

- introducing the Lord's Prayer;
- giving the Concluding Prayer and Blessing.

Prayer & Silence

In the liturgy prayer is greater than the spoken texts prayed by the presider and the assembly. Prayer is the shared silent response to a passage of scripture, the graceful lighting of a candle or placing of some incense on an incense burner.

Every liturgy needs moments of silence so that people can reflect on what they have heard and listen to the voice of God speaking to them. Silence helps to give a celebration pace and flow leading from one element to another. Different groups will have different capacities for silence and those leading the prayer need to be sensitive to those who have gathered to pray together.

Prayer and Reflection

*May the spoken words of my mouth,
the thoughts of my heart,
win favour in your sight, O Lord,
my rescuer, my rock!*

Psalm 18:15

*Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Serve the Lord with gladness.
Come before him, singing for joy.*

Psalm 99:1-2

*I will thank the Lord with all my heart
in the meeting of the just and their assembly.*

Psalm 110:1

*Let my prayer come before you like incense,
the raising of my hands like an evening oblation.*

Psalm 140:2

This leaflet is one a series of resources prepared by the Liturgy Office to accompany the publication of *Celebrating Sunday Evening Prayer* and to support parish celebrations of the Prayer of the Church. Excerpts from *Celebrating Sunday Evening Prayer* and this leaflet © 2006 Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. Excerpts from *The Psalms, a new translation* © 1963, The Grail, England. *Celebrating Sunday Evening Prayer* is published by Canterbury Press [www.scm-canterbury.co.uk]. Further resources can be found at www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Hours

**Liturgy
Office**
ENGLAND
& WALES

CELEBRATING SUNDAY EVENING PRAYER

A Guide for Presiders

Evening Prayer is part of the ancient tradition of the Church.

Christians have always marked the morning and evening hours of the day with prayer. The earliest sources outside the New Testament tell us that they prayed the 'Our Father' at morning and evening. Other early documents tell us that they blessed the lighting of lamps at the hour of sunset by calling on Christ, the 'joyful light of God the Father.'

Still today, as the light of day dims, the Church gathers for her Evening Prayer, to offer thanksgiving to God for the gift of Christ, the light of the world.

In her prayer the Church also calls to mind her baptismal vocation to die to sin with Christ and live with him in holiness.

At Vatican II the Church urged that this ancient tradition of prayer should truly become once more the prayer of the whole Church. In particular it was said that:

Pastors should see to it that the chief hours, vespers particularly, are celebrated in common in church on Sundays and the more solemn feasts.
Sacrosanctum Concilium 100

The intention was to correct a tendency to see such prayer as more or less reserved to the clergy.

Over the past forty years, and especially since the texts have been published in English many other people have begun to pray Morning and Evening Prayer. However the published form of this prayer is sometimes seen as a little complex for those who do not pray the Office together every day.

Recently an adaptation of Evening Prayer has been prepared, firmly based on *The Divine Office* but better suited for parish use, and especially for weekly Sunday celebrations. *Celebrating Sunday Evening Prayer* has been authorised

for use in England and Wales by the Bishops' Conference Department for Christian Life and Worship

The use of this form of prayer provides a very healthy complement to the parish's celebration of the Eucharist, and helps it with the worthy keeping of Sunday, the Lord's Day.

Structure

The liturgy of Evening Prayer, sometimes known as Vespers, has the following basic format. There might be slight variations how your community chooses to celebrate Sunday Evening Prayer.

Introduction

- Hymn
- Opening Responses
- Opening Rite: Light *or*
- Opening Rite: Incense *or*
- Evening Thanksgiving

Psalmody

- Seasonal Psalm
followed by Psalm Prayer
- Second Psalm
[optional]
- New Testament Canticle

Word

- Scripture Reading
- Silence *or*
- Response
- Magnificat

Prayer

- Intercessions
- Lord's Prayer
- Concluding Prayer & Blessing

Ministry of Presider

All ministries are ministries of service, enabling the prayer of the community. CSEP, page 14

The main consideration is to ensure that the celebration is not too inflexible or elaborate nor concerned merely with the formal observance of rules, but that it matches the reality of what is being celebrated. The primary aim must be to inspire hearts with a desire for genuine prayer and to show that the celebration of God's praise is a thing of joy. General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours 279

A good presider is the leader of the assembly, able to open and conclude prayer, proclaim in word and song, lead when needed, follow when necessary.

The ministry of presider requires:

- a sense of prayer;
- a presence through word, gesture and silence;
- a grasp of the liturgy itself, an idea of how the various parts fit together;
- an ability to enable others in their ministries;
- a perceptible competence in leading liturgical celebration.

A priest or deacon exercises the ministerial role of presider. Where there is a need others may lead this form of liturgy.

In Evening Prayer there is no obligation to give presiders a special chair or to set them apart. As first among equals they need to be part of the assembly yet also seen and heard by all. In some communities the various roles may be shared.

The role of the presider will vary depending on the choices made by the preparation group. It may include the following:

- leading the Opening Responses;
- praying the Collect that concludes the Opening Rite: Light or Incense;
- proclaiming the Evening Thanksgiving;
- saying the Psalm Prayer;