

HANDBOOK FOR READERS AND INTERCESSORS



"For lay people to take a more active part in the liturgy by acting as readers and intercessors."



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A HANDBOOK FOR READERS AND INTERCESSORS

READING ALOUD FROM THE BIBLE

Introduction

The scriptures are given a prominent role in Anglican liturgy. The Church's services of worship are full of scriptural phrases and sentences. This prominence reflects the Anglican church's emphasis through the centuries on the primacy of the scriptures. *"All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work."*
(2 Timothy 3:16-17 - NRSV)



In congregational worship, the liturgy is the work of all the people of all ages (as well as the presider). More lay people are exercising their gifts of ministry by acting as readers and intercessors. This handbook has been prepared to provide some guidance in these important ministries.

The Reader as Prophet

In a scriptural context, a prophet is a person whom God uses to deliver a divinely inspired message to an individual, a group, a people, a church, or even to nations. Any person who reads the divinely inspired Scriptures aloud to a congregation is therefore doing the work of a prophet. It is known that people have been converted by hearing the Word of God read during the worship service. Certainly this part of the liturgy is meant to be an occasion for the revelation of God's truth and purposes for His people. Through reading and the work of the Spirit, the worshipping community and each member of it are led to an encounter with the Word of God.

The concept of the reader as prophet is expressed poetically in a

verse of a contemporary Christian song:

*“These are holy lips.
He’s given us holy lips.
God speaks through these lips,
And so these lips are holy.”*

The Reader as Servant

The call to be a reader is a call to be a servant of God and the congregation. It is also a call to allow the reader to be used by the Holy Spirit in worship. Hence the thought of being called to do the work of a prophet in a servant role builds faith, courage and gratitude as well as prevents the reader from being fearful or proud.



The Reader as Representative

Christians gather at worship to hear the Word of God proclaimed and in listening to the Word to be drawn closer to Jesus who is the Word of God. They express their joy and gratitude for God’s past and present healing acts of redemption, to offer God glory and praise, and to be a sign of faith to the community in which they live. When Christians gather to worship God, parish readers speak on behalf of the congregation and speak also on behalf of God to the congregation, as they recount and extol the qualities and deeds of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as recorded in Scripture. Therefore, the reader speaks as a representative of the whole parish.

The Reader as a Person of Prayer

A reader’s prayerful preparation will bring special blessings upon the congregation and him/herself. When preparing for each reading the reader prays that the Holy Spirit will enable him/her to speak the Sacred Scriptures with clarity, confidence and authority. The reader also prays that the hearts, minds and wills of the reader and the congregation will be open to receive God’s message in the reading.

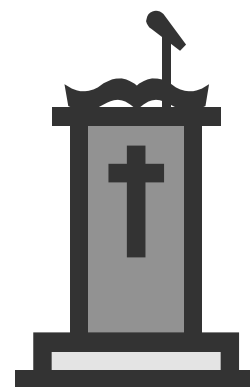


The Reader as Learner

Reading effectively in a worship service requires knowledge and skills that many parishioners have not had reason to develop previously. For example: skill in reading aloud before a congregation; skill in using a microphone; knowledge and familiarity with the Bible; and the structure of the liturgy. Hence a reader is a learner, whose effectiveness can be strengthened by teaching, coaching, practice and feedback and thereby do his/her best with the gifts God has provided.

The Microphone and Sound System

Many churches are equipped with a sound system and some with an audio loop for the hearing impaired. It is therefore very important that the readers become familiar and comfortable with using the microphone. The best way to learn to use a microphone is by practice, preferably with someone to help you by listening. Arrangements could be made to do this at the church after the Sunday service or during the week. The following are some basic guidelines for using the microphone:



1. ***Distance from the Microphone:*** For the best results be no closer than 6 inches (15 cm) and no farther than 12 inches (32 cm) from the microphone. Getting too close causes the air from your speaking to be picked up by the microphone which causes an annoying “popping” sound. When too far away, the microphone has trouble picking up your voice. Try to keep a constant distance from the microphone. Stand with your feet about 12 inches (32 cm) apart and keep both hands on the lectern to prevent any swaying.
2. ***Volume Variance:*** Try to maintain a constant volume level throughout the reading. A good speaker will keep his/her volume level constant, using the tone inflections of the voice for any required dramatic effect.
3. ***Volume Level:*** One of the common mistakes made by persons using a microphone for the first time is assuming that the sound system will do all the work and that all the speaker has

to do is speak in his/her normal voice. This is incorrect. The microphone levels are set to pick up a normal public speaker's type of voice, that is, a voice that can be heard, without amplification, at least three-quarters of the way back in the church. The microphones cannot be turned up any louder without picking up too much of the background noise in the church and in particular they would pick up the amplified noise from the speakers causing the familiar ear-piercing squeal called feedback. Aim your volume level (project your voice) so that people sitting three-quarters of the way back can hear you with the microphone turned off.

4. ***Using your Voice:*** The reader needs to practise reading aloud. The voice is used differently when reading aloud to a gathering in church than during regular conversation. Attention needs to be paid to enunciation, speed, volume, pronunciation, intonation, phrasing and emphasis. Practising reading aloud at home, preferably using a cassette recorder so you can listen to the playback, will yield great benefits. It is important not to read too quickly. There is seldom a complaint that a reader read too slowly! Avoid allowing the voice to fade at the end of sentences and to slur over small words.

Introductory Remarks

In some parishes, the readings may be introduced by **brief** remarks - 2 or 3 sentences, (*not more than 30 seconds*), to give the listener some understanding of the context of the passage, with regard to time, place, situation, when it was written and/or its relationship to the other readings for that day. The reading is announced as follows:

“A READING FROM (E.g. THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES)”
(E.g. THE BOOK OF EXODUS)”

At the end of the reading, pause before ending with the proclamation; “THIS IS THE WORD OF THE LORD”.

The reader then waits for the congregation to add “THANKS BE TO GOD” before stepping down.

Choice of Translation

Individual parishes have preferences for certain translations and these should be followed. Some translations “read” better out loud than others. The translation used for public readings should be consistent from reading to reading. Most churches prefer that the Lectern Bible be used. To enhance the sense of significance of the event, reading from a flimsy piece of paper is discouraged. *The New Revised Standard Version* is recommended for use in public worship.

Bowing and/or Genuflecting

Ordinarily, this is a matter of personal preference and parish practice. It is a sign of respect for the cross located on or above the altar, and/or the Reserved Sacrament, and is done before turning one’s back to the altar. Consistency in practice by readers is helpful.

PREPARATION

There is no substitute for proper preparation for both the reading of the Bible and for leading the Prayers of the People. With proper spiritual and practical preparation, God will be served and the congregation will receive maximum benefit from your efforts.

Spiritual Preparation

Pray for guidance and understanding at the beginning of your preparation. Seek to understand what God is saying in the readings for the day by reflection, and by using whatever commentaries and books are available. Do not hurry, let God speak to you.

Eternal God, who caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning, grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.
Amen.

(The Collect for the Sunday between 6 and 12 November, Proper 32 - BAS)



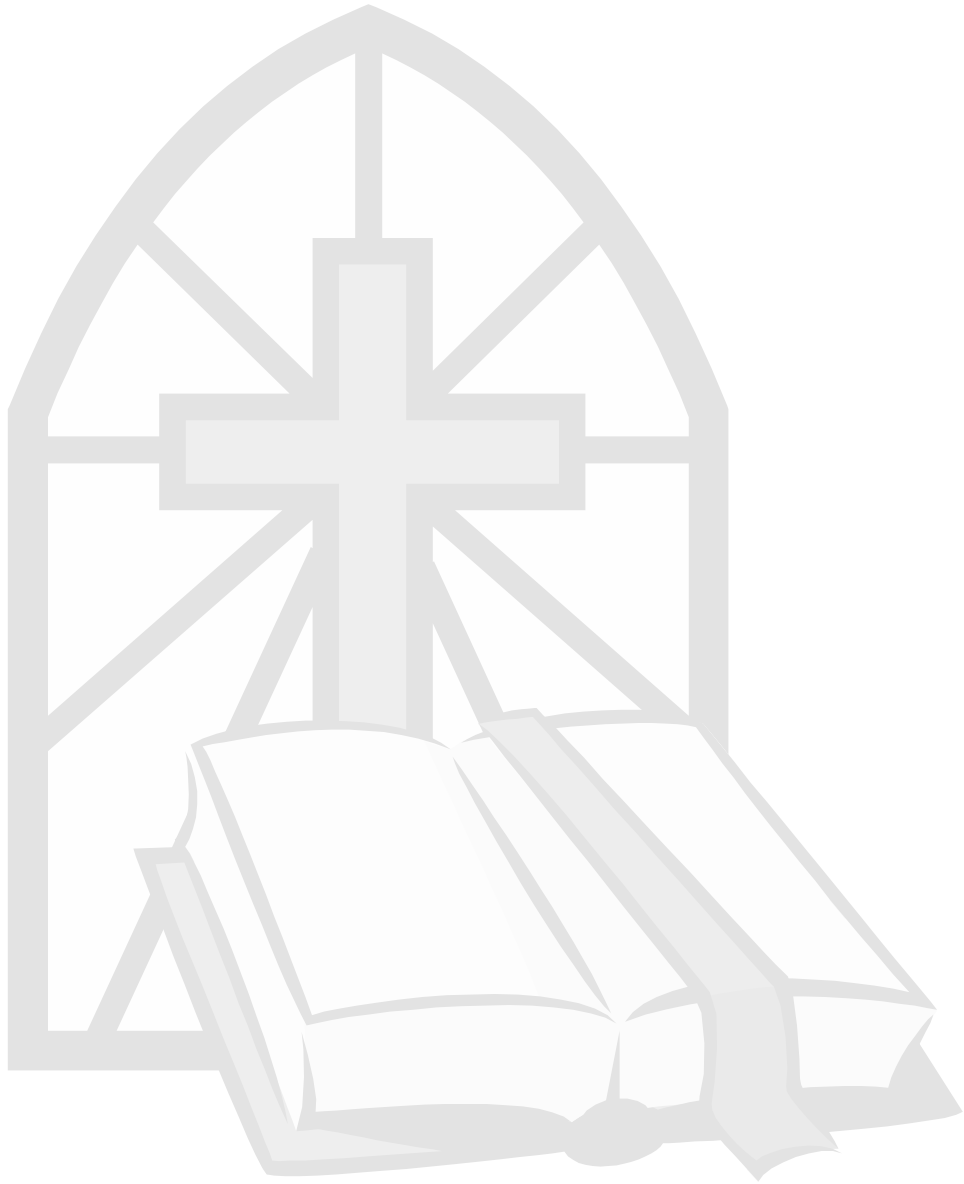
Practical Preparation

It is wise to pre-read the passage aloud to find the pace, rhythm and voice inflections most appropriate for the passage. Check pronunciations of difficult words with a Bible dictionary. It is also helpful to locate the reading in the Bible, and to insert a removable yellow sticker note, or some such marker, before and after the passage to be read.

Sit in a location that is near to the lectern, so that the flow of the service will not be interrupted as you move to the place from which you will read or from which you will lead the prayers of the people. Before turning the microphone on or starting to speak, adjust the microphone position if necessary. After the microphone is positioned properly, turn the microphone switch to “On”.



PERSONAL NOTES:



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INTERCESSIONS—THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

When we "pray for others" we have a particular sense that Christ is our Advocate. Our prayers and praises are acceptable to God through Christ's intercessions.

Introduction

Lord, I am ready for you to use my praying. Guide my thoughts that I will know how to pray. Guide my lips that I will ask for those things that give you glory. And remind me that you can use my requests to change the world. Amen.¹

The Prayers of the People are an expression of God's people gathered around Christ as their head and lord. They are joined in him and with him, in offering prayer to God through Him, with the world God has created and with the human family on their hearts.

Much of the information given for the readers also applies to leaders of the Prayers of the People. It is vitally important that those who have been chosen to lead the intercessions are sensitive to the needs of those whose prayer they focus and direct. This requires reflection and preparation.

There are outlines for intercessions in the worship books. You may use these or adapt them or you may create your own.

What are Intercessions?

It is important to have a clear understanding of intercessory prayer. Intercession comes from two Latin words, *inter*, which means "between" and *cedere*, which means "to go" To intercede is *to go between* two people in the hope of reconciling differences or to plead with someone on behalf of the other. In the context of prayer it means we make sure we bring others into our times of conversation with God.²

¹ Jones, Timothy "The Art of Prayer - a simple guide" Ballantine Books, 1997 - page 117

² Ibid - page 113

Intercession is, by definition, *the act of coming between*. In the Christian sense it means *coming between* God and our relatives, friends and others who have asked us to pray for them and/or situations. An Intercessor acts as a "conduit" for the Holy Spirit to "connect" God's people with God. In our intercessions we are not trying to change God's mind nor are we presuming to say what should be done for our people. God knows about those for whom we pray and their needs, but we desire to express our love and interest.

Intercession is a relationship in which we share our concerns with each other and with God, as a **Christian community**. It is natural that we should hold before God those people and situations in need. The intercessory prayers should focus on God's reconciling, transforming, and healing love.

The worshipping community's prayers are an expression of our belief that people, and the circumstances in the world that affect the human family, can be touched and changed through Jesus Christ and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. The prayers are given shape both by our awareness of human need and the Gospel vision of God's Kingdom.

The Prayers of the People Gathered

In acting as an Intercessor in public worship one is bringing before God the *prayers of the people gathered together*. Ideally, the Intercessor expresses or vocalizes the prayers that the people have presented to him/her to offer on their behalf. The challenge facing parishes is to find ways in which the Intercessor can truly act as the gatherer of prayers and the encourager for others in the congregation to express the prayers that are in their heart.

There is sometimes a tendency to focus on prayers for local concerns and the healing of the sick. It is important to look beyond the immediate local concerns and pray for our political leaders, for business people, teachers, scientists etc., whose decisions affect the whole human family.

The Prayers of the People Are:

1. An expression of what we are concerned about, what we are excited about, of our joy and of thanksgiving.
2. About the world in which we live and concerns for the whole human family.
3. Concerns both of the local and wider church beyond the parish.
4. Representative but brief.
5. Intended to challenge people to continue to pray about these issues.
6. A response to the church season and theme for the day.

The Prayers of the People Are Not:

1. A sermon.
2. The announcements.
3. The occasion for promoting your personal point of view or issues.
4. Long (*they should not take over the liturgy*) - use an economy of words.
5. A monologue in which the people have no part.

Spiritual Preparation

Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you prepare the prayers, remembering that prayer is a gift from God. St. Paul says, *“The spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”* (Romans 8:26-27 - NRSV). Prayer is more than what we do, it is what God does through us.



Preparing the Prayers

1. Check the bulletin: read through the order of service, read the appointed Scripture readings and note the prayer focus.
2. Make sure you know the intercession format that has been chosen for the day. Often churches use different formats each week with seasonal emphasis appropriate to the occasion.
3. Individual parishes have different ways of encouraging parishioners to put particular prayer requests into the intercessions. In some congregations people are encouraged to write prayers, before the worship service begins, in an Intercession Book that is placed near the entrance to the worship space. The Intercessor expresses these prayers when offering the Prayers of the People.
4. Write out the special prayers that you have prepared, or adaptations of the chosen form, including the parish, diocesan, and world-wide Anglican cycle of prayer. This will help to keep the prayers an appropriate length as well as avoid any embarrassing lapses of memory or confusion.
5. Be creative, and be aware of current events, both local, national, and international.
6. Check the prayers that have been written for their integrity. Check for length and for balance, being sure to include both thanksgiving, as well as petition.
7. While preparing for (and leading) the Intercessions, think of the people and situations for whom you are praying.
8. The Prayers of the People could be prepared by 2 or 3 people (*who will have met previously in the week to create the intercessions*). They will then co-lead these Prayers of the People.



Leading the Prayers

1. It is important that the congregation understand that the Prayers of the People truly come from all of the people. Therefore, if practical, the Intercessor can lead from the midst of the people gathered. However, as with the Readings, it is very important the prayers be heard by the whole congregation. If a microphone is necessary to accomplish this, it should be used. The place from which the Prayers are led would be selected with this in mind.
2. When introducing the Prayers of the People make clear to the congregation what the expected response is; in order to reinforce this, the Intercessor can introduce and join in the response. The response could be printed in the bulletin.
3. As well as encouraging members of the congregation to write prayers in the Intercession Book, if such is the practice of the parish, it is important that their actual concerns be verbally expressed and that the intercessor makes space and time for people to articulate their cares and joys, either aloud or in silence.
4. During the prayers, provide for a moment of silence after each intercession, to offer personal and private concerns either verbally or silently. We need to encourage people to uphold the whole human family and all of creation.

REFERENCES:

This handbook was originally prepared for AFP Canada, by the Ottawa Diocese, based on the following resources:

Parish Readers' Handbook; St. Richard's, Ottawa, 1986.

Resources for Liturgy; by Paul Gibson, 1985.

Handbook for Readers and Intercessors; St. Stephen's, Ottawa.

AFP Canada revised edition, 2002.