

The Prayers of the People: How to write them and how to lead them.

The whole liturgy is a quilt of prayers, every one of which is a prayer of the people. Even those prayers which the Celebrant alone says are meant to be prayed by the whole congregation. But at the center of all these prayers is a collection specifically called the Prayers of the People, because they are the prayers the congregation says on behalf of the whole world. These are the prayers in which the people begin to speak as priests. Interceding with God on behalf of others and giving thanks to God on behalf of others, the Prayers of the People employ the people as a priesthood, whose ministry is to advocate with God for the whole creation.

It is especially appropriate, then, that these prayers be led by the laity, and no less appropriate that they be composed by members of the congregation. Though our Prayer Book bequeaths us a treasure trove of prayers to use for this purpose, at St John's we also employ the gifts of our people in writing prayers that give voice both to our faith and the cry of our hearts. Guided by scripture, tradition, and the relationships that form the life of our particular parish, our prayer writers support our priesthood by giving us words to which we can heartily assent, and which cultivate in us the humility and the compassion of our great high priest, mediator and advocate, Jesus Christ.

This guide is meant to serve you as you serve us in this way. Never hesitate to call upon your fellow writers for advice and feedback, for they are a most humble and encouraging group of colleagues. And rest assured that the clergy of St John's are always at your disposal too.

Your brother in Christ,
Fr Steve

What are the Prayers of the People?

Our Prayers of the People are the intercessions – prayers requests and thanksgivings – of all the people in our community. With these intercessions, we bring others into our conversation with God. We express our love and interest in the needs and thanksgivings of those for whom we pray.

Who can write them?

Anyone can write a prayer. Anyone can be a conduit for the Holy Spirit to connect us with God. Anyone in our community can share our joys and concerns with each other and God.

When and how often do we write them?

The Prayers of the People are written and prayed seasonally: i.e. Advent, Epiphany, Lent, Proper. A prayer may last the duration of a season with variations that reflect the readings of each particular Sunday. Variations may also reflect holidays or Saints' Days. A prayer may last for an entire season without changes because it contains a theme that is appropriate for the entire season. The goal for the prayers of each season is to reflect the continuity of the season and its celebration. For examples of how this works, see the sample prayers at the end of the guide.

How do we write them?

First, we pray for guidance; prayer is a gift from God.

Second, we think about the season, and read and pray Scripture and prayers associated with it. We are mindful of whether the season's service is Rite I or Rite II as that may influence the prayer's style.

Third, we keep it simple. Versicles (leader parts) can be of varying length, but short responses (people parts) are best for allowing the people to comprehend what the leader says and lift it up to God with their response.

It is perfectly acceptable to adapt existing prayers either from the Prayer Book or other resource. If you are so inspired, it is also perfectly acceptable to write your own prayer.

We always include intercessions for: 1) thanksgivings, 2) needs and concerns of the community, 3) the departed, and 4) our mission partners.

Members of our community are encouraged to write prayer requests for these intercessions on the Prayers of the People list. This list may be circulated on Saturday morning, and is placed on the podium in the narthex before the services on Sunday.

The Book of Common Prayer recommends these intercessions:

The Universal Church, its members, and its mission

The Nation and all in authority

The welfare of the world

The concerns of the local community

Those who suffer and those in any trouble

The departed (with commemoration of a saint when appropriate)

A prayer writer may add any intercessions they are led by the Spirit to include.

The last line of the prayer can be written to lead into the confession that follows, or you may use the lead-in from the Prayer Book. Sample prayers at the end of the guide show examples of this.

Resources for writing prayers:

The lectionary.

The season of the year.

The feast of the day (e.g., All Saints).

Any text from the liturgy (e.g., phrases borrowed from the Rite 1 Eucharist, the Canticles, the Daily Office).

The newspaper (i.e., local, national or global distress or celebration).

Where are they used?

The Prayers of the People are printed in the weekly service bulletin and are generally prayed at the 10:00 AM Holy Eucharist, Feast and Holy Day Services. But some services, like Baptism, do not have Prayers of the People and some services may not have an intercession list.

Our prayers may be edited before appearing in the bulletin, but Fr. Steve, or other Prayers of the People writers, will work with us to ensure that the edited prayer remains true to our intentions.

How do we lead the Prayers of the People?

To ready ourselves to lead, the first two suggestions are the same:

Pray for guidance; prayer is a gift from God.

Think about the season, and read and pray Scripture and prayers associated with it.

Arrive early and be ready to pray. Reflect on leading the intercessions that come from all of us.

The Prayers of the People will be led from the nave (your pew). Get the microphone from the front pew, bring it to your seat, and familiarize yourself with turning it on and off. Return the microphone to the front pew at The Peace so the Celebrant can use it for announcements.

You should make yourself known to a Deacon or Celebrant as Prayers of the People leader; they will bring you the prayer list from the narthex after the community has added its prayer requests.

Make note of where each type of intercession occurs in the Prayers to ensure the people's prayer requests on the list are appropriately included.

Add a period of silence after each intercession to allow the community time and space to express their joys and concerns aloud or in silence. In this silence, we also allow God time and space to speak to us about our joys and concerns.

The congregation will expect you to start the confession that follows the prayer.

Sample Prayers

Adapted from the St. Francis Prayer

This prayer is being prayed through the last five weeks of the season of Epiphany in 2014. The prayer is appropriate for the entire season without changes because of the references to the beatitudes which are studied throughout the season.

Leader: Lord, make us instruments of thy peace.

People: For blessed are the peace-makers.

Leader: Where there is hatred, let us sow love;

People: For God is love.

Leader: Where there is injury, pardon;

People: For you pardon us.

Leader: Where there is discord, unity;

People: So the world will know you were sent.

Leader: Where there is doubt, faith;

People: For faith is the substance of things hoped for.

Leader: Where there is error, truth.

People: For you are the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Leader: Where there is despair, hope;

People: For hope is the evidence of things not seen.

Leader: Where there is sadness, joy.

People: For there is joy in Heaven over one who repents.

Leader: Where there is darkness, light;

People: For we are your children, and you said "Let there be light."

Leader: O divine Master, grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; we ask you to uphold your ministers in the work of consolation. We especially pray for: Presiding Bishop Katharine, Bishop Bill, Father Steve, Deacon Paul, Deacon Sandy, and St. John's lay ministers and staff.

People: To be understood as to understand,

Leader: Help our mission partners: the Agape Church, the Church of the Holy Spirit in Lascahobas, Haiti, the Oaks Café, and Troy Area United Ministries to meet the needs of others.

People: To be loved as to love;

Leader: We pray for the special needs and concerns of this congregation_____. Are there others?_____.

We pray for our families, friends and neighbors. We pray for those for whom we feel no love.

People: For it is in giving that we receive;

Leader: We thank you for what we have received, especially for_____. Are there others?_____ . We thank you for the ability to give all we have.

People: It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

Leader: Help us be merciful, that we may be blessed. We pray for those in prison and for the victims of injustice.

People: It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life.

Leader: We pray for all who have died, that with us they may be born to eternal life; we pray especially for_____. Are there others?_____ .

We pray to you for the forgiveness of our sins:

From *Of the Imitation of Christ* (Chapter 17 "United with Christ") by Thomas a Kempis

This prayer served us in Advent of 2013. The language is florid and Elizabethan, but so is Rite One; less-than-simple responses are best tolerated when the Prayers of the People are embedded in Rite One, as they are in Advent and Lent. Even so, the leader does most of the work in this prayer. The responses agree with the versicles because they were all originally part of the same long prayer. The only lines that

changed each week were where a character from the Bible is referenced or quoted (other weeks had Christ or John the Baptist instead of Mary, as below). The changes gave greater significance to the prayer by featuring the main character of the day's gospel reading; the changes also made the prayer serve for an entire season.

Leader: Within our community, within our church, within our homes, we desire to seize Thee with the most vehement desire, and the most worthy reverence, that any of the saints ever had, or was able to feel.

People: *Let all people, nations, and languages praise Thee, and in peace, magnify Thy holy name with exultation and burning devotion.*

Leader: All that holy souls conceive and desire; such as justice, freedom, peace, and unity, we do, with the deepest reverence and most inward fervor, offer and present unto thee.

People: *We desire to reserve nothing unto ourselves, but freely and most cheerfully to sacrifice all that is ours unto Thee.*

Leader: We offer and present the special needs and concerns of those in danger, sorrow and trouble. We offer and present the special needs and concerns of this congregation, especially:_____. Are there others?

Leader: O Lord our God, our Creator and our Redeemer, we desire to seize Thee this day, with such affection, reverence, praise, and honor, with such gratitude, worthiness, and love, with such faith, hope, and purity, as Thy most holy mother, the Virgin Mary, desired Thee with, when to the angel who declared unto her glad tidings of the mystery of the incarnation, she humbly and devoutly answered:"

People: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."*

Leader: In like manner do we wish also to be on fire with great and holy desires, and to offer ourselves up to Thee from our whole hearts. Wherefore also for all who are commended to us in prayer, our mission partners around the world and especially in this diocese: Agape Church, the Church of the Holy Spirit in Lascahobas, Haiti, the Oaks Cafe, and the Parole House in Troy.

People: *that by all Thou may worthily be praised and glorified forever.*

Leader: We offer and present unto Thee the triumphant joys, the burning illuminations and celestial visions of all devout hearts, including those of the departed, especially_____. Are there others?

Leader: Receive, O Lord our God, our wishes and desires of giving Thee infinite praise, and blessing that has no bounds, which according the measure of Thine ineffable greatness, are unto Thee most justly due. These we render to Thee, and long to render every day and every moment. We offer unto Thee our thanksgivings, especially for:_____. Are there others?

Leader: And with prayers and zeal we invite and beseech all heavenly spirits, and all Thy faithful servants, such as our ministers, to render with us thanks and praises unto Thee.

People: *We offer unto Thee the whole affection of our hearts, as if we had all the most grateful and burning longings after Thee.*

Leader: Seize us, O Lord our God, this day, with such affection as Thy mother Mary desired Thee with when she was obedient to Thy word spoken through the angel. Make our confession one of desire and love; empty us of all that is not from Thee; fill us with Thyself; with the birth of Christ, let us be born anew.

Adapted from the Anima Christi (a prayer used in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius)

Leader: We are holy and sacred vessels made by you for your use. So use us; for in using us, you save us.

People: Soul of Christ, sanctify me.
Body of Christ, save me.

Leader: Let us be cleansed; renewed; reborn. Clarify and purify our intentions, and remove from us preoccupation with things that do not matter or last.

People: Blood of Christ, inebriate me.
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.

Leader: Let us be revitalized; let us be healed. Put us back together, because we don't know how to do it ourselves.

People: Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O Good Jesus, hear me.

Leader: Protect us, our mission partners: the Agape Church, the Church of the Holy Spirit in Lascahobas, Haiti, the Oaks Café, Troy Area United Ministries, and those in our community with special needs. Especially _____. Are there others?

Let us speak your Word against the voices within us and without that deny you and your love.

People: Within thy wounds, hide me.
Permit me not to be separated from thee.
From the wicked foe defend me.

Leader: Good Jesus, take us, fill us with your love, and then use us to bring you all honor and glory. And we pray the very same for our departed brothers and sisters. Especially _____. Are there others?

Thank you for loving us from inside of us where nothing is hidden from you. We give you thanks and praise for all of the joys and challenges in our lives. Especially _____. Are there others?

People: At the hour of my death call me, and bid me come to thee.
That with thy saints I may praise thee.
Forever and ever. Amen.

Leader: Let us be restored to you through forgiveness.

Basic Intercessions Format (added Lent 2015)

Leader: We pray for our mission partners: the Agape Church, the Church of the Holy Spirit in Lascahobas, Haiti, the Oaks Café, Troy Area United Ministries. For Katherine, our Presiding Bishop; for Bill, our Bishop; for Father Steve, Deacon Sandy, Deacon Paul, Katie, Ted, Helene, Jason and all other ministers;

People: **For all who serve God in his Church.**

Leader: For the special needs and concerns of this congregation, especially _____. Are there others? _____ Hear us Lord;

People: **For your mercy is great.**

Leader: We thank you, Lord, for all the blessings of this life, especially _____. Are there others? _____ We will exalt you, O God, our King;

People: **And praise your name for ever and ever.**

Leader: We pray for all who have died, that they may have a place in your eternal kingdom, especially _____. Are there others? _____ Lord, let your loving-kindness be upon them;

People: **Who put their trust in you.**