

From the very beginning of our worship experience today,
we turn to our guide book, the Book of Common Prayer.

While many protestant denominations
do not use a guide book like we do,
the vast majority of Christians worldwide use a worship guide
and practice the same form of worship Sunday after Sunday.
The Roman Catholics, both East and West, call the book a Missal.
The Orthodox Christians call it the Byzantine Rite.
We Anglicans use the Book of Common Prayer.
That makes up about 2/3 of all Christians in the world.

The use of a guide goes back probably
to the beginning of Christian worship.

The earliest document found thus far is the *Didache*,
also known as *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*
from around the mid-2nd Century.

Of course, we read in the Letters of Paul an admonition to worship
in an orderly fashion,
based on the Last Supper of Christ with his disciples.

The *Didache* has three main sections dealing with
Christian ethics,
rituals such as baptism and Eucharist,
and Church organization.

The original Book of Common Prayer was finished
and published in 1549.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer,
was the inspiration and principal author.
Cranmer used many sources for the book.

He took the eight prayer hours of the Benedictine Order
and reduced it to three.

Matins became Morning Prayer,
Vespers became Evening Prayer
and Compline stayed as a prayer before sleeping.

He took the Catholic Missal and the English alterations,
primarily from the Sarum Rite

and produced a new order of Communion.
He included the Comfortable Words, and Prayer of Humble Access
and attached them to the Eucharistic prayer in different places
which made more sense to him.
He took private Priestly prayers and made them public,
such as the one we begin our service with,
the Prayer for Purity.
He ordered that communion in both kinds, bread and wine,
be offered.
But probably most importantly he wrote the book in English
and commended worship in the new Church of England
in English not Latin.
His purpose was to create a book that needed only
one other book for complete worship, the Bible.
The first book was quickly replaced by a second edition in 1552.
Parliament had invited the Lutheran Martin Bucer
to come to England
and advise them on the new theology of Martin Luther.
One of the things he did was to recommend changes
to the Book of Common Prayer
to reduce the “Popish” elements,
including in the Eucharistic Prayer,
and introduce more reformist ideas.
Since the English Church was a state church,
Parliament was in charge and had the final say.
At that time Parliament was under the control
of Calvinist reformers,
so they happily poked at the established church
by forcing a change in the Book.
One of the areas that they changed most was in the rubrics.
The instructions that provide guidance to the Priest
and congregation in the form of worship.
One of the huge issues was whether
to kneel to receive Communion or not.

Kneeling, candles, vestments, crosses, windows, paint
and even architecture of church buildings were hot topics
from the beginning of the Church of England even until now.

Cranmer was a genius in religious writing.

I ran across this sentence in a book I used for research.

“While Cranmer could produce the most majestic phrases and seem
to imply much by them, he could also be deliberately vague. At
times his language resembles a kind of verbal incense that offers an
attractive religious haze but no clarity of meaning.”

The English Book of Common Prayer went through a few editions
and finally the 1662 version gained

both political and religious acceptance.

But all further attempts at revision have failed in Parliament.

So even today 355 years later the “authorized version
of the Book of Common Prayer in the Church of England”
is the 1662 version.

When our Revolutionary War was over

and our denomination began to take shape,

we needed a version of the Book that suited our unique needs.

For instance, we really didn't need to pray
for the King or Queen.

Our first edition was in 1789.

The language was in a form that was closer to the 1549 book.

As a result, the American Episcopalian liturgical tradition
is more "catholic" and "high church"

than its English counterpart.

Finally after over 103 years, a new version was approved
by the General Convention in 1893.

Just 25 years later a bold attempt was made to revise the Book.

Conservatives ruled the day and the 1928 version was approved.

In many parts of our church,

this is still the preferred Prayer Book ,

not to mention our 8AM Rite I service

which uses language almost from the 1928 edition.

Revolution came to the Episcopal Church
when the 1979 edition was produced.
Aside from the debate over the ordination of a Bishop in 2003,
no issue has divided the church more
than the new radical Prayer Book.

The language changed,
the principal service changed
and the theology of the book changed
away from the 1928 penitential theology.

The baptismal covenant was introduced
and public baptism and the Sunday Eucharist
became the norm.

The division seems to have died down with time,
so I'm sure we will have another new prayer book in 2030 or 2050.
Some things move slowly in the church.

My personal first encounter with the Book of Common Prayer
was with the 1928 version.

When I began attending worship at St. Paul's in Waco,
I came to love the language and form of worship.
For example, things change for me personally
when I say the Prayer for Purity.

That simple prayer transports me from today
to some other reality, something eternal.

I realized that the book can be used for personal devotions.
In fact, I think it is about the best devotional book ever.
It can be used for personal and family prayer.
It is used for public prayer in special occasions.

One of my personal friends a Chaplain in the Civil Air Patrol
is a retired Assembly of God pastor,
he "found a wonderful resource one day,"
and now carries the Book of Common Prayer
with him all the time.

Another friend in the CAP is Calvary Chapel pastor,
he too uses the Book in his pastoral care responsibilities.

Other denominations have used the Book as a resource for their worship.

John Wesley sent a simplified version
of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer
to the “Methodists in America.”

The United Methodist Church’s Book of Worship
is based on the Book of Common Prayer.

Lutheran Worship books have mirrored our Book,
and their Worship Books have influenced our revisions.

When one talks about the BCP,

the question arises “which Book of Common Prayer”?

That’s because there are around a dozen different varieties
all produced to fit the needs of the worshipping people.

For example, the New Zealand Prayer Book
is in English, Maori and Tongan.

One of the truly fascinating things I read was the use of the Prayer Book
in the Unitarian Universalist denomination.

The American mother church of the Unitarians is Kings Chapel
in Boston. By the way, Kings Chapel was also
the mother church for two Anglican churches in Boston
-Old North Church of Paul Revere fame
and Trinity Church on Copley Plaza which was on the
far outskirts of Boston Commons in those days.

In 1785, a lay person in that chapel took the BCP altered it
and produced a non-Trinitarian version

The preface of the 1986 version of their Prayer Book says this:

“In an age of liturgical change and experiment, we at King’s
Chapel are sometimes asked why we keep the Prayer Book.
In fact, it is the Prayer Book that has kept us.”

In spite of the length of time to the next revision
of the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer,
the Standing Liturgical Commission of the church
was commissioned to continue to release supplements.

I have used two Eucharistic Prayers
from Enriching our Worship, volume one.

Our burial rites have been supplemented by volumes 2 and 3.

Recognition of new ministry is volume 4

and Volume 5 contains Liturgies and Prayers

Related to Childbearing, Childbirth, and Loss.

Another volume which didn't receive the Enriching our Worship designation is called *Changes*.

It is a volume full of prayer for rites of passage in our lives.

The Commission also published *Enriching our Music*,

two volumes of new service music and canticle settings.

It can be said that the one thing the BCP does for us

is to create the environment for togetherness.

We can disagree and argue with each other,

but the genius of our faith is that we can worship

together as one body.

Over the years in many settings,

people have told me how much our form of worship

means to them.

We together participate as a congregation,

and we engage in Episcopal callisthenics together.

Our worship is not dominated by one person

or by a band performing to an audience seated in a concert venue.

We all participate - clergy and lay alike.

We all voice and sing as a body to the tempo and tune

of the Book of Common Prayer.

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