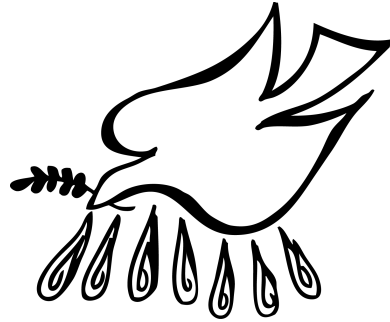


## Leading Intercessions

As Christians, our prayers are united with the prayers of Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father, and who “ever lives to make intercession for us”. As the body of Christ, we have the special privilege and duty to share in the priestly ministry of Christ towards our fellow human beings and towards all creation. This means we come to God with the world on our hearts, bringing its needs and sorrows before him, and we represent the love of God in Christ when we go back out into the world and into our daily lives. This is especially true when we all come together to celebrate the Eucharist.



The prayer of the faithful, or ‘general intercessions’, are prayers offered by the people of God for the needs of the world. This practice dates back to the earliest days of Christianity; in the First Epistle to Timothy, Paul urges that “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions”. The word ‘general’ refers to the fact that these prayers are offered on behalf of all the gathered community; leading the intercessions is thus a wonderful ministry of stirring up God’s people in prayer.

## Preparing to write prayers

Before sitting down to write the intercessions, give yourself some context to help guide what you’re going to say. You may want to...

**Check the readings** for that Sunday ahead of time. Do any themes or images particularly stand out to you? Having some thematic resonance between the scriptures and the intercessions can help to keep them fresh and integrate them into the offering of the mass.

Think more broadly about the **liturgical context**- is it Eastertide? Lent? A particular feast day? It’s not necessary to include explicit references, but the mood or key themes of the season can be useful inspiration.

**Think about what’s going on** globally, nationally, in the Church, and in the community. You don’t need to be a current affairs expert, however- God doesn’t need an update on the news!

**Check the pew sheet** or newsletter email for any names to be included (e.g. of the sick or recently departed), any major notices that may deserve reflecting on in the intercessions, upcoming baptisms, etc.

## Brainstorming your prayers

Once you’ve done a little bit of prep, you can start outlining your prayers. The intercessions shouldn’t last longer than around 4 minutes, and are often shorter. There’s no rule for how long each prayer should be, but overly long prayers can cause people to lose focus.

## Step 1: WHO?

The Church of England suggests that we pray for:

The Church of Christ  
Creation, human society, the Sovereign and those in authority  
The local community  
Those who suffer  
The faithful departed

Within these guidelines, you have the freedom and flexibility to choose who and what we pray for in particular.

Begin by jotting down your ideas for the people you want us to pray for. One prayer for each of the main 5 headings is usually enough; sometimes you might want a second one in case of a particular event or if it's a special occasion. The things you choose to pray for can be **global** or **local**, **general** or **specific**. It's nice to have a mix! If you don't have any specific situation or group of people in mind, for any of the headings, that's fine; you can simply use the heading itself as the basis for your prayer.

Note: There may be some intentions (e.g. for the sick or recently departed) that the vicar wants us to pray for every week. If in doubt, ask!

## Step 2: WHAT?

Think about what we are asking God to do for the people we are praying for. Remember we are **asking God to act**, not just updating him on the news; so don't be afraid to use imperative verbs! Here are some examples to help you:

*GIVE /SAVE /DEFEND /HEAL/ STRENGTHEN /EMBOLDEN  
/DELIVER /UPHOLD /INSPIRE /COMFORT/ RAISE UP/ BE  
WITH/ RENEW/ GUIDE /FORGIVE*

Next to each of your proposed intentions, try to write down one or two suggestions for what we want God to do in this situation.

## Step 3: WHY?

Now that we've identified how we want God to help, have a think about **why!** What's the intended outcome? Whatever our specific prayer may be, our deeper prayer is always "**Thy kingdom come**". Thinking about the bigger picture is helpful in uniting our prayers with God's purposes for the world, even if you may choose not to spell it out in every prayer.

Here is an example of what your prayer might look like at this point:

*Who?* The leaders of this country as they prepare for the election.

*What?* That God would grant them wisdom and discernment.

*Why?* So that they would govern with justice and work for the good of the most vulnerable.

## Bringing it all together

Now that you've identified the WHO, WHAT, and WHY, you can bring it all together and decide how you want to frame your prayers. There are lots of ways to do this, but here are two easy ways.

### A: Direct Prayer

In this style we simply pray directly to God, addressing ourselves to him. You may choose how to invoke God; you can vary this according to the petition (for example, "God of peace"), but a simple 'Almighty God' or 'Heavenly Father' will do just as well!

Here is an example, using the above intention.

*Heavenly Father, as the election draws near, we pray for the leaders of this country. Grant them wisdom and discernment in all their decisions, that they might govern the nation with justice and work for the good of the most vulnerable.*

If you're feeling more ambitious, you can also flesh this out by reference to an attribute or action of God relevant to the petition you're about to make; this is very common in **collect** prayers.

*O God, **who** art the author of peace and lover of concord...  
Almighty Father, **whose** will is to restore all things...  
Merciful God, **you** have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass our understanding...*

### B: Bidding Prayers

A traditional and easy way of leading intercessions is by using 'biddings'. This is especially useful if you don't really feel like writing prayers, or you feel nervous praying in public. In this approach, you are **telling the people what to pray for** rather than praying out loud. This means you do **not** address God directly, but instead address the congregation and refer to God in the **third person**. The general formula is "Let us pray for.... That...." For example:

*As the election draws near, **let us pray for the leaders of this country; that** God would grant them wisdom and discernment in all their decisions, to govern the nation with justice and work for the good of the most vulnerable.*

### The Best of Both Worlds!

You can also choose to **blend the two styles** by using a short bidding as a headline, followed by a prayer. For example:

*Let us pray for the leaders of the nation.*

*Heavenly Father, as the election draws near, grant to those in power the gifts of wisdom and discernment; that they would govern the nation with justice and work for the good of the most vulnerable.*

## Responses

Your prayers should be broken up with responses after each intention. The most commonly used are:

Lord, in your mercy  
**Hear our prayer**

Lord, hear us  
**Lord, graciously hear us**

Using responses that everyone knows will make life easier for you and for the congregation.

## Silence is Golden

Your focus will inevitably be on the words you say, but don't forget to consider the role of silence in prayer! A few ways to incorporate silence into your intercessions are:

- Pausing for a few seconds between the prayer and the responses, to give people time to process what you've said and join their prayers to your petition. This is especially important if you've chosen to use Bidding Prayers, since you are telling the people what to pray for; they need time to do so!
- Setting aside a specific moment (about ten seconds or so) for people to pray silently for their own intentions. You can signal this with words such as,  
*"In a moment of silence, let us bring before the Lord those who are most on our hearts and those who have asked for our prayers"*,  
...and bring this to a close by once again leading us in the response. This is by no means necessary, but it can be nice to create that space for people to tell God what's on their hearts.

And finally...

*"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".*

God knows what is needed better than we do. As with everything, we offer what we can to him and trust him to do the rest!