

The Church of England believes that the way we worship and pray together helps to reflect who we are. We therefore take seriously the need for our worship to be “in common”: in other words, our worship needs to reflect the common features of our identity as Anglican Christians. It is for this reason that we use officially authorized rubrics (or instructions), structures, and texts when we worship.

History

Until the twentieth century, all worship in the Church of England was governed by the contents of the *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP), which was first published in 1549. The *Book of Common Prayer* is still used today and remains the only permanently authorized liturgical resource of the C of E.

Early in the twentieth century the Church of England, like other Christian churches, decided to produce new liturgies which were based on new research about the early history of Christian worship, and which were intended to meet the needs of a new generation.

Revisions were proposed to the services of the Book of Common Prayer in a revised volume of 1928, but this book was not then approved for use. Since then, many of the services as revised for the 1928 Prayer Book have been authorized, many of them in 1966 as the First Series of Alternative Services. The “Series One” Form of Solemnization of Matrimony and Burial Services continue to be authorized for use in public worship. More periods of experimentation with further Alternative Services (Series Two and Three) began in the mid-1960s; these were followed by the publication of *The Alternative Service Book* (ASB) 1980. The Series Three services used contemporary English for the first time. The ASB was authorized first for ten years and then for a further ten. From 2000 it was replaced by a new generation of services, under the general title *Common Worship*.

Common Worship draws together the best of modern liturgy and the tradition of worship stemming from *The Book of Common Prayer*. The services and resources that are part of *Common Worship* represent the latest stage of a process of liturgical revision. They were originally drafted by the Liturgical Commission. The material was passed on to the House of Bishops, which amended the material as it saw fit. It was then presented to the General Synod, the Church of England’s governing body.

Forms of services that were *alternative* to equivalents in the *Book of Common Prayer* were debated by Synod and revised by a Revision Committee in the light of the comments made by Synod members and the wider public. The House of Bishops then reconsidered them, put them into their final form and submitted them to the General Synod for Final Approval as Authorized Services. To be authorized, each service had to gain a two-thirds majority in each House of the Synod (Bishops, Clergy and Laity).

Additional material, which had no equivalent in the *Book of Common Prayer*, was debated by the General Synod and then put in its final form and commended by the House of Bishops.

In the case of authorized services in *Common Worship*, the Archbishops gave some eight hundred parishes permission to use draft forms of service on an experimental basis before they were presented to the General Synod. The services were adjusted in the light of feedback from this 'field testing'.

The present day

At the request of the House of Bishops, the Liturgical Commission prepares forms of service and promotes the development and understanding of liturgy and its use in the Church.

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