

# Leading Intercessions in Church

## A PRACTICAL GUIDE

**The aim is to express before God the concerns of the congregation – as God would wish them to be expressed.**

### SENSING THE OCCASION

As I stand to lead the prayers of the congregation, I am in God's presence. So are we all – and all those we want to pray for. We are all surrounded by the great irrigation system of his love; we have the control of a sluice to release the water of life into the hearts of his family. How am I to make use of it?

In God's presence, I shall be simple, uncomplicated, and down to earth. In a calm and straightforward way I shall be myself. I am not speaking in order to draw attention to my way with words. When I find the right words, they will serve only to express the shared prayer of the congregation addressed directly to our loving Father. "We pray for...", rather than "Let us pray for..."

In our conversation with God, we will always have plenty to be thankful for. There can be no better starting point. Praying to God is more than just asking for this and that; we are not presenting God with a shopping list. We can also realistically begin by asking forgiveness for our failings; prayer is never an occasion for criticising or condemning those with whom we disagree.

When leading prayer, I need in my imagination to place myself beside the people for whom we pray - both those who suffer, and those who cause that suffering. I cannot, even in imagination, stand beside *all* I pray for, so I will not pray, for instance, for 'all who suffer'.

### PREPARATION

The orders for Holy Communion in the Church of England's 'Common Worship' provide a fivefold framework for intercessions: the Church, the World, the Local Community, those In Need, the Departed.

Our worship links us in an invisible presence with the worldwide church ... the whole human family ... the living ... the dying ... and the dead. So the framework gives me guidelines until I'm quite sure I know what I'm doing – and some clergy don't yet!

I can also usefully sketch out what I feel needs to be mentioned by picking up on themes from the day's Bible readings, as well as including items from the morning's news. When I am more confident, I may be able to build in thoughts and prayers arising from the sermon that has just been preached.

Even if the occasion when I am leading the intercessions is not a Communion service, I may focus on the same five areas of concern – with short biddings followed by well-chosen prayers. I will avoid using a long string of prayers without introducing them.

### PRACTICALITIES

I may hope to stand in the middle of the congregation. Indeed I may be asked to do so. I'm very likely to be using a microphone. But this is not so as to address God from a distance, but rather to emphasise that I am speaking on behalf of everyone in the church. However, there may well be people who are hard of hearing. If so, I will do well to stand where people can see my lips moving.

I will use my natural voice but I must be audible, and not swallow the ends of words or sentences. I will use short everyday words, not 'ecclesi-aaa-stical' ones. I will lift my head as I speak; my voice will not carry if I speak into the floor or into the reading desk.

There will be no pretence or sham or show in what I say. The words will be few, the phrases short, with quiet spaces between for others to make the prayer their own. The spaces will not be there because I'm still thinking on my feet what to say or how to say it. Until I am much more experienced, I will write out the biddings or prayers, and will rehearse them to get the tempo and spacing right.

I need to let the Spirit of Jesus speak through my heart and my lips to 'Abba' his Father, our Father, and the Father of all for whom together we will pray. In that confidence alone I will know what to say.