feel isolated, what these services do is to put that journey in the context of the Church, the Church which prays, which celebrates, which cares. For the sake of those for whom it cares, the Church and its liturgy need to embody that flexibility to adjust to different pastoral situations which is implied by being a church on the move. They also need to reflect that dependability, consistency and stability which is implied by the long history of the Church's worship, traditions and buildings. We serve God, who is the same yesterday, today and for ever, and who is continually doing new things, drawing his new creation to himself.

The order of our journeying

These services are not in the order some might expect.

Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child could have come first: birth, and welcome into a human family might seem the obvious starting point. But there is a logic in placing Marriage before Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child. Funeral Services, in all their richness, are placed towards the end.

Wholeness and Healing

Wholeness and Healing services come first because, as the Theological Introduction to that section of the book makes clear, they are as much part of the baptismal liturgy as they are of pastoral services. Salvation, wholeness, healing and peace with God are part of the same family of words, revealing the same essential theological themes as both incarnation and crucifixion: vulnerability and powerlessness, identification and suffering, being put right, made whole and restored as part of a new creation. Both in the Celebration of Wholeness and Healing and in the more personal ministries of the Laying on of Hands and the Distribution of Holy Communion, these Gospel themes are made to relate to the real human condition, with humility and without triumphalism, in a way that brings people face to face with Jesus Christ.

The Marriage Service

The Marriage Service, unlike Baptism and Funeral Services, is not for everyone, though here again the Church is present on the journey, surrounding the couple with love, providing preparation and promising – for the first time in a Church of England service – support and prayer. But, down the centuries, not much has changed in the Marriage Service, and much of the same structure and feel is retained in the new service. In the Middle Ages there was more dramatic movement in the service, with most of it happening at the church door, and the couple entering church for the Wedding Mass. At the Reformation the wedding proper moved into the body of the church, and the beginning of the second part of the service was marked by the procession to the sanctuary. But the main concerns of the marriage preface (where the reasons for marriage are set out), have changed little since medieval times – Chaucer uses similar material in the Parson's Tale, told on another journey in 1387. Cranmer's 1549 service included 'quietness, sobriety and peace' as the ideal of Christian married life, and later social changes included

those in the 1928 service making ‘the causes for which matrimony was ordained’ acceptable to a more refined generation, and the omission of the word ‘obey’ in the bride’s promises. The 1928 service is the basis for the Series One Marriage Service (pages 418–429), in which the omission of the word ‘obey’ is optional.

Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child

The short service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child may be used on a wide variety of occasions, both private and public, as part of the journey towards baptism. It is at such key moments in people’s lives that they are often prompted to ask serious questions and even to turn to God. Here there is also provision for those who accompany others on the journey, as words are given for supporting friends, standing alongside the parents welcoming a new member of the family.

The Funeral Service

The Funeral Service is both the end of the human journey in this world and a whole series of journeys in itself. From the eighth century or earlier, the Funeral rite was a continuum, broken by movements from place to place, from home to church, to the place of burial and back to the home. This pattern was severely truncated at the Reformation, but today’s pastoral needs suggest a return to it. As grieving is a process marked by different stages, we believe that one helpful contribution the Church can make pastorally is to have a series of services and resources in which some of these different stages can be recognized, spoken of in advance or recapitulated.

So the Funeral Service is part of a longer continuum, though it stands perfectly well on its own if necessary. Following on from ministry to the sick we move into ministry at the time of death, through the possibility of prayers in the house after someone has died, prayers in church or at home before the funeral, through the journey which brings the body to the dead person’s spiritual home on earth, the church, for the funeral itself, and then on to some prayers at home after the funeral, a later Memorial Service and the provision for annual memorials. The bereaved will need to be able to say different things to God and to one another at each of these different stages.

The structure within the *Common Worship* Funeral Service itself moves from the human to the divine, from earth to heaven. It begins with an acknowledgement of the different groups of people who come to mourn, for some of whom the early part of the service will be a recapitulation of those stages since the death which they have not been able to witness. The service provides an opportunity for the celebration of the life of the person who has died, and moves from this into the reading of Scripture and prayer, before reaching its climax in the commendation and the committal.

A simpler form of this structure is offered in the Series One Burial Services (pages 430–451), using the texts from the 1662 and 1928 Prayer Books.

Conclusion

Through all of these resources runs the theme of being accompanied on the journey by the Church, by the people who, in surrounding us and supporting us, reveal the personal love and care of Jesus Christ, whose death put an end to death for eternity.

The pastoral task of the Christian Church, all the people of God, ministers and laity, is to provide company on the journey, towards baptism, marriage, welcoming children and at death itself. This is the kind of company, using these and other resources, which, in revealing the love of Christ, will draw people to put their faith in him and to serve him in the fellowship of his Church until they come to their eternal home in the company of all the saints.