

Often in our worship, we are led in prayer by others. In practice, this is often in the gathered community of Christians who are asked to join their prayers together in petition for the needs of the Church and the world, and for all who are in need. All Christians are called to share in the ministry of Christ’s intercession for the whole world.

In the Church of England, we often pray with language which comes from the Bible and from the texts of our liturgy. But we knit together these words and images with ideas which come from our own hearts and from the communities in which we pray. It is important to prepare for the task of leading the intercessions with care because in every case the intercessor is not just offering prayers independently, but also helping to encourage others in their own.

In your community, it is helpful to retain a basic structure for the intercessions, since familiarity will help people to join in, and will help the intercessor plan what is to be said. Sometimes a church will have such a structure which it ordinarily uses for the intercessions. The typical pattern for intercessions in *Common Worship* services is this:

1. The Church of Christ;
2. Creation, human society, the Sovereign and those in authority;
3. The local community;
4. Those who suffer;
5. The communion of saints.

It is sometimes appropriate to deviate from the pattern, especially on a significant occasion or in time of catastrophe.

Some intercessions include a response from the congregation, thus:

Lord, in your mercy

hear our prayer. *(All)*

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us. *(All)*

Responses can help to break up the prayers to help people concentrate. They also help people to join in, just as we say ‘Amen’ at the end of prayers. *Common Worship* provides a range of possible responses, but it is helpful for the congregation to know which will be used. If no other advice is given, the intercessor can model the response.

Ways of using the pattern

You could use the pattern above, or the equivalent in your church, in several different ways:

Using an invitation to prayer, sometimes called a ‘bidding’:

‘Let us pray for the sick and for those who suffer, for all in the nursing homes and hospices of our parish, and for those who are housebound. We remember all who are sick, among them ... *(a list of names follows)*

Comfort and heal all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit; give them courage and hope in their troubles; and bring them the joy of your salvation.

Lord, in your mercy

hear our prayer.’

Sometimes ‘bidding’ prayers may take the following form, usually throughout the period of intercessory prayer:

For this community, for every city, town, and village, and for all the people who live within them,

let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

In this case, each petition ends, ‘let us pray to the Lord’, with the congregation responding, ‘Lord, have mercy.’ Typically the syntax of the bidding will be the same in each case; for instance, *‘For X, that God will do Y.’*

2. Integrating the ‘bidding’ into the prayer:

‘Comfort and heal all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit, *especially ... (a list of names follows) ... and all those being cared for in this parish.* Give them courage and hope in their troubles; and bring them the joy of your salvation.

Lord, in your mercy

hear our prayer.’

Praying more freely, using different words:

‘We hold in your presence all who are being cared for in this parish, and thank you for the care and dedication of the staff. We name before you all those with particular needs who have asked for our prayers, especially ... *(a list of names follows)*. May they know your presence with them, and that you are their strength, their healing, and their salvation.

Lord, in your mercy

hear our prayer.’

Your church may have a preference for a particular format, or familiar words to use in a particular part of the intercessions. You may also be able to be creative and use some of the rich imagery of Scripture and liturgy to create your own prayers.

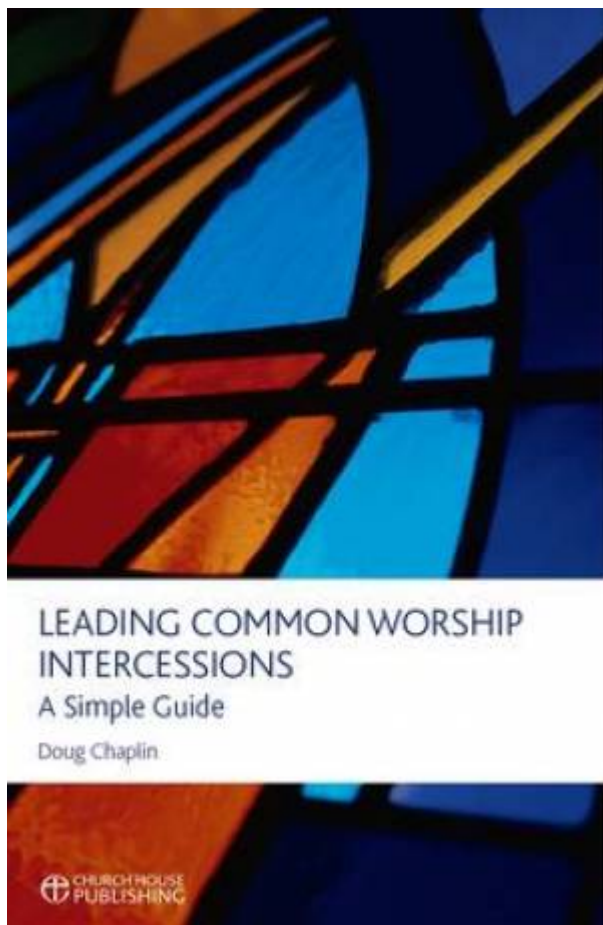
Some churches use intercessions which are differently structured. One example, often found at Morning or Evening Prayer might be the use of a bidding, followed by one of the Collects from the *Book of Common Prayer* or *Common Worship*.

Other intercessions might adopt the language of, for instance, something else which has been read or sung in the service. They might be accompanied by songs or chants. Sometimes, the intercessions will invite prayer based on the readings in the service, especially from the Gospel. Try out some ideas and see what works in your church!

Some advice

Like other forms of ministry, leading the intercessions in a service is both a privilege and a responsibility.

- Remember that you are helping to lead others in prayer, not simply praying in public;
- the language of your intercessions should broadly match the style and vocabulary normally used in your church’s worship;
- the intercessions are not a ‘shopping list’ of concerns, nor are they a news report or an opportunity to express a personal opinion which might not be shared by others; they are appeals to God who already knows the prayers on our hearts.



This page is based in part on *Leading Common Worship Intercessions: a simple guide*, by Doug Chaplin, which provides a more comprehensive introduction.

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