

**Choirs or music groups** have a ministry in evening prayer supporting and enhancing the song of the assembly. As a group they can act as cantors — leading the psalms and canticles. A motet or other piece of music might be sung as part of the response after the scripture reading. The text and the music should reflect the themes of the season, evening prayer or the particular passage of scripture.

At more festive celebrations there is opportunity to sing more elaborate settings of the psalms and canticles. Indication of 'other settings' is offered with each particular text. Care should be taken that the choice of setting does not remove the role of the assembly in praying the text. A celebration of evening prayer would be unbalanced where the main components (psalms, canticles, and intercessions) were sung by the choir alone. As a rule the assembly should always have a role in the singing of the Magnificat.

## Silence

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

*Give thanks to the Lord upon the harp,  
with a ten-stringed lute sing him songs.*

*O sing him a song that is new,  
play loudly, with all your skill.*

Psalm 32:2–3

*O praise him with the sound of the trumpet,  
praise him with lute and harp.*

*Praise him with timbrel and dance,  
praise him with strings and pipes.*

Psalm 100:1

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](http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Hours)

**Liturgy  
Office**  
ENGLAND  
& WALES

# CELEBRATING SUNDAY EVENING PRAYER

## A Guide for Musicians

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 Musician

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

Music is integral to liturgy. The human voice has always been the primary instrument of worship and the principal minister of music is the assembly.

Many of the texts of Evening Prayer are intended to be sung: the hymn, the psalm and canticle and the Magnificat. Music brings another dimension to the celebration. It allows all to sing with one voice and it can help give expression to the text. Communities should choose carefully what it is sung according to what is available and to their resources.

Through repetition it is hoped that people will become familiar with settings. Repeat the musical settings of some parts such as the Magnificat or the New Testament Canticle from season to season allowing other parts which change with the season to be learnt with ease.

For parishes with few musical resources start with just singing the hymn and a metrical version of the Magnificat. Omit the Light and Incense service and the New Testament Canticle. (See notes in Appendix 3.)

A **cantor** can lead the assembly, sing alone as required and also teach new settings. A second cantor or musician may seem a luxury but they can provide a lead for the assembly and a contrast and help to the cantor. An **organist** or **instrumentalist** helps sustain the singing and through music can create atmosphere and allow reflection.

The role of the **musician** will be to support the sung prayer of the assembly, the cantor and other ministers. This will be primarily through accompanying the hymn, psalms and canticles and other sung texts. Care should be taken the accompaniment supports the singing rather than obscures it. In Evening Prayer there opportunities for instrumental music:

- before the liturgy begins to create an atmosphere of prayer;
- in response to the Scripture reading;
- at the end of the liturgy as a postlude.

Instrumental music should reflect the themes of season, evening prayer or the stage in the liturgy.