



How to Use
the Prayer Book

HOW TO USE THE PRAYER BOOK. Published by
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“It doesn’t matter how bad the minister is, we can still have a good service.”

A high school freshman was explaining one strength of the Episcopal Church, in an interdenominational discussion. She was right.

The thing that appeals most about the Episcopal Church to those who have ben brought up in a different tradition, is the dignity, reverence and beauty of the worship. This is also what sometimes makes Episcopalians say, the first time they attend any other church “It just does not seem like Church.”

It is also true, of course, that many people dislike the first Episcopal service they attend. Praying out of a book seems artificial. The congregation, instead of sitting quietly, has to be doing something all the time, standing up. for praise, kneeling down for prayer, ‘turning back and forth in the Prayer Book. It is not only confusing but embarrassing unless they know how to follow the service.

This leaflet has a double function.

1. First of all it extends an invitation to newcomers to come to Episcopal services. A few simple directions will help you to feel at home, so that you can forget the strangeness and become part of this common response to God.

2. Secondly, it suggests to Episcopalians and others that they take the Prayer Book into their homes, instead of leaving it behind in church. We miss a great deal by not making use of the treasures of this common heritage of English-speaking Christians, individually and in family life.

The Prayer Book can be regarded as a kind of handbook or manual, such as business, military or fraternal organizations publish. It is the Christian company’s manual through which “with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name.”

It sets forth the way in which, before this country was settled, Christians in England had been functioning collectively for many years. In fact, the Prayer Book incorporates, notably in the Communion

Service, the essential way in which the body of Christians has carried on its distinctive function of common worship since the early centuries of the Christian era, as well as significant modifications in their conduct from the 16th to the 20th century.

Furthermore, it brings the whole cycle of human life from birth to death within the orbit of God's purpose and love, as those are communicated to men by His living word and Holy Spirit in common worship, in the sacraments, and in Holy Scripture in which the Prayer Book abounds and which impregnate all its worship.

DIRECTIONS FOR NEWCOMERS

The reason for a Book of Common Prayer is to enable the whole congregation to join actively in the whole service. The minister is the conductor-you are the orchestra. The Prayer Book is like the music score for you to follow. There is no audience; everyone is a player, so open the book and participate (the pages are numbered identically in all copies of the Prayer Book).

Morning or Evening Prayer

Skip fifty-seven pages of small print and you will find Morning Prayer which begins on page 3 (p.21*). Turn to page 6 (p.23*) to make the General Confession with "the whole congregation", pray the Lord's Prayer and say the answers to the Versicles on pages 7-8 (p.25*). When the Confession is omitted these answers follow immediately after the opening sentences of Scripture.

The Canticle Venite on page 9 is then sung or said by the whole congregation. It helps if you keep your finger at that page when the Psalm for the day is announced, because after the Old Testament lesson you will join in one of the songs from Scripture on page 10 or 11 (p.26-27*). The Psalm numbers are found at the top corners of the page over half way through the book.

Keep the Prayer Book open while the New Testament lesson is read to be ready to join in one of the Canticles on pages 14-15

*Numbers in brackets are for Evening Prayer.

(p.28- 290), the Apostles' Creed that follows and the answers to the Versicles, page 16 (pp. 30- 31*).

The particular prayer (or Collect) for that day comes first. And then some or all the prayers that follow are said by the minister. Often the congregation says the General Thanksgiving on page 19 (p.33°) aloud with the minister.

If you are unfamiliar with the Service these simple directions will help to avoid that “lost feeling” so that from the first you can be a participating member of the orchestra of corporate worship in Morning or Evening Prayer, or in the Ante-Communion at Communion Service as described below.

Holy Communion

The Holy Communion instituted by Christ is a central act of common worship of the Church. The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper is found beginning page 67.

When the Decalogue is read, join in saying (or singing) the responses in italics, pages 68- 69, or after Christ's Summary of the Law the response in italics, page 70.

The Collects, Epistles and Gospels for each Sunday, Saint's Day and Holy Day of the year are found from page 90 to page 269. It makes it easier to turn back to page 71 to join in the Nicene Creed, which expresses the historic Faith of the Universal Church, if you keep a finger at that page. It is an ancient custom to stand when we listen to the words of Christ in the Gospel and to say the response on page 70 before the Gospel is read and sometimes the second response afterwards.

The Ante-Communion is a service of self-examination, Scripture and preaching, and ends after the sermon. There is frequently a convenient opportunity given for those who do not wish to remain for the Sacrament of Holy Communion to leave during the singing of a hymn or anthem. Whether or not you are prepared to receive

Communion yourself, you can participate in the worship by staying for the full service.

The Offertory, which is our response to the Gospel in action as well as words, then begins with a sentence from Scripture. The sacrificial gifts of the people are received and presented; the bread and wine are placed upon the Holy Table; prayer is offered for the whol of Christ's Church, and, in response to the invitation, the people offer themselves in penitence saying together the General Confession on page 75.

The Consecration includes thanksgiving, praise and prayer, our Lord's words of insti- tution, the offering of bread and wine and of the worshippers themselves. It begins as the people join first in the answers on page 76 and then in the very ancient hymn of adora- tion. "Holy, Holy, Holy" on page 77. On the great Feast Days one of the Proper Prefaces is read immediately preceding this hymn. The Prayer of Consecration follows, pages 80-81.

After the Communion and Thanksgiving the people join in the "Gloria in Excelsis" on page 84 or some other hymn and then kneel for the Benediction.

A MAP

The Chamber of Commerce in large cities often provide hotel guests with a free map of the downtown area and notes about points of interest. Similarly, this may help you to locate unexplored sections of the Prayer Book.

To begin with, do not overlook the Table of Contents inside the title page. Forget for the present the technical pages indicated by Roman numerals except for the Preface. Read the last paragraph of that great document of 18th century English on page vi. It expresses cogently the intent of the Prayer Book and the spirit in which to examine and use it.

The first section of the Prayer Book proper, pages 1-63, contains the regular and occasional public services with a great collection of

prayers. Look at a few of them: For Our Country, page 36, For Missions, page 38, For Schools, page 42, For the Sick, page 45, Thanksgiving for Recovery and a Safe Return, page 53.

The second section, pages 65-269, contains the Holy Communion with the classic condensed prayers known as Collects which are appointed with the Epistles and Gospels for use throughout the Church Year. Three quarters of this whole section consists of selections from the New Testament for you to read.

In the third section, pages 271-342 “the critical stages of one’s life and growth from birth to death are consecrated to God’s eternal purposes through the corporate prayer of the whole Church: Baptism in infancy, Offices of Instruction in childhood, Confirmation in adolescence, Marriage and child-birth, sickness and old age and death.” Explore these as you and those you love undergo these experiences.

Incidentally, the clearest simple statement of what the Episcopal Church believes and stands for is found in the answers given on pages 283-295. Your bounden duty as a Church member is state on page 291.

The Psalms comprise the next section, pages 343-525. Use the topical index on page ix in the front of the book to help you locate the parts most appropriate to your needs. This collection is mankind’s greatest devotional literature, shared by Jews and Christians alike.

Since most of us never attend an Ordination, the next section containing the Forms for Ordaining Clergy and Consecrating Churches, pages 527-574, are almost unknown territory. The character and function of the Ministry is powerfully set forth pages 539-541, as in the intent of the services of the Church in the prayers, pages 566-567.

Family Prayer, beginning page 585, includes prayers for a variety of occasions; pages 594-600 are most rewarding for personal use as well

as by members of the family together, perhaps beginning by using at meals one of the graces on page 600.

The point of this map is to help you find your way into the great company of believers through the ages whose lives have been sustained and transformed by the known and felt presence and the power of God in common prayer and worship.

“IN CHURCH”

The Prayer Book is for use in Church. However, we are in church from the time of our Baptism and not merely when we are in a church building or attending divine service. “The Church is the Body of which Jesus Christ is the Head and all baptized people are members” (page 290).

Christ seems remote from us when we become separated from that Body. By taking the Prayer Book into our life during the week, we become enabled to function as living instead of dismembered parts of the Body.

This is not to suggest that private prayer should be limited to established forms, however charged with power and beauty they may be. Our real problem, however, is that many of us are much too confined in our praying already; but what confines us is the limited and self-centered forms of childhood prayer.

Small wonder that prayer is often neglected. Far from limiting us, the use of the great prayers of the Church can increase the range and scope of our prayer, so that we may grow “to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” by allowing the vitality and power of the whole Body to nourish us.

But where to begin? Some pattern is needed by everyone. The Prayer Book suggests one, page 6, “...humbly to acknowledge our sins before God, to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his most holy word, and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary as well for the body as the soul.”

First read one of the sentences from Scripture at the beginning of the Order for Daily Morning Prayer, page 3, or Evening Prayer, page 21, to recollect into whose Presence we make bold to come. Pause long enough after each phrase of the General Confession, page 6 (23) to make quite specific the ways in which this applies to you personally. Repeat the Lord's Prayer. Duration of time is no consequence. What matters is the intensity with which attention is focused. The obstacles which block our access to God are of our making, not His. Not until we recognize them for what they are does He remove them from our path to reunite us with Him. God's decisive encounter with mankind is found in the Bible. Through the written word His living word still speaks anew. But here again we know not where to begin nor how to continue. The Prayer Book offers us a pattern to follow. Turning back to the small type on pages x-xlv you will find a Psalm and a short passage from both Old and New Testaments appointed for every morning and every evening of the Christian Year with their double choice for Sundays. The church bulletin board or calendar will tell you where you are in the Christian Year at this moment. Read the Psalm appointed and the Lesson from the Old or New Testament for today. Continue the practice each day for a period and you will find God speaking to you in new ways.

Now return to prayer. Using the Collect for last Sunday first, then in your own words, or using prayers you have found in the book which give wings to the thoughts of your heart, let your prayer become a channel through which the righteousness of God and His inexhaustible love may flow, not only to all whom you love but to the whole fellowship of His people, and through that Church to embrace with His arms and redeem with His grace all mankind.

Second printing

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