

Patterns for Worship

The disk version is provided to encourage flexible use of the material in worship and study groups. you can adapt, edit and print material for a variety of situations.

The files on this disk are all in rich text format. Most modern word processing or desk top publishing programmes should be able to open them. They can then be saved in your preferred format.

There is one file for each section of *Patterns for Worship*. This contains both the notes pages and the service material, arranged sequentially.

The layout of the text will depend upon the programme you are using. Please feel free to alter the layout to suit your requirements.

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The version of *Patterns for Worship* on the disk includes revisions made in 1998. These mainly affect the services for Christian marriage, where the law has been changed since the original version of *Patterns for Worship* was published.

April 2nd 1998

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Patterns
for
Worship

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with contributions from
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**The Congregational Federation
4 Castle Gate, Nottingham
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Foreword

Patterns for Worship is designed to encourage understanding of the ways in which we worship together. It has evolved over the years as the orders of service have been used in the life of the Church and as the notes have been used as part of the Congregational Federation's Integrated Training Course.

Patterns for Worship is not an authorised service book. This is in keeping with our Congregational heritage. We hope that it will be used as one set of resources among many by those who share in the preparation of worship. More than this, it can also stimulate the thinking of many others in the churches. Each order of service provides a framework on which to build, rather than a complete order to be used uncritically. The prayers and readings suggested are examples, rather than words appropriate for every occasion. The loose-leaf format is designed to encourage flexibility.

A particular feature of Patterns for Worship is that it includes extensive notes on each service. They give an insight into the thinking behind each way of ordering worship. In the Congregational tradition the most appropriate form of worship is decided locally. It is important that the local church has a good understanding of how a service is ordered. The notes can help increase this understanding and they should be read before using or adapting any of the services.

For this edition, the notes and text of the marriage services have been revised to take account of recent changes in the law in England and Wales.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
flow through the worship we share
for the blessing of the world around us.

Richard Cleaves and Michael Durber

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to Andrew Carter and others at the Congregational Centre for work on the design and production of Patterns for Worship.

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The English translations of the Benedictus, Magnificat, Nunc Dimittis and Te Deum and the second version of the Lord's Prayer have been prepared by the English Language Liturgical Commission (ELLC), 1988.

Thanks also to anyone else whose work has been used inadvertently. Every effort has been made to seek permission to use copyright material but in a book of services which has grown over many years it is difficult to be sure that we have made complete acknowledgements. Please notify us of any corrections or additions for future inclusion.

0.1 Ways of Worship

From earliest times, the people of God knew that worship was something at two levels: the part you could see, like buildings and robes, ceremony and music (and even smell, like incense and perfumed oil!); and the part you could not, the worship of the heart that only God could see. Today also, the beauty of outward things does not necessarily mean that true worship is going on. Some elaborate worship can be spiritually dead, and a simple meeting in an ugly hall or humble sitting room can be truly alive; and, of course, vice versa!

Worship is also inseparable from service to God in the lives of those involved. God hates all attempts to worship him, however elaborate or 'correct', when personal and social relationships are wrong (Amos 5:21-24; Matthew 7:21).

So it is important to remember that whatever way Christians worship, it is only a way to the 'real thing'. This way may be plain or rich, formal or informal. Real worship expresses the relationship of a group of Christians (or an individual Christian) with the God they know because of Jesus Christ and in the power of his Spirit. As Jesus said, "God is Spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth," (John 4:24).

In other words true worship is a mystery. It is hard to talk or write about but when you have experienced it, you know!

The Gathered Church's Responsibility

In a Congregational Church what goes on in an act of worship is the responsibility of the Church Meeting of that church. So is everything else in the life of that church. If the worship is lifeless, the teaching feeble, the music awful and the style out-of-date, then it is the fault of that church and no one else's - not even the minister or pastor, because the Church Meeting appoints and advises its leader. Nor is it the fault of the Congregational Federation, which is the body that holds together nearly three hundred independent churches. It does not have authorised worship books nor insist on their use, nor appoint church leaders. No, the individual Congregational Church itself is responsible for its own worship. Many resources are available including this collection which can help churches take responsibility for the worship in which they share.

Because of the independence of each Congregational Church, no one can state that all Congregational Churches worship in this way or that. There is much variety. Congregationalists may worship in ornate and imposing buildings, small and cosy

chapels, or in a borrowed school hall or sitting-room. The one who leads worship may or may not be in special robes. The singing may or may not be led by a robed choir. The accompaniment may be by a fine pipe or electronic organ, a much humbler instrument, or by a music group. The congregation may be numbered in hundreds or a handful. The style and dress of the congregation may be formal and dignified or very informal and relaxed or, more likely, both in the same service. In some churches, the worshippers will participate noisily and enthusiastically, with hands lifted and they may even dance in the aisles. Others would be shocked at the very idea! In other words, you may find in Congregational Churches the same breadth of style that can be found in most other denominations today. Christians of all kinds are feeling God stirring them up to create acts of worship that meet worshippers at their point of need and lift them nearer to him. Congregationalists are sharing in these developments and experiments in form and style and, in their case, every member is, or should be, involved in making decisions about them.

The Leadership of Worship

There is a sense in which the leadership of worship is in the hands of Jesus himself. He alone is the 'priest' who can make what we offer acceptable to his father, God. We can be confident of His presence because he promised, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them," (Matthew 18:20). Nevertheless, Congregationalists have high standards of training for their formally accepted and listed ministers, pastors and lay preachers, all of whom have to undergo courses that are partly academic.

Yet anyone called by God and acceptable to the Church Meeting can conduct any service. Even the Communion service can be led by an 'ordinary' member. This is because of our belief that the presence of Jesus in every believer makes him or her part of a 'royal priesthood' (I Peter 2:9). Both women and men may be asked to lead worship.

The freedom from 'set' forms of worship

The early Congregationalists reacted against set worship. We still do! Some denominations have often used books and leaflets setting out the whole service, with the words to be spoken by the leader and congregation, and with Bible readings fixed for the whole year. On the whole, Congregationalists have preferred greater flexibility and variety in worship, and this approach is becoming increasingly important across many denominations. This book is called "Patterns for Worship" because it is intended as a guide to help people lead worship more effectively rather than a collection of prescribed services.

Most Congregationalists celebrate the major festivals (Advent, Christmas, Lent,

Easter, Pentecost and even some others), and so do not copy our forbears, some of whom were so angry with the 'tyranny' of feast days, which they saw as merely an excuse for drunken holidays that were far from 'holy days', that they even abandoned Christmas.

Several Congregationalists have written books of services, but they have mainly been used as guide-lines for worship only. Most Congregationalists who lead worship jealously guard their right to do so in the freedom the Spirit gives. This is risky, as we shall see later. It can, though, enable the congregation to ...

- 1 respond quickly to personal events within the membership and share together in a special service to suit the occasion. Perhaps a much loved member dies suddenly or a good conference has just finished and there is much to share.
- 2 respond to events in the wider world. Perhaps a disaster or a moral issue has just hit the headlines.
- 3 follow through a series of services on a theme, such as Jesus' parables or famous Christian lives.
- 4 experience different forms and styles of worship for various occasions. Perhaps a holiday service with a group of young people from a campsite may be held or a service handed over to the members of a study group or family.

However, such freedom can be misused. The church can suffer ...

- 1 if the leader has limited understanding, imagination or experience. The church may end up with an incomplete celebration or grasp of Christianity.
- 2 if the leader only uses one form or style of worship. The church may end up with only one age-group or type of person. The others may have left feeling the church does not cater for them.
- 3 if the balance is lost between a necessary variety created by a sensitive response to people and circumstances, and a degree of regularity and familiarity in worship. The congregation can feel like a boat in a high sea.

Children in Worship

Sunday School used to be at a separate time from adult worship, but most Congregational Churches have now accepted the idea often described by the term 'Family Church' in which the age groups separate for the second part of the service. However, the children's address has not been abandoned and any attempt to do so is usually firmly resisted by the adults, who enjoy it just as much as the children. Sadly, some of those churches who have no children regularly worshipping with them make no

provision for any who might suddenly turn up, so it is not surprising if those who do come go away with little wish to return.

In *Patterns for Worship* we have described the children's address as 'a keynote address': this is to convey the idea that it is an integral part of the whole service and is of value not only to the children but to all who are present.

Hymn Books

Many Congregational Churches now have not only a traditional hymn book but one of the new ones with modern songs and choruses. Early Congregationalists, like other Protestants, sang Psalms that had been put into verse form but, in the 17th and 18th centuries, some fine minister-poets pioneered the new art of hymn-writing. Indeed, one Congregationalist, Isaac Watts, has been described as the father of English hymnody. The best hymns are so full of Christian teaching that, if someone asks why we do not say any creed in our worship we can reply, "We don't say our faith, we sing it!" Because we believe that the Holy Spirit inspires all God's people we have not hesitated to include hymns from many Christian traditions. Hymn books can also make fine prayer books and are quite often used as such in public and private worship. *Congregational Praise* (published 1951) is widely used, and the Federation produced a *Supplement* in 1982, with additions in 1987. We have also shared with several other denominations in the preparation of an ecumenical hymn book, *Hymns and Psalms* (published 1983). In 1998 a collection of hymns and songs is being produced to mark the 250th anniversary of Isaac Watt's death.

The Sermon

One part of the service which Congregationalists have traditionally taken very seriously is the sermon. This is not meant to be a lecture or a statement of personal opinion, but the Word of God addressed to a congregation. It should be stated in a simple and interesting way and will usually clarify some verses or theme from the Bible. One of the reasons for the original split from the newly-formed Church of England was that some of the priests could not preach at all. They simply read the service from the Prayer Book and then sent the congregation home. It was a congregation moreover that consisted of every man and woman in the parish who wanted to avoid paying a fine for not being there. In those cases where the priest was well-educated and a good preacher, some early Congregationalists were advised to continue attending their parish church. Gradually, however, the desire for stronger spiritual food resulted in the forming of separate congregations. In most Congregational Churches there is still this desire. The writer remembers the way her father settled into his pew at the start of a sermon. Even as a small child she recognised this as the high point in the service and felt the air of expectancy that something good was about to happen. A poor sermon was, and still is, a real disappointment. This

influences the training for the Congregational ministry.

Patterns for Worship

In Patterns for Worship the orders of service are arranged in four groups with additional resources for worship included in a fifth section. The arrangement of the orders of service reflects the way in which worship is at the very heart of the life of the Church.

1 The Church and its Worship

Most Congregational Churches and those who lead them in worship try to keep the balance between order and freedom by the regular use of several 'orders of service'. These do not state the theme or the content but simply the running order of the different parts of the services - and even then they can be adjusted. They are often called, rather crudely, 'hymn sandwiches'. Carefully chosen hymns, however, add to the flow of the whole service and encourage participation by the congregation.

We have included one order of service which is structured as a dialogue between God and the congregation and another which mirrors the Biblical drama of salvation. There is a suggested pattern for all-age worship and also for a quiet, meditative evening service.

2 The Sacraments of the Church

Like most other Christians, Congregationalists recognise Baptism and the Lord's Supper (also called Communion or Holy Communion) as sacraments. These are the 'outward and visible' actions that Jesus asked his followers to do as a sign of the 'inward and spiritual' blessings that God offers, blessings which should bear fruit in the church and the world. Both are sacraments of grace - the once and for all act of baptism reminds us that Christ died once and for all to enable each of us to receive God's free, forgiving love before we did anything to deserve it. Regularly sharing in the Lord's Supper reminds us that Christ pours that love constantly into our lives.

Baptism

Baptisms are almost always in the main Sunday service. It is usual for a Congregational Church to celebrate the sacrament for both children and adults who have not previously been baptised. In the case of a child, those responsible for its up-bringing make solemn promises, and the whole congregation stands to declare that it accepts its responsibilities as the wider 'family of faith', thus taking some of the responsibilities that godparents have taken in other churches. However, in an age when families move house more frequently, some parents ask to have godparents too. It is for the

Church Meeting to decide whether or not to permit the baptism of the child of every parent that asks, or to limit baptism only to those whose parents are Christians. This is a knotty problem for every church that practises infant baptism. In the case of an adult, he or she makes a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Like other churches, Congregationalists share in the age-old argument between infant baptism and believer baptism. A few Congregational Churches prefer the latter. Most baptisms are by sprinkling with water, but requests by adults for baptism by total immersion can sometimes be accommodated.

The two orders of service for infant baptism and for believer baptism include much the same words. This is a reminder that the Sacrament of Baptism is one and the same Sacrament whether it is administered with infants or with adults.

The Lord's Supper or Holy Communion

The sharing of communion usually forms part of an ordinary Sunday service once a month. Different forms of the service may be chosen which emphasise different aspects of the sacrament, but the words of institution are almost invariably used. These are the words Jesus used over the bread and wine: "This is my body ... This cup is God's new covenant, sealed with my blood," (Luke 22:17-20, I Corinthians 11:23-25). Rather than the congregation moving forward, the servers usually bring the bread and wine to the people which reminds them that Christ's love reaches out to each one, wherever they are. As they eat the individual pieces of bread together and drink from the individual glasses, the truth should be made clear, that in Christ we are, each one, both a precious individual and part of his body, being nourished by Christ in order to serve in his world. Some Congregational Churches arrange things differently, as they are free to do. In most when the service is announced the invitation is given to 'all who love the Lord Jesus' to share in the celebration. Thus it is quite usual to welcome people to full communion whether members of that church (or indeed any church) or not. Churches which adopt this policy are said to have an open table.

Those who are sick or housebound are usually able to share in communion in their own homes or in hospital. Since communion is properly celebrated by the church rather than by a minister or any individual alone, this may be a special celebration of communion with a number of Church Members present in the home. Some churches prefer to take bread and wine from a Sunday service to those who are sick or housebound, with whom it is shared amid a setting of prayers and readings.

In some Congregational Churches, certain members of Junior Church are being allowed to share fully in communion, but this is a matter for earnest debate in the Church Meeting.

We include two patterns for the Lord's Supper each of which serves as a reminder that Holy Communion is a complete service and not simply an after thought tagged on at the end of 'the ordinary service'. All four versions of the words of institution

are included from the New Testament as well as an adaptation of the words of institution which is particularly appropriate for an evening service.

3 The Life of the Church

Worship is at the heart of the life of a Congregational Church. We include in this section Patterns of Worship which may be used to mark particularly important occasions in the life of a church.

Church Membership

This is always a joyous occasion, because it is the time when those who have accepted Christ (and they can be anyone from a teenager, to the very old) declare their personal faith in him as Lord and Saviour. Those who are to be received into membership declare their intention to become loyally involved in the life of this one particular, local church, as part and proof of their belonging to the world-wide Church. The new members are invited forward at a communion service, and, after their public declaration of faith, receive 'the right hand of fellowship'. This is not just an ordinary hand-shake: it is a powerful New Testament symbol valued greatly by Paul (see Galatians 2:9). Some new members are received by transfer, that is, by the right hand of fellowship only, having been through a membership service of another church, Congregational or not. In both cases, the Church Meeting has to agree to the request for membership.

The Church Meeting

A Congregational Church Meeting is a coming together of church members to discover the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit in the work of the church of which they are part.

The Church Meeting is the governing body of a Congregational Church and every member of the church has a place in it. Jesus pledged that where two or three meet in his name, he will be present himself. It is a privilege to make decisions in the light that he gives.

This independent way of church government goes back to the New Testament origin of the Church. The early Christians 'waited on the Holy Spirit', and with patience and understanding sensed what they had to do. The power in a church depends on whether its members are truly willing to do and seek the will of Christ. Separated from Christ, churches, like individual Christians, can do nothing. This is why it is so very important that a Church Meeting be conducted in the context of worship and prayer.

Commissioning of those Called to Serve

Long ago Paul said that Jesus Christ gave us gifts, "to prepare all God's people for

the work of Christian service,” (Ephesians 4:11,12).

Paul’s words are as true of the Church today as they were of the Church of his own day. As we belong to a church we all of us have some kind of ministry to offer to the Church. If we are to serve the Church to the best of our ability and to the greater glory of God it is important that the Church should openly recognise the ministry we can share.

In Patterns for Worship we include an order of service which can be used to commission people who are called by a church to share a particular kind of ministry. Within the one order of service there are alternative paragraphs to be used for the commissioning of a Minister or Pastor, a Preacher, a Deacon, a Church Secretary, a Church Treasurer, a Teacher, an Organist or a Director of Music. Two forms of Ordination Service are also included, each of which can also be adapted for the Induction of a Minister or Pastor.

4 The Family and the Church

Christians have always stressed the importance of the family. The major events in the life of the family are shared with the whole family of the church. In so doing care must be taken not to devalue those whose lives are not set within a family.

Christian Marriage

Congregationalists share with other Christians the belief that, if a couple want a Christian wedding, it should be a sign of their intent to enter the life-long commitment of a Christian marriage. Weddings are held by agreement with the minister or pastor and Church Meeting, which has to decide whether or not to permit the marriage of divorced people. This is another knotty problem which is left to the individual church.

We include two orders of service. The first uses words that have been familiar to generations of Congregationalists and other Christians. The second is arranged in a rather different way and uses a new set of responses and prayers.

Thanksgiving for the Birth of a Child

Some parents feel it inappropriate for infants to be baptised: we include a pattern for thanksgiving for the birth of a child and the dedication of parents which may be used in these and a variety of other circumstances.

Prayer for Healing

Many churches are discovering anew the importance of the ministry of healing. We include an order of service which forms the basis of a service of prayer for healing.

When this form of worship is used in a church for the first time it is very important that the church is properly prepared to share in the ministry of healing. There is a

need for careful preparatory teaching so that people come in a true spirit, without false expectations which can so easily become counter-productive. The Churches' Council for Health and Healing has a great deal of useful teaching material.

Funerals

We each have a limited life span: it is not inappropriate to link Prayers for Healing with Funeral Services in the same section of Patterns for Worship. There is a real sense in which the wholeness which God wills for us all can only come as we enter through Jesus Christ into God's full glory (see I Corinthians 13 and 15).

Congregationalists share with other Christians the belief that a funeral is an opportunity to celebrate the resurrection victory at the heart of the Christian faith and to provide comfort and strength to the bereaved.

5 The Word and the Church

Congregationalists rejoice in the Word of God at the heart of the Christian faith. How important it is to use the Scriptures in our worship!

To allow the children to leave for their groups without hearing a reading from the Bible is to give them a very incomplete experience of worship. To have only a single brief reading from the Scriptures in the course of a service is a denial of all that our forbears stood for. They once saw to it that a congregation would sing the Scriptures, if not say them together; they once saw to it that prayers were couched in the words of Scripture.

Of course, because the Scriptures are so important they must be used with care. The world to which God speaks does not stand still and it has to be remembered that however they are used, they need to be interpreted and applied for today.

The final section of Patterns for Worship includes examples of the way in which the Scriptures can be used in worship. Now that churches rarely if ever chant the psalms, why not include responsive readings of passages from Scripture? Examples are given of the way in which it is possible to adapt passages of Scripture for use in prayer.

Congregational Churches are not bound to a lectionary, yet many have found it useful to refer to one from time to time. A new lectionary, produced by the Joint Liturgical Group, is included. For the first time, this spreads over four years, suggesting three appropriate readings for each Sunday.

The Importance of Worship

In all these services, the Congregational freedom from set forms means that they can be so arranged as to include all sorts of items and references to make them very special and personal to those concerned. Indeed the one leading worship can spend so long tailor-making a special service that he or she can almost envy those in other

churches with a set form of service.

It is to be hoped that no one will use Patterns for Worship in a rigid way: may it be used with freedom under God's guidance to glorify his name!

How worship is conducted, its content and style, is vital to the health of the congregation. In some churches with no regular leadership, much depends on the Pulpit Supply Secretary, who is appointed by the Church Meeting to see that there is some one individual or group to lead each service. Regrettably, there are people who offer to lead worship who are poorly qualified, being out-of-touch with both God and their contemporaries.

In the notes reference is sometimes made to a pastor or minister as the one who is leading worship and though this will often be the case it is for the Church Meeting, under the guidance of the Spirit, to decide who is best equipped to lead. This may be a minister, pastor, lay preacher or some other person. Whoever leads, it is a duty of the church to see that he or she has both the necessary gifts and appropriate training.

It is a grave responsibility and wonderful opportunity for a Church Meeting to see that those who attend a service find they are sharing in worship which pleases God. When a church gathers together and worships in spirit and in truth the experience can be nothing less than 'an hour on heaven's doorstep!'

0.1 Ways of Worship

From earliest times, the people of God knew that worship was something at two levels: the part you could see, like buildings and robes, ceremony and music (and even smell, like incense and perfumed oil!); and the part you could not, the worship of the heart that only God could see. Today also, the beauty of outward things does not necessarily mean that true worship is going on. Some elaborate worship can be spiritually dead, and a simple meeting in an ugly hall or humble sitting room can be truly alive; and, of course, vice versa!

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may or may not be in special robes. The singing may or may not be led by a robed choir. The accompaniment may be by a fine pipe or electronic organ, a much humbler instrument, or by a music group. The congregation may be numbered in hundreds or a handful. The style and dress of the congregation may be formal and dignified or very informal and relaxed or, more likely, both in the same service. In some churches, the worshippers will participate noisily and enthusiastically, with hands lifted and they may even dance in the aisles. Others would be shocked at the very idea! In other words, you may find in Congregational Churches the same breadth of style that can be found in most other denominations today. Christians of all kinds are feeling God stirring them up to create acts of worship that meet worshippers at their point of need and lift them nearer to him. Congregationalists are sharing in these developments and experiments in form and style and, in their case, every member is, or should be, involved in making decisions about them.

The Leadership of Worship

There is a sense in which the leadership of worship is in the hands of Jesus himself. He alone is the 'priest' who can make what we offer acceptable to his father, God. We can be confident of His presence because he promised, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them," (Matthew 18:20). Nevertheless, Congregationalists have high standards of training for their formally accepted and listed ministers, pastors and lay preachers, all of whom have to undergo courses that are partly academic.

Yet anyone called by God and acceptable to the Church Meeting can conduct any service. Even the Communion service can be led by an 'ordinary' member. This is because of our belief that the presence of Jesus in every believer makes him or her part of a 'royal priesthood' (I Peter 2:9). Both women and men may be asked to lead worship.

The freedom from 'set' forms of worship

The early Congregationalists reacted against set worship. We still do! Some denominations have often used books and leaflets setting out the whole service, with the words to be spoken by the leader and congregation, and with Bible readings fixed for the whole year. On the whole, Congregationalists have preferred greater flexibility and variety in worship, and this approach is becoming increasingly important across many denominations. This book is called "Patterns for Worship" because it is intended as a guide to help people lead worship more effectively rather than a collection of prescribed services.

Most Congregationalists celebrate the major festivals (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and even some others), and so do not copy our forbears, some of whom were so angry with the 'tyranny' of feast days, which they saw as merely an

excuse for drunken holidays that were far from 'holy days', that they even abandoned Christmas.

Several Congregationalists have written books of services, but they have mainly been used as guide-lines for worship only. Most Congregationalists who lead worship jealously guard their right to do so in the freedom the Spirit gives. This is risky, as we shall see later. It can, though, enable the congregation to ...

- 1 respond quickly to personal events within the membership and share together in a special service to suit the occasion. Perhaps a much loved member dies suddenly or a good conference has just finished and there is much to share.
- 2 respond to events in the wider world. Perhaps a disaster or a moral issue has just hit the headlines.
- 3 follow through a series of services on a theme, such as Jesus' parables or famous Christian lives.
- 4 experience different forms and styles of worship for various occasions. Perhaps a holiday service with a group of young people from a campsite may be held or a service handed over to the members of a study group or family.

However, such freedom can be misused. The church can suffer ...

- 1 if the leader has limited understanding, imagination or experience. The church may end up with an incomplete celebration or grasp of Christianity.
- 2 if the leader only uses one form or style of worship. The church may end up with only one age-group or type of person. The others may have left feeling the church does not cater for them.
- 3 if the balance is lost between a necessary variety created by a sensitive response to people and circumstances, and a degree of regularity and familiarity in worship. The congregation can feel like a boat in a high sea.

Children in Worship

Sunday School used to be at a separate time from adult worship, but most Congregational Churches have now accepted the idea often described by the term 'Family Church' in which the age groups separate for the second part of the service. However, the children's address has not been abandoned and any attempt to do so is usually firmly resisted by the adults, who enjoy it just as much as the children. Sadly, some of those churches who have no children regularly worshipping with them make no provision for any who might suddenly turn up, so it is not surprising if those who do come go away with little wish to return.

In *Patterns for Worship* we have described the children's address as 'a keynote address': this is to convey the idea that it is an integral part of the whole service and is of value not only to the children but to all who are present.

Hymn Books

Many Congregational Churches now have not only a traditional hymn book but one of the new ones with modern songs and choruses. Early Congregationalists, like other Protestants, sang Psalms that had been put into verse form but, in the 17th and 18th centuries, some fine minister-poets pioneered the new art of hymn-writing. Indeed, one Congregationalist, Isaac Watts, has been described as the father of English hymnody. The best hymns are so full of Christian teaching that, if someone asks why we do not say any creed in our worship we can reply, "We don't say our faith, we sing it!" Because we believe that the Holy Spirit inspires all God's people we have not hesitated to include hymns from many Christian traditions. Hymn books can also make fine prayer books and are quite often used as such in public and private worship. *Congregational Praise* (published 1951) is widely used, and the Federation produced a *Supplement* in 1982, with additions in 1987. We have also shared with several other denominations in the preparation of an ecumenical hymn book, *Hymns and Psalms* (published 1983). In 1998 a collection of hymns and songs is being produced to mark the 250th anniversary of Isaac Watt's death.

The Sermon

One part of the service which Congregationalists have traditionally taken very seriously is the sermon. This is not meant to be a lecture or a statement of personal opinion, but the Word of God addressed to a congregation. It should be stated in a simple and interesting way and will usually clarify some verses or theme from the Bible. One of the reasons for the original split from the newly-formed Church of England was that some of the priests could not preach at all. They simply read the service from the Prayer Book and then sent the congregation home. It was a congregation moreover that consisted of every man and woman in the parish who wanted to avoid paying a fine for not being there. In those cases where the priest was well-educated and a good preacher, some early Congregationalists were advised to continue attending their parish church. Gradually, however, the desire for stronger spiritual food resulted in the forming of separate congregations. In most Congregational Churches there is still this desire. The writer remembers the way her father settled into his pew at the start of a sermon. Even as a small child she recognised this as the high point in the service and felt the air of expectancy that something good was about to happen. A poor sermon was, and still is, a real disappointment. This influences the training for the Congregational ministry.

Patterns for Worship

In Patterns for Worship the orders of service are arranged in four groups with additional resources for worship included in a fifth section. The arrangement of the orders of service reflects the way in which worship is at the very heart of the life of the Church.

1 The Church and its Worship

Most Congregational Churches and those who lead them in worship try to keep the balance between order and freedom by the regular use of several 'orders of service'. These do not state the theme or the content but simply the running order of the different parts of the services - and even then they can be adjusted. They are often called, rather crudely, 'hymn sandwiches'. Carefully chosen hymns, however, add to the flow of the whole service and encourage participation by the congregation.

We have included one order of service which is structured as a dialogue between God and the congregation and another which mirrors the Biblical drama of salvation. There is a suggested pattern for all-age worship and also for a quiet, meditative evening service.

2 The Sacraments of the Church

Like most other Christians, Congregationalists recognise Baptism and the Lord's Supper (also called Communion or Holy Communion) as sacraments. These are the 'outward and visible' actions that Jesus asked his followers to do as a sign of the 'inward and spiritual' blessings that God offers, blessings which should bear fruit in the church and the world. Both are sacraments of grace - the once and for all act of baptism reminds us that Christ died once and for all to enable each of us to receive God's free, forgiving love before we did anything to deserve it. Regularly sharing in the Lord's Supper reminds us that Christ pours that love constantly into our lives.

Baptism

Baptisms are almost always in the main Sunday service. It is usual for a Congregational Church to celebrate the sacrament for both children and adults who have not previously been baptised. In the case of a child, those responsible for its upbringing make solemn promises, and the whole congregation stands to declare that it accepts its responsibilities as the wider 'family of faith', thus taking some of the responsibilities that godparents have taken in other churches. However, in an age when families move house more frequently, some parents ask to have godparents too. It is for the Church Meeting to decide whether or not to permit the baptism of the child of every parent that asks, or to limit baptism only to those whose parents are Christians. This is a knotty problem for every church that practises infant baptism. In the case of an adult, he or she makes a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Like other churches, Congregationalists share in the age-old argument between

infant baptism and believer baptism. A few Congregational Churches prefer the latter. Most baptisms are by sprinkling with water, but requests by adults for baptism by total immersion can sometimes be accommodated.

The two orders of service for infant baptism and for believer baptism include much the same words. This is a reminder that the Sacrament of Baptism is one and the same Sacrament whether it is administered with infants or with adults.

The Lord's Supper or Holy Communion

The sharing of communion usually forms part of an ordinary Sunday service once a month. Different forms of the service may be chosen which emphasise different aspects of the sacrament, but the words of institution are almost invariably used. These are the words Jesus used over the bread and wine: "This is my body ... This cup is God's new covenant, sealed with my blood," (Luke 22:17-20, I Corinthians 11:23-25). Rather than the congregation moving forward, the servers usually bring the bread and wine to the people which reminds them that Christ's love reaches out to each one, wherever they are. As they eat the individual pieces of bread together and drink from the individual glasses, the truth should be made clear, that in Christ we are, each one, both a precious individual and part of his body, being nourished by Christ in order to serve in his world. Some Congregational Churches arrange things differently, as they are free to do. In most when the service is announced the invitation is given to 'all who love the Lord Jesus' to share in the celebration. Thus it is quite usual to welcome people to full communion whether members of that church (or indeed any church) or not. Churches which adopt this policy are said to have an open table.

Those who are sick or housebound are usually able to share in communion in their own homes or in hospital. Since communion is properly celebrated by the church rather than by a minister or any individual alone, this may be a special celebration of communion with a number of Church Members present in the home. Some churches prefer to take bread and wine from a Sunday service to those who are sick or housebound, with whom it is shared amid a setting of prayers and readings.

In some Congregational Churches, certain members of Junior Church are being allowed to share fully in communion, but this is a matter for earnest debate in the Church Meeting.

We include two patterns for the Lord's Supper each of which serves as a reminder that Holy Communion is a complete service and not simply an after thought tagged on at the end of 'the ordinary service'. All four versions of the words of institution are included from the New Testament as well as an adaptation of the words of institution which is particularly appropriate for an evening service.

3 The Life of the Church

Worship is at the heart of the life of a Congregational Church. We include in this section Patterns of Worship which may be used to mark particularly important occasions in the life of a church.

Church Membership

This is always a joyous occasion, because it is the time when those who have accepted Christ (and they can be anyone from a teenager, to the very old) declare their personal faith in him as Lord and Saviour. Those who are to be received into membership declare their intention to become loyally involved in the life of this one particular, local church, as part and proof of their belonging to the world-wide Church. The new members are invited forward at a communion service, and, after their public declaration of faith, receive 'the right hand of fellowship'. This is not just an ordinary hand-shake: it is a powerful New Testament symbol valued greatly by Paul (see Galatians 2:9). Some new members are received by transfer, that is, by the right hand of fellowship only, having been through a membership service of another church, Congregational or not. In both cases, the Church Meeting has to agree to the request for membership.

The Church Meeting

A Congregational Church Meeting is a coming together of church members to discover the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit in the work of the church of which they are part.

The Church Meeting is the governing body of a Congregational Church and every member of the church has a place in it. Jesus pledged that where two or three meet in his name, he will be present himself. It is a privilege to make decisions in the light that he gives.

This independent way of church government goes back to the New Testament origin of the Church. The early Christians 'waited on the Holy Spirit', and with patience and understanding sensed what they had to do. The power in a church depends on whether its members are truly willing to do and seek the will of Christ. Separated from Christ, churches, like individual Christians, can do nothing. This is why it is so very important that a Church Meeting be conducted in the context of worship and prayer.

Commissioning of those Called to Serve

Long ago Paul said that Jesus Christ gave us gifts, "to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service," (Ephesians 4:11,12).

Paul's words are as true of the Church today as they were of the Church of his own day. As we belong to a church we all of us have some kind of ministry to offer to the

Church. If we are to serve the Church to the best of our ability and to the greater glory of God it is important that the Church should openly recognise the ministry we can share.

In Patterns for Worship we include an order of service which can be used to commission people who are called by a church to share a particular kind of ministry. Within the one order of service there are alternative paragraphs to be used for the commissioning of a Minister or Pastor, a Preacher, a Deacon, a Church Secretary, a Church Treasurer, a Teacher, an Organist or a Director of Music. Two forms of Ordination Service are also included, each of which can also be adapted for the Induction of a Minister or Pastor.

4 The Family and the Church

Christians have always stressed the importance of the family. The major events in the life of the family are shared with the whole family of the church. In so doing care must be taken not to devalue those whose lives are not set within a family.

Christian Marriage

Congregationalists share with other Christians the belief that, if a couple want a Christian wedding, it should be a sign of their intent to enter the life-long commitment of a Christian marriage. Weddings are held by agreement with the minister or pastor and Church Meeting, which has to decide whether or not to permit the marriage of divorced people. This is another knotty problem which is left to the individual church.

We include two orders of service. The first uses words that have been familiar to generations of Congregationalists and other Christians. The second is arranged in a rather different way and uses a new set of responses and prayers.

Thanksgiving for the Birth of a Child

Some parents feel it inappropriate for infants to be baptised: we include a pattern for thanksgiving for the birth of a child and the dedication of parents which may be used in these and a variety of other circumstances.

Prayer for Healing

Many churches are discovering anew the importance of the ministry of healing. We include an order of service which forms the basis of a service of prayer for healing.

When this form of worship is used in a church for the first time it is very important that the church is properly prepared to share in the ministry of healing. There is a need for careful preparatory teaching so that people come in a true spirit, without false expectations which can so easily become counter-productive. The Churches' Council for Health and Healing has a great deal of useful teaching material.

Funerals

We each have a limited life span: it is not inappropriate to link Prayers for Healing with Funeral Services in the same section of Patterns for Worship. There is a real sense in which the wholeness which God wills for us all can only come as we enter through Jesus Christ into God's full glory (see I Corinthians 13 and 15).

Congregationalists share with other Christians the belief that a funeral is an opportunity to celebrate the resurrection victory at the heart of the Christian faith and to provide comfort and strength to the bereaved.

5 The Word and the Church

Congregationalists rejoice in the Word of God at the heart of the Christian faith. How important it is to use the Scriptures in our worship!

To allow the children to leave for their groups without hearing a reading from the Bible is to give them a very incomplete experience of worship. To have only a single brief reading from the Scriptures in the course of a service is a denial of all that our forbears stood for. They once saw to it that a congregation would sing the Scriptures, if not say them together; they once saw to it that prayers were couched in the words of Scripture.

Of course, because the Scriptures are so important they must be used with care. The world to which God speaks does not stand still and it has to be remembered that however they are used, they need to be interpreted and applied for today.

The final section of Patterns for Worship includes examples of the way in which the Scriptures can be used in worship. Now that churches rarely if ever chant the psalms, why not include responsive readings of passages from Scripture? Examples are given of the way in which it is possible to adapt passages of Scripture for use in prayer.

Congregational Churches are not bound to a lectionary, yet many have found it useful to refer to one from time to time. A new lectionary, produced by the Joint Liturgical Group, is included. For the first time, this spreads over four years, suggesting three appropriate readings for each Sunday.

The Importance of Worship

In all these services, the Congregational freedom from set forms means that they can be so arranged as to include all sorts of items and references to make them very special and personal to those concerned. Indeed the one leading worship can spend so long tailor-making a special service that he or she can almost envy those in other churches with a set form of service.

It is to be hoped that no one will use Patterns for Worship in a rigid way: may it be used with freedom under God's guidance to glorify his name!

How worship is conducted, its content and style, is vital to the health of the congregation. In some churches with no regular leadership, much depends on the Pulpit Supply Secretary, who is appointed by the Church Meeting to see that there is some one individual or group to lead each service. Regrettably, there are people who offer to lead worship who are poorly qualified, being out-of-touch with both God and their contemporaries.

In the notes reference is sometimes made to a pastor or minister as the one who is leading worship and though this will often be the case it is for the Church Meeting, under the guidance of the Spirit, to decide who is best equipped to lead. This may be a minister, pastor, lay preacher or some other person. Whoever leads, it is a duty of the church to see that he or she has both the necessary gifts and appropriate training.

It is a grave responsibility and wonderful opportunity for a Church Meeting to see that those who attend a service find they are sharing in worship which pleases God. When a church gathers together and worships in spirit and in truth the experience can be nothing less than 'an hour on heaven's doorstep!'

1.1 Worship

A Dialogue with God

Worship can be seen as a dialogue with God. In this 'conversation' God takes the initiative as he speaks to his people. They, in turn, address their thoughts to God as they speak to him. Finally, there are moments at which the congregation offers itself in service to God.

Within the framework outlined here various things can be added: drama, dance, singing. It is important when planning worship to be aware of the movement of worship and include extra things with sensitivity to the overall pattern of the service.

The service begins not with a chatty, informal word of welcome, but with words of Scripture at which point God is calling his people to worship. Words of Scripture may be sung, in which case the service begins with an introit or a Scripture song. Philip Doddridge always began with a prayer and a Psalm.

The first response the people can make to such a call is to praise God in his glory and his greatness. They are then led in a brief prayer of invocation and praise. With the realisation of their own inadequacy and sinfulness comes the need to make confession and rejoice in the forgiveness of sins. The Psalms are a rich resource of words to voice the joy or longing of the congregation. Verses from a Psalm may be read together, or a hymn based on a Psalm may be sung.

Again, God speaks through the reading of a passage of Scripture and through the Keynote or Children's Address. This is not just an opportunity for fun with the children, it is an opportunity to share with the children a declaration of God's word for all.

The hymn following takes up the theme of the Address and enables members of the congregation to respond to what they have heard by offering themselves to God in service.

The announcements remind the congregation of ways in which they can serve God through the Church in the coming week and the offertory [not just a collection] is an offering of oneself for service.

Though the children continue their worship in smaller groups they are still part of the worshipping community of the Church, sharing in dialogue with God. Churches which use the National Christian Education Council's *Partners in Learning* or Scripture Union's *Salt* material may well enable adults and children to focus on the same theme.

While prayer is usually extempore it is good from time to time to use a variety of resources for prayer, involving the congregation in responses, free prayer or reading prayers together. The hymn that follows the prayers may be regarded as part of this time of prayer and may continue their theme.

This is not followed by an address in which someone shares their thoughts for the week, but by a sermon in which God speaks his Word for all! The congregation responds through singing a hymn.

The Scriptures offer a rich resource of words to use as a Benediction: see particularly Paul's letters!

Holy Communion is not simply tagged on at the end. It flows from the first part of the service.

This pattern for worship is like a symphony in two or three movements, each of which is divided into clear sections. As with a symphony there is a lively beginning, a reflective middle and a moving climax.

Without Communion, worship comes to its climax in the Word we hear from God and our response to it. With Communion worship comes to its climax in the tangible sharing of God's presence in Christ through the sharing of the bread and the cup and our response in praise.

1.1 Worship - a Dialogue with God

**We speak
to God**

**God speaks
to us**

**We offer
to God**

Call to Worship

Hymn of Praise

Prayer of Invocation

Confession & Petition

The Family Prayer

Psalm

Bible Reading

Keynote Address

[sometimes known as
Children's Address]

Hymn

Announcements

Offertory

Dedication

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN GROUPS

Prayers of Intercession

Lesson material

Prayer and Singing

**We speak
to God**

**God speaks
to us**

**We offer
to God**

REMAINDER OF CONGREGATION

Bible Reading
leading to Prayer

Prayers of Intercession
Hymn

Bible Reading
leading to
Sermon

Hymn
[Benediction]

Prayer of Preparation

Words of Jesus
Words of Purpose
Words of Scripture

Prayer of Thanksgiving
Fellowship Prayer

← Sharing of Bread →
← Sharing of Cup →

Prayer of Dedication

Hymn
Benediction

1.2 Worship

A Drama in God's Presence

As the Bible recounts the history of salvation in a dramatic way, so too each act of worship can encapsulate the drama of God's salvation.

Creation As the Bible begins with the glory of God in creation, so worship begins with praise. Praise takes people from a preoccupation with themselves and into the presence of God who stands over the Church's worship in majesty.

Fall and God's Response In a prelude to the story of salvation the early chapters of Genesis tell of people's sinfulness and God's determination to bring them back to himself. A prayer of confession is followed by a Bible reading declaring God's forgiving love, a prayer of petition which may be a responsive prayer and a hymn or song rejoicing in the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ. A Psalm, or hymn based on a Psalm, may be appropriate.

Salvation The Old Testament story moves towards its climax in the central point of all history, the coming of Jesus Christ. The Word once revealed through prophets and writers is now revealed in God's Son.

The declaration of God's Word can take many forms. Whether it be in a sequence of readings, sketches, musical items, with visual aids or by the use of a sermon, all need to listen out for God's Word for today.

Children and young people in their groups are not simply hearing moral tales, they are hearing and learning about God's Word.

The preacher must be immersed in the Word. The Spirit's guidance is absolutely essential ... but it is as real in the study as in the pulpit! To be prepared does not mean being enslaved to one's notes.

A Church for the World Acts and the Epistles tell of the way in which God's story moves out through the Church into the world. The congregation now thinks about the Church and the world in announcements, collection and prayers. 'Collection' is a good biblical word: a weekly collection was unheard of 150 years ago when the members would contribute their gifts on a quarterly basis. Might such a practice be

re-introduced?

The best preparation for prayer is prayer. To lead in prayer be constant in your own prayers! Extempore prayer is not an excuse for waffle - a simple structure can be liberating.

God's Glory to the End As it began with the glory of God, so the Bible ends with the glory of God. As worship began with praise, so it ends on the same note.

To leave on a note of praise sets the tone for the week ahead. Seven whole days, not one in seven ...

Holy Communion comes as the climax to worship but it must never be seen as an after-thought at the end of the service. When sharing in communion it is important to realise that the whole service is the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper - the early parts of the service build up towards the climax, pointing all who share together to God's glory.

1.2 Worship - a Drama in God's Presence

THE BIBLICAL DRAMA

Creation

Genesis 1-2

Fall and God's Response

Genesis 3-11

God's Word of Salvation

Genesis 12 - John

A Church for the World

Acts and Epistles

God's Glory to the End

Revelation

THE DRAMA OF WORSHIP

Praise

Call to Worship
Prayer of Invocation
Hymn of Praise

Confession and Forgiveness

Prayer of Confession
Bible Reading declaring
God's forgiving love
Petition for future
Song or Hymn

God's Word

Reading
Keynote Address
[sometimes known as
Children's Address]
Children & Young People go
to their own groups to explore
the reading and the theme
Hymn
Prayer
Sermon
Hymn
Children & Young People return

The Church and the World

Collection and Dedication
Announcements
Prayers for the Church
and the World

Praise

Hymn of Praise
[Benediction]

Prayer

Words of Jesus

Words of Purpose

Words of Scripture

Prayers of Thanksgiving
and for Church Fellowship

Sharing of Bread and Wine

Prayer of Dedication

Hymn of Praise

Benediction

1.3 Worship - A Celebration for All Ages

All-age worship is a very important part of the life of many churches. Beware of the phrase 'Family Service' as it can alienate those who do not belong to families or whose families are separated.

This form of worship needs to be very flexible, involving people of all ages. At the same time it is important that it retains a helpful pattern which will enable people of all ages and not simply children to feel part of what is going on.

This Service follows a simple pattern. In each of the three sections of the Service it is possible to use different approaches through dramatic readings, responsive prayers, drama, song, music, visual aids.

In Preparation for the Word the congregation will join in praise, confession and thanksgiving for the Good News of God's forgiving love.

In the Presentation of the Word it is important to remember that through all the different approaches to worship which may be appropriate, God's Word must be declared. Fun though an all-age service can be, it must never be seen merely as entertainment.

The Response to the Word gives the congregation the opportunity to respond to the Word of God in prayer, hymns, songs and other appropriate ways.

In choosing hymns it is good to introduce children to some of the great hymns of the Church, but also important to introduce the adults to the kind of things that particularly primary school children are singing in school assemblies.

It is important to be sensitive to the needs of the youngest children ... and their parents. Pre-school children may need to go to their groups at some point in the service.

Preparing an All-age Service

This is the kind of service which lends itself to group preparation. The following suggested method of preparation is adapted from a Scripture Union training session on all-age worship:

Open with Prayer

Well ahead of the service ...

- * Pray and read the Scripture passage
- * Work at the aims

Bear in mind as you start to plan ...

- * The time available
- * The resources available ... premises, music, people
- * The group generally ... the whole church family

A pattern for worship ...

- * Preparation for the Word
- * Presentation of the Word
- * Response to the Word

A tool for planning in a group ...

- 1 Write on postcard size cards/paper just one possible idea. E.g., an idea for a drama (one card), an idea for a song (one card), and an idea on which to base a prayer (one card).
- 2 Place your card where you think it might be appropriate in one of three groups set out on a table and headed Preparation for the Word, Presentation of the Word, or Response to the Word. Do not discuss anything until all ideas are placed on the table.
- 3 Give each person time to explain their idea if this is necessary.
- 4 Pray. Recognising together before the Lord that you only want his plan for this service ... give your own ideas back to the Lord, be prepared to be open to others or to a specific direction from the Spirit of God. Some ideas will inevitably be rejected, others may be joined together or even new ideas emerge from the discussion.
- 5 Turn over, as individuals, any cards you feel you are not absolutely certain about. Only leave the right way up, the ones you are sure should be in the service. This

will leave very few the right way up, but you can be certain that these are the definites. They do not have to be discussed. The ones that have been turned over need to be looked at one at a time. Some of these will need to be rejected. If one is decided on as a certainty leave it the right way up with the others. Begin to slot things fairly early into the Preparation, Presentation, Response framework.

- 6 Decide who will do the various parts ... do you need others from outside the planning group? If so, who is going to organise this?
- 7 Build in from the beginning the fact that the leader has the responsibility to tie up loose ends if the group has not finished by the end of the meeting time.

Check ...

- * Everything contributes to the aim.
- * That the needs of different age groups are being catered for.
- * That there are a variety of different worship/learning approaches.
- * That tasks within the group are allocated. E.g., visual aids, music, drama, communication with those outside the group from whom help is needed.
- * Write it out.

Evaluate ...

- * What went well and why was it successful?
- * If I were to do this again what would I do differently?
- * Were there any problems I/we could have avoided?
- * Did we achieve our aim?

This Pattern for Worship, together with the Planning Tool, can meet many differing needs. It would be particularly appropriate for a Youth Service.

1.3 Worship - A Celebration for All Ages

Fellowship

Welcomes

Preparation for the Word

Call to Worship

Hymns and/or songs of praise

Prayers of praise, confession and thanksgiving

Declaration of the Good News of forgiveness

Hymns and/or songs of thanksgiving
for that forgiving love

Presentation of the Word

Bible readings

Other readings, drama, poetry,
dance, visual aids

Hymns and/or songs related to the theme

Group activities, address

Response to the Word

Prayers of commitment and dedication

Prayers for other people,
the Church and the world

News of life in the Church

Offertory for the work of the Church

Appropriate hymns and/or songs of response

Praise

Benediction

1.4 Worship - a Service for Sunday Evening

An evening service can follow the same pattern as a morning service: it is also an opportunity to do something a little different. It may be a good time to have a service which speaks to a particular interest group, a youth fellowship, the local chamber of commerce or something similar.

This pattern for worship is a quiet, meditative, service appropriate for an evening and following the pattern, Preparation, Word, Response.

Preparation

After an introit or a Scripture song the service begins with a call to worship and a prayer which leads into a quiet, prayerful hymn or song.

Using the pew Bibles or the Scriptures included in a hymn book or specially printed material, the Congregation read together a scriptural prayer of confession or of recognition of the need of God. Many Psalms are appropriate, as are parts of the Epistles.

God's forgiving love is declared in the reading of the Good News: this may be taken from the words of Jesus or may be a passage from the Epistles declaring the heart of the Gospel.

The next hymn celebrates the wonder of this forgiving love.

The Word

In choosing a theme, readings and meditative prayer sources such as the Prayer Handbook published by some of the European Churches of CWM is very helpful, following lectionary readings for the week.

Response

There is an opportunity for open prayer, responsive prayer or prayers using music, slides or choruses. Imaginative ways of praying can be helpful.

After news of the forthcoming week the service closes on a note of praise or with a hymn or song seeking God's blessing, protection and peace.

1.4 Worship - a Service for Sunday Evening

Preparation

Introit or Introductory Song

Call to Worship

Prayer

Hymn of Quiet Preparation

Congregational Reading of Scriptural

Prayer of Confession or Canticle

Declaration of God's forgiving love

in a reading of the Good News

Hymn or Song celebrating God's forgiving love

The Word

Introduction of the Theme

Old Testament Reading

New Testament Reading

Hymn taking up the theme of the Readings

Sermon

Meditative Prayer to respond to the Sermon

Response

Hymn taking up the theme of the Sermon

Prayers

Hymn in the spirit of prayer

Offertory and Dedication

Announcements

Hymn of Praise or

Hymn seeking God's blessing, protection and peace

Benediction

2.1 Baptism for Infants

The service opens with an invitation from God to join in worship. A hymn of praise to God is sung.

Throughout the service visitors to the church should be helped to feel at home. Some may be unfamiliar with worship. It is important to explain what is going on and to draw out the message of the service without using too much jargon. The Sacrament of Baptism is a sacrament of grace in which the message of God's free gift of love and the need for everyone to make a response to it is brought home very powerfully.

The Sacrament of Baptism is a sacrament of the Church: that is why it is celebrated at an ordinary service when the whole community of the church comes together to worship.

Opening prayers of adoration and praise seek God's blessing on the service and on all gathered together to worship.

This selection of short readings takes the place of a single lesson and highlights the New Testament basis for the Sacrament of Baptism.

In love, God takes the initiative. He does not wait for people to meet certain conditions: he acts on their behalf (Romans 5:8). His love is poured out on each person before ever they know anything about it (Psalm 139:16). Baptism is that sacrament which celebrates the wonderful truth that God was there first in people's lives, not only creating them, but also pouring out his love upon them (Jeremiah 1:5).

The importance of the passage about Jesus and the children lies not so much in the way in which Jesus blessed the children, but rather in his comment that the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. This is an indication that the Old Testament belief that the children of believing parents are within the Covenant of God and belong to the people of God carries on into the New Testament. The Old Testament conviction was expressed in the sacrament of the Old Covenant, circumcision; the same conviction in the New Testament is expressed in the Sacrament of Baptism as whole households are baptised (Colossians 2:11-15). The parents' faith and the family's belonging to the Church are two important channels through which the child is receiving the out-pouring of God's grace.

The outward sign of circumcision was of no value unless it became an inner spiritual reality as the child grew older (Deuteronomy 30:6). So too the outward sign of Baptism of itself makes no difference to an individual unless it becomes an inner spiritual reality as the child grows older (Colossians 3:1).

At each stage of their development children can make their own the love which God

has freely poured out on them as they respond in their own way. In adulthood this response will take the form of turning to God and believing in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

These ideas are now conveyed in a statement explaining the significance of Baptism.

Children of believing parents are in a covenant relationship with God (Acts 2:38,39; I Corinthians 7:14) and belong to the kingdom (Mark 10:13-16).

Paul writes, 'Jesus saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit,' (Titus 3:5. See John 3:16; I John 4:10; Romans 5:5.)

The transformation described in Romans 6 is achieved not by any human effort but by the grace of God (Romans 5:6-11). This only makes a difference to people as they respond to it by turning to God and believing in Jesus Christ. Faith, however, does not achieve salvation - it is the means people have of responding to the grace already given to them in the Lord Jesus Christ. At different ages faith expresses itself differently.

For grace to be at work in the child, making a difference to his or her life, it is a great help for the child to grow up in an atmosphere of Christian love (Ephesians 6:4). It is significant that teaching to parents is in the context of teaching on the whole family or household (see Ephesians 5:21 to 6:9 and Colossians 3:18-25). That teaching in turn is in the context of teaching about the life of the whole Church. There is then a responsibility on the part of the parents, the wider family and the church to provide Christian nurture.

The traditional role of god-parents is taken by the whole church. However, if family traditions are such that god-parents are proposed, they can have a part to play. Some churches invite someone or some family to take special care of the child on behalf of the whole church community.

It might be appropriate to ask the church and the wider family to make a response at this point.

In some churches the parent(s) are asked themselves to read or repeat a promise similar to this one.

If only one parent is able to make this confession of faith, it ought to be addressed to him or her alone. The other parent, if present, should be asked to do all that he or she is able to do in sharing in these duties so that the child can enjoy the security of love and the heritage of faith. If neither parent is able to make a Christian profession of faith baptism is generally considered inappropriate as two of the most important channels of God's grace (the parent's faith and involvement in the church family) will not be available to the child as he or she grows older. Some Congregational

Churches hold differing views.

The minister or the one presiding at the Sacrament then takes the child from the parents, holding it in such a way that the baby can see them both. He/she then pours a little water on the brow of the baby. In some churches the water is poured three times, reflecting the Trinitarian form of words used at the baptism.

A declaration of baptism may be made in these words, based on 1 Peter 2:9.

It can be appropriate for the church to welcome the child in these or similar words. Some churches make a gift of a lighted candle to the parents as a sign of the invitation to the resurrection life which God holds out to us through Baptism.

After the blessing of the child he or she is returned to the parents and while everyone is standing, prayers for the child, the family and the church are spoken. The final part of those prayers is a prayer that each person present might respond to the free gift of God's grace and discover the change that it can bring about in their lives.

The keynote or children's address is a valuable opportunity to express the message of Baptism in a relaxed and simple way. Some suggestions as to how this might be done are given below.

Announcements are not an intrusion. They are a reminder to members and an indication to visitors of the church's on-going life. It is in this atmosphere of Christian life that the baby will be helped to grow up.

It is vital to make every effort to welcome newcomers into the children's and young people's groups if they want to join. This is a sign of the way the church lives out its commitment to its children, and who knows, they may come again!

Prayers for the work of the church are an indication of the need to support one another firmly in prayer. Prayers for the wider world show the church's concern for the community and the world at large.

The hymn which follows takes up the spirit of the prayers.

The sermon is an opportunity to present the heart of the Christian Gospel in a challenging way. One or other of those passages at the beginning of the service could be used as a text. The following is a sermon outline using an illustration of John Calvin's.

John 3:16

- the initiative of God's love
- God's love for the world
- God's love for each one of us individually

- the need for us to respond by believing
- the new life in Christ

If one were to pour water over a glass that was turned upside down, the water would cascade to the floor and be no use to anyone. The water is of use only if the glass is turned the right way up, ready to catch the water.

The baby who has been baptised knows nothing about the Christian faith now: the water poured on the forehead is real, just as the love of God poured over the baby's life is real. But for that love to make a difference the little one will have to catch it and take it inside as he or she grows older - upend the glass, as it were - and then it can become something to make a difference. Everyone's prayer today is that as he or she grows older he/she will do just that and in faith make the love of God his/her own and discover the difference it can make to the whole of life.

But there is more! [This is the point at which the preaching of the Gospel at the Sacrament of Baptism becomes a very real challenge to those who are there in the church.] Many here were baptised - the love God pours out on the world he pours out on each one individually. Has everyone taken that love into themselves? Have they discovered the difference it can make to their lives? Now is an opportunity to re-discover that difference simply by renewing faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour ... now may be an opportunity to do that for the very first time.

The sermon is followed by a hymn which expresses the challenge of the Gospel.

On other occasions a sermon could stress that Baptism is not just about an individual. It is entering into the life of the whole people of God - "For in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body," (I Corinthians 12:13; see Galatians 3:27-29).

There are many other effective ways of communicating the Gospel in the Keynote Address or during the sermon. For example:

To bring home the awesome truth that God's love is poured out on this particular baby a story about someone bearing the child's Christian name might be very effective. Alternatively the testimony of a great Christian might be appropriate to remind people that everyone has to make the love of God their own by faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

To teach the basic message of Baptism a reflection on the significance of water might be very helpful. After stressing that the water in the font is real, just like the water in a glass [bucket, for the more adventurous] that is held up for all to see, some fun follows in threatening to prove that it is real by throwing it over the Congregation. Just as this water is real so the love of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is absolutely real. It can come inside anyone and make a difference to their lives.

In preparing for a baptism service the parents can share in choosing appropriate hymns. At the same time it is helpful to include one hymn which conveys something of the message of the service. This is an example of a hymn which reminds people that the Sacrament of Baptism has something to say to everyone who shares in the service.

A Baptismal Hymn

(7 6. 7 6.)

‘The Water I give will become in them a spring of water
gushing up to eternal life’

(John 4:14)

Lord God, our heavenly Father,
Reach out in love we pray
To this, your child, your treasure
Brought here in faith today.

Each day bind him/her yet closer
In faith and hope and love;
Pour out your Holy Spirit
As peaceful as a dove.

Help him/her to know your presence
As Saviour and as Lord,
To treasure up the essence
Of your most gracious word.

As streams of living water
The love of God flows free;
That love so true and tender
Brings life anew to me.

For once I too was tiny,
A babe helpless and small,
Yet God reached out to love me
And Christ my name did call.

So help me, heavenly Father,
To make your love my own;
Through faith in Christ my Saviour
I shall approach your throne!

2.1 The Sacrament of Baptism

An Order of Service for the Baptism of Infants

Call to Worship

Hymn of Praise

Welcome and Introduction

As - *the parents' names* - bring - *the child's name* - to be baptised we all share in the Church's Sacrament of Baptism. It is a time for all of us to be reminded of the free gift of God's love which is poured out on us before ever we know anything about it ... and it is a time for us to rejoice in the difference that love can make to us all as we make it our own in faith.

Prayer of Preparation

Readings on Baptism

This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.
(I John 4:10)

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3:16)

People were bringing little children to Jesus in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16)

Jesus showed that the love of God has no limits as he went to the cross and on the third day rose again from the dead. It was then that he challenged his disciples to take the Good News of that love to the uttermost ends of the world.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20)

The disciples bided their time until with the outpouring of the Spirit of God they

were empowered by God to go out into the streets with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Peter was the first to preach the message. When the people in Jerusalem heard what he had to say they wanted to know what they could do.

Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children and for all who are far away - everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him. (Acts 2:38-39)

From that day on Baptism became the sign of the change that God's love in Jesus Christ can make in our lives. Those coming to believe in Jesus Christ were baptised and their families too. From the time of the early church, Christian parents have brought their children to be baptised as a sign of the love God pours on them all ... a love to which, it is their prayer, their children will respond in faith as they grow older.

Baptism Today

So it is that - *the parents' names* - bring - *the child's name* - to be baptised today.

In Baptism, God our Father welcomes us into a covenant relationship with him, declaring that we are his children through Jesus Christ, our Lord, and that our future lies with him through the Holy Spirit.

Baptism is a powerful sign that God's grace is not dependent on anything we do - but is poured out quite freely on each of us. This grace of God in Christ Jesus has the power to change our lives enabling us to die to the world and to rise again to newness of life in Christ Jesus our Lord. But grace can only make a difference to us as we make it our own, responding to the love of God in Christ Jesus simply by turning and trusting ourselves to him in faith.

It is our prayer today that at each stage of his/her development this child will make the promise of salvation his/her own until in adulthood he/she is able to make a full commitment entering into membership of the Church by declaring his/her faith in Jesus Christ as his/her Lord and Saviour.

_God's grace is at work through Jesus Christ and through his Spirit working in the lives of the parents, the family and the church. In presenting this child for baptism we therefore acknowledge a threefold responsibility - of the parents, the family and of the church - to care for his/her faith and character and to see that he/she is brought up in the Christian way of life, in the nurture and admonition of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and in the fellowship of the Church.

[It is for the god-parents to play their part together with parents, family and church in fulfilling these responsibilities.]

The Baptism

Will those who belong to this church and those who belong to the family please stand to show that you accept the responsibilities laid upon you ..

- *The parents' names* - as you believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, do you promise, depending on the grace of God, to teach - *the child's name* - the truths and duties of the Christian faith; and by prayer and example to bring him/her up in the life and worship of the Church so that he/she can enjoy the security of love and the heritage of faith?

We do.

- *The child's name* - I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you
and give you peace.

- *The child's name* - has been baptised into the household of God. He/she belongs to a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.

[All may say:] **We welcome - *the child's name* - in the name of Christ.**

Prayer

Almighty God, remembering the welcome and the blessing that your Son gave to the little children who were brought to him in Galilee, we thank you for the love you have for the world, for each one of us individually and for - *the child's name* - in particular. Grant that as - *the child's name* - grows in years he/she may also grow in understanding and in faith. Lead him/her by the Holy Spirit safely through the years of childhood, until he/she is ready to profess his/her faith in the salvation you have pledged to him/her today.

Your Son has been part of a family home in Nazareth. Let his peace and his joy be known within the home of - *the parents' names* -: give them wisdom that their family life may be enriched by faith, sustained by prayer and inspired by the knowledge of your love.

Bless this church that we may be so filled with the spirit of love that others may see in us your love for them. Enable us, by the power of the Spirit, to play our part in the care of this little child and all other children in our fellowship.

Give all of us, Father, the grace to respond worthily to the great gift that you have

given us in our baptism; grace to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, grace to serve him in every part of our daily life, and grace to live in unity and fellowship within the Church. Through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Keynote Address

[sometimes known as Children's Address]

Baptismal Hymn

Announcements

Offertory and Dedication

[Children and Young People go to their groups]

Prayers

Hymn

Sermon

Hymn

Benediction

2.2 Baptism for Adults

It has always been the custom in Congregational Churches for adults who come to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and who have not been baptised as infants to be baptised.

This is done in an act of worship which is much the same as the Sacrament of Baptism for Infants, stressing as it does the heart of the Christian Good News of salvation by grace through faith.

The Sacrament of Baptism, whether for infants or for adults, is an excellent opportunity to proclaim the Gospel of salvation.

The Sacrament may well be celebrated as part of an ordinary service in which case the baptism will be done with a token amount of water using the font. This establishes the fact that baptism is very much a sacrament of the Church as a whole.

On occasion arrangements are made with a church in the locality which has a baptistry to share in baptism by immersion.

Through the ages, some people who have already been baptised as infants wish to be baptised again as adults. This is a custom which has not been practised in Congregational Churches where it is maintained that there is only one baptism. Baptism is the outward and visible sign of the act of grace which once and for all time has brought salvation: for that reason it is inappropriate for it to be repeated.

It is important to help visitors to the church to feel at home and throughout the service to be aware that some of them may not go to church much at all. It is helpful to explain what is going on and to draw out the message of the service without using too much jargon! The Sacrament of Baptism is a sacrament of grace in which the message of God's free gift of love and the need for everyone to make a response to it is brought home very powerfully.

This selection of short readings takes the place of a single lesson and highlights the New Testament basis for the Sacrament of Baptism

In love, God takes the initiative. He does not wait for people to meet certain conditions: he acts on their behalf (Romans 5:8). His love is poured out on each person before ever they know anything about it (Psalm 139:16). Baptism is that sacrament which celebrates the wonderful truth that God was there first in people's lives, not only creating them, but also pouring out his love upon them (Jeremiah 1:5).

The transformation described in Romans 6 is achieved not by human effort but by the grace of God (Romans 5:6-11). That only makes a difference to people as they respond to it by turning to God and believing in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Faith, however, does not achieve salvation - it is the means people have of

responding to the grace already given to them in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Sacrament of Baptism is the sign of the new covenant relationship that God has with his people.

The emphasis in this service as in the Service for the Baptism of Infants is on grace at the heart of baptism. At the core of the Christian Good News of salvation is the conviction that salvation comes by grace through faith as the Holy Spirit of God is at work. Paul writes, 'Jesus saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit,' (Titus 3:5. See John 3:16; I John 4:10; Romans 5:5.)

It may be appropriate for the person being baptised to give their testimony.

In some churches the water is poured three times, reflecting the Trinitarian form of words used at the baptism.

A declaration of baptism may be made in these words, based on 1 Peter 2:9.

The church may welcome the one who has been baptised with these or similar words. In some churches the gift of a lighted candle is made, a sign of the resurrection life which Christ shares with his people through Baptism.

The prayer is an opportunity to pray God's blessing on the person baptised, that they will grow in the faith by the power of God's Spirit.

The hymn should be chosen carefully by the person to be baptised as a declaration of the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith.

A Keynote or Children's Address may well not be appropriate ... on the other hand it may be very appropriate indeed.

If the person being baptised has children who have not previously been baptised, it would be appropriate for them to be baptised at the same time.

The sermon is an opportunity to present in a challenging way the heart of the Christian Gospel. One or other of those passages at the beginning of the service could be used as a text.

2.2 The Sacrament of Baptism

An Order of Service for the Baptism of Adults

Call to Worship

Hymn of Praise

Welcome and Introduction

As - *name* - comes to be baptised we all share in the Church's Sacrament of Baptism. It is a time for all of us to be reminded of the free gift of God's love which is poured out on us before ever we know anything about it ... and it is a time for us to rejoice in the difference that love can make to us all as we make it our own in faith.

Prayer of Preparation

Readings on Baptism

This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.
(I John 4:10)

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Jesus showed that the love of God has no limits as he went to the cross and on the third day rose again from the dead. It was then that he challenged his disciples to take the Good News of that love to the uttermost ends of the world.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20)

The disciples bided their time until with the outpouring of the Spirit of God they were empowered by God to go out into the streets with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Peter was the first to preach the message. When the people in Jerusalem heard what he had to say they wanted to know what they could do.

Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children and for all who are far away - everyone whom the Lord

our God calls to him. (Acts 2:38-39)

From that day on Baptism became the sign of the change that God's love in Jesus Christ can make in our lives. Those coming to believe in Jesus Christ were baptised and their families too.

Baptism Today

So it is that - *name* - comes to be baptised today.

In Baptism, God our Father welcomes us into a covenant relationship with him, declaring that we are his children through Jesus Christ, our Lord, and that our future lies with him through the Holy Spirit.

Baptism is a powerful sign that God's grace is not dependent on anything we do - but is poured out quite freely on each of us. The grace of God in Christ Jesus has the power to change our lives enabling us to die to the world and to rise again to newness of life in Christ Jesus our Lord. But that grace can only make a difference to us as we make it our own, responding to the love of God in Christ Jesus simply by turning and trusting ourselves to him in faith.

It is a joy to all in the church that - *name* - is able to come forward and make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

The Baptism

Will you stand please as - *name* - comes forward.

- *Name* - do you believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour?

I do.

[A Testimony from - *name* -]

- *Name* - I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

 _The Lord bless you and keep you;
 the Lord make his face to shine upon you
 and be gracious to you;
 the Lord lift up his countenance upon you
 and give you peace.

- *Name* - has been baptised into the household of God. He/she belongs to a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.

[All may say:] **We welcome - *name* - in the name of Christ.**

Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Hymn

Keynote Address

[sometimes known as Children's Address]

Announcements

Offertory and Dedication

[Children and Young People go to their groups]

Prayers

Hymn

Sermon

Hymn

Benediction

2.5 The Lord's Supper

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is shared by the whole church as it meets together for worship. Although the sharing of the bread and the wine may come as the climax to a service it is important to remember that the whole service is the Sacrament.

It is not the church's occasion, far less should people think of the one presiding as the host: it is the Lord's Supper. For this reason the service begins with a call to worship and a hymn of praise which then leads into the invitation to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ to share in communion.

Those who come are invited to do so in a spirit of humility, seeking God's presence. A prayer of confession, together with a declaration of God's forgiving love is important early in the service.

Some of the words Jesus shared with his disciples at the table may be used as a basis for the prayer, such as these from Luke 22:25-27.

The service moves towards a focus on Jesus and the kingdom of God fulfilled through him. His presence is discerned in the proclamation of God's Word as the Bible is read, the sermon is preached and bread and wine are shared at his table.

The Old Testament illuminates and anticipates the fullness of the kingdom of God revealed for us in Jesus. Many moving passages from the Old Testament, pointing towards all that was fulfilled by Jesus in giving himself up on the cross, or expressing God's comfort, are equally appropriate at this point. The examples given here are only a few verses but a longer Old Testament reading might generally be used.

If the Lord's Supper is to be shared with people who are unwell it is good to have two or three people from the church to share with them. While most of the first part of the service will be omitted, it is good to include some of this preparatory material and to have a short reflection on the Word, recalling the sermon preached at the previous Sunday's communion service.

The hymn or song here is one appropriate to communion.

The keynote or children's address introduces the theme for the morning service or develops some theme related to communion: it may well take up the Old Testament text which has just been used, or include a reading from the New Testament. It may also include a song.

Communion binds us with all who believe in Christ Jesus as Lord, throughout the world and in every age. By remembering the fellowship of the Church both local and universal, we are reminded that others not present in the service are a part of the

body of Christ. It may be appropriate to ask a deacon to say the fellowship prayer.

Children and young people may well return for communion or remain for the whole service. In some churches children are welcomed to share in the bread and the wine: in other churches they are encouraged to wait until they are able to make a full profession of faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. In this case the first time they share in the Lord's Supper would be after making that profession on being received into membership. Meanwhile it may be appropriate at some point in the service to invite them to gather around the table and say the Lord's Prayer together.

A short reading, such as Matthew 7:7-11, might be used as an introduction to the prayers of intercession. In the prayer of confession human weakness and failure were acknowledged before God. In the fellowship prayer, concerns of the church were recognised and offered to God. Now the wider needs of the world are placed before him. God's response in Jesus to all human need is then declared in the reading which follows, in the sermon and in the sharing of bread and wine.

The preaching of the Word is a fundamental part of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In the Sacrament the grace of Jesus Christ is conveyed through word and deed in the most powerful of ways.

It is important to be imaginative and creative in the use of Scripture in communion. Passages from the Psalms (e.g. 23, 100, 139), the Prophets (Isaiah 40, 53, 55, 60,) or the Epistles (Romans 5.1-11; I John 4.7-21) are very appropriate as they get to the heart of the faith. Some of the New Testament psalms (Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-20; Revelation 5:9-10,12-14) express the faith in powerful language.

Holy Communion is the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and the Lord Jesus Christ is present with his people at the head of the table. It is important to share words of Jesus in such a way as to bring out the wonderful promises of Jesus for those who share in communion. The sayings of Jesus in the Gospels are a rich source of words to share around the table: it is good to use some words that are familiar, but at the same time it is important to vary the words that are chosen.

The great 'I am' sayings of John's Gospel capture the impact a meeting with Jesus Christ has on ordinary people: those who gather together at the communion table meet with Jesus who is for each of them:

the Resurrection and the Life;

the Way, the Truth and the Life;

the Light, the Gate and the Good Shepherd;

the True Vine and the Bread of Life.

It would be valuable to note all those sayings of Jesus which contain words of

promise appropriate for the table of the Lord.

The Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount, the texts Jesus chose in his preaching, the words of Christ's teaching recorded by John, the words from the cross, the advice given to disciples - all are appropriate and all need to be used imaginatively as a source for words of great power which can be shared at communion.

It is possible to compile a sequence of readings to remind us of the nature of the Jesus who is with us at communion. (e.g. Acts 10:36-39, Isaiah 53:3-5, Ephesians 1:17,20-22, Romans 5:1-5,11)

If the church has copies of the Bible in the pews it might be helpful to choose passages which can be read by the congregation as an expression of the faith which they share in Jesus Christ their Lord. (e.g. Romans 5:1-11, Philippians 2:5-11, I John 4:7-11)

It is important to emphasise that these are the kind of texts and passages which can be read at this point in communion. It is important not to try to put too much in. Two to four brief texts carefully chosen and thoughtfully read can have a tremendous effect. One of the suggested passages occasionally used at this point can bring home the point of communion most effectively. There is value in both familiarity and variety.

This simple statement has been used in Congregational services for many years. The additional reference to I Corinthians 11:28 emphasises the way in which these words remind us of the need to examine ourselves and approach the Lord's table in the right spirit of humility. The final reference from I Peter 1:8,9 strikes a note of joy at the wonder of God's salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

By using the first person plural pronoun it is clear that the one presiding at the Lord's table is no different from anyone else.

One of the deacons serving at the table may be asked to lead the prayer of thanksgiving: it is important that it is a prayer of thanksgiving for all that God has done for his people in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is the first of four versions of the narrative of the institution. The most appropriate one for each particular service should be chosen. This version uses the words which are perhaps most familiar.

There is a thrill about using words which have been used by the generations who have gone before - this is the value of reverting to the grand language of the Authorised Version at this point. Other translations may be preferred.

This service is kept very simple by including the distribution of the bread and the wine at the appropriate point in these words of institution.

All are equal in God's sight around the table and so all are served.

A common loaf and a single cup express the close bond of fellowship in communion. Individual pieces of bread and glasses of wine can have equal meaning. As the bread and the wine have been prepared individually for each person, and as each one eats and drinks, it dawns on them anew that the free forgiving love of Jesus Christ which has a transforming power is given for each person individually.

The second alternative uses I Corinthians 11:23-26 from the NRSV. It incorporates words from I Corinthians 10:16.

_The third alternative uses Matthew's account of the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-29). It incorporates words from Psalm 23:6.

The fourth alternative is particularly appropriate for an evening communion service, using Luke 24.

With triumphant prayers of thanksgiving and consecration for the week ahead, perhaps using these words from Psalm 107, the service draws to a close in a spirit of praise as we look to the abiding glory of God.

Matthew records that Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn after supper (Matthew 26:29). It was customary at a Passover meal to sing the Hallel-psalms (113-118). Psalms 113 and 114 were sung before the meal and Psalms 115-118 afterwards. Verses from these psalms could also provide a fitting prayer of thanksgiving at the conclusion of the service.

2.5 The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

Call to Worship

Hymn or Song of Praise

Invitation to Communion

On this God's day of rest, God's day of resurrection, God's day of the Spirit's blessing, we are invited to come to the table of our Lord and share in communion with one another and with our God. The Lord's table is open to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. All he asks is that we come in a spirit of humility, willing to serve God and to serve one another.

Prayer of Confession

At the table Jesus said,
The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them;
and those in authority over them
are called benefactors.

But not so with you;
rather, the greatest among you
must become like the youngest,
and the leader like one who serves.

For who is greater,
the one who is at the table
or the one who serves?

Is it not the one at the table?
But I am among you as one who serves.

Let us confess our sins ...

Extempore or other prayer of confession

Thanksgiving for Forgiveness

Words from the Old Testament

Prophecy looking to Jesus
promising comfort
or pointing towards all that is fulfilled
in Communion

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long. (Psalm 23:5,6)

O taste and see that the Lord is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him. (Psalm 34:8)

I love the Lord, because he has heard
my voice and my supplications.
Gracious is our Lord and righteous;
our God is merciful.
What shall I return to the Lord
for all his bounty to me?
I will lift the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord. (Psalm 116:1,5,12,13)

With the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem. (Psalm 130:7)

To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness,
though we have rebelled against him. (Daniel 9:9)

Hymn

Keynote Address

[sometimes known as a Children's Address]

Concerns of the Church Fellowship

Fellowship Prayer

Hymn

Announcements

Offertory and Dedication

[Children and Young People go to groups]

Reading
leading to

Prayers of Intercession

Hymn

Reading
leading to

Sermon

Hymn

Words of Scripture

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3:16)

In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins, the means by which our sins are forgiven. (I John 4:10)

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. (I Timothy 1:15)

He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? (Romans 8:32)

Words of Jesus

Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)

Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. (John 6:35)

Anyone who comes to me I will never drive away. (John 6:37)

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (Matthew 5:6)

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. (Revelation 3:20)

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. (John 6:35)

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. (John 8:12)

I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. (John 10:9)

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (John 10:11)

I am God's Son. (John 10:36)

I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. (John 11:25)

You call me Teacher and Lord - and you are right, for that is what I am. (John 13:13)

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty. (Revelation 1:8)

Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive for ever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. (Revelation 1:17,18)

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. (John 14:1)

I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (John 14:13)

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid. (John 14:27)

I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!
(John 16:33)

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. (John 15:12-14)

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.
(John 20:29)

And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.
(Matthew 28:20)

Words of Purpose

We come to this sacred table,
not because we must but because we may.

We come in all humility, examining ourselves
and recognising our frailty and sin.

We come not to testify that we are righteous,
but that we sincerely love our Lord Jesus Christ,
and desire to be his true disciples.

[We come not because we love him a lot
but because we love him a little
and want to love him more.]

We come not because we are strong,
but because we are weak;

not because we have any claim on heaven's reward
but because in our frailty and sin
we stand in constant need of heaven's mercy and help.
We come in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Although we have not seen him,
we love him;
and even though we do not see him now,
we believe in him
and rejoice
with an indescribable and glorious joy,
for we are receiving the outcome of our faith,
the salvation of our souls.

Before supper Jesus gave thanks, he said grace. Let us pray ...

Prayer of Thanksgiving

for the love of God, the Father who cares for us
for the grace of Jesus, the Saviour who redeems us
for the fellowship of the Holy Spirit who renews us

Words of Institution

first alternative

As Paul once said, countless generations of Christians have said ever since, so I too am able to say ...

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when He had given thanks, He brake it and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.'

Distribution of the Bread

Let us eat this bread in remembrance of Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Bread is eaten

After the same manner also he took the cup when he had supped, saying, 'This cup is the New Covenant in my blood: this do ye as oft as ye drink it in remembrance of me.' For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death until He come.

Distribution of the Wine

Let us drink of this cup in remembrance of Christ Jesus our Saviour.

The Wine is taken

Words of Institution

second alternative

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

Distribution of the Bread

The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?

The Bread is eaten

In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Distribution of the Wine

The cup of blessing that we bless is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?

The Wine is taken

Words of Institution

third alternative

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take eat; this is my body.'

Distribution of the Bread

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life

The Bread is eaten

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'

Distribution of the Wine

I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

The Wine is taken

Words of Institution

fourth alternative

Now on the day of resurrection two of them were going to a village called Emmaus ... While they were talking Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognising him ... Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they were coming near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.'

So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

Distribution of the Bread

Jesus said, 'Peace be with you.'

The Bread is eaten

They recalled the supper he had shared with them only two nights before when he had taken a cup, and after giving thanks had said, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'

Distribution of the Wine

Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in Jesus' name to all nations.

The Wine is taken

Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him ... The Lord has risen indeed!

Prayer and Lord's Prayer or Psalm

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,
those he redeemed from trouble
and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works for humankind.

For he satisfies the thirsty,
and the hungry with good things

Tell of his deeds with songs of joy.
(Psalm 107:1-3,8,9,22b)

Hymn

Benediction

2.7 The Lord's Supper - An Alternative Order

This service provides some additional material and ideas for ordering a celebration of Holy Communion.

In the approach the people of God come seeking an awareness of God's presence and his forgiving love. The service begins quietly with prayer. Sins are confessed and there is a waiting on God.

God then speaks words of forgiveness as his mercy is declared through verses from a Psalm or the New Testament. The Biblical words provided are only a selection of those which might be used at this point. One or more sentences, from these or others, may be chosen.

An alternative might be to weave together scriptural quotations with a prayer of approach. For example, promises of Jesus or some of the 'I am' sayings from John's Gospel might be used.

In a hymn, the service continues with praise in response to the forgiveness received from God, or with invocation.

The Word of God in Christ is revealed through the reading of the Bible and the proclamation of the Gospel in the sermon or through drama or other presentation. The theme introduction, replacing the children's address, provides a way into the theme which can communicate with all ages present. It may include a reading and a song or hymn appropriate to the theme.

The people of God respond to his Word with praise.

That response continues through their concern for the world and the Church fellowship. Acknowledging human weakness the congregation also prays for God's help for itself.

It is Christ who invites his people to the table and so it is his words which are heard. Other words of Jesus could be used, else words of Paul such as I Corinthians 5:7b-8 which links the sacrificial death of Christ with the Passover meal. Words from the Psalms can also be appropriate.

This alternative invitation uses words from the Iona Community. The emphasis is firmly on Christ as the one who invites us.

This form of the invitation to the Lord's Supper uses imagery from Proverbs where Wisdom calls people to her banquet. Christ, as the Wisdom of God, invites us to share at his table.

As all dedicate their lives and their gifts of money, it is also appropriate to dedicate the gifts of bread and wine which have been provided for the service, using these or similar words.

It is increasingly common amongst churches of many traditions for a sign of peace to be shared at some point in a communion service. Jesus explains how important it is that we should be reconciled to each other as we come with our offerings in worship (Matthew 5:23,24) and Paul often urges the churches to which he writes to live in peace.

The renewed popularity of this ancient custom can be seen in the most formal and informal of services. Some prefer a simple handshake with those immediately next to them in the church, in other churches worshippers can be seen embracing and the giving of the peace may last several minutes! In those churches where the peace is exchanged, it is for each church to decide how best it should be done. It is important that no one is unnecessarily offended and that no one is left out!

However it is done, it is important to remember that the peace which God promises us and in which he wants us to live is not just for us and for our friends. We are urged to make peace with our enemies too. This can be a time for real reconciliation within a church in the light of the Gospel which has been proclaimed. The love of God is expressed in a tangible form and the fellowship of the church can be strengthened as the peace is shared.

The giving of the peace is introduced with a scriptural quotation such as those given here. Many others referring to the peace which God promises us or the need for love and unity in the church could be used. One appropriate to the theme of the service is chosen, and this is followed by the invitation to exchange a sign of peace.

It may be more appropriate sometimes for a sign of peace to be exchanged near the beginning of the service, perhaps after the prayer of confession and words of forgiveness - having found ourselves at peace with God through his forgiving love, we must live at peace with each other. The peace may also be shared immediately before or straight after the sharing of bread and wine.

As the members of the congregation shake hands or embrace, they may say to each other 'peace' or 'the peace of God' or 'peace be with you.' Sometimes people also say the name of the one with whom they are sharing the peace.

One of the stories of the last supper is generally read as a warrant for the celebration of Holy Communion. Jesus' words and actions on the night of his betrayal provide a model for the words and actions in the service and for the way Christians should live, sharing in the offering of their lives and participating in the new covenant. Though Christ's sacrifice was once and for all, by his grace his people are able to follow him in self-giving in the church, the body of Christ, and join with him in the joy of resurrection life.

Each Biblical account of the last supper has its own nuances, while all move from the present celebration both backwards in remembering to the last supper, and forwards in anticipation of Christ's kingdom. Whilst the celebration of Holy Communion is always a remembering, as Jesus commanded, it is also a lively celebration of the victory Christ has won and a foretaste of the joys of his kingdom.

Luke's account of the last supper includes two cups. Here, the first is omitted. The full account may be used.

John's Gospel contains no account of the institution of the Lord's Supper. It does, however, include these words of Jesus which link his body and blood with eating and drinking. They are difficult words. After Jesus had spoken them, his disciples said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?' (John 6:60) Used carefully, they can however help draw out the depth of significance in communion as we feed on Christ 'by faith with thanksgiving.'

On some occasions words may be used from John's account of the meal Jesus ate with his disciples before his betrayal. While John does not recount the actions of sharing bread and wine, he does describe the way in which Jesus took the role of a servant, washing his disciples feet. (John 13:1-15) This too provides an insight into the significance of the meal and of the offering of Jesus' life.

As we come to drink from the fruit of the vine, these words too may be appropriately used.

The prayer of thanksgiving goes to the heart of the faith. Thanks are offered to God for his work as Father, Son and Spirit. At the centre of thanksgiving is our gratitude for the work of Christ.

This prayer is one model which can be adapted and developed according to the circumstances in which it is used or taken as an example for extempore prayer.

It was Jesus himself who gave thanks to God at the last supper and his people do the same, but now with the whole of God's work in mind. Within the prayer there may be particular aspects of this work which will be remembered according to the theme of the service and the circumstances of the celebration - for example, at Christmas, it will be appropriate to include special thanks for the birth of Christ and associated events.

Though the service of Holy Communion is a memorial or remembering of Christ, it is also a celebration, in the light of the resurrection and the gift of the Spirit, of his living presence in the life of the Christian community gathered for worship. As the gifts are shared, his presence is discerned. It was one of Paul's criticisms of the Church at Corinth that when they met for the Lord's Supper, they did not discern the body of Christ (I Corinthians 11:29). Here his body is seen in the unity into which communion should draw the people of God. It is right then that the marvellous diversity and unity of the Church in Christ should be acknowledged in the Sacrament

which churches have celebrated around the world and throughout its history.

Such a prayer of thanksgiving for the marvellous acts of God almost compels the congregation to break into song. This hymn (which may be sung to Mainzer, or other long metre tune) is derived from words of Isaiah and from the New Testament, many of which have been associated with the celebration of communion from the first centuries of the Christian era.

As the focus moves to the gifts of bread and wine, it is through them and through their sharing that the offering of the life of Christ can be seen. His own words from the last supper point to his sacrifice for all, represented also in the symbolic act of sharing bread and wine from his table.

As communion is celebrated, past, present and future come together. Christ the risen Lord is the one whose work is accomplished but its fulfilment in his kingdom and at the heavenly banquet is here anticipated.

The prayer ends with a doxology, an ascription of glory to God, such as this one from the letter of Jude.

The Lord's prayer sums up all the prayers which have gone before.

At this point the bread is broken, reflecting the Biblical words and portraying the sharing of life.

All may eat the bread and drink the wine as it is distributed or, as a sign of unity in Christ, the bread may be eaten by all together and the wine, if served in individual glasses, may be drunk by all together.

A cup is usually held up at this point.

After communion, there is little more that words can say. This scriptural thanksgiving may be all that is needed, else an extempore prayer, looking towards the life which we take from the table into the world.

The doxology or other hymn of praise or purpose is appropriate. The Hallel-psalms (113-118) would have been used by Jesus at the Passover meal which formed the basis of the Last Supper. Psalms 115-118 were sung after the meal and words from these are particularly suitable as a prayer of praise after communion. They might be read together or by the worship leader.

The blessing is given in these or other words.

2.7 The Sacrament of Lord's Supper - An Alternative The Approach

Prayer of Invocation and Confession

Words of Forgiveness

This is the promise of God's grace and the assurance of his forgiveness:

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgression from us. As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him. (Psalm 103:8,11-13)

With the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. (Psalm 130:7)

In this is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent us his Son to take away our sins. (I John 4:10)

The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. (II Corinthians 5:17,18)

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. (II Corinthians 5:19)

If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (I John 1:9)

If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (I John 2:1,2)

We are loved and forgiven. We can begin again.

Hymn of Approach or Praise

The Word of God

Theme Introduction

Readings

Hymn or Prayer for Illumination

or

Hymn on the Theme of the Readings

The Sermon

Response to God's Word

Hymn of Praise

Prayers of Concern

The Communion

The Invitation

Brothers and sisters in Christ, come to this holy table and hear the gracious words of our Lord:

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. (John 6:35)

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (Matthew 5:6)

Our Paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (I Corinthians 5:7b-8)

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. (Revelation 3:20)

What shall I return to the Lord
for all his bounty to me?

I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord. (Psalm 116:12,13)

An Alternative Invitation

This is the table,
Not of the Church, but of the Lord.
It is to be made ready
For those who love him and want to love him more.

So, come,
You who have much faith and you who have little,
You who have been here often
 and you who have not been for a long time,
You who have tried to follow
 and you who have failed.
Come,
Not because I invite you:
It is our Lord.
It is his will that those who want him
Should meet him here.

A New Alternative Invitation

From mountains and valleys, wisdom calls. From high-ways and by-ways, wisdom calls. From town gates and cross-roads, wisdom calls.

To you, O people, to all that live, my table is set; so come.
Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.
The feast is ready.

Whoever finds me finds life. Jesus who became for us wisdom from God says:
anyone who comes to me I will never drive away.
(Proverbs 8:2,4; 9:2,5; 8:35; I Corinthians 1:30; John 6:37)

Communion Hymn

Dedication of Ourselves and our Gifts

God of grace and strength, we offer these gifts of money, bread and wine, as tokens of the lives we owe you. Help us in faith to share with Christ who gave his life, as we pledge ourselves in the service of humankind.

The Peace

This is Christ's promise:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.
(Matthew 5:9)

This is God's promise:

By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.
(Luke 1:78-79)

The angels sang:

Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!
(Luke 2:14)

Simeon sang:

Master, now you let your servant go in peace,
according to your word.
(Luke 2:29 altd.)

Jesus says to us:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.
Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid.
(John 14:27)

The risen Lord came and stood among his disciples and said:

Peace be with you.
(John 20:19)

Since we are justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
(Romans 5:1)

In the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body - and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
(I Corinthians 12:13)

God has reconciled us to himself through Christ, who has given us the ministry of reconciliation.
(II Corinthians 5:18)

Paul urges:

Brothers and sisters, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.
(II Corinthians 13:11,12)

Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made us into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is the hostility, between us.
(Ephesians 2:14)

God will speak peace to his people,
to those who turn their hearts to him.
(Psalm 85:8)

Through the prophet Micah, God promises us:

They shall beat their swords into ploughshares,

and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.
(Micah 4:3)

Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

The Story of the Last Supper first alternative

Paul tells us:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.'

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (I Corinthians 11:23-26)

The Story of the Last Supper second alternative

Matthew tells us:

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.'

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.' (Matthew 26:26-29)

The Story of the Last Supper third alternative

Mark tells us:

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it,

gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body.'

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.' (Mark 14:22-25)

The Story of the Last Supper fourth alternative

Luke tells us:

When the hour came, Jesus took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.'

Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.' (Luke 22:14-16,19-20)

The Story of the Last Supper fifth alternative

In John's Gospel we read that Jesus said:

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. (John 6:51,53-56)

Jesus also said:

I am the true vine. Abide in me as I abide in you. (John 15:1,4)

Prayer of Thanksgiving

So, in the name of Christ and following his own example, we take this bread and this wine and give thanks to God.

It is both our joy and our duty to bring you our thanks, as creator, redeemer and sustainer.

At the beginning of time you brought existence out of nothing, and gave it shape. You spoke, and life began. With your own hands you formed us from the dust and moulded us in your image.

When we ignored your voice and discovered evil you never abandoned us but sent prophets to call us back to you; and finally, when we had persisted in sin, you sent your Son, our redeemer. He was born as one of us; he shared our pain; healed our wounds; and taught us the truth. He welcomed the sinner, and touched the unclean; yet he was rejected and killed.

Death could not hold him and after three days he broke from the tomb and appeared to the women; though others would not believe them, the good news spread.

By the presence of the Spirit, still he is with us. He renews our lives, and makes us into one body. The hearts of his people are filled with faith, hope and love.

Now we can praise you with the whole church throughout the world and in every time as we celebrate this feast at your own table.

[O, holy, holy, holy Lord,
the pow'rful and almighty God,
your glory fills all heaven and earth -
with praises we declare your worth!

A broken people, now remade,
one body through the living bread,
we celebrate with wine from heaven
the life of Christ so freely given.

How blessed is he, great David's Son
who in the Lord's name now will come.
Humanity is here restored
by Christ our dying, living Lord.]

By the Spirit's presence we know Jesus' words to be true as we share his gifts and hear him say:

This is my body.
This is my blood of the covenant.

As we eat and drink together
we look to the past, as we remember his living, dying and rising;
we look to the present, as we celebrate his presence

and declare that he is Lord of all;
and we look to the future as we prepare for the day
when we shall drink the wine new with him in his Father's kingdom.

And to him who is able to keep us from falling and to make us stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24)

Lord's Prayer

The Sharing of Bread and Wine

'The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of one bread.'

*The bread is broken and then distributed to the congregation.
As all eat, these words may be used:*

The bread of heaven in Christ Jesus.

or

Jesus says: 'Take, eat; this is my body.'

'The cup of blessing that we bless,
is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?'

*The wine is distributed to the congregation.
As all drink, these words may be used:*

The cup of salvation in Christ Jesus.

or

Jesus says: 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'

Prayer after Communion

Thanks be to God for his gift beyond words. (II Corinthians 9:15)

Concluding Hymn

or

Doxology

or

Psalm

Praise the Lord, all you nations!

Extol him, all you peoples!
For great is his steadfast love towards us
and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.
Praise the Lord!
(Psalm 117)

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!
Let those who fear the Lord say,
his steadfast love endures forever.
Out of my distress I called on the Lord;
the Lord answered me and set me free.
The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.
This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvellous in our eyes.
(Psalm 118:1,4,5,22,23)

Blessing

May the blessing of God,
the Creator, the Christ and the Holy Spirit,
be with us all.

3.1 Church Membership - on Profession of Faith

Belonging to the Church involves a commitment to meet together within the fellowship of the local church and to grow individually in the Christian life.

Never let it be said that being received into membership is the end of the road ... it most certainly is not. It is the beginning of something great for the person concerned and for the life of the Church.

When someone is to be received into church membership it is good to make this the focus of the whole service. It is one of the great moments of celebration in the life of a church and the life of the individual Christian. It is particularly important for the children to be present.

This form of this service assumes that the candidate for church membership has already been baptised. If someone wishes to be received into membership who has not been baptised it is a wonderful opportunity for that person and for the whole fellowship of the church to share in the Sacrament of Baptism.

In baptism it is the grace of God which is celebrated and revealed. Paul says that those who have been baptised into Christ Jesus have been baptised into his death and should consider themselves dead to sin and alive to God (Romans 6:1ff). As Christians respond in faith to the grace of God, their lives can be transformed. In becoming a church member an individual is responding to the grace seen at work in baptism by committing him or herself to the covenanted community of the Church which is the body of Christ and so looking to a life in which sin has no dominion.

At the heart of the Congregational understanding of the Church is the conviction that membership of Christ's body must find expression in a commitment to a local church. Membership of a particular local church is at the same time membership of the one holy, catholic, apostolic Church of Jesus Christ.

This statement of congregational principles is taken from the Congregational Federation's membership certificate. It begins with a reminder of the basis of the Congregational understanding of the Church: a faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and a conviction that the risen Lord is present wherever his Church meets.

This means that each church has the power, under God and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to make its own decisions. It can also exercise its freedom to seek help, support and counsel from other churches and individual Christians, and to offer such help wherever it can.

Each local church enjoys fellowship within the Congregational Federation with other churches all of whom are equal partners in the work of the Federation. The churches of the Congregational Federation are fully committed to working with Christians in the whole family of Christ's Church. They believe very firmly in the oneness of the Church which needs to find expression at every opportunity. It is, however, a oneness which is best seen in the rainbow colours of a beautiful unity in diversity. It is for this reason that supporters of the Congregational Federation have rejected any moves towards organic union which they have feared might lead to a dull, monolithic uniformity.

It is important to prepare for church membership by exploring the Christian faith and what it means to be a member of the whole Church and of a particular local church within the Congregational tradition.

People are received into membership of the church on the authority of the church meeting.

This may be an opportunity to invite the congregation to share in a reading of the Scriptures which sets out its faith. Alternatively, a church covenant, outlining the faith shared by the members of the church together, could be read at this point.

Those who seek to join a local church are asked to make a simple statement of faith, echoing Paul's words in Romans 10:9.

It may be appropriate to ask the one being received into membership to give his or her own testimony at this point. One has to be sensitive to the particular person ... and give plenty of notice.

The right hand of fellowship is not simply a handshake. It is a great New Testament custom described in Galatians 2:9ff. After his wilderness years, when Paul joined the church in Jerusalem, the leaders were understandably sceptical about his conversion. They met and talked with him, and discovered that God's grace really was at work within him. Then, Paul writes, when 'those who were acknowledged pillars [of the church] recognised the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship,' (Galatians 2:9). It is good to involve others who might be described as 'pillars of the church' in giving the right hand of fellowship.

Immediately after receiving the right hand of fellowship Paul and Barnabas were commissioned for service in the mission to the Gentiles and challenged to remember the poor. The new member is now given a specific task and together with all other church members reminded of the responsibilities they share.

It is particularly important to stress the responsibility to play a full part in the decision-making of the church at church meeting. This description of the responsibilities of membership is drawn from the Congregational Federation's

membership certificate.

This is a good opportunity to talk to the children ... and to the adults as well ... about the Church and about commitment. If the children and young people go out it is good to invite them to come back into the service for communion.

The sermon may well focus on challenge of the Good News of the Christian faith for all in the congregation and explore what it means to belong to the Church.

Communion is the climax of the service. It is the tradition in many churches that young people take Communion for the first time when they have made their profession of faith and have been received into membership.

Since the way faith expresses itself can vary with age, some churches have a junior church membership for younger teenagers who are thought not ready for the full responsibilities of church membership. In these churches those young people who have become junior members may be welcomed to share in communion, whilst in others baptised children of all ages receive the bread and wine. There is a responsibility on the local church to think carefully about the time at which children share in the sacrament and its relationship to church membership. Some believe that the mature faith of an adult or teenager is necessary. Others believe that the grace of God for all, regardless of age, is expressed in the sacrament and ask only for such response as an individual is capable of making at his or her particular stage of development.

3.1 Church Membership

On Profession of Faith

Call to Worship

Hymn of Praise

Prayer

Introduction to Church Membership

Today we are to receive - *name* - into membership of the Church of Jesus Christ as he/she makes a profession of his/her faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

When we meet together to share in the Sacrament of Baptism we rejoice in a powerful sign that God's grace is not dependent on anything we do but is poured out quite freely on each of us. We are then reminded of the way in which that grace of God in Christ Jesus has the power to change our lives enabling us to die to the world and to rise again to newness of life in Christ Jesus our Lord. But that grace can only make a difference to us as we make it our own, responding to the love of God in Christ simply by turning and trusting ourselves to him in faith.

As we celebrate baptism we pray that those who are baptised will at each stage of their development make the promise of salvation their own until in adulthood they are able to turn to God and declare their faith in Jesus Christ and enter into membership of the Church.

Today we rejoice that - *name* - is now able to come forward and make that profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and so become fully a member of the Church of Jesus Christ.

To belong to the Church of Jesus Christ involves belonging to a local church. - *name of church* - shares a wonderful heritage of faith with all local churches and in particular with churches of the Congregational Federation.

Congregationalists are bound to their local church and each church to the Congregational Federation by belief in the living God revealed in Jesus Christ.

We trust in our Lord's promise to be with his people who meet in his name.

We affirm the scriptural right of every church to maintain independence in the ordering of its affairs according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We recognise the oneness of all Christians within the world-wide Church and respect the natural diversity of ways to God. We seek the unity for which Christ prayed by whatever means he wills.

We play our full part in - *name of the local Council of Churches* - , in - *Churches Together in England or Cytun or Acts* - and in the Council of Churches for Great Britain and Ireland. We are in partnership with churches all over the world through the Council for World Mission and the International Congregational Fellowship. [Name other groupings to which the church belongs.]

We worship, work and serve with all who love our Lord, to realise his kingdom of justice and peace, and to help people everywhere to know the joy of his companionship.

We ask of those who wish to join us as members that they make a simple declaration of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

We rejoice that today - *name* - is able to make that profession of faith and with the full support of the church meeting we welcome him/her into church membership.

A Statement of the Church's Faith

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Profession of Faith

Will the Congregation please stand and will - *name* - come forward to make a profession of faith?

Do you believe in God
and accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour?

I do.

The Right Hand of Fellowship

On behalf of - *church's name* - I extend to you the right hand of fellowship, recognising the grace God has given to you, as a sign that we are all partners together in the work of Christ's body, the Church.

God bless you in the life we share in Jesus Christ.

[One or two senior members of the church also extend the right hand of fellowship.]

A Commission to Service

When Paul was given the right hand of fellowship by the pillars of the church in Jerusalem he was given a task to do in proclaiming the Gospel and he was challenged to remember the poor.

- *Name* - is to be [name the particular task or role that the newly received member is already doing or is going to do]. There are other responsibilities we share together as

members.

Without neglecting other duties or responsibilities we will worship regularly and give time to Bible reading and prayer. We want to live the whole of our lives in the relationship of disciple and friend of Jesus Christ.

We accept our privilege to share in the government of the church at church meetings by the guidance of the Holy Spirit; to uphold the church and its witness while we live within reach; and to transfer a similar loyalty to another fellowship of the Church of Jesus Christ if we leave the district.

- *Name* - , may God bless you in the work you share with us, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Hymn celebrating the Gospel

Keynote Address

[sometimes known as Children's Address]

Announcements

Invitation to the Lord's Supper

Offertory and Dedication

Prayer

[children and young people go to their groups]

Hymn

Sermon

Hymn

Prayers

Words of Jesus and Words of Purpose

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Sharing of the Bread

Sharing of the Cup

Prayer of Dedication

Hymn

Benediction

3.2 Church Membership - By Transfer

A person who has previously been in membership of another local church may be received into membership of a Congregational Church by transfer. The church meeting generally receives and accepts a letter of commendation from the local church to which he or she last belonged.

The service itself is an amended version of the earlier order of service, receiving members on profession of faith.

In preparation for this service it can be important to share with the people concerned what it means to be a member of a Congregational Church.

Membership of the body of Christ finds expression in a commitment to a particular local church, yet it is at the same time membership of the one holy, catholic, apostolic Church of Jesus Christ. This statement recognises the wider life of the whole Church in which a member is involved through participation in the life of the local church.

A statement of the faith of the Church may be made here. These words from John's Gospel are only one very brief example of what may be appropriate. A passage of scripture summarising the basis of the Christian faith may be read together, or the words of a church covenant may be read.

As a way of expressing a commitment to the unity of Christ's Church, Congregationalists do not ask those who have already been received into church membership elsewhere to make a new profession of faith. Similarly, those who, in some traditions, have been confirmed, are not asked to make such a profession again as if all that has gone before was of no account. Rather, the individual's commitment is renewed as he or she now comes to participate in the life of another local church.

The right hand of fellowship is not simply a handshake. It is a New Testament custom described by Paul in Galatians 2:9ff.

Immediately after receiving the right hand of fellowship Paul and Barnabas were commissioned for service in the mission to the Gentiles and challenged to remember the poor (Galatians 2:9,10). While all are reminded of the responsibilities they share through church membership, a particular task, previously agreed, can be given to one who is being received into membership. God has given us many gifts and in the Church each person has some particular ministry which can help build up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Stress is laid on the importance of the duty of playing a full part in the decision-making of the church at church meeting. This description of the responsibilities of membership is drawn from the Congregational Federation's membership certificate.

It is appropriate that new church members should be received at a communion service, whether on profession of faith or by transfer. In some churches it is the custom for the new member(s) to be served first with the bread and wine.

3.2 Church Membership

By Transfer

Call to Worship

Hymn of Praise

Prayer

Introduction to Church Membership

To belong to the Church of Jesus Christ involves belonging to a local church. We rejoice therefore that - *name* - wishes now to transfer his/her membership from - *name of previous church* - to this church.

- *Name of church* - shares a wonderful heritage of faith with all local churches and in particular with churches of the Congregational Federation.

Congregationalists are bound to their local church and each church to the Congregational Federation by belief in the living God revealed in Jesus Christ.

We trust in our Lord's promise to be with his people who meet in his name.

We affirm the scriptural right of every church to maintain independence in the ordering of its affairs according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We recognise the oneness of all Christians within the world-wide Church and respect the natural diversity of ways to God. We seek the unity for which Christ prayed by whatever means he wills.

We play our full part in - *name of the local Council of Churches* - , in - *Churches Together in England or Cytun or Acts* - and in the Council of Churches for Great Britain and Ireland. We are in partnership with churches all over the world through the Council for World Mission and the International Congregational Fellowship. [Name other groupings to which the church belongs.]

We worship, work and serve with all who love our Lord, to realise his kingdom of justice and peace, and to help people everywhere to know the joy of his companionship.

We ask of those who wish to join us as members that they make a simple declaration of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

A Statement of the Church's Faith

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Profession of Faith

We have received a letter of commendation from - *name of previous church* - and it is a great joy now to transfer - *name* - 's membership to this church.

Will the congregation please stand as - *name* - comes forward to renew his/her profession of faith.

Do you believe in God

and accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour?

I do.

The Right Hand of Fellowship

On behalf of - *church's name* - I extend to you the right hand of fellowship, recognising the grace God has given to you, as a sign that we are all partners together in the work of Christ's body, the Church.

God bless you in the life we share in Jesus Christ.

[One or two senior members of the church also extend the right hand of fellowship.]

Prayer and Lord's Prayer

A Commission to Service

When Paul was given the right hand of fellowship by the pillars of the church in Jerusalem he was given a task to do in proclaiming the Gospel and he was challenged to remember the poor.

- *Name* - is to be [name the particular task or role that the newly received member is already doing or is going to do]. There are other responsibilities we share together as members.

Without neglecting other duties or responsibilities we will worship regularly and give time to Bible reading and prayer. We want to live the whole of our lives in the relationship of disciple and friend of Jesus Christ.

We accept our privilege to share in the government of the church at church meetings by the guidance of the Holy Spirit; to uphold the church and its witness while we live within reach; and to transfer a similar loyalty to another fellowship of the Church of Jesus Christ if we leave the district.

- *Name* - , may God bless you in the work you share with us, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

Keynote Address

[sometimes known as Children's Address]

Hymn

Announcements and Invitation to the Lord's Supper

Offertory and Dedication

Prayer

[children and young people go to their groups]

Hymn

Sermon

Hymn

Prayers

Words of Jesus and Words of Purpose

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Sharing of the Bread

Sharing of the Cup

Prayer of Dedication

Hymn

Benediction

3.3 The Church Meeting

The Church Meeting is much more than a business meeting: it is the occasion when church members gather together to pray and plan for the life of the church. All they do is set in a framework of worship.

The meeting opens in worship, perhaps led by one of the deacons.

Any concerns for the church fellowship are reported and the meeting shares in prayer for the fellowship of the church.

All who share in the life of a church have a part to play in its work and mission. It is important to spend time equipping people to carry out the service to which they are called. A church meeting provides one opportunity to undertake this training.

The business of the meeting should be conducted in a proper way and the agenda should be constructed so as to ensure that adequate time is given to the important items. Remember, the longer the agenda, the less that can be effectively achieved! Any other business should usually be notified in advance so that it can be considered first by the diaconate and sufficient time allowed for its discussion.

The agenda is usually drawn up by the deacons who will themselves have met in an atmosphere of prayer to consider how best each item should be discussed. They will often have particular recommendations for the meeting to consider. Concern with practical matters such as buildings should not be allowed to take undue prominence, and a balance should be struck between immediate concerns of the local church and wider concern for the whole Church and for the world.

The aim of the Church Meeting is to discover the will of God for the future of the church: for this reason it is important that the business is conducted in an atmosphere of prayer. In taking decisions it is far better to seek the consensus of the meeting: in establishing the common mind of the meeting, one can best see the will of God for his people. Should a vote be necessary, a close division is a sure indication that the church is not yet of a common mind on that issue. In such circumstances a decision should usually be deferred.

3.3 The Church Meeting

Words of Scripture

Prayer

Hymn

Bible Reading

The Church Fellowship

Fellowship Prayer

Equipped to serve - training in discipleship

Apologies

Notice of any other business

Minutes

Matters Arising

Correspondence

Reports

Plans

Prayer

Benediction

3.4 Commissioning of those Called to Serve

All who belong to the body of Christ have a part to play in the work of the Church. It is important to recognise the special tasks different people are called to undertake. This can be done in an appropriate service of commissioning.

On the pages which follow there is material which can be combined and adapted for use in a service commissioning someone called by a church to serve in one of a wide range of offices. This may be the office of a deacon, a minister or pastor, a preacher, a teacher, or some other office for which a church believes it appropriate to hold such a service of recognition and commissioning.

The form of introduction and the responses on the first three pages can be used in the commissioning of those called to any office in the church. This should be followed by words appropriate to the particular office describing the nature of the calling or task to be undertaken and including an appropriate biblical reading. Suggested material is provided for a number of offices and tasks.

Finally the right hand of fellowship is offered on behalf of the church marking the recognition of the call, and after appropriate biblical words prayers are said before the service continues following the usual pattern for communion. The sermon may well emphasise how God equips all his people for service.

Material is included for use in a service of commissioning or induction for a minister or pastor. Whilst there are also separate patterns for services of ordination and induction by including material here for use at an induction it should become clear that the minister or pastor serves as one among many in the Church whom God may call to a special office.

This responsive reading from Church Family Worship is a reminder of the common calling which all share in the life of discipleship and in the work of the Church.

It is important to lay stress on the centrality of the priesthood of all believers. It is equally important to be quite clear that this does not mean that everyone can be a jack of all trades and master of none. Some people have gifts which equip them for a particular role within the life of a church. It is right that a church should carefully and prayerfully appoint to undertake such roles people who are committed to Jesus Christ and to the life of the Church.

Words taken from I Peter 2:9-10, I John 4:19 and Romans 12:6-8 aim to strike the correct balance between the teaching about the priesthood of all believers and the teaching about the gifts of the Spirit.

The one(s) to be commissioned come forward as the congregation stands.

The appropriate section from the following pages can follow straight on.

‘To engage in pastoral care is to extend the Word and Sacrament into the life of the dispersed congregation. It is to celebrate the reconciliation of God amid the estrangement of people, to re-enact redemption in the fabric of relationships, to proclaim the word of judgement and renewal, to announce a kingdom that wills to be embodied in the stuff of living.... The pastoral ministry is not a break-down service. It is directed towards the building up of the Body of Christ.’ (Neville Clark)

‘The Christian cure of souls is simply the application of Christian theology to pastoral situations, bringing the gospel to bear upon individual needs and circumstances. Here the work of the Christian pastor is clearly distinguished from those of doctor, psychiatrist, social worker or mere busybody. A Pastor is a practitioner of the faith, clinically applying all he or she knows of God, of the saving grace of Christ, of Christian teaching and experience, to specific moral and spiritual problems.’ (REO White)

At a service of induction or commissioning of a pastor or minister it is important to include ...

- an opportunity for the pastor or minister to make a statement, describing his or her call to the ministry and his or her understanding of the Christian faith,
- an opportunity for the church secretary to describe how the call was given.

Appropriate responses can be adapted from the Ordination Services. See further the notes which accompany the Ordination and Induction Services.

Preaching is a great responsibility.

Writing at a time when preaching was valued more highly than it is today, Charles Morgan had this to say ...

‘When the sermon begins what someone in the pew wishes to hear is not a doubtfully wise man of the world lecturing on politics but a preacher who, fearlessly and without compromise, refers his subject whatever it may be, to the innermost truths of Christianity.’

Martin Luther’s advice to a young preacher is still very appropriate ...

‘If Peter and Paul were here, they would scold you because you wish right off to be as accomplished as they. Crawling is something, even if one is unable to walk. Do your best. If you cannot preach an hour, then preach half an hour, or a quarter of an hour. Do not try to imitate other people. Centre on the shortest and simplest points, which are the very heart of the matter, and leave the rest to God. Look solely to his honour and not to applause. Pray that God will give you a mouth and your audience ears. I can tell you preaching isn’t a work of man. Although I am old and experienced, I am afraid every time I have to preach. ... So pray to God and leave all

the rest to him.’

An alternative reading could be taken from II Corinthians 4:13,14 or Acts 18:9,10.

The office of deacon is a key appointment within the life of a Congregational Church. The duties of a deacon have been described as follows:

‘With all the members of the Church to show the example of a devout and Christian life; to do his or her part in maintaining the public worship in which the Church proclaims its faith, and the meetings for fellowship in which the Church renews its obedience to its Lord, and more particularly to share in the ministry of the Church, serving at the Lord’s table and exercising a pastoral care within the congregation; to give leadership and counsel in the temporal affairs of the church, and to represent the local church in the wider concerns of God’s people.’

The deacon’s main work is to have a prayerful concern for all the people in the church fellowship. The membership list may well be divided between the deacons to enable them to share the pastoral care of the church fellowship.

They have a particular responsibility for the pastoral care of the minister/pastor and his or her family.

The various administrative tasks which the church needs to carry out may be divided among the diaconate.

Each deacon will generally take it in turn to be responsible for all the arrangements that have to be made to enable Sunday worship to happen smoothly.

The deacons will meet regularly for prayer and planning.

As a member of the Church with a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour the church secretary has a key part to play in the life of a church. A good administrator, he or she will play an important part in the spiritual leadership of the church.

This is a critical post, to be held by somebody with total dedication, an orderly mind, a sense of humour and great tact. In brief, the job is to make sure that the church is run efficiently, with the whole team of office holders doing their jobs properly and without strain. It is preferable for the post to be held by someone who is prepared to continue in office for some time, to ensure a sense of stability.

The church secretary will keep in touch with denominational matters, ensuring that all correspondence is handed on to the appropriate person within the church.

In some churches the church secretary is also a deacon. In other churches the church secretary attends deacons’ meetings in an ex-officio capacity.

The church secretary will prepare the agendas for church meetings and deacons’ meetings in consultation with the chairperson, and undertake all the necessary

arrangements to see that meetings work smoothly. Minutes may well be the responsibility of someone appointed as minute secretary.

The good church secretary will allow and enable other people to get on with their jobs, once they have been appointed. He or she will by encouragement and attention to detail make the work of minister, pastor and others a pleasure, while at the same time keeping out of the way!

As a member of the Church with a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour the church treasurer has a key part to play in the life of a church. A good financial administrator, he or she will play an important part in the spiritual leadership of the church.

There is much in common between this job and being the treasurer of any other busy organisation. People with some idea of basic book keeping and the handling of money should be appointed. The work is about two things: getting money in and paying money out. It also involves balancing the books at the year end and having them properly audited, and sharing in drawing up a budget for the following year.

Most churches will expect their major income to arise from free-will offerings week by week. Each Sunday money in the collections will have to be counted and booked under loose offerings, weekly envelope gifts and covenanted scheme. In the handling of money and cheques the treasurer will ensure that things are done properly. Cash needs to be counted by two people, the second signature on a cheque must be added when the cheque has been written out in full, receipts and acknowledgements are to be given promptly.

Planned giving through a covenant scheme is to be encouraged for all who are taxpayers as it brings with it great returns for the church: it is important to oversee the scheme carefully and accurately.

If the church has a paid minister or pastor it will be necessary to oversee the P.A.Y.E. scheme.

Careful note should be taken of changing tax laws with particular reference to allowable expenses.

The choice of leaders and teachers for work with children and young people demands great care.

The aim of the teacher is to make children feel welcome, loved and happy in the Christian fellowship as they grow up to learn more about the Christian faith.

A deep love for Jesus Christ and for children and young people is the most important thing that someone called to teach needs to have.

Teaching material is available from the National Christian Education Council, from the Scripture Union and from other sources too. Both those organisations run

training courses and provide teacher training material for use in the local church.

It is important to enable children to feel very much a part of the church fellowship as they grow older.

Music is a vital part of worship and the Organist and/or Director of Music will always have a great deal to do with the atmosphere of the service.

It is essential to build up a good working relationship between the one taking the service and the Organist.

While it is important for those leading the worship to choose hymns for the worship it is essential that this be done in close co-operation with the Organist or one leading the music. The contribution he or she makes in the choice of tune and the choice of music during the service is a very real contribution made by someone with special gifts to the worship of the whole congregation.

It is important to remember that the Organist needs time to prepare in the same way as the preacher needs time to prepare. It is necessary that he or she receives the hymns in good time before the service begins.

There may well be other appointments to be made for which no sentences are included here.

Provide for each a brief 'job description' followed by an appropriate text of Scripture and incorporate it into this Commissioning Service.

It is important for people to realise that the appointment has been made by the Church Meeting. At the same time it is equally important to remember that this is not just another job ... it is very much a call of God to a specific form of service within the fellowship of the church.

The right hand of fellowship is the sign used by the early church to express their recognition of the grace of God at work in a particular person (Galatians 2:9). In this instance that grace of God is at work equipping a person for a special task in the church.

These words from I Peter 4:10-11 set all acts of service in the context of the enabling grace of God and end with an ascription of glory.

It would be appropriate to ask another deacon or someone else involved in the same area of church work to lead in prayer.

The person being appointed may choose this hymn: it is important to plan the service in consultation with that particular person.

Such commissioning ought to be set in the context of a normal celebration of Holy Communion when the whole congregation can be present, including any children so

that they can appreciate that they too are part of the whole life of the Church. It may be an appropriate occasion for children either to stay or to return for the part of the service which focuses on the Lord's Supper.

If a deacon is being appointed it is appropriate for that person to serve at table.

3.4 Commissioning of those Called to Serve

Call to Worship

Hymn

Prayer of Preparation

Introduction

In this service we are to commission - *name(s)* - who has/have been called to serve [our church] as - *title of office* - .

It is good for us to remember that all who belong to the Church of Jesus Christ are called to serve one another in his name.

Jesus calls us all to share in a life of discipleship: it is for us all to respond to that call in faithful obedience.

Called to Serve

Jesus said: 'If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest.'

Master, we hear your call: help us to follow.

Jesus said: 'Unless you change and become humble like little children, you can never enter the kingdom of heaven.'

Master, we hear your call: help us to follow.

Jesus said: 'Blessed are those who are humble; they will receive what God has promised.'

Master, we hear your call: help us to follow.

Jesus said: 'Be merciful just as your Father is merciful; love your enemies and do good to them.'

Master, we hear your call: help us to follow.

Jesus said: 'Love one another, just as I love you; for by this shall everyone know that you are my disciples if you have love, one for another.'

Master, we hear your call: help us to follow.

Jesus said: 'Go to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples and I will be with you always, to the end of the world.'

Master, we hear your call: help us to follow.

Lord, you have redeemed us and called us to your service: give us grace to hear your word and to obey your commandment; for your mercy's sake. Amen.

Statement

As we belong to the fellowship of the Church we all have a part to play in the life of the Church.

Together with all who proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord we are a royal priesthood, God's own people. We are all called by God to proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light and to live out in our lives the love of him who first loved us.

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

We rejoice today that - *name(s)* - is to be commissioned as a - *title of office* - .

It is the responsibility of a - *title of office* - to ...

a Minister or Pastor ...

- to deliver to the people of God the Word of God
- to instruct and admonish them in the ways of the Lord
- to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ in word and deed
- to lead the prayers and worship of the church
- to administer the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper
- to show through pastoral care the love of God for all people
- to maintain the church in good discipline

All that a minister or pastor does is to enable the whole Church to grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of God and to shine forth as a light in the world and so to enable others to know for themselves the love of God in their hearts.

As Paul reminds Titus,

Since those who are given pastoral oversight
are entrusted with God's work,
they must be blameless;
they must not be arrogant
or quick-tempered or addicted to wine
or violent or greedy for gain;

but they must be hospitable,
lovers of goodness, prudent,
upright, devout and self-controlled.
They must have a firm grasp of the word
that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching,
so that they may be able
both to preach with sound doctrine
and to refute those who contradict it.
(Titus 1:7-9)

Statement on behalf of the Church

Let us hear how - *name* - has been called to serve this church ...

A Testimony

Now let us hear - *name* - 's own statement of his/her faith and calling ...

[Questions to the Church]

[Questions to the One who is to be Commissioned]

Hymn for the Spirit

a Preacher ...

- to preach the Word of God faithfully
- to teach the truths of the Christian faith
- to lead the worship of Christ's people
- to live a life worthy of the calling of a preacher

It is good for us to remember the words Paul shared with Timothy as he urged him to preach the Word ...

[In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you:]

Proclaim the message
be persistent
whether the time is favourable or unfavourable;
convince, rebuke and encourage
with the utmost patience in teaching.

Set the believers an example

in speech and conduct,
in love, in faith, in purity.
Give attention to the public reading of scripture,
to preaching, to teaching.
Put these things into practice,
devote yourself to them,
so that all may see your progress.

Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching;
continue in these things,
for in doing this
you will save both yourself and your hearers.
(II Timothy 4:2; I Timothy 4:12-16)

a Deacon ...

- to serve God in a personal life of devotion
- to serve the church in its day to day needs
- to share in the spiritual leadership of the church
- to share in the administrative life of the church

Paul writing to Timothy describes the high calling of a deacon:

Deacons must be serious, not double-tongued,
not indulging in much wine,
not greedy for money;
they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith
with a clear conscience.
And let them first be tested;
then if they prove themselves blameless,
let them serve as deacons.
(I Timothy 3:8-10)

a Church Secretary ...

- to administer the affairs of the church to the glory of God
- to share in the leadership of the church

Paul, writing of the spiritual gifts upon which the life of the church depends, includes the gifts of assistance and of leadership or administration:

Now there are varieties of gifts,
but the same Spirit;
and there are varieties of services,
but the same Lord;

and there are varieties of activities,
but it is the same God
who activates all of them in everyone.

God has appointed in the church
forms of assistance,
and forms of leadership.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit
for the common good.
(I Corinthians 12:4-6,28,7)

a Church Treasurer ...

– to administer the financial affairs of the church to the glory of God

Paul stressed the need for generous giving according to the means of the giver and careful administration of the finance of the church:

If the eagerness is there,
the gift is acceptable according to what one has.

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind,
not reluctantly or under compulsion,
for God loves a cheerful giver.

We rejoice in the person
who has been appointed by the churches
to share in administering these generous gifts
for the glory of the Lord himself.

It is important to do what is right
not only in the Lord's sight
but also in the sight of others.

(II Corinthians 8:12, 9:7-8, 8:19-21)

a Teacher ...

– to teach the truths of the Christian faith

– to nurture children and young people in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ

– to share the love of God in word and deed with the children of the church

– to enable children at each stage of their development to make a response in faith
to the love God has first shown them in Jesus Christ

– to encourage children to be fully part of the life of the church

The work of the teacher has always been important as Paul and the wise words of Proverbs remind us ...

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly;
teach and admonish one another in all wisdom.

My child, if you accept my words
and treasure up my commandments within you,
making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to understanding;

If you seek it like silver,
and search for it as for hidden treasures -
then you will understand the fear of the Lord
and find the knowledge of God.

For the Lord gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.
(Colossians 3:16; Proverbs 2:1-6)

an Organist / Director of Music ...

- to enrich the life of the church through its music and singing
- to share in the preparation and leadership of worship

Music is a fundamental part of worship as the words of the Psalm and the words of Paul remind us ...

Be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

Praise the Lord!

Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty firmament!
Praise him for his mighty deeds;
praise him according to his surpassing greatness!

Praise him with trumpet sound;
praise him with lute and harp!
Praise him with tambourine and dance;
praise him with strings and pipe!
Praise him with clanging cymbals;
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord!
(Colossians 3:16; Psalm 150)

Other Officer or Church Leader ...

The Right Hand of Fellowship

In the name of Jesus Christ and with the authority of the Church Meeting I extend to you the right hand of fellowship recognising that God has called you to serve the fellowship of our church as - *title of office* - .

May God bless you in the ministry which you now share with us all.

Remember, in Peter's words,

Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God,
serve one another with
whatever gift each of you has received.

Whoever speaks
must do so
as one speaking the very words of God;

whoever serves
must do so
with the strength that God supplies,

so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ.

To him belong the glory and the power
for ever and ever. Amen.

(I Peter 4:10-11)

Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Hymn

[The order of service then follows
that which is customary for Communion]

3.6 Ordination and Induction

At the heart of the ordination service is the conviction that all who belong to Jesus Christ are part of a royal priesthood, the priesthood of all believers.

At the same time each person has a particular part to play in the life of the Church as he or she is called by God. Ordination is a celebration of that special vocation to ministry to which some are called: it is conducted in the local church which has extended the call to ministry but with the support of the wider fellowship of churches within the Congregational Federation. To have that wider support candidates for ordination will have their call to ministry recognised by the Pastoral Care Committee of their Area and of the Congregational Federation as a whole. In addition they will have completed an approved course of training.

It is good for the minister elect together with his or her family, where appropriate, to be received into membership of the church at an ordinary communion service prior to the ordination. This is an opportunity for the church to be reminded that its minister is one member among the whole body of church members. In this earlier service the minister elect will have been welcomed into membership of the church by the giving of the right hand of fellowship. This is an ancient symbol of the Christian Church whereby a church fellowship recognises the grace of God at work in a particular person: see Galatians 2:1-10.

The service begins with a call to worship which challenges the whole congregation to recognise the call of Jesus Christ to lifelong service and mission. Alternatives might include verses which sum up the nature of the Church - e.g. Ephesians 5:25b-27.

The opening prayer captures the sense of expectation in the hearts of both the minister elect and the congregation.

This responsive reading is taken from Church Family Worship, 150. It is a reminder that the whole body of the Church is called by Christ to a life of discipleship.

Many other readings could be used at this point in the service. Whilst they need not be responsive readings these do enable the whole congregation to share in the reading of Scripture. For example, Philippians 1:5-11 could be read by all together, declaring as it does the heart of Christian faith and pointing to Christ as providing the pattern for all who follow him.

The presiding minister will be a senior minister who is a friend of the minister elect, a minister dear to the church concerned, a senior minister from the local Area or from the Congregational Federation nationally.

This statement of our Congregational understanding of the Church is taken from the church membership certificate.

Other statements might be used instead. If the church has a church covenant it might be appropriate to read that at this point. It might be appropriate to read the statement of faith used by one of the national ecumenical bodies, Churches Together in England, Cytun or Acts.

It might be appropriate to invite a member of the church to read this statement.

References to involvement with the wider family of the Church are important - it is necessary to get the details of that involvement right! Remember that the church might have involvement with other missionary fellowships.

This statement draws heavily on the New Testament.

I Peter 2:9.

It is important to stress the priesthood of all believers since it is fundamental to the Congregational understanding of ministry.

Ephesians 4:7,11,12.

This is a reminder that all who belong to the Church receive gifts from the Holy Spirit: but not all are appointed to every kind of ministry.

The ministry of pastor and teacher is a high calling with many diverse responsibilities. It is important for the minister elect, together with his or her church to review what is included here and adapt it if necessary. In adapting these words, however, care must be taken to include the full scope of Christian ministry.

Part of the fundamental purpose of Christian ministry is to help to enable all the people of God to function effectively as the body of Christ in the world.

These words are taken from I Thessalonians 5:12,13. The New Testament is quite clear that there is an authority in pastoral ministry which calls for the respect of the church.

It is the Church Meeting which recognises the call of God to ministry and it will have called this particular person to be the church's minister.

The church secretary or another will report the way in which the church was led to recognise the call of the minister elect to the Christian ministry and to the pastorate of the particular church. He/she will describe the church's vision for the future.

This statement by the minister elect is one of the highlights of the whole service. It will include

– a testimony describing how the minister elect came to be a Christian,

- an account of the way in which he/she was called to the ministry
- an account of the way in which he/she was called to this pastorate
- and most important of all a description in his/her own words of the faith which will be at the heart of his/her ministry.

In this way the minister elect will declare to his/her congregation and to all others present what is at the heart of the message of Good News which will faithfully be preached and taught.

These or similar responses may be included here. This first set of questions adopts a basically Trinitarian format and so relates the calling of the minister to the beliefs of the whole Church. It also embraces insight from Old and New Testaments and from both gospel and epistle.

There is a particular emphasis on celebration and joy as being at the core of our response to God. The minister helps lead the church in its celebration which looks forwards to the time when creation is released from bondage to decay (Romans 8:21) and the whole creation may resound with praise!

The text Jesus used at the outset of his ministry (Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:18,19) provides a pattern for the proclamation of the whole Church which the minister will declare through preaching, teaching, presiding at communion and baptism and by his or her own life. This is a liberating, life-filled message. Paul proclaimed 'Christ and him crucified' and this is the core of the Gospel which the minister must preach, both within the local church and for the wider community, since it is the crucified Christ who is the risen one and who redeems and gives new life.

The out-pouring of the Spirit at Pentecost is recalled by the quotation from Joel 2:28 used by Peter in Acts 2:17. It is the Spirit which equips all God's people for service. The minister is no exception. Such a calling and gift will have been tested by the Church Meeting and through the training received. The Spirit sustains God's people, providing both comfort and strength, and unites the people of God throughout the world in the body of Christ.

There is one question to the church which enables it to declare both its belief in God's calling of the candidate to the Christian ministry and its confidence that he or she is called to be the minister of that particular church. This ministry is seen as being exercised alongside the various ministries of all in the church. Together all are freed by the forgiveness Christ offers and enabled by the strength the Spirit gives to work both for the sake of the Church, the body of Christ, and with active concern for the world in which it is set.

It is quite possible for these questions to be rewritten so that they are spoken by the candidate and by the church as a direct statements of their beliefs but this should not detract from the significance of the testimony given previously by the candidate.

This alternative set of questions is based on words of Scripture. A further set of responses can be found in the second order for ordination. It is important for the minister elect to use only responses which he/she believes communicate his/her own convictions about ministry, and with which the church also will be satisfied. The church in consultation with the minister elect may, for example, prefer to use a similar collection of verses as the basis of a set of responses, or a more traditional set of responses ... or indeed to dispense with them altogether as what is contained in them will have been covered fully in his/her earlier statement.

The texts used here are from:

- 1 Romans 10:9;
- 2 II Timothy 3:16; I Timothy 4:13; II Timothy 4:2;
- 3 Ephesians 4:1; I Timothy 4:12; I Timothy 4:15,16.

Many other texts, especially some from the Pastoral Epistles, may be appropriate.

Again these alternative questions are mainly based on NT texts:

- 1 Ephesians 4:4-6; Ephesians 4:1,2;
- 2 Titus 1:5-9; I Thessalonians 5:12,13;
- 3 I Corinthians 9:14; 12:7; II Corinthians 9:7.

The phrase 'pastoral oversight' can be an important one to use, linked as it is to the NT calling of 'overseer' (Titus 1:5-9), a calling very similar to the Congregational understanding of the pastoral ministry.

The laying on of hands in ordination is a New Testament custom (Acts 14:23, I Timothy 4:14 and II Timothy 1:6). It is placed here in the context of prayer and it signifies the setting apart of the minister for his or her task of ministry. It does not confer any change of status on the minister. It is important to choose carefully those who take part in laying on hands. Some may like to confine it to the senior members or deacons of the church concerned. Others may like to include representatives from the wider family of Congregational churches or indeed from the wider family of churches represented at the service.

Hands are laid on the candidate's head at an ordination only. The candidate will usually kneel for the ordination, but not where there is an induction only.

The words in bold type may be said by the representatives together or by the whole church. It is important that people realise that this is an act setting apart for specific service and does not imply the same understanding of the apostolic succession as that adhered to in other traditions.

The presiding minister may speak these or other appropriate words, else they may be spoken by a member of the church or someone else of the minister and church's choosing.

These words are taken from Paul's charge to Timothy in I Timothy 6:11-16.

The presiding minister continues with words from Numbers 6:24-26.

Prayers may be found in other order of service books: far better is to be true to our tradition of extempore prayer. They may be led by a close friend of the minister or by a representative of the wider fellowship of churches, or by a member of the local church.

The right hand of fellowship is offered first by a representative of the church to which the minister has been called. It is then given by representatives of:

- The national Congregational Federation
- The local Area of the Congregational Federation
- The local council of churches
- Any other appropriate body.

A single sermon (or charge) will usually address the shared calling of all in the church whilst not neglecting the particular calling of the minister. It is sometimes customary to have two sermons: the first would be a charge to the church, declaring the Word of God for the members of the congregation as they enter into a new phase of their life; and the second, a charge to the minister as he or she embarks on this new ministry. A charge to the minister will usually be preached by someone of the minister's choosing. It will include the challenge to share in the ministry of all God's people. Whether there is one sermon or two, most important is that the good news is proclaimed and that the call of God is heard and celebrated.

The prayers are not an afterthought. The call of all God's people leads them to be concerned for the whole church and the world within which they will minister.

This benediction is taken from Ephesians 3:20-21.

3.6 Ordination and Induction

Call to Worship

Jesus said, “Full authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

Hymn of Praise

Prayer

Lord God, our heavenly Father,
grant us such a sense of your presence this day
that all who are filled with expectation
of great things to come
may find your blessing
in the fulfilment of all their hopes.

Lord Jesus Christ
reach out to each one of us
at the point of our deepest need
to bring forgiveness in our sinfulness
strength in our weakness
and courage in our timidity.

Sow in our hearts this day the seeds of the Spirit
that in the life of this church,
in the life of - name -
and in the lives of each one of us
we may bear the fruit of love, joy and peace
to the glory of your everlasting kingdom.

This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

Lord's Prayer

Called to Serve

Jesus calls us all to share in a life of discipleship. It is for us all to respond to that call in faithful obedience.

Jesus said: ‘If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest.’

Master, we hear your call: help us to follow.

Jesus said: ‘Unless you change and become humble like little children, you can never

enter the kingdom of heaven’.

Master, we hear your call: help us to follow.

Jesus said: ‘Blessed are those who are humble; they will receive what God has promised.’

Master, we hear your call: help us to follow.

Jesus said: ‘Be merciful just as your Father is merciful; love your enemies and do good to them.’

Master, we hear your call: help us to follow.

Jesus said: ‘Love one another, just as I love you; for by this shall everyone know that you are my disciples if you have love, one for another.’

Master, we hear your call: help us to follow.

Jesus said: ‘Go to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples and I will be with you always, to the end of the world.’

Master, we hear your call: help us to follow.

Lord, you have redeemed us and called us to your service: give us grace to hear your word and to obey your commandment; for your mercy’s sake. Amen.

Statement by the Presiding Minister

It is a joy to meet together in the presence of Jesus Christ to celebrate the call of - *name* - to the Christian ministry and to rejoice in his/her induction to the pastorate - *name of church* - . It is good for us to remember what it means for us to be the Church of Jesus Christ in the world.

Congregationalists are bound to their local church and each church to the Congregational Federation by belief in the living God revealed in Jesus Christ.

We trust in our Lord’s promise to be with his people who meet in his name.

We affirm the scriptural right of every church to maintain independence in the ordering of its affairs according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We recognise the oneness of all Christians within the world-wide Church and respect the natural diversity of ways to God. We seek the unity for which Christ prayed by whatever means he wills.

We play our full part in - *name of the local Council of Churches* - , in - *Churches Together in England or Cytun or Acts* - and in the Council of Churches for Great Britain and Ireland. We are in partnership with churches all over the world through the Council for World Mission and the International Congregational Fellowship. [Name other groupings to which the church belongs.]

We worship, work and serve with all who love our Lord, to realise his kingdom of justice and peace, and to help people everywhere to know the joy of his companionship.

A Hymn to Celebrate the Calling of the Church

The Christian Ministry

It is also important for us to be reminded of our understanding of Christian ministry.

As we belong to the fellowship of the Church we all have a part to play in the life of the Church.

Together with all who proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord we are a royal priesthood, God's own people. We are all called by God to proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light and to live out in our lives the love of him who first loved us.

Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

It is the calling of a minister to be a pastor and teacher:

- to deliver to the people of God the Word of God
- to instruct and admonish them in the ways of the Lord
- to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ in word and deed
- to lead the prayers and worship of the church
- to administer the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper
- to show through pastoral care the love of God for all people
- to maintain the church in good discipline.

All that a minister does is to enable the whole Church to grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ so that it may proclaim good news to the poor, with liberty, healing and justice for all people as it looks to the coming kingdom of our God.

In the words of St Paul, we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labour among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

Let us, therefore, hear how - *name of church* - , meeting in the presence of Jesus

Christ and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in prayer has called - name - to be its minister and will receive him/her as appointed by the Lord.

Statement by a Representative of the Church

Statement by Minister Elect

Let us also hear from - *name* - of his/her assurance that God has called him/her to the Christian ministry and to the pastorate of this church, of the faith he/she holds and of his/her purpose under God to be faithful in his/her ministry in this church and in the whole Church of Jesus Christ wherever it may meet.

Questions to the Minister Elect

Do you believe in God the Creator,
in whose image men and women are made,
in whose world we live
and in whose gifts we rejoice;
and do you believe that you are called
to celebrate life
with this company of God's people,
to share in their joy
and in their sorrow,
proclaiming new birth
and leading in worship,
that all of creation may praise its maker?

This I believe.

Do you believe in God the Redeemer,
who brought good news for the poor,
release for the captives,
sight for the blind
and freedom for the oppressed;
and do you believe that you are called
to proclaim Jesus Christ
in this company of God's people
and for the community in this place,
showing in words and in actions,
as bread is broken and wine is shared,
that the one who was crucified
is the one who brings life?

This I believe.

Do you believe in God the Sustainer,
the Spirit of truth,

who consoles and empowers
and is poured out on all flesh
so that sons and daughters shall prophesy;
and do you believe that God has called you
and equipped you with the gifts of a minister
to guide, to comfort and to encourage,
to baptise and to teach
in this company of God's people
and with the Church throughout the world?

This I believe.

Question to the Church

Do you who are the church in this place
believe that God,
the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
has called - name -
to the Christian ministry;
and that you can receive him/her
as one called by God
to serve among you and with you
as you each take your part
in building up the body of Christ,
living in peace,
in the freedom of forgiveness,
and seeking justice
by the power of the Spirit
for the glory of God?

This we believe.

Alternative Questions to the Minister Elect

Do you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead?

I do.

Do you accept that all Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work; and do you promise to devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching, to convince, rebuke and encourage - with the utmost patience in teaching?

I do.

Do you promise to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, to

set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity; and do you promise to put these things into practice, to devote yourselves to them, so that all may see your progress, paying close attention to yourself and to your teaching and continuing in these things?

I do.

Alternative Questions to the Church

Will the members of - name of church - please stand? In your Church Meeting you have recognised that God has called - name - to the Christian Ministry and to the pastoral oversight of - name of church - . Will you make a public declaration of the support you will give him/her as he/she fulfils that calling?

Do you accept that there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all; and do you promise to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?

We do.

Do you recognise that God has called - *name* - to the Christian ministry and to the pastoral oversight of this church; and do you promise to welcome him/her in the Lord with great joy, showing respect to the one whom you have called to be your minister and esteeming him/her very highly in love because of his/her work, giving him/her [and his/her family] all the support and encouragement he/she/they will need?

We do.

As the Lord has commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel do you promise each one to give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver; and do you promise, each one, to use whatever spiritual gifts God has given you for the common good recognising that you are the body of Christ and that each one of you has a part to play in it?

We do.

Hymn for the Holy Spirit

The Act of Ordination/Induction

[At an ordination:] In the very early days of the Church those who were appointed to pastoral oversight were committed in prayer to the Lord in whom they had put their trust. When Timothy was so appointed the senior members of the church together

with Paul laid their hands on him as a sign that he was set apart for the pastoral oversight of his church. I now invite - *names* - to join me as representatives of the whole Church in the act of ordination and induction as the remainder of the congregation stand to share in the setting apart of - *name* - for the Christian ministry and his/her induction to the pastoral oversight of this church.

[At an induction:] I now invite - *names* - to join me as representatives of the whole Church as the remainder of the congregation stand to share in the induction of - *name* - to the pastoral oversight of this church.

[The senior members of the church gather round the minister elect, and one leads in prayer.]

Thanksgiving for the ministry of Christ
Thanksgiving for the whole Church
Thanksgiving for the gifts of the Spirit

[At an ordination only, those gathered round the minister elect lay hands on him/her and say:]

**May - *name* - be filled with the Holy Spirit,
as in full confidence of the call
which he/she has received from you,
we now ordain him/her
to be a minister of the Gospel
in the Church of Jesus Christ.**

[At an induction only, the one leading in prayer says:]

May - *name* - find his/her belief in your call
renewed as he/she responds to your guiding
and takes up the new work you have given him/her.

[Then at an ordination may be said:]

Man of God / Woman of God,
pursue righteousness, godliness,
faith, love, endurance, gentleness.
Fight the good fight of the faith;
take hold of the eternal life
to which you were called
and for which you made the good confession
in the presence of many witnesses
gathered together here today.

In the presence of God,
who gives life to all things,
and of Christ Jesus,

who in his testimony before Pilate
made the good confession,
I charge you,
to keep the commandment without spot or blame
until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ,
which he will bring about at the right time -
he who is blessed and only Sovereign,
the King of kings and Lord of lords.
It is he alone who has immortality
and dwells in unapproachable light,
whom no one has ever seen or can see;
to him be honour and eternal dominion.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.

[The same or another representative of the local or wider church continues in prayer:]

prayer for the minister
and for the particular gifts that he/she will need;
prayer for the particular church
which he/she has been called to serve

The Right Hand of Fellowship

[Given by a representative of the local church:]

In the name of Jesus Christ and with the authority of the Church Meeting I extend to you the right hand of fellowship, recognising that God has called you to the pastorate of this church.

May God bless you in the ministry which you now share with us all.

[Representatives from other churches and appropriate bodies extend the right hand of fellowship]

Hymn Praying God's Blessing on the Minister

Scripture Readings

Charge to the Church and to the Minister

Prayer for the Church and the World

Hymn

Benediction

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

3.8 Ordination and Induction - An Alternative Order

The ordination of a minister is a matter that affects the whole Christian Church and it seems right that it should not be undertaken by a local Congregational Church without reference to, and approval from the Congregational Federation.

The ordinand or candidate (minister elect) should be in touch with the presiding minister before the ordination/induction service to familiarise himself/herself with the questions that will be asked and the 'expected' answers, and to talk over such things as the choice of hymns, and who will be taking part.

It is wise for the presiding minister to take responsibility for ensuring everything runs smoothly and that nothing is forgotten in preparing or conducting the service. This relieves the minister elect of what can otherwise be a worrisome burden.

This order of service may be amended where indicated and used as the basis for the induction of a pastor or minister.

The service begins as the presiding minister explains what is about to happen and then calls the congregation to worship.

This call to worship brings together words from the Epistles: Ephesians 5:25b-27, 4:11; Romans 12:4; Ephesians 4:16.

With the invocation the presiding minister offers a short prayer for God's blessing on the proceedings.

The Scripture reading is usually read by a friend of the minister elect. The choice of reading or readings is a matter for careful consultation between the preacher and candidate.

In place of a hymn there may be an anthem or solo.

These statements concern the call. The first, by the presiding minister assures the assembled company of the approval of the Congregational Federation. The second statement, by the church secretary, explains how the church has been led to call this particular minister.

The candidate's statement testifies to his/her Christian commitment, call to the Christian ministry and call to this pastorate.

The presiding minister questions the ordinand [or in the case of an induction service, the pastor or minister] to confirm his or her fitness for the task.

These questions include an affirmation of Congregational principles.

This question uses words from I Peter 5:2,3 in which Peter sets down a pattern for Christian ministry as generous service.

At the induction of a minister or pastor the next section is omitted: the order of service moves from the questions to the ordinand to the question to the church.

The prayer for the ordinand is offered by the presiding minister or perhaps by a representative of the Training Board.

The presiding minister invites the ordinand to kneel and asks those chosen to share in the laying on of hands to join him/her around the ordinand. Those chosen will usually include two representatives of the local church and one representative each of the Training Board, the local Area of the Congregational Federation and the national Congregational Federation.

The ordination prayer is read together by all those laying on hands.

The presiding minister declares the ordinand to be duly ordained to the Christian ministry.

This declaration incorporates words from: Psalm 121:8; Proverbs 3:6; and Numbers 6:24-26.

The presiding minister asks for the support of the congregation for their new minister. This is the point at which an induction service continues immediately after the questions to the minister or candidate. The quotation is from I Timothy 5:17.

The presiding minister offers prayer for the newly inducted minister seeking the Holy Spirit's grace and power upon the ministry about to begin.

The newly inducted minister or pastor is welcomed as minister of the church by representatives of:

- The local church
- The national Congregational Federation
- The local Area of the Congregational Federation
- The local council of churches
- Any other appropriate body.

A sermon is preached either by the presiding minister or some other mutually acceptable person, charging both the minister and the church of which he or she is now a part to respond to their callings.

The blessing is pronounced by the newly inducted minister or pastor.

3.8 Ordination and Induction - An Alternative Order

The Intention

[All standing]

In the presence of almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are gathered here this day to ordain - name - to the Christian ministry. We do this in the confidence that God has called him/her to this office through the call of the deacons and members of this church, and through his/her satisfactory completion of a course of training approved by the Congregational Federation, and by the secret working of the Holy Spirit in his/her own heart.

Call to Worship

Jesus Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the Church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind - yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. To this end the gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another, and must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.

Let us then worship God with praise and with prayer, giving heed to his Word, and offering ourselves afresh to his service.

Hymn

Invocation

Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth and all things visible and invisible, we are moved with wonder at the transcendence of your grace by which we are invited to believe that as we meet in Jesus' name, you are among us and in us.

Make us sensitive to your presence. Let us feel in awesome gladness the moving of your Spirit among us. May none of us escape this place without the assurance that we have shared this time with the risen Lord, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

And for your servant about to be ordained we pray, that he/she shall be strengthened by your mighty power to fulfil his/her ministry with glory to your holy name, and with the reverent boldness of one who knows himself/herself to be duly authorised to minister by our Saviour and only Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Scripture Reading

Hymn

Statement by the Presiding Minister

[Briefly describing the Congregational understanding of the Christian Ministry, and assuring the company that this candidate has the approval of the Congregational Federation]

Statement by the Church Secretary

[Explaining how the church has been led to this particular candidate]

Statement by the Candidate

[Testifying to his/her call to the Congregational ministry and to this particular church]

Questions to the Candidate

I, - *name of presiding minister* - , by the grace of God a minister of the Gospel, and here representing the Congregational Federation, call upon you, - *name* - , to testify to your Christian faith, and to assure us of your fitness to undertake the work of a minister in the churches of our faith and order.

Do you believe that God has called you to be a minister in his Church?

I do so believe.

Do you believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and do you confess Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour and Lord?

I do so believe and confess.

Are you persuaded that the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments reveal all things necessary for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ?

I am so persuaded.

Will you be diligent in prayer, in reading Holy Scripture, and in study to deepen your faith, that you may ever uphold the truth of the Gospel and faithfully proclaim it?

By the help of God, I will.

Will you tend the flock of God, exercising the oversight not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you do it, not lording it over those in your charge allotted to you, but as an example to the flock?

I will do so, the Lord being my helper.

Will you promote unity, peace and love among all Christian people, and especially among those whom you will serve as minister?

By the help of God, I will.

Do you believe that Congregationalism represents a truly scriptural concept of ecclesiastical polity, and will you administer the business of the church according to that concept?

I do so believe, and in that manner I will conduct the business of the church.

Having heard your testimony to your faith in Jesus Christ, and of your call to the ministry of his Church, and of your readiness to abide by our Congregational constitutions, and of the preparations you have made to equip yourself to the work of the ministry, I am persuaded that your call is from God and that we may proceed to your ordination assured that what we do accords with his will and purpose for your life and that of the churches you will serve.

[Turning to the congregation the president says:]

Good people, our brother/sister in Christ - name - and those who have trained and examined him/her are satisfied that he/she is truly called of God to the ministry of the Church. If you are able to share that conviction with us, will you please stand.

Let us pray ...

_Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we stand before you to signify that we believe our brother/sister - name - is truly called and adequately prepared to be a minister of the gospel in the Congregational Federation. Be pleased to honour our faith and grant that all our prayers and hopes for his/her future ministry may be fulfilled as you enable him/her to keep the promises he/she has made this day, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Will the congregation please be seated, and will those who are to share with me in laying hands on our brother/sister please join me now.

[The candidate kneels]

The Ordination Prayer

[Read together by all those laying-on-hands]

- Name - , in the name of almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we ordain you to the Christian ministry. May the Lord fill you with his Holy Spirit and endow you with all the necessary grace to be a faithful and wise minister of the gospel. May he also give you the physical strength to meet the demands the ministry will make upon you. May he grant you power to preach with conviction, patience to endure hardness, tolerance and courtesy in your attitudes to those you will serve, and love for all people.

Above all things else, may it please the Lord to make you a winner of souls, an effective evangelist able to introduce men, women and children, to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Support him/her in his/her labours, Lord. Grant him/her peace in his/her heart and in his/her home, and so preserve him/her from everything unworthy of his/her calling that his/her life is never in conflict with his/her message.

All this we seek in the name of Jesus. Amen.

The Declaration of Ordination

[The president, takes the candidate by the right hand, and says:]

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the great head of the Church, and in the name of the churches of our Congregational faith and order, I declare you to be ordained to the ministry of the Church of Christ. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and even forevermore. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you
and give you peace.

The Induction

[The president addresses the congregation]

Do you who are members of - *name* of church - receive our reverend brother/sister in Christ, - *name* - as your minister, and will you uphold him/her by your prayers and your practical support, remembering that 'those who labour in preaching and teaching' are to be 'considered worthy of double honour?' And if you do so receive - *name* - , will you who are members of this church please stand?

Let us pray ...

Our heavenly Father, we pray you to grant that the joining together of minister and people in this place shall be attended by your continual blessing. Let it be that the ministry now commencing shall be to the honour and glory of your holy name. May love always inform the relationships of all who are members here, and may the united work and worship of this people be an effective witness to your Son and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in this area and neighbourhood. We ask this in his name. Amen.

The Declaration of Induction

[All standing]

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, I declare that - *name* - is duly inducted as minister of - *name of church* - . May this ministry be fruitful in all things pleasing to God. Amen.

The Right Hand of Fellowship

Let those appointed to represent the churches of our faith and order, and such other representatives as intend to add their prayers to ours for our reverend brother/sister in Christ now ordained to the ministry and inducted to this church, extend their hands in fellowship and love.

Hymn

Charge to the Church and Minister

Hymn

Blessing

[Pronounced by the newly ordained minister]

4.1 Christian Marriage

It is important to prepare with the couple not just for the marriage service but for marriage itself. After the alternative order for marriage, beginning on page 427 of the notes, there is brief guidance on preparing for marriage, planning the service, and the legal requirements of the ceremony in England and Wales. These notes should be read before planning a marriage service. Different regulations apply in Scotland, and all information on legal requirements given in *Patterns for Worship* applies only to England and Wales.

In a call to worship the first words of the service are from God to the congregation. Christian marriage is a celebration in which God is praised. The first hymn takes up this note of praise. It is important to take care over the choice of hymns, remembering the appropriate ordering of the service.

The prayer includes thanksgiving for what has brought us to this point, confession, forgiveness, and prayer for guidance and blessing in the taking of vows.

At the beginning of the service is a clear declaration of the Christian teaching on marriage, taken from the Church of Scotland's Book of Common Order (1979). The first words are from Psalms 127:1 and 124:8, suggesting that a Christian marriage is built effectively through God's involvement, providing help from day to day.

What makes any Christian service special is the presence of God in Christ by the power of the Spirit: this is what makes the marriage service a particular joy. The service is truly a gateway into a lifelong relationship in which Christ is always present.

Jesus states that marriage is part of the very fabric of society as ordered by God. The closeness of the sexual relationship is seen by him as a picture of the closeness of the marriage relationship. This is one positive reason why Christians have traditionally held that the sexual relationship is for marriage alone. The best model for all human relationships and most of all for marriage is the relationship Christ has with his people: its characteristic is a forgiving love freely shared. As people are forgiven so they forgive in the spirit of the Lord's prayer.

Taking marriage lightly and entering it selfishly are two of the biggest factors in the breakdown of marriage. They can be countered by reverence, involving deep respect for one another and by dedication, involving hard work.

Marriage is a two-way relationship of mutual trust, caring and love. It is wrong to say as some services do that it is primarily for having children.

This is not a killjoy statement. It is the affirmation that sex can reach its full potential only within a stable loving relationship in the presence of God.

Notice the careful wording which does not give the false impression that marriage must result in a family: where there are children marriage provides the security of love and the heritage of faith. These words are echoed in the Service of Baptism for Infants.

In these words there is a movement from the couple to the family and now to society at large where the stable marriage relationship has a vital part to play.

A hymn may be added at this point.

The remainder of the service is adapted from A Manual for Ministers (Independent Press).

The law requires that a wedding be conducted in a building solemnised for marriages, by an Authorised Person or Registrar who must use certain specific words. These are shown in capitals. Alternative words are permitted and are indicated in the accompanying notes. The service must be conducted in public in the presence of at least two witnesses. No wedding can be by invitation only: anyone has a right to be there and the doors of the church must not be locked. Any serious objection would be dealt with in the vestry in the presence of the couple and the witnesses. The only grounds for objection are legal ones: that one partner is already married, that one partner is not of age, that the two partners are too closely related. For further information on the legal requirements for a marriage service please see the notes on page 472. It is also important to refer to **The Guidebook for Authorised Persons** published by the Office for National Statistics and made available to all Authorised Persons.

The precise wording shown in capitals is legally required: The only alternatives permitted are as follows:

Either:

“I declare that I know of no legal reason why I, - *full name* - may not be joined in marriage to - *full name* - .”

Or this response may be used:

“Are you, - *full name* - , free lawfully to marry - *full name* - ?”

“I am”

One of these alternatives must be used with both bride and groom and cannot be altered. Full Christian names and surnames have to be used as they appear on the certificate and will appear in the registers.

The congregation stands as the couple make their vows. At this point it may be appropriate to add a prayer specifically linked to the taking of the vows.

These words appear in different forms in various service books: the couple may wish to choose one that is most appropriate to them or even plan what they themselves want to say. It is important that both bride and groom make the same promises as marriage is a mutual partnership of love. There is a resonance and poetry about this particular form of words which has a lasting appeal. In preparing for the service it is worth pondering the deep significance of each of the thoughts expressed here as they get to the heart of the commitment of marriage.

This custom is an age-old tradition but it is important to get away from any notion of the bride as the property of her father and then of her husband! It may be appropriate to omit it altogether; alternatively the couple may like to work out a response which the bride's parents can make and a response which the groom's parents can make as well.

As the couple join hands, this is not only a handshake, symbolising peace, friendship and total commitment, but also the right hand of fellowship involving the recognition of God's grace in each other.

The precise wording of the section in capitals (including 'thee') is legally required. The only alternative permitted in law is the following simpler and more modern wording:

"I, - *full name* - , take you (or thee) - *full name* - , to be my wedded wife (or husband)."

The remainder of the vows can be altered as appropriate so long as marriage is seen as the life long commitment which these words so powerfully express. The identical wording expresses the mutual relationship of love. The minister divides the vow into manageable phrases each of which is repeated clearly by each partner. Alternatively, the couple may read the words from a printed card.

This is a public declaration by the couple and so ought to be heard! Some like to turn and face each other at this point, others prefer to look towards the front of the church.

The minister takes the ring from the best man or other supporter and gives it to the groom who places it on the fourth finger of the left hand of the bride. If there are two rings the bride does the same. They then say these words together. The couple may need to be helped to feel at ease at this point as rings are notoriously difficult to put on!

This statement is a powerful summary of the elements of the service - it is the beginning of a life-long partnership, carried out in the presence of God and openly in public. The exchange of vows, of a ring and of the right hand of fellowship symbolises the close relationship. How important that no one should threaten it!

At this point the couple are married and all can breathe a sigh of relief and relax. The couple may kiss (though not for too long!) and the congregation may sit. The bride and groom may remain standing. The address is an opportunity to apply the Christian teaching on marriage in a personal way for the benefit primarily of the couple but also for the rest of the congregation. The couple may recognise allusions to the preparatory sessions, though confidences must not be divulged, and others may find words which speak directly to them. Be brief, be interesting and communicate God's word!

Since it is often said that the best communicator starts where people are, to begin with personal comments can help lead people towards hearing and responding to God's Word. The reading may, then, follow the address. Suggested readings are listed in the notes following the alternative marriage service.

The prayer and final hymn look forward to the future life the couple are entering together and seek God's blessing on it.

If possible it is good to sign the registers at the front of the church enabling all in the congregation to witness the signing. The couple then return to their places at the front of the church ready for the blessing and the benediction and the procession from the church.

4.1 Christian Marriage

Call to Worship

Hymn of Praise

Prayer

The Christian Teaching on Marriage

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain.

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Beloved, we have come together in the house of God to celebrate the marriage of this man and this woman [the couple's names may be used], in the assurance that the Lord Jesus Christ, whose power was revealed at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, is present with us here in all his power and his love.

Marriage is provided by God as part of his loving purpose for humanity since the beginning of creation. Jesus said, 'The creator made them from the beginning, male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and be made one with his wife; and the two shall become one flesh.'

Marriage is enriched by God for all who have faith in the Gospel, for through the saving grace of Christ and the renewal of the Holy Spirit, husband and wife can love one another as Christ loves them.

Marriage is thus a gift and a calling of God and is not to be undertaken lightly or from selfish motives, but with reverence and dedication, with faith in the enabling power of Christ and with due awareness of the purpose for which it is appointed.

Marriage is appointed that there may be lifelong companionship, comfort and joy between husband and wife.

It is appointed as the right and proper setting for the full expression of physical love between man and woman.

It is appointed for the ordering of family life, where children - who are also God's gifts to us - may enjoy the security of love and the heritage of faith.

It is appointed for the well-being of human society, which can be stable and happy only where the marriage bond is honoured and upheld.

Into this holy relationship of marriage these two persons come now to be joined together.

The Preparation for Marriage

Therefore, if anyone can show just cause why they may not be lawfully joined together, let him now declare it, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace.

[To the couple:] I require and charge you both as in the sight of God, and remembering your responsibility to him, that if either of you know any impediment why you may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, you do now confess it.

The Legal Declarations

[The groom:] **I DO SOLEMNLY DECLARE THAT I KNOW NOT OF ANY LAWFUL IMPEDIMENT WHY I, - GROOM'S FULL NAME - , MAY NOT BE JOINED IN MATRIMONY TO - BRIDE'S FULL NAME - .**

[The bride:] **I DO SOLEMNLY DECLARE THAT I KNOW NOT OF ANY LAWFUL IMPEDIMENT WHY I, - BRIDE'S FULL NAME - , MAY NOT BE JOINED IN MATRIMONY TO - GROOM'S FULL NAME - .**

[The congregation is invited to stand]

The Marriage Promises

[To the groom:] - *Groom's Christian name* - , will you take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife, to live together after God's command in the holy relationship of marriage? Will you love her, comfort her, honour and serve her, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all other, keep only unto her, so long as you both shall live?

I will.

[To the bride:] - *Bride's Christian name* - , will you take this man to be your lawful wedded husband, to live together after God's command in the holy relationship of marriage? Will you love him, comfort him, honour and serve him, in sickness and in health, and, forsaking all other, keep only unto him, so long as you both shall live?

I will.

[Who gives this woman to be married to this man?

I do.]

[The bride and the groom may take each other by the right hand]

The Marriage Vows

[The groom:] **I CALL UPON THESE PERSONS HERE PRESENT TO WITNESS THAT I, - GROOM'S FULL NAME - , DO TAKE THEE, - BRIDE'S**

FULL NAME - , TO BE MY LAWFUL WEDDED WIFE, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy command; and thereto I give thee my word.

[The bride:] **I CALL UPON THESE PERSONS HERE PRESENT TO WITNESS THAT I, - BRIDE'S FULL NAME - DO TAKE THEE, - GROOM'S FULL NAME - , TO BE MY LAWFUL WEDDED HUSBAND, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy command; and thereto I give thee my word.**

The Giving of the Ring or Rings

[To the couple:] May this ring be a symbol of true faith in each other and always remind you of your love.

[As the rings are given:]

**All that I have I give to you
All that I am I share with you
in the name of the Father,
the Son and the Holy Spirit.**

The Declaration of Marriage

Forasmuch as - *groom's Christian name* - and - *bride's Christian name* - have consented to live together in holy matrimony and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and have given and pledged their word, either to the other, and have declared the same by the giving and receiving of a ring and by joining of hands, I pronounce them husband and wife in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Whom God hath joined together let no one put asunder.

The Address

Reading

Prayer

A Hymn of Consecration

The Register is Signed

Blessing and Benediction

4.2 Christian Marriage - An Alternative Order

The Christian marriage service is one of the Church's great celebrations. The joy of a couple who are giving themselves to each other is shared by the Church as the gift of God's love is revealed. On such a special occasion there are more than just two people involved. This usually includes family and friends as well as the church itself, but God too is involved because God is love. The way God loves is the way bride and groom promise to love each other, through good times and bad without giving up. Through the commitment and joy of this service and the support of the church, he adds his love to the couple's own.

This alternative form of service places the marriage itself after the reading of scripture and the address. It builds towards marriage which becomes the climax of the service and is properly seen as a response to the loving Word of God declared through the Bible. Wherever possible it uses modern language, including the more recent words allowable by law. The legal requirements are different in Scotland, and the words and explanations given here apply only to England and Wales.

Right at the start of the service God's call is heard, urging love for one another in these or other words from the Bible. Like children who take after their parents, Christians take after God when they live in love.

A hymn is sung which praises God for his goodness and love, or which asks that his Spirit and his love will be present. There are usually three, sometimes two, hymns in the service.

Marriage is a new beginning. There is a desire to leave behind all past mistakes, broken relationships and failures in love and start afresh today, so God's forgiveness is sought and then declared in the words of the Bible. God forgives all those who want to make a clean start, so all can join in this prayer and then hear of the way God accepts them.

Other words from scripture could be used at this point to state boldly the same truth - it is God who does forgive and accept if people turn to him for mercy.

In response to the declaration of forgiveness which has been heard, praise is offered to the God who gives joy, life and love. The words of the prayers given here are only examples of what might be appropriate. Extempore prayer, or prayers from other sources, can be substituted.

The choice of readings is made by the minister and couple together. See the list in the notes following this service for some suggestions. Many readings are appropriate. Some mention marriage, but the themes of loving relationships, new

beginnings and celebration run right through the Bible giving many possibilities.

The hopes and joy which are being celebrated are related in a quite personal way to the great truths of the Christian faith spoken through the readings. God is with his people in relationships when they reflect his love.

Prayer for the bride and groom and for their life together is important, but there should be prayer also for their families and friends and for wider concerns.

During the hymn the couple move forward, together with any supporters such as the best man. The congregation remains standing.

The purpose of marriage is simply and directly declared. It is God who joins a man and woman together. By his love he unites them as one body.

The words in capitals are required by law. Two alternatives are permitted:

Either:

[The groom:] I DO SOLEMNLY DECLARE THAT I KNOW NOT OF ANY LAWFUL IMPEDIMENT WHY I, - *GROOM'S FULL NAME* -, MAY NOT BE JOINED IN MATRIMONY TO - *BRIDE'S FULL NAME* - .

[The bride:] I DO SOLEMNLY DECLARE THAT I KNOW NOT OF ANY LAWFUL IMPEDIMENT WHY I, - *BRIDE'S FULL NAME* -, MAY NOT BE JOINED IN MATRIMONY TO - *GROOM'S FULL NAME* - .

Or the following question and response may be used:

[Minister:] ARE YOU, - *FULL NAME* -, FREE LAWFULLY TO MARRY - *FULL NAME* - ?

[Response:] I AM.

Whichever form is chosen, the exact words must be used as given here, and the same affirmation should be used with both bride and groom.

Before the promises are made a prayer is said asking that God will make the bond of marriage as strong as the bond of his own relationship with his people, and that the words may be spoken honestly.

In the promises, both bride and groom make plain that they are freely entering into the commitment and joy of a marriage which they will hold to for life. There is an honest acknowledgement that marriage is not going to guarantee that there will only be good times.

Where appropriate, the parents or families of the bride and groom may be asked if they give their blessing to the couple in their marriage. This can reflect the loving support shown by the families of both bride and groom. The more traditional 'giving away' looks only to the support of the father of the bride. The necessity to seek the

consent of the bride's father to the marriage does not reflect either a legal requirement or the modern social conventions and has no particular Christian significance. In certain circumstances however it may still be felt necessary to use the traditional words: 'Who gives this woman to be married to this man?' to which the father or other member of the bride's family replies, 'I do'. The minister then joins the couple's right hands.

_With these words the couple make their commitment, before God and the congregation, to live in Christian marriage. The words in capitals are required by law. The only possible alternative is shown in capitals below. The words in lower case are optional, and may be adapted. It is important though that the mutual commitment of Christian marriage is reflected in the use of the same words by both bride and groom.

[The Groom:] I CALL UPON THESE PERSONS HERE PRESENT TO WITNESS THAT I, - *GROOM'S FULL NAME* - , DO TAKE THEE, - *BRIDE'S FULL NAME* - , TO BE MY LAWFUL WEDDED WIFE, in accordance with God's holy will, to have and to hold from this day forward for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death us do part.

[The bride:] I CALL UPON THESE PERSONS HERE PRESENT TO WITNESS THAT I, - *BRIDE'S FULL NAME* - DO TAKE THEE, - *GROOM'S FULL NAME* - , TO BE MY LAWFUL WEDDED HUSBAND in accordance with God's holy will, to have and to hold from this day forward for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death us do part.

There may be one or two rings - it is increasingly common for there to be two, emphasising the mutuality of marriage which is an equal commitment in love and respect. The rings are a visible sign of the bond of love in which the man and woman are joined by God.

These words speak for themselves. What has happened in the service is declared for everyone to hear. Christian marriage is a public ceremony - indeed, a marriage service must by law be open to the public and not conducted behind locked doors. The support of those present and the knowledge that the commitment to each other has been entered upon as a public act can help strengthen the bond of marriage.

The service ends with the blessing - asking that God will bless not only what has happened but the whole of married life - and a hymn which may be one of thanksgiving and praise or commitment and consecration.

The registers cannot be filled in by the Authorised Person until the legally required words have been spoken. Completing the registers can take a little time since the marriage itself comes as the climax of the service. For this reason the registers may be signed out of sight of the congregation, by the couple and the two witnesses.

Close family may also be present. After the signing is complete, a certificate is issued, and the couple process out of the church.

Preparing for Marriage

A Lifelong Relationship

The Christian wedding service is the gateway to the lifelong relationship of Christian marriage. Before the wedding it is important to prepare not just for the service but also for Christian marriage itself. Preparatory sessions need to be appropriate to the particular circumstances of the couple: the object of each session is to enable the couple to explore the implications of Christian marriage together:

- 1 An introductory session
- 2 What it means to be a Christian
- 3 Marriage
- 4 Christian Marriage
- 5 The Service

Planning the service

In preparing for the service the minister or pastor will want to discuss the choice of appropriate hymns and readings. There should also be a chance to look at the form of promises and the shape of the rest of the service, so as to help understand the nature of the commitment and the joy of the marriage relationship. Some churches suggest several possible forms of service, the most appropriate being selected in close consultation with the couple.

Readings

There are very many passages from the Old and New Testaments which could be chosen. Even though relatively few speak directly about marriage, the themes of love, both human and divine, of commitment and faithfulness can be found running right through the Bible.

There are often two, sometimes three readings. Some prefer to use just a single reading, but it is good to choose at least one reading from the Gospels with possibly one or two more from either the Old Testament or the remainder of the New Testament.

Modern translations of the Bible can help make the sense of a passage clear - for example, the New International Version, the New Revised Standard Version, the Revised English Bible, the New Jerusalem Bible or the Good News Bible.

This is a list of some commonly chosen passages, but it is not exhaustive.

Genesis 1:26-28,31a

Genesis 2:18-24

Psalm 23
Psalm 37:3-7
Psalm 67
Psalm 84
Psalm 121
Psalm 128

Song of Songs 8:6-7a (or another extract)
Tobit 8:5-9
Ecclesiasticus 26:1-4

Romans 12:1-2,9-13
I Corinthians 13:1-8a,13
Ephesians 3:14-21
Ephesians 5:1-2,(21-24),25-33
Philippians 1:9-11
Philippians 2:1-11
Colossians 3:12-16a,17
I John 3:18-24
I John 4:7-13
Revelation 19:1,5-9a

Matthew 5:3-10
Matthew 7:21,24-27
Mark 10:6-9
John 2:1-11
John 15:9-12

It may be that some passage is particularly appropriate for the couple. They may wish to add a non-Biblical reading as well. It is possible to incorporate the readings into the address.

Hymns

Many hymns are appropriate for a marriage service, particularly those which emphasise the faithful love of God, and the Christian's response to that love.

The following hymns are just some of those which could be chosen.

_Congregational Praise

1	All people that on earth do dwell
14	We praise, we worship thee, O God (Te Deum)
18	Praise, my soul, the King of heaven
25	O praise ye the Lord!
31	All creatures of our God and King
42	Now thank we all our God

43	The God of love my shepherd is (Psalm 23)
45	Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
61	The King of love my Shepherd is (Psalm 23)
179	Love divine, all loves excelling
199	Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire
204	Come down, O Love Divine
237	Blessed city, heavenly Salem (Christ is made the sure foundation)
243	Glorious things of thee are spoken
446	Blest are the pure in heart
447	O Jesus, I have promised
507	Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
534	Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy
596	New every morning is the love
675	O perfect love, all human thoughts transcending
729	The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want (Psalm 23)

There are some good hymns for marriage services which are not in Congregational Praise. It is quite possible that these could be used. The following are all set to well known tunes:

Lutheran Book of Worship

288	Hear us now, Our God and Father (Hyfrydol)
-----	--

Love From Below (The Iona Community)

p18	God in the planning and purpose of life (Slane)
p20	That human life might richer be (Sussex Carol)
p24	Lord and lover of creation (Westminster Abbey)

Hymns and Psalms

364	As man and woman we were made (Sussex Carol)
373	The grace of life is theirs (Love Unknown)

A Legal Ceremony

The wedding service is a legal ceremony as well as a religious one. It is important to follow the law regarding marriage. The details given here apply to England and Wales. Marriage can only be solemnised in a registered building, with the doors unlocked, between 8.00 a.m. and 6.00 p.m., and in the presence of either a Registrar or an Authorised Person and of at least two witnesses. No more than 12 months and no later than 21 days before the day of the wedding the couple have to give notice of their marriage at the Registrar's office. 21 days later they can return to the office to collect the Certificate which has then to be handed to the Authorised Person.

A marriage may be solemnised at shorter notice by Licence. A marriage may not

proceed in church until the Authorised Person is in possession of a Certificate or a Licence issued by the Registrar.

A church may appoint two Authorised Persons, of whom one is usually the minister or pastor and the other a member of the church. It simplifies matters for the pastor or minister on the day of the wedding if the other Authorised Person officiates. The full duties of the Authorised Person are spelled out in the *Guidebook for Authorised Persons* issued to all Authorised Persons by the Office for National Statistics. It includes detailed instructions on the custody and completion of the Registers and Marriage Lines.

Take care when using service books to include the words which the law requires. Free Churches are not allowed to use the wording used by the Church of England in the Alternative Service Book. Remember too that the marriage laws are quite different in Scotland where different wording is required. A newly Authorised Person will receive a copy of the statutory booklet on marriage law and will be given a training session by a representative of the Registrar's Office.

The words required by law are shown in capitals in the orders of service. First, the couple must make the solemn declaration in one of the following ways:

I do solemnly declare that I know not of any lawful impediment why I - *full name* - may not be joined in matrimony to - *full name* - .

or:

I declare that I know of no legal reason why I, - *full name* - , may not be joined in marriage to - *full name* - .

or the following response may be used:

[Minister:] Are you, - *full name* - , free lawfully to marry - *full name* - ?

[Response:] I am.

Second, the vows must include these words:

I call upon these persons here present to witness that I, - *full name* - , do take thee, - *full name* - to be my lawful wedded wife/husband.

An alternative wording is also permitted:

I, - *full name* - , take you, (or thee) - *full name* - , to be my wedded wife (or husband).

The Registrar or Authorised Person (who must be from the same registration district) will listen to the service up until the legally required vows are spoken; he or she can then withdraw to complete the registers in the vestry. If the minister is acting as the Authorised Person he or she is obliged to fill in the registers following the service.

First the groom signs each of the registers, followed by the bride, and the two witnesses (sometimes the two fathers or the two mothers or the best man and the chief bridesmaid). The Authorised Person then signs the two registers and proceeds to copy the signatures on to the marriage lines which he or she then has to sign as an accurate copy of the registers. If the minister is not acting as Authorised Person, he/she may add their signature to the register adjacent to the signature of the Authorised Person.

Special provisions apply to enable the marriage of those who are housebound or detained. There are also provisions to enable those who are profoundly deaf or have serious speech difficulties to make their vows. Advice should be sought from the Registrar.

On the Day

The groom and best man generally arrive half an hour early and check details for the register, which of course cannot be filled in until the legally required part of the ceremony is complete. They may also have photographs taken before the service. Traditionally they take their places at the front of the church and to the right. The minister then welcomes the bridal party at the door of the church and when all are settled takes his or her place at the front of the church. It can be good for the bride and groom to arrive together or meet at the door of the church and enter together, recognising the equality of both partners. The organist plays appropriate music as the congregation stands and the bride, or bride and groom, enters the church. The bride may be accompanied by her father or other attendant. Bride and groom take their positions at the front of the church, the groom on the right of the bride.

A Checklist for the Authorised Person

What to do before the wedding day

- advise the couple to give notice of their intention to marry to the superintendent registrar in the district where they live up to twelve months prior to the marriage ceremony
- explain to the couple that notice may be given by certificate or by licence

What to do on the Wedding Day

Before the Marriage

- obtain from the couple the superintendent registrar's certificate (you will need two if the couple live in different districts) or licence. If the couple do not have the authorities, the marriage must be postponed until you can confirm with the appropriate superintendent registrar that the authorities have or can be issued
- check that the certificate[s] or licence is still valid, i.e. issued within twelve months of the date notice was duly entered and that it has been signed by the

person who issued it. If not, the marriage will have to be postponed

- check that the registered building where the marriage is to take place is named on the certificate[s] or licence
- by direct personal questioning of the couple, verify the details contained in the certificate[s] or licence, and satisfy yourself that there is no legal impediment to the marriage; if in doubt, contact the superintendent registrar who issued the authority

During the Marriage Ceremony

- ensure the marriage ceremony takes place with ‘open doors’ i.e. with free access, between the hours of 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. in a part of the building which is registered for marriages
- ensure that the whole marriage ceremony takes place in the presence of the bride and groom, two witnesses and yourself
- ensure that as an integral part of the marriage ceremony the words of declaration and contract are spoken in English (or Welsh where the law so provides) by the bride and groom and in the presence of each other

After the Marriage Ceremony

- using registration ink, register the marriage in both marriage registers, as legibly as possible, without unauthorised amendment or overwriting
- the information should be given verbally by each part
- full information should be stated
- writing should be contained within each column
- every column should be completed
- recommended form of words used
- appropriate signature
- note signatures in the binding margin in pencil if necessary
- issue to the couple a certificate of their marriage, being a true copy, certified by you of the marriage registers

Andrea and Rob's Wedding

Welcome

This is the day that the Lord has made:
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Hymn: Praise my soul the King of heaven

Prayer

The Christian Teaching on Marriage

Rob and Andrea, you have come together in this church
and in the presence of God and of this congregation
to be joined in Christian marriage,
so that the Lord may add the seal of his love to your own.

Everything that happens in this world happens at the time God chooses.
He sets the time for birth and the time for death,
the time for planting and the time for pulling up,
the time for killing and the time for healing,
the time for tearing down and the time for building.
He sets the time for sorrow and the time for joy,
the time for mourning and the time for dancing,
the time for making love and the time for not making love,
the time for kissing and the time for not kissing,
He sets the time for finding and the time for losing,
the time for saving and the time for throwing away,
the time for tearing and the time for mending,
the time for silence and the time for talk.
He sets the time for love and the time for hate,
the time for war and the time for peace. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

God created you man and woman,
and in marriage it is his will that you become one.
By his grace, he unites you in a bond of love and peace,
symbolising God's covenant with his people
and Christ's love for his Church.
Here, with God's blessing,
you may enter into the joy of marriage and assume its duties
with mutual and lasting fidelity.

Two are better off than one,
because together they can work more effectively.
If one of them falls down, the other can help them up.

But if someone is alone and falls, it's just too bad,
because there is no one there to help them.
If it is cold, two can sleep together and stay warm,
but how can you keep warm by yourself?
Two can resist an attack that would defeat one person alone.
A rope made of three cords is hard to break. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

In the marriage you share together may you always seek the kind of love which Paul speaks of in his letter to the Christian community in Corinth:

a love that is patient; a love that is kind;
a love that is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.
that does not insist on its own way;
that is not irritable or resentful;
that does not rejoice in wrongdoing,
but rejoices in the truth.
a love that bears all things,
believes all things,
hopes all things,
endures all things.

Rob and Andrea as now you take your marriage vows may that be the kind of love you seek and find for such love never ends.

The Legal declarations

Are you, Robert Andrew Lacey, free to marry Andrea Yvette Smith?
I am.

Are you, Andrea Yvette Smith, free to marry Robert Andrew Lacey?
I am.

The Marriage Promises

Rob, will you take Andrea to be your wife in Christian marriage? Will you love her, comfort her, honour and protect her, in times of prosperity and health, and in times of trouble and suffering, and be faithful to her, as long as you both shall live?

I will.

Andrea, will you take Rob to be your husband in Christian marriage? Will you love him, comfort him, honour and protect him, in times of prosperity and health, and in times of trouble and suffering, and be faithful to him, as long as you both shall live?

I will.

Who gives this woman to be married to this man?

I do

Rob and Andrea have invited family and friends together to share in their celebration of Christian marriage - and so I invite everyone here to respond to the following question with the words 'We do'.

As Rob and Andrea's family, as their friends, as those who belong to this church family, do you give your blessing to the marriage of Rob and Andrea and do you promise to support and encourage them in their life together?

We do.

Rob and Andrea take each other by the right hand.

The Marriage Vows

[Rob:] I, Robert Andrew Lacey, TAKE YOU, Andrea Yvette Smith, TO BE MY WEDDED WIFE, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy command, and thereto, I give you my word.

[Andrea:] I, Andrea Yvette Smith, TAKE YOU, Robert Andrew Lacey, TO BE MY WEDDED HUSBAND, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy command, and thereto, I give you my word.

The Giving of the Rings

May each of these rings be a symbol of the trust you have in each other and always remind you of that kind of love that you seek in your marriage:

[As the rings are given]

**All that I have I give to you
All that I am I share with you
in the name of the Father,
the Son and the Holy Spirit.**

[Or, where there is only one ring, 'I receive this ring in God's name as a symbol of all that we have promised and all that we shall share.']

The Declaration of Marriage

- *Bride's Christian name* - and - *groom's Christian name* - have declared before God and before you that they will live together in Christian marriage; they have made sacred promises to each other, and have symbolised their marriage today by

joining hands and the giving and receiving of rings. I therefore pronounce them to be husband and wife, in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What God has joined, let no one separate.

The Blessing

May Almighty God, with his word of blessing,
join your hearts in a bond of pure love.

May the peace of Christ live always in your hearts and in your home.

May you have true friends to stand by you, both in joy and sorrow.

May you be ready and willing to help and comfort
anyone who comes to you in need.

May daily problems never cause you undue anxiety,
nor the desire for earthly possessions dominate your lives.
But may your hearts' first desire always be
the good things waiting for you in the life of heaven.

May the Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you
and give you peace.

Hymn

The Signing of the Registers

4.4 Thanksgiving for the Birth of a Child

The birth of a child is usually an occasion for rejoicing. Some parents will quite rightly want to express their thanks to God for the gift of a child and this order of thanksgiving suggests one form in which this can be done.

Such an act of thanksgiving can be used in or adapted for a variety of circumstances:

It may be used soon after the birth of a child who will later be brought for infant baptism. In such cases the service may be at home or even by a hospital bedside;

It may be used where a baptism may be considered inappropriate, either because the parent(s) are not able to make the promises to share their own Christian faith with their child, or where there is a sincere belief that baptism should be celebrated when the child is old enough to make his or her own profession of faith. In these cases, the thanksgiving may be incorporated into a Sunday service or, on occasion, used in the home. Individual circumstances may suggest one or other as most appropriate.

Following words from the psalms, the purpose of the service is clearly stated. It is important not to confuse such a service with the sacrament of Baptism. It will be a church's hope that baptism will follow, whether in infancy or later in life. In this service the emphasis is on thankfulness for the gift of a child and on the responsibilities of the parents. In Baptism the grace of God working through the sacrament is the focus of the service. It is by grace that we are saved and the outpouring of grace symbolised and made present through the sacrament cannot be replaced by a service of thanksgiving.

Brief readings from the Old and New Testaments establish the Biblical framework for our care for and attitude towards children. The faith we share and the standards God sets are to be shared with children who have a special place in the sight of God as those to whom his kingdom belongs.

Alternative readings which could be used here or elsewhere in the service include: selected verses from Psalms 100, 113, 127, 128; Isaiah 66:5-13; I Samuel 1:9-20; Proverbs 2:1-6; 22:1-6; Matthew 18:1-4; 18:10-14; Mark 10:13-16; verses from Luke 2:59-80; Ephesians 6:1-4.

The words of the song of Zechariah following the naming of John (the Baptist) could be used as a canticle or responsive reading (Luke 1:68-79).

A prayer of thanksgiving is spoken using these or other words. It is good to give thanks not only for the life of the child but also for the gift of Jesus Christ, born a child, and for the heritage of faith which the Church must aim to share with the child. Circumstances may suggest that there are particular reasons for thanksgiving, or that

certain items are omitted.

In the case of a handicapped child or other special circumstances, care must be taken to express the true feelings and thoughts of parents and the church, which may include both thankfulness and perplexity or even anger.

Though such a service is sometimes described as a service of dedication, it is the parents and not the child who are dedicated to serving God in their care for their child. All or a selection of these or other appropriate words may be used. The image of a mother comforting her child is taken from Isaiah 66:13. The phrase 'the tender compassion of our God' echoes the words of Zechariah, after the name John had been given to the child born to Elizabeth (Luke 1:78).

When only one parent is present, care will be needed in the wording of the service.

Extempore or other prayer moves naturally towards the wider and related concerns of the church, and may include these and other areas.

4.4 Thanksgiving for the Birth of a Child

Words of Scripture

O Lord, our Sovereign,
how exalted is your name in all the world!
Out of the mouths of babes and infants
your glory is praised above the heavens.
(Psalm 8:1,2 [adapted])

It was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.
On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me
you have been my God.
(Psalm 22:9,10)

Praise the Lord!
Happy are those who fear the Lord,
who greatly delight in his commandments.
(Psalm 112:1)

Introduction

We are here as the children of one heavenly Father to give thanks to God for the birth of - *name* -, the son/daughter of - *parents' names* - .

As we pray and as we listen to God's Word, may - *name* - and his/her whole family come to be enfolded in the tender care of our God.

As we dedicate ourselves and the lives of - *parents' names* - in caring for this child, may the grace of God grow in us and the love of God flow through us to surround him/her so that he/she may come to be baptised into Christ and to share in the heritage of faith.

Readings

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to our children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.
(Deuteronomy 6:4-7)

People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them: and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, 'Let the little children come to me and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive

the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.’
(Luke 18:15-17)

Thanksgiving

Gracious God, you came among us as a little child, born into a human family, cared for by Mary and Joseph. In Jesus you welcomed children and you promised your kingdom to children and the child-like. With joy in our hearts we thank you for the birth of - *name* - , your gift to - *parents’ names* - and a reminder to us all of your grace. [We thank you for your care of - *parents’ names* - through the anxiety of childbirth.] We praise you for the hope you have set before us, that - *name* - may grow to love you with all his/her heart and soul and might. Amen.

Dedication of the Parents

- *Parents’ names* - , may you always care for - *name* - whom God has entrusted to you.

May you share with him/her the heritage of our faith.

May your home be a place of security and trust where - *name* - can grow in love and understanding.

May God comfort you in bad times as a mother comforts her child.

May the tender compassion of our God become your own.

May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest on you and on - *name* - all the days of your lives.

Prayer

For the family of the child
For the household of the Church

Lord’s Prayer

4.5 A Service of Prayer for Healing

One and the same Greek word can be translated in English as 'save' and 'heal'. Health has to do with salvation and salvation has to do with health. Both salvation and health have to do with the wholeness of each person.

The ministry of healing should be a natural part of the worship and life of the Church.

The service begins with a welcome and words of explanation. It is important that from the outset people are aware of what is going to happen during the service.

In this, as in every act of worship, God takes the initiative. He invites his people to share in communion, the sacrament of his healing grace, and he speaks through words of Scripture as the congregation gathers for worship.

A responsive reading from the Iona Community Worship Book leads into prayers of confession and a declaration of forgiveness. Extempore prayer may be appropriate, whilst a prayer said together may help people to open the depths of their lives to God. Not only individual sin but also the corporate failure to care for and heal each other should be acknowledged.

The knowledge of forgiveness has immense healing power, as James knew well (James 5:16). Read the opening and closing words of this statement together with one of the suggested texts.

There are many appropriate passages of Scripture which can be used in a healing service: the accounts of Jesus' healing ministry can be particularly moving.

The sermon is an opportunity to share teaching about the healing ministry. Here the preacher has to be sensitive to the needs and understanding of the congregation.

“Through the love and care of us all, God can act and become present to those in need, both healing and restoring. We trust God to answer our prayers for healing, but we do not know how or when our prayers will be answered. We simply trust God to act in love for us, out of a deeper knowledge of our needs than we ourselves have. We know too, that to be involved in the healing ministry requires our willingness to be involved in the process of change - change which may involve us in action as well as prayer. The things which cause people to be hurt often require a political solution arising out of our prayer. Our worship and our daily lives belong together.

“In this ministry of healing we are in no sense rejecting the work of medicine, which is also the gift of God. Prayer is not an alternative, but a complement to other forms of healing, and a recognition that healing comes in many ways, and is finally

concerned with wholeness and not simply cure.”

(The Iona Community Worship Book)

These or similar words of Scripture invite people to come forward to receive the laying on of hands. The one presiding at communion together with one or more of the deacons share in the laying on of hands.

The person who comes forward kneels, the one presiding at communion, together with the deacon(s) place their hands on the bowed head and say a simple prayer in these or similar words.

The remainder of the congregation is invited to share in quiet prayer ... any who prefer not to come forward may indicate their desire to receive the laying on of hands in their place.

“The New Testament tells us clearly not only to pray for the sick, but to lay our hands on them as we pray, and Jesus himself did this many times. We know that in our daily lives, it is often touch, the hand on the shoulder, the hug of a friend, the cuddle of a child, that lets us know that we are loved. Touch, often more than words, is a way of giving physical expression to our prayers and concerns for each other. Those coming forward for prayer for healing may not be ill physically - our past experience of hurt, our tangled emotions and our inability to forgive and to receive forgiveness all make us less than whole and in need of healing.”

(The Iona Community Worship Book)

In the prayers people may have asked that their names be mentioned: it is important to make sure that individuals are happy to be named. Prayers for healing must never become an opportunity for gossip.

The service comes to its climax in Holy Communion as the congregation shares in that peace which the world cannot give.

Verses from the Psalms can be very appropriate following communion. These words from Psalm 103 are especially suitable at a healing service, or words from the Hallel-psalms (113-118) can be used.

The service ends as it began with a responsive prayer taken from the Iona Community Worship Book.

4.5 A Service of Prayer for Healing

Welcome and Explanations

Words of Invitation

As we gather for worship, to pray for healing and to hear God's word, he invites us to be made whole by meeting with Christ at his own table. When we come in faith to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, aware of our weakness but willing to serve him, he will share his life with us as the bread is broken and the wine is poured.

We come then to Christ who can heal us as we place ourselves into his hands. He knows our needs better than we do ourselves. Though for some there may be no physical cure we believe that he will act out of love for us to transform us and make us whole.

Call to Worship

I am the Lord who heals you.
(Exodus 15:26c)

They cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress;
he sent out his word and healed them,
and delivered them from destruction.
(Psalm 107:19-20)

The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:5b-7)

Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.
(James 5:16a)

Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.
(Matthew 18:20)

Hymn or Song of Approach

Responses

We come in this service to God,

In our need, and bringing with us the needs of the world.

We come to God, who comes to us in Jesus

And who knows by experience what human life is like.

We come with our faith and with our doubts:

We come with our hopes and with our fears;

We come as we are, because it is God who invites us to come

And God has promised never to turn us away.

We come, seeking God's forgiving love.

A Prayer of Confession

Extempore or other prayer

A Declaration of God's Forgiveness

This is the promise of God's grace and the assurance of his forgiveness:

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him. (Psalm 103:8,11-13)

With the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. (Psalm 130:7)

In this is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent us his Son to take away our sins. (I John 4:10)

The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. (II Corinthians 5:17-18)

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. (II Corinthians 5:19)

If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (I John 1:9)

If any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (I John 2:1-2)

We are loved and forgiven. We can begin again.

Hymn or Song

Celebrating God's forgiving love

Introduction to Theme of Healing

Old Testament Reading

Psalm

New Testament Reading

Hymn

Taking up the theme of the Readings

Sermon

On a theme related to the ministry
of healing

Meditative Prayer

Responding to the Sermon

Hymn

Prayers for Healing

To be in need of healing we need not be physically ill. As individuals and as a community our emotions, our understanding and our relationships, as well as our bodies, need the healing which Christ offers.

Jesus said, "Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

Paul writes, "The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." (Philippians 4:5b-6)

As we share together in quiet prayer, all those who wish to receive the laying on of hands in prayer for healing are invited to come forward.

[As hands are laid upon each person these or similar words of prayer are said:]

Spirit of the living God,
present with us now,
enter you, body, mind and spirit,
and heal you of all that harms you
in Jesus' name.

or

May God's healing touch
reach out to you
at the point of your deepest need
and grant you
strength of body, peace of mind
and a renewed spirit within
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Prayers of Intercession

for other individuals
for healing in community
and in the wider world

Hymn

Leading to Communion

Words of Jesus

Words of Purpose

Prayers of Thanksgiving

Sharing of Bread and Wine

Prayer of Dedication

or

Psalm

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits -
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as you live.
(Psalm 103:1-5a)

Praise the Lord, all you nations!
Extol him, all you peoples!
For great is his steadfast love towards us
and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.

Praise the Lord!
(Psalm 117)

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!
Let those who fear the Lord say,
his steadfast love endures forever.
Out of my distress I called on the Lord;
the Lord answered me and set me free.
The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.
This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvellous in our eyes.
(Psalm 118:1,4,5,22,23)

Hymn

Seeking God's blessing and protection

Responses

On our heads and on our house...

The blessing of God

In our coming and our going...

The peace of God

In our life and believing...

The love of God

At our end and new beginning

The arms of God to welcome us and bring us home.

Benediction

4.7 The Funeral Service

Funeral customs vary from place to place and from church to church. A minister or pastor needs to be aware of these customs and to respond sensitively. Each family will to some extent have different expectations of the funeral service. It is necessary to understand these expectations and to talk with close relatives or friends about their wishes.

It is important to remember also that those present will probably not all be Christians and that while some Christians may be confident in the hope of the resurrection, others will find their faith questioned by the death. The minister or pastor, as he or she shares the struggle of relatives and friends of the deceased, will help them to discover that Christ can speak even in such darkness, sharing their distress and showing the way to new life. He or she will also help those who feel guilty to understand their feelings, perhaps to see that they have little need for such guilt, and to know the forgiveness which God offers.

On the other hand the funeral service is first of all an opportunity to worship God, to celebrate the central truths of the Christian faith and to hear God speaking afresh in the light of the death which has occurred. This should not be lost sight of despite the need to ensure that the service is sufficiently personal. The aim should be to enable all in the congregation both to worship honestly and to discover what God is saying to them in their new situation.

The family may wish to start with prayers and a short reading at the house. The minister or pastor will be at the house a little while before the funeral director arrives: when he or she arrives the minister or pastor leads a short prayer and shares a reading.

Other readings may be appropriate in the home.

The minister or pastor now leads the family to the cars and proceeds to church. The minister needs to be at the door of the church in time to meet the family as they arrive. Walking slowly into church the minister leads, followed by the funeral director, the coffin and the family.

Some families prefer to have the coffin taken into the church before they arrive and simply to enter the church as if they were going to any other service.

In some parts of the country the coffin may be brought into the church the night before the funeral service. On this occasion it is good to share in simple prayers and readings.

These or other similar sentences may be read by the minister or pastor as he or she is walking into church. The first sequence of short readings moves from a statement of the reality of what has happened through to the assurance of hope in the Lord Jesus

Christ.

Some prefer to walk into church quietly, take their place in the pulpit and allow the family to settle themselves as if they were preparing for an ordinary service. In this case the organist will finish playing as people are settled. If the family have sat down the minister will invite the rest of the congregation to sit and then begin with the call to worship.

It is not intended that all the sentences in the second set should be read. This is rather a list from which a number of appropriate verses may be chosen and to which others may be added. Here, as elsewhere in the service, important truths of the Christian faith are expressed in moving and profound words from the Bible.

Especially in the case of a funeral of a child the words used must be chosen carefully. In the case of a still-born child a simple service of prayer and readings, with a committal, may be appropriate but it needs to be recognised that grief can be just as real and prolonged in the case of a still-birth or neo-natal death as in any other, when there can be a shattering sense of emptiness and shock at what is often completely unexpected. It is good for the parents to give the child a name and to think of it as a person. Such a death should not be brushed aside.

The first hymn takes up the affirmation of faith contained in the opening sentences. The family will choose the hymns - usually two or three - in consultation with the minister or pastor. There are many hymns which express the positive glory of the faith in a way which is neither sentimental nor morbid.

It may be appropriate after that hymn to extend a welcome in order to help people relax as far as possible in the service. One example is given of the way in which the purpose of the service can be stated simply. It may be appropriate to move straight into prayer without such an introduction.

This is a prayer of preparation for the service in which the congregation seeks God's blessing on the service and on all who have come together in the hope that it can become in the midst of sadness a service of thanksgiving.

To mention the person's name early in the service makes it as personal as possible. It is necessary to be sensitive to any particularly difficult circumstances which may make it difficult to share in a spirit of thanksgiving.

Introductory prayers from service books can be helpful ... but extempore prayer has a liveliness which can speak very powerfully to the immediate moment.

It may be helpful to put together a sequence of readings which express the faith at the heart of the service. To be sensitive to the people in the congregation will help those who are not used to being in church. It may be helpful to introduce the readings with links which help to convey the message of the faith. The readings must not be too long!

Other O.T. readings:

Psalms 16:8-11; 34:18,19,22; 39:4-7; 46; 62:5-8;

90:1-6,10,12; 100; 103:8-18; 121; 130.

Deuteronomy 33:27; Isaiah 25:8,9 & 26:3,4; 40:6-8;

40:28-31; Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-3; 4:13-17.

Different readers may be used. The one leading the service might provide the linking commentary and different people the readings. Those readings suggested here are only examples of what may be used: there are many others that would be suitable. Whatever readings are chosen, their themes can be taken up in the address which follows.

The choice of translation is important in a funeral service. The great readings from Psalm 23 and John 14 may on some occasions best come from the Authorised Version. The choice needs to be made with sensitivity to the congregation and its understanding of the faith.

Other Gospel readings:

Matthew 10:29-31; 18:1-5,10-14; Mark 10:13-16; 16:1-8;

Luke 7:11-16; John 6:35,37-40; 11:17-27; 20:19-21a; 20:24-29 or 24-31.

Many other words of Jesus are appropriate - it is important to refer to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The final reading draws the message of the Gospel and points to that resurrection hope we can all enjoy. The passage from I Corinthians 15 is particularly vivid, incorporating as it does the parable of the seed come to life. If children are present and closely involved this could be filled out a little, perhaps with a visual aid of a seed, sown and coming to life. It is important to help children through the service as much as possible. The whole service can then convey something of the hope of the gospel for everyone present.

_Other passages from the Epistles and the rest of the N.T.:

Romans 8:18,19,22,23,24a,31b-35,37-39; 14:7-9;

II Corinthians 1:3-4; Philippians 3:10-12,21;

I Thessalonians 4:13-14,18; I Peter 1:3-9;

Revelation 7:9-17; 21:1-4, 22:3b-5.

Again the minister must be sensitive to the congregation and its needs.

Whilst certain readings may always seem appropriate for a funeral and the death and

resurrection of Christ should never be far from the minds of the worshippers, a particular theme may be thought appropriate for the service.

For example, where the loss is felt to be especially great a reading from Ezekiel 34 (the faithful shepherd taking care of his flock), may be combined with one from I Thessalonians 4:13-18 (the grief of Christians illuminated by hope) and verses from John 10 (Christ as the good shepherd who gives his sheep life here and hereafter).

At the funeral of a child words from Isaiah 49:8,14-15 and Matthew 18:1-5; 19:13-15, picture a child being held by God in the way a mother holds a child to her breast and recall how Jesus welcomed children into his own arms. It is important that the value of the life of even the youngest child is recognised.

A good knowledge of the Bible and an awareness of the circumstances of an individual's life and death can help readings to be chosen and discussed with relatives in a way which will illuminate and strengthen faith.

The readings lead on towards the address: having established the message at the heart of the faith it is then time to apply that message to the circumstances facing the congregation.

The leader of the service is there to share the grief of the bereaved and to share the good news of the faith.

A personal address helps the family to express the pain of bereavement. An address which declares the good news of Jesus Christ helps the family to realise that in the midst of sadness there is hope and grounds for thanksgiving.

In the pattern suggested here the address begins where the family is by echoing its grief. There is then a move from the minor key to the major as the minister spends some time giving thanks for the person who has died. From what is known of the person the minister builds up a picture of them to share with the congregation. If the minister does not know the person it is as if he or she puts into words what the nearest and dearest would want to say if only they could say something.

From personal thanksgiving the address moves to a climax in a statement of resurrection hope and finishes with triumphant words of Scripture from the end of Romans 8 or a similar quotation.

To praise God is to forget oneself and to rise into the presence of God - to begin with praise helps all to share in the glory of God.

In bereavement there are many mixed feelings - guilt can be prevalent - things said or done which can now not be taken back. Confession and the declaration of forgiveness is a vital part of the service. Personal thanksgiving is important and grounds the prayer in the particular experience of the people who mourn.

Great care should be taken to ensure the prayers are appropriate and never more so

than when a child has died.

In intercession for the family it is sometimes appropriate to mention the close family by name. Sadly, one has to be sensitive at times to difficult family circumstances, and of course if one does mention names care must be taken not to omit any.

Remembering that all in the congregation share in the sadness and that some may be re-living another bereavement, petition too becomes important.

To finish on a note of praise ends the time of prayer as it began in celebration of God's glory.

To share in the familiar words of the Lord's Prayer with its triumphant conclusion can be a great comfort.

The final hymn continues that note of triumph sending the congregation out from the service aware of the glory of God's presence.

There are some excellent New Testament benedictions.

The one leading the service then leads the coffin back to the hearse and once it is in the car proceeds to the cemetery or crematorium. If the service is only in the crematorium it will have been necessary to abbreviate some of the above, choosing shorter readings, fewer sentences and perhaps dispensing with a hymn. At this point in the crematorium the service moves straight into the committal.

A committal involves letting go of the earthly body in the hope of the resurrection. If the funeral service has been held in a church and the committal is elsewhere, a short introduction may be appropriate explaining that the congregation has gathered for the committal of the body and restating the Gospel declared in the earlier service.

Crematoria work in different ways: it is important for the minister to be acquainted with the customs of the particular place. The following is typical of many.

When the family arrive the minister leads them into the crematorium ahead of the coffin. The coffin is placed on the catafalque. The minister or pastor stands at the reading desk and waits for the congregation to settle.

The service then begins with words of Scripture, perhaps echoing the service conducted earlier in the church.

At a cemetery the minister or pastor leads the coffin to the grave-side. He or she will choose a spot to stand a little away from the grave or, as is often customary, at the head of the grave. It may be best to ask the funeral director to position the family a little aside from the grave - not around it. As the bearers are preparing to lower the coffin words of Scripture are read, and then, when the coffin has been lowered, the words of committal. It may be necessary to include other appropriate quotations.

The role of the one leading the service at the graveside or at the crematorium is to

share the certainty and the assurance of our faith. The moment when the coffin is lowered or when the curtains close can often be too much for some people present. There will usually be friends around who will be able to comfort them in the appropriate way. The minister or pastor's part is to carry on with the service, pronouncing the words as clearly as possible and in this way conveying the assurance of the faith, though it is false to try to appear unmoved.

At the crematorium the congregation stands for the words of committal. As the minister begins the words he or she will press a button or switch which either prompts the officer at the crematorium to close the curtains around the coffin or starts a motor which does this automatically. Being sensitive to the congregation it may be helpful at this point to invite them to close their eyes in prayer.

Appropriate words of Scripture expressing the triumph of our faith round off the words of committal.

A hymn may be appropriate.

The final brief prayer leads into the benediction.

At a graveside this is when the minister moves into the background and the funeral director can take the family to look into the grave. The minister stands towards the gate of the cemetery and greets people as they leave.

At the crematorium the minister moves to the exit door (it may well be different from the entrance); the funeral director will usher the family to the door. The minister will greet people as they leave. Occasionally at a crematorium there may be no time to greet everyone personally, but the handshake at the end is important as it is an opportunity to express a personal word of blessing and of love to each person who has been there.

There is no need to be ashamed if it is hard to find the right words to say after a funeral. Such depth of emotion as may be present at a funeral is not easily expressed in words.

Out of sight of the family there may be arrangements to make with the funeral director, a form to sign for the crematorium or cemetery authorities and fees to settle.

Some find the time limits at a crematorium disturbing. It depends largely on one's attitude. To treat time and its limitations as gifts from God will help one to keep to the point and, by being concise, to communicate the faith more effectively. It is a responsibility not just for the sake of the authorities but also for the sake of all the families involved to keep strictly to the time set.

Depending on the circumstances the work of a minister or pastor may continue long beyond the day of the funeral as he or she provides support and counsel for the bereaved.

4.7 The Funeral Service

Prayer in the Home

Introduction

It is right that here, where - *name* - lived and where he/she welcomed friends and family, we should spend a while in prayer, thanking God for all that he has given us through - *name* - , and asking that he will be as kind to us now, as we show our love for - *name* - in this last tender act.

Prayer

Let us spend a moment recollecting that we are here not just as family and friends of - *name* - , but as the children of God.

Holy God,
holy and strong,
holy and immortal,
have mercy on us.

Lord, today we strain to see your goodness through our grief.
Though tears fill our eyes,
and sorrow [and anger] at what has happened
mingles with our thankfulness for - *name* - ,
we ask you to raise our thoughts to those things which last,
to faith, to hope and to love.
While the frailty of life confronts us
you are changeless, certain,
always faithful to your promises.
Even out of death, you brought life,
even from the cross and the tomb, there came hope.
Speak to us your words of peace.
By your love which knows no end,
take away our shame and remorse.
Give us a heart that trusts in you.
And give rest for our souls. Amen.

Reading

A reading from St John.

My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. (John 10:27-29)

Concluding Prayer

O God our Father, your beloved Son was not afraid to face the darkness of death.

[*or*: O God our Father,
your beloved Son took children into his arms and blessed them.]

Give us grace, we pray, that we may be confident that - *name* - is surrounded by your never failing care and love, and bring us to your heavenly kingdom, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. Amen.

At the Church or Chapel

A Call to Worship

“A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble, comes up like a flower and withers, flees like a shadow and does not last.”

(Job 14:1)

But Jesus said,

“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.”

(John 11:25-26)

So we may be sure,

“that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

(II Corinthians 5:1)

Therefore,

“God will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

(Revelation 21:4 altd.)

or

The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

(Deuteronomy 33:27 RSV)

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1)
Cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you. (Psalm 55:22)

The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. (Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-3)

I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. (I Corinthians 13:12)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (I Peter 1:3)

Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever. (Revelation 1:17b-18b)

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (John 12:24)

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (Matthew 5:4)

[especially at the funeral of a child]

He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom. (Isaiah 40:11)

Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. (Isaiah 49:15)

As a mother comforts her child so I will comfort you, says the Lord. (Isaiah 66:13)

As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him. (Psalm 103:13)

Jesus said: Whoever becomes humble like this child is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:4)

Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. (Luke 18:16)

Hymn

[Introduction]

[We have been brought together here by - *name* - 's death. It is because we have loved him/her - and still do - that we are all here.

We want to thank God for - *name* - , his precious gift to us, now taken back.

We want to be together to share our grief and help support each other.

We want to find God comforting us, to hear him speaking to us as we pray and as we listen.

And above all else, we want to worship God, to renew our trust in him, to touch eternity, and say what we believe - that death is not the end; that Christ has faced it and fought it and conquered it, so that - *name* - can go where he is leading us all, to be welcomed in the arms of his grace.

Jesus said: 'Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.' (Matthew 11:28)]

Prayer

Lord God, our heavenly Father, as we meet together in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, we know that you are present with us in all your glory.

As we remember the life - *name* - has led help us in the midst of our sadness to share together in a spirit of thanksgiving for all that he/she has meant to us.

Strengthen us at this time with the power of your Holy Spirit.

Through the words of our service, speak to us your Word.

In our sadness, speak your word of comfort;
In our loneliness, speak your word of love;
In our anxiety, speak your word of peace;
In the presence of death speak your word of life.

And then, we pray, be with us as we leave this place and help us to be sure of your abiding presence in our hearts day by day.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Readings

At the heart of our service today is a faith which enables us to be sure that in Jesus Christ death is not the end beyond which there is nothing ... but a new beginning, the beginning of life eternal.

We turn first to that wonderful Psalm, Psalm 23:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;

he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff -
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life.
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

(Psalm 23)

How can we be sure of that hope of eternal life? Shortly before he died at an early age Jesus shared these words with his disciples ...

Do not let your hearts be troubled.
Believe in God, believe also in me.
In my Father's house there are many dwelling places.
If it were not so, I would have told you;
for I go to prepare a place for you.
And if I go and prepare a place for you,
I will come again and will take you to myself,
so that where I am, there you may be also.

I am the way, and the truth and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me.

Peace I leave with you;
my peace I give to you.
I do not give to you as the world gives.
Do not let your hearts be troubled,
and do not let them be afraid.
(John 14:1-3,6,27)

Shortly after sharing those words with his disciples Jesus himself died, an agonising death on the cross. But on the third day he rose again from the dead. Since then those who have come to believe in him have found that they too can share in his wonderful

victory over death. Paul was one of those who found that the resurrection of Christ makes all the difference.

In fact Christ has been raised from the dead,
the first fruits of those who have died.
For since death came through a human being,
the resurrection of the dead
has also come through a human being;
for as all die in Adam,
so all will be made alive in Christ.

But someone will ask,
'How are the dead raised?
With what kind of body do they come?'
Fool!
[Remember the seeds that you sow in the ground:]

What you sow does not come to life unless it dies
And as for what you sow,
you do not sow the body that is to be,
but a bare seed,
perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.
But God gives it a body, as he has chosen,
and to each kind of seed its own body.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead.

What is sown is perishable,
what is raised is imperishable.
It is sown in dishonour,
it is raised in glory.
It is sown in weakness,
it is raised in power.
It is sown a physical body,
it is raised a spiritual body.

[Listen, I will tell you a mystery!
We will not all die, but we will all be changed,
in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,
at the last trumpet.
For the trumpet will sound,
and the dead will be raised imperishable,
and we will be changed.

For this perishable body
must put on imperishability,

and this mortal body
must put on immortality.]

When this perishable body puts on imperishability,
and this mortal body puts on immortality,
then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:
Death has been swallowed up in victory.
Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory
through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved,
be steadfast, immovable,
always excelling in the work of the Lord,
because you know that in the Lord
your labour is not in vain.
(I Corinthians 15:20-22,35-38,42-44,51-55,57-58)

May God bless to us those readings from his Word.
May they speak to each of us
of the faith we share,
of the hope to which we look
and of the abiding love of God
reaching out to us even now.

Address

Opening - a grief to share
Thanksgiving - a life to remember
Good News - a faith to share

[Hymn]

Prayers

Praise

Confession

Declaration of God's Forgiving Love

Thanksgiving

for the life that has been lived
for the memories that can be cherished
for the lessons we can learn

for the love that has been shown to - *name* -

Intercession

for those who mourn

Petition

for all God's people

Praise

for the gospel of faith, hope and love

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn

Benediction

Now to him who by the power at work within us
is able to accomplish abundantly
far more than all we can ask or imagine,
to him be glory
in the church and in Christ Jesus
to all generations,
forever and ever.
Amen.
(Ephesians 3:20-21)

The Committal

[Words of Introduction]

Words of Scripture

Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. (John 11:25)

John writes, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

'See, the home of God is among men and women,
He will dwell with them as their God;

they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe away every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.’
(Revelation 21:1-4)

[at a burial]

Jesus said, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies it bears much fruit. (John 12:24)

[Prayer]

Words of Committal

[at a burial]

We have entrusted our brother/sister, - *name* - into the hands of God, and we now commit his/her body to the ground, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, having our whole trust and confidence in the mercy of our heavenly Father, and in the victory of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who died, was buried, and rose again for us, and is alive and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

[at a cremation]

We have entrusted our brother/sister, - *name* - into the hands of God, and we now commit his/her body to be cremated, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, having our whole trust and confidence in the mercy of our heavenly Father, and in the victory of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who died, was buried, and rose again for us, and is alive and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying,
‘Blessed are the dead
 who from now on die in the Lord.’
‘Yes,’ says the Spirit,
 ‘they will rest from their labours,
for their deeds follow them.’
(Revelation 14:13)

or

Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
 according to your word;

for my eyes have seen your salvation,
 which you have prepared
 in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
 and for glory to your people Israel.
(Luke 2:29-32)

or

For this reason they are before the throne of God,
 and worship him day and night within his temple,
 and the one who is seated on the throne
 will shelter them.
They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;
 the sun will not strike them,
 nor any scorching heat;
for the Lamb at the centre of the throne
 will be their shepherd,
 and he will guide them to springs
 of the water of life,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.
(Revelation 7:15-17)

[Hymn]

Prayer

Lord God, our Heavenly Father,
send us forth from this place,
looking back with thanksgiving in our hearts,
looking forward in hope,
sure of your abiding love in our hearts
now and for evermore.

Blessing

And the peace of God,
which surpasses all understanding,
will guard our hearts and our minds
in Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:7)

And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be amongst us and remain with us
now and for evermore. Amen.

or

Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

(Hebrews 13:20,21)

5.1 Biblical Prayers and Canticles

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

OR

Our Father in heaven
hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come,
 your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

OR

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

The Benedictus

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
who has come to his people and set them free.

**The Lord has raised up for us a mighty Saviour:
born of the house of his servant David.**

Through the holy prophets, God promised of old
to save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all who hate us,
**to show mercy to our forebears:
and to remember his holy covenant.**

This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham:
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
**free to worship him without fear,
holy and righteous before him,
all the days of our life.**

And you, child, shall be called the prophet
of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
**to give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of their sins.**

In the tender compassion of our God
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
**to shine on those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.**

(The Song of Zechariah, Luke 1:68-79)

Magnificat

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
who has looked with favour on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me

and holy is his name.

God has mercy on those who fear him,
from generation to generation.

**The Lord has shown strength with his arm
and scattered the proud in their conceit,**

casting down the mighty from their thrones
and lifting up the lowly.

**God has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.**

He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,
to remember the promise of mercy,

**the promise he made to our forebears,
to Abraham and his children for ever.**

(The Song of Mary, Luke 1:46-55)

Nunc Dimittis

Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace:
your word has been fulfilled.

**My own eyes have seen the salvation
which you have prepared in the sight of every people:**

a light to reveal you to the nations
and the glory of your people Israel.

(The Song of Simeon, Luke 2:29-32)

A Song of Incarnation

The grace of God has appeared,
bringing salvation to all.

**The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
Those who lived in a land of deep darkness -
on them has light shined.**

**For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us.**

God is love;
and God's love was revealed to us in this way;
God sent his only Son into the world
so that we might live through him.

**For we know the generous act of
our Lord Jesus Christ,
that though he was rich,
yet for our sakes he became poor,
so that by his poverty we might become rich.**

God has spoken to us by the Son,
whom he appointed heir of all things.

**The Word became flesh
and lived among us,
and we have seen his glory,
the glory as of the Father's only Son,
full of grace and truth.**

(Titus 2:11; Isaiah 9:2,6a; I John 4:8b,9 altd.;
II Corinthians 8:9 altd.; Hebrews 1:2ab; John 1:14)

A Song of Resurrection

Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed.

Therefore let us celebrate the festival,

not with the old yeast,

the yeast of malice and evil,

but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Christ has been raised from the dead,

the first fruits of those who have died.

For since death came through a human being,

the resurrection of the dead has also

come through a human being;

for as all die in Adam,

so all will be made alive in Christ.

Death has been swallowed up in victory.

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory

through our Lord Jesus Christ.

(I Corinthians 5:7d,8 altd.;15:20-22,54d,57)

A Song of Christ's Glory

Christ Jesus though he was in the form of God:

did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited,

but emptied himself,

**taking the form of a slave:
being born in human likeness.**

And being found in human form
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death -
even death on a cross.

**Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,**

so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and
under the earth,

**and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.**

(Philippians 2:6-11)

Holy, Holy, Holy

Holy, holy, holy
the Lord God the Almighty,
who was and is and is to come.

You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power,
for you created all things,
and by you they existed
and were created.

(Revelation 4:8b,11)

The Song of the Lamb

Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honour and glory and blessing!

**To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honour and glory and might
forever and ever!**

Amen!

(Revelation 5:12,13b)

A Song of Moses and the Lamb

Great and amazing are your deeds,

Lord God the Almighty!
**Just and true are your ways,
King of the nations!**

Lord, who will not fear
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.

All nations will come
and worship before you,
for your judgements have been revealed.

**To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honour and glory and might
forever and ever!**

Amen!

(Revelation 15:3-4;5:13b)

Te Deum

We praise you, O God,
we acclaim you as Lord;
**all creation worships you,
the Father everlasting.**

To you all angels, all the powers of heaven,
the cherubim and seraphim, sing in endless praise:
**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

The glorious company of apostles praise you.
the noble fellowship of prophets praise you.
the white-robed army of martyrs praise you.

Throughout the world the holy Church acclaims you:
**Father, of majesty unbounded,
your true and only Son, worthy of all praise,
the Holy Spirit, advocate and guide.**

You, Christ, are the king of glory,
the eternal Son of the Father.
**When you took our flesh to set us free
you humbly chose the Virgin's womb.**

You overcame the sting of death
and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.
**You are seated at God's right hand in glory.
We believe that you will come and be our judge.**

Come then, Lord, and help your people,
bought with the price of your own blood,
**and bring us with your saints
to glory everlasting.**

Save your people, Lord, and bless your inheritance.

Govern and uphold them now and always.

Day by day we bless you.

We praise your name for ever.

Keep us today, Lord, from all sin.

have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy.

Lord, show us your love and mercy,

for we put our trust in you.

In you, Lord, is our hope:

let us never be put to shame.

The Ten Commandments

As we listen to God's Commandments we pray for strength to keep them:

You shall have no other gods but me:

**Lord, help us to love you
with all our heart, all our soul,
all our mind and all our strength.**

You shall not make for yourself any idol:

**Lord, help us to worship you
in spirit and in truth.**

You shall not dishonour the name of the Lord your God:

**Lord, help us to honour you
with reverence and awe.**

Remember the Lord's day and keep it holy:

**Lord, help us to remember Christ
risen from the dead,
and to set our minds on things above,
not on things on the earth.**

Honour your father and your mother:

**Lord, help us to live as your servants,
giving respect to all,**

and love to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

You shall not kill:

**Lord, help us to be reconciled with each other,
and to overcome evil with good.**

You shall not commit adultery:

**Lord, help us to realise
that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.**

You shall not steal:

**Lord, help us to be honest in all we do,
and to care for those in need.**

You shall not be a false witness:

Lord, help us always to speak the truth.

You shall not covet anything which belongs to your neighbour:

**Lord, help us to remember Jesus said,
'It is more blessed to give than to receive,'
and help us to love our neighbours as ourselves;
for his sake.
Amen.**

True Discipleship

Jesus said, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

Lord Jesus, we hear your word:

Make us truly your disciples.

Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Lord Jesus, we hear your word.

Make us truly your disciples.

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate, a helper, a comforter, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth."

Lord Jesus, we hear your word.

Make us truly your disciples.

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

Lord Jesus, we hear your word.

Make us truly your disciples.

Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, went to the cross and said, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

Lord Jesus, we hear your word.

Make us truly your disciples.

On the third day Jesus rose again from the dead and appeared to many believers, until his earthly ministry was ended and he said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Lord Jesus, we hear your word.

Make us truly your disciples.

Lord of truth - seek us this day.

Lord of peace - still us this day.

Lord of grace - keep us this day.

Lord of all - send us this day

and make us truly your disciples.

Amen.

(John 8:31b,32; 13:34,35; 14:15-17a; 14:27; Luke 23:34a; Matthew 28:18b-20)
(NRSV and Bruce D Thompson, All Year Round, 150, BCC 1990)

The Promise of our Faith

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives."

Do not let your hearts be troubled

and do not let them be afraid.

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

Do not let your hearts be troubled

and do not let them be afraid.

Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble

in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Do not let your hearts be troubled
and do not let them be afraid.

Jesus said, “I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!”

Do not let your hearts be troubled
and do not let them be afraid.

God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Do not let your hearts be troubled
and do not let them be afraid.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.

Do not let your hearts be troubled
and do not let them be afraid.

Song

My peace I give unto you
My rest I give unto you
My strength I give unto you
My love I give unto you
My peace I give unto you

(John 14:1; 14:27; Matthew 11:28; 11:29; John 16:33; I John 4:9-10; 4:18a)

By the Power of the Holy Spirit

May the God of life
fill us with all patience and faithfulness
in believing,
so that we may abound in life

by the power of the Holy Spirit.

May the God of truth
fill us with all generosity and gentleness
in believing,
so that we may abound in truth

by the power of the Holy Spirit.

May the God of grace
fill us with all love and kindness
in believing,
so that we may abound in grace

by the power of the Holy Spirit.

May the God of mercy
fill us with all goodness and self-control
in believing,
so that we may abound in mercy

by the power of the Holy Spirit.

May the God of hope
fill us with all joy and peace
in believing,
so that we may abound in hope

by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Lord God, almighty,
as we abound
in life and truth,
in grace, mercy and hope
may our lives bear fruit

by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

(Based on Galatians 5:22,23 and Romans 15:13)

We shall be Comforted

When the fears of our hearts overwhelm our lives,
this is what the Lord says:
As a mother comforts her child,
so will I comfort you,

and we shall be comforted.

When the fear of the dark overwhelms in the night,
this is what the Lord says,
As a mother comforts her child,
so will I comfort you,

and we shall be comforted.

When fear of ill health overwhelms our well-being,
this is what the Lord says,
As a mother comforts her child,
so will I comfort you,

and we shall be comforted.

When the fear of loneliness overwhelms in a crowd,
this is what the Lord says,
As a mother comforts her child,
so will I comfort you,

and we shall be comforted.

When the fear of parting overwhelms in our sadness,
this is what the Lord says,
As a mother comforts her child,
so will I comfort you,

and we shall be comforted.

When the fear of anxiety overwhelms our peace of mind,
this is what the Lord says,
As a mother comforts her child,
so will I comfort you,

and we shall be comforted.

God is love,
and those who abide in love
abide in God,
and God abides in them.
Love has been perfected among us.
There is no fear in love
but perfect love casts out fear.
this is what the Lord says,
As a mother comforts her child,
so will I comfort you,

and we shall be comforted.

(Isaiah 66:13a)

The King of Glory

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world and those who live in it;
for he has founded it on the seas,

and established it on the rivers

**The children of Jerusalem
welcomed Christ the King.
Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name
of the Lord!**

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
who do not lift up their souls to what is false,
and do not swear deceitfully.

**The children of Jerusalem
welcomed Christ the King.
Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name
of the Lord!**

They will receive blessing from the Lord,
and vindication from the God of their salvation.
Such is the company of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

**The children of Jerusalem
welcomed Christ the King.
Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name
of the Lord!**

Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.

Who is the King of glory?

The Lord strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle.
Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.

Who is this King of glory?

The Lord of hosts,
he is the King of glory.

**We welcome Christ the King.
Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name
of the Lord!**

(Psalm 24; Matthew 21:9bc)

Coming to Christ

We come from a busy, anxious world, and Christ says:

My peace I give to you.

We come with our cares and worries, and Christ says:

Do not let your hearts be troubled.

We come with our burdens of guilt and responsibility,
and Christ says:

My yoke is easy and my burden is light.

We come with our prayers for the church and for the
world, and Christ says:

Ask, and it will be given you.

We come to find love, and Christ says:

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.

Abide in my love.

(John 20:26; John 14:1; Matthew 11:30; Matthew 7:7; John 15:9)

The Beatitudes

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,

for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,

for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

(Matthew 5:3-10)

5.1 Biblical Prayers and Canticles

This section contains a selection of readings and prayers based on texts from the Bible and on some early hymns of the Christian Church.

The English translations of the Benedictus, Magnificat, Nunc Dimittis and Te Deum and the second version of the Lord's Prayer have been prepared by the English Language Liturgical Commission (ELLC), 1988. This international and ecumenical body has aimed to produce translations acceptable for use in all English speaking churches around the world.

The third version of the Lord's Prayer is that adopted by the Church of England in the Alternative Service Book. It has also gained acceptance in many schools.

All other Biblical texts are taken or adapted from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, 1989.

5.5 Benedictions and Blessings

To all God's beloved ...,
who are called to be saints:
grace to you and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.
(Romans 1:7)

O the depth of the riches
and wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments
and how inscrutable his ways!
From him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever.
Amen.
(Romans 11:33,36)

Let love be genuine;
hate what is evil,
hold fast to what is good.
Rejoice in hope,
be patient in suffering,
persevere in prayer.
Extend hospitality to strangers.
Bless those who persecute you;
Rejoice with those who rejoice,
weep with those who weep.
Live in harmony with one another.
(Romans 12:9,12,13b,14a,15,16a)

The God of peace be with all of us.
(Romans 15:33 altd.)

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us.
(Romans 16:20 altd.)
Now to God who is able to strengthen us
according to the gospel
and the proclamation of Jesus Christ ...,
to the only wise God
be the glory through Jesus Christ forever.
Amen.

(Romans 16:25a,27 altd.)

To the church of God in this place,
to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus,
called to be saints,
together with all those who in every place
call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
both their Lord and ours,
Grace to you and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.
(I Corinthians 1:2,3 altd.)

Thanks be to God,
who gives us the victory
through our Lord Jesus Christ.
Therefore let us be steadfast, immovable,
always excelling in the work of the Lord,
because we know that in the Lord
our labour is not in vain.
(I Corinthians 15:57,58 altd.)

To the church of God in this place,
including all the saints
throughout the world:
Grace to you and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.
(II Corinthians 1:1b,2 altd.)
Blessed be the God and Father
of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of mercies
and the God of all consolation,
who consoles us in all our affliction,
so that we may be able to console
those who are in any affliction
with the consolation with which
we ourselves are consoled by God.
(II Corinthians 1:3,4)

Let us put things in order,
encourage one another,
agree with one another,

and live in peace.
And the God of love and peace
will be with us.
(II Corinthians 13:11 altd.)

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with all of us.
(II Corinthians 13:13 altd.)

Grace to you and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ,
who gave himself for our sins
to set us free from the present evil age,
according to the will of our God and Father,
to whom be the glory forever and ever.
Amen.

(Galatians 1:3-5)
For freedom Christ has set us free.
Stand firm, therefore,
and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.
The only thing that counts is
faith working through love.
May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
be with your spirit, brothers and sisters.
Amen.
(Galatians 5:1,6b; 6:18)

To the saints who are in this place,
and are faithful in Christ Jesus:
Grace to you and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.
(Ephesians 1:1,2 altd.)

May you have the power to comprehend,
with all the saints,
what is the breadth and length
and height and depth,
and to know the love of Christ
that surpasses knowledge,

so that you may be filled
with all the fullness of God.
(Ephesians 3:18,19)

Now to him who by the power at work within us
is able to accomplish abundantly
far more than all we can ask or imagine,
to him be glory
in the church and in Christ Jesus
to all generations,
forever and ever.
Amen.

(Ephesians 3:20,21)
Peace be to the whole community,
and love with faith,
from God the Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Grace be with all
who have an undying love
for our Lord Jesus Christ.
(Ephesians 6:23,24)

Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I will say, Rejoice.
Let your gentleness be known to everyone.
The Lord is near.
Do not worry about anything,
but in everything
by prayer and supplication
with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God,
which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:4-7)

Finally, beloved,
whatever is true,
whatever is honourable,
whatever is just,
whatever is pure,
whatever is pleasing,

whatever is commendable,
if there is any excellence
and if there is anything worthy of praise,
think about these things.
Keep on doing the things that you have
learned and received and heard and seen ...
and the God of peace will be with you.
(Philippians 4:8-9)

Since we have been raised with Christ
let us seek the things that are above,
where Christ is,
seated at the right hand of God.
Let us set our minds on things that are above,
not on things that are on earth,
for we have died
and our life is hidden with Christ in God.
When Christ who is our life is revealed,
then we also will be revealed with him in glory.
(Colossians 3:1-4 altd.)

Now may our God and Father himself
and our Lord Jesus
direct our way ...
And may the Lord make us increase
and abound in love for one another
and for all ...
And may he so strengthen our hearts in holiness
that we may be blameless before our God and Father
at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.
(I Thessalonians 3:11-13 altd.)

May the God of peace himself
sanctify us entirely;
and may our spirit and soul and body
be kept complete and blameless
at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
The one who calls us is faithful
and he will do this.
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.
(I Thessalonians 5:23,24,28 altd.)
Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself
and God our Father,
who loved us

and through grace
gave us eternal comfort
and good hope,
comfort our hearts
and strengthen them
in every good work and word.
(II Thessalonians 2:16,17 altd.)

Now may the Lord of peace himself
give us peace at all times in all ways.
The Lord be with all of us.
(II Thessalonians 3:16 altd.)

Grace, mercy, and peace
from God the Father
and Christ Jesus our Lord.
(I Timothy 1:2b)

Let us keep the commandment
without spot or blame
until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ,
which he will bring about at the right time -
he who is blessed
and only Sovereign,
the King of kings
and Lord of lords.

It is he alone who has immortality
and dwells in unapproachable light,
whom no one has ever seen
or can see;
to him be honour and eternal dominion.

Amen.

(I Timothy 6:14-16 altd.)

The Lord will rescue us from every evil attack,
and save us for his heavenly kingdom.
To him be the glory forever and ever,
Amen.

(II Timothy 4:18 altd.)

Now may the God of peace,
who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus,
the great shepherd of the sheep,
by the blood of the eternal covenant,
make us complete in everything good,

so that we may do his will,
working among us that which is pleasing in his sight,
through Jesus Christ,
to whom be the glory
forever and ever.

Amen.

(Hebrews 13:20,21)

Blessed be the God and Father
of our Lord Jesus Christ!

By his great mercy
he has given us a new birth into a living hope
through the resurrection
of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Although we have not seen him, we love him;
and even though we do not see him now,
we believe in him and rejoice
with an indescribable and glorious joy,
for we are receiving the outcome of our faith,
the salvation of our souls.

(I Peter 1:3,8,9 altd.)

Let us clothe ourselves with humility
in our dealings with one another, for
'God opposes the proud,
but gives grace to the humble.'

Let us humble ourselves therefore
under the mighty hand of God,
so that he may exalt us in due time.

Let us cast all our anxiety on him,
because he cares for us.

Let us discipline ourselves and keep alert.

Like a roaring lion
our adversary the devil prowls around,
looking for someone to devour.

Let us resist him, steadfast in our faith,
for we know that our brothers and sisters
in all the world

are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

And after we have suffered for a little while,
the God of grace,

who has called us to his eternal glory in Christ,
will himself restore, support,

strengthen and establish us.
To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.
(I Peter 5:5b-11 altd.)

May grace and peace be ours in abundance
in the knowledge of God
and of Jesus our Lord.
(II Peter 1:2 altd.)

Let us grow in the grace and knowledge
of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
To him be the glory
both now and to the day of eternity.
Amen.
(II Peter 3:18 altd.)

To those who are called,
who are beloved in God the Father
and kept safe for Jesus Christ:
may mercy, peace and love
be yours in abundance.
(Jude 1:2)

Now to him who is able to keep us from falling,
and to make us stand without blemish
in the presence of his glory
with rejoicing,
to the only God our Saviour,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
be glory, majesty,
power and authority,
before all time
and now and forever.
Amen.
(Jude 1:24,25 altd.)

Grace to you and peace
from him who is and who was and who is to come ...
and from Jesus Christ
the faithful witness,
the firstborn of the dead,
and the ruler of the kings of the earth.
(Revelation 1:4b-5a)

To him who loves us

and freed us from our sins by his blood,
and made us to be a kingdom,
priests serving his God and Father,
to him be glory and dominion
forever and ever.

Amen.

(Revelation 1:5b-6)

Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honour and glory and blessing!

To the one seated on the throne

and to the Lamb

be blessing and honour and glory and might
forever and ever.

Amen.

(Revelation 5:12,13b)

Salvation and glory and power to our God,
for his judgments are true and just.

Amen. Hallelujah!

(Revelation 19:1b,2a,4c)

Blessed are you,

Lord God of our ancestor Israel,
forever and ever.

Yours, O Lord,

are the greatness,

the power,

the glory,

the victory,

and the majesty;

for all that is in the heavens

and on the earth

is yours;

yours is the kingdom, O Lord,

and you are exalted as head above all.

And now, our God,

we give thanks to you

and praise your glorious name.

(I Chronicles 29:10b,11,13)

The Lord bless you and keep you;

the Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.
(Numbers 6:24-27)

5.5 Benedictions and Blessings

Many passages from the Bible can be adapted for use as benedictions, or ascriptions of glory, and as blessings. A selection of appropriate verses from the Epistles is reproduced in this section, together with two passages from the Old Testament. They may each be used on their own or in combination with a trinitarian blessing at the conclusion of a service. Some are also appropriate following a sermon or at other points in a service.

The passages are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Those which have been adapted have generally been put into the first person plural instead of the second person plural. In some cases a reference to a specific place has been removed.

5.8 A Four Year Lectionary

The lectionary has been prepared by the Joint Liturgical Group. It provides a four year cycle of readings, with suggested Old Testament, Gospel and Epistle readings for each Sunday. With some exceptions, one gospel is used each year.

Those who choose to follow such a lectionary will be ensuring that a good proportion of scripture will be read with little duplication over the four years. Whilst thematic preaching can be very worthwhile and whilst it is important to take into account the situation of the congregation when preparing worship, the use of a lectionary can help the Word of God heard through the Bible to become the starting point for worship. Such a lectionary should not, however, confine worship leaders. They will want to seek the Spirit's guidance in all they do as they prepare to lead and to preach.

It may be possible to discern some link between the readings set for a Sunday, but no theme is provided as with some lectionaries. This helps to allow the Bible to speak for itself rather than through pre-determined themes.

5.8 A Four Year Lectionary

The lectionary is designed to begin with Year A on the 9th Sunday before Christmas 1992. Year B begins in 1993, Year C in 1994 and Year D in 1995. The cycle is then repeated.

YEAR A YEAR B YEAR C YEAR D

9th Sunday before Christmas

Prov 8.1,22-31 15-25	Gen 2.4b-9, 24-31a	Job 38.1-18	Gen 1.1-5,
Rev 21.1-4, 22-27	Rev 4.1-11	Acts 14.8-17	Col 1.15-20
Matt 10.28-33	Mark 10.2-12	Luke 12.13-31	John 1.1-14

8th Sunday before Christmas

Isa 44.6-17	Gen 4.1-10	Gen 9.8-17	Gen 3.1-15
Rom 3.21-28	1 John 3.9-18	Rom 5.12-21	Rom 7.7-13
Matt 23.25-36	Mark 7.14-23	Luke 11.33-41	John 3.13-21

7th Sunday before Christmas

Gen 13.1-18	Gen 15.1-18	Gen 18.1-16	Gen 12.1-9
Gal 3.1-14	Jas 2.14-26	Rom 9.1-9	Rom 4.13-25
Matt 3.7-12	Mark 12.18-27	Luke 3.1-14	John 8.51-59

6th Sunday before Christmas

Deut 18.15-22	Exod 6.2-13	Exod 3.1-15	Exod 2.1-10
Acts 3.11-26	Heb 11.17-29	Heb 8.1-13	Heb 3.1-6
Matt 5.38-48	Mark 13.5-13	Luke 20.27-40	John 6.27-35

5th Sunday before Christmas

Micah 2.12-13	1 Sam 16.1-13	2 Sam 5.1-5	Jer 23.1-6
Rev 19.11-16	1 Tim 1.12-17	1 Cor 15.20-28	Rev 1.4-8
Matt 25.31-46	Mark 10.17-31	Luke 23.35-43	John 18.33-40

4th Sunday before Christmas (Advent 1)

Isa 2.1-5	Isa 51.4-11	Jer 33.14-16	Isa 52.1-10
Rom 13.8-14	1 Thess 5.1-11	Jas 5.1-11	Rom 11.13-24
Matt 24.36-44	Mark 13.21-37	Luke 21.25-36	John 7.25-31

YEAR A YEAR B YEAR C YEAR D

3rd Sunday before Christmas (Advent 2)

Isa 59.12-20	Jer 36.1-10	Isa 55.1-11	1 Kings 22.(1-5) 6-17
Rom 16.25-27	2 Tim 3.14- 4.8	Rom 15.4-13	2 Pet 1.19- 2.3
Matt 13.53-58	Mark 7.1-13	Luke 4.14-21	John 5.36-47

2nd Sunday before Christmas (Advent 3)

Judg 13.2-14 Isa 40.1-11 Zeph 3.14-18 Mal 4.1-6
Phil 4.4-9.2 Pet 3.8-14 1 Thess 5.16-24 1 Cor 4.1-5
Matt 11.2-19 Mark 1.1-8 Luke 1.5-25 John 1.19-28

Sunday next before Christmas (Advent 4)

Isa 7.10-14 1 Sam 2.1-10 Isa 11.1-10 Zech 2.10-13
Rev 11.19-12.6 Rom 1.1-7 I Cor 1.26-31 Heb 10.1-10
Matt 1.18-23 Luke 1.39-56 Luke 1.26-38a Luke 1.57-66
Luke 1.68-79 may well be used as a canticle

Christmas (midnight)

Micah 5.2-4 Isa 9.2,6-7 Isa 45.22-25 Isa 7.10-14
Titus 2.11-15 Titus 3.4-7 Phil 2.1-13 Heb 1.1-6
Luke 2.1-20 Luke 2.1-20 John 1.1-14 Luke 2.1-20

Christmas Day

Isa 9.2,6-7 Isa 52.7-14 Micah 5.2-4 Isa 62.6-7,
10-12
1 John 4.7-14 Heb 1.1-6 Titus 2.11-15 Titus 3.4-7
John 1.1-14 John 1.1-14 Luke 2.1-20 John 1.1-14

1st Sunday after Christmas

Isa 60.1-6 Isa 49.7-13 Isa 61.1-11 Isa 11.1-10
Eph 3.1-12 Rev 21.22-22.5 1 John 1.1-2.2 Gal 3.26-4.7
Matt 2.1-12 Matt 2.1-12 Matt 2.1-12 Matt 2.1-12

When this day falls on December 30th, the readings of the 2nd Sunday after Christmas are used.

2nd Sunday after Christmas

Jer 31.15-17	Zech 8.1-8	1 Sam 1.20-28	Isa 40.25-31
2 Cor 1.3-11	1 Thess 2.1-8	Rom 12.1-8	Col 1.1-14
Matt 2.13-23	Luke 2.41-52	Luke 2.21-40	John 1.14-18

YEAR A YEAR B YEAR C YEAR D

Epiphany (January 6th)

Isa 49.13-23	Isa 49.1-6	Isa 60.1-6	Isa 49.7-13
Rom 15.13-21	Gal 4.1-7	Eph 3.1-12	Rev 21.22-22.5
Matt 2.1-12	Matt 2.1-12	Matt 2.1-12	Matt 2.1-12

1st Sunday after Epiphany

1 Sam 16.1-13a	Exod 14.15-22	Josh 3.1-17	Isa 42.1-9
Rom 6.12-23	1 John 5.6-9	Acts 10.34-48a	Eph 2.1-10
Matt 3.13-17	Mark 1.9-11	Luke 3.15-22	John 1.29-34

2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Ezek 2.1-3.4	Jer 1.4-10	Exod 18.13-27	1 Sam 3.1-10
Rev 10.8-11	Acts 9.1-20	Acts 16.(6-10)	Gal 1.11-24
Matt 4.18-25	Mark 1.14-20	Luke 5.1-11	John 1.35-51

3rd Sunday after Epiphany

Isa 9.1-4	Deut 30.11-15	Num 9.15-23	Exod 33.12-23
Rom 1.8-17	1 Pet 1.3-12	1 Cor 1.1-9	1 John 1.1-4
Matt 4.12-17	Mark 1.21-28	Luke 4.16-30	John 2.1-11

4th Sunday after Epiphany

Gen 28.10-22 6-19	1 Chr 29.(1-5)	Hagg 2.1-9	1 Kings 8.22-30
Acts 7.44-50 7.1	1 Cor 6.12-20	2 Cor 6.14-	1 Cor 3.10-17
Matt 21.12-16	Mark 1.40-45	Luke 21.1-9	John 2.13-25

5th Sunday after Epiphany

Isa 6.(1-7) 8-12	2 Sam 12.1-13a	Jer 13.1-11	Judg 9.7-15
Rom 1.18-25	1 Pet 1.22-25	1 Cor 2.1-5	1 Cor 10.1-13
Matt 13.10-17 21-34	Mark 4.10-12,	Luke 5.33-39	John 12.37-50

6th Sunday after Epiphany

1 Sam 21.1-6	Isa 1.10-17	Exod 20.8-11	Deut 5.12-15
Rom 2.1-11	Col 2.16-19	1 Cor 3.18-23	2 Cor 2.14-3.6
Matt 12.1-14	Mark 2.23-3.6	Luke 6.1-11	John 7.14-24

YEAR A YEAR B YEAR C YEAR D

9th Sunday before Easter

Isa 30.18-21	Prov 2.1-9	Prov 3.1-8	Job 22.12-28
1 Tim 4.(4-7a) 7b-16	1 Cor 2.6-10	1 Cor 4.8-16	2 John 1-13
Matt 5.(1-12) 17-20	Mark 4.1-9	Luke 8.4-15	John 8.21-36

8th Sunday before Easter

2 Kings 5.1-14	2 Kings 4.18-37	Job 2.1-10	Job 23.1-10
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(15-19a)

2 Cor 12.1-10	Jas 5.13-16	Acts 3.1-10	Jas 1.2-5
Matt 15.21-31	Mark 2.1-12	Luke 5.12-26	John 5.1-18

7th Sunday before Easter

Isa 30.8-17	Jonah 1.1-17	Isa 41.8-16	Deut 8.1-6
Acts 12.1-17	Heb 2.1-4Acts 28.1-6	Phil 4.10-20	
Matt 14.22-36	Mark 4.35-41	Luke 9.10-17	John 6.1-15

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2.12-18	Isa 58.1-8Amos 5.6-15	Exod 20.1-17	
2 Tim 2.1-7	1 Cor 9.19-27	Jas 4.1-10	2 Cor 5.14-6.2
Matt 6.16-21	Mark 2.18-22	Luke 18.1-14	Matt 6.1-15

6th Sunday before Easter (Lent 1)

Deut 30.15-20	Jer 31.27-34	Deut 6.10-17	Exod 17.3-7
Jas 1.12-18	Heb 2.10-18	Rom 10.8-13	Heb 4.12-16
Matt 4.1-11	Mark 1.12-15	Luke 4.1-13	Matt 4.1-11

5th Sunday before Easter (Lent 2)

Isa 35.1-10	Jer 2.1-13Gen 6.11-22	2 Kings 6.8-17	
1 John 3.1-10	Eph 6.10-20	1 John 4.1-6	Eph 5.6-14
Matt 12.22-32	Mark 3.19b-27	Luke 11.14-26	John 9.(1-12)13-41

4th Sunday before Easter (Lent 3)

Job 1.1-12	Isa 48.1-8Isa 63.7-14	Josh 24.14-24	
1 Pet 4.12-19	2 Tim 1.8-14	2 Tim 2.8-13	Gal 2.11-21
Matt 16.13-28	Mark 8.27-33	Luke 9.18-27	John 6.60-71

YEAR A YEAR B YEAR C YEAR D

3rd Sunday before Easter (Lent 4)

Exod 24.3-11 Exod 24.12-18 Exod 34.29-35 1 Sam 9.27-
10.1,6-7

2 Pet 1.16-19 2 Cor 4.1-6 2 Cor 3.4-18 2 Cor 1.15-22

Matt 17.1-13 Mark 9.2-10 Luke 9.28-36 John 12.1-8

These readings are also appropriate for the Sunday nearest to
August 6th (Transfiguration)

Mothering Sunday

Isa 66.5-13; or Jer 31.15-20; or Gen 21.8-21; or 1 Sam 1.9-20

Rom 16.1-7; or 1 Thess 2.1-8; or Gal 4.21-5.1;

or Heb 11.1-2,11-12

Matt 23.29-39; or Mark 3.31-35; or Luke 1.39-45 (46-55);

or Luke 2.41-52

2nd Sunday before Easter (Lent 5)

Gen 25.29-34 Lam 3.(1-9) Lam 1.1-14 Isa 63.1-9
18-33

Rom 8.1-11 Rom 5.1-11 Heb 5.1-10 Col 2.8-15

Matt 20.20-28 Mark 10.32-45 Luke 20.9-19 John 12.20-36

Palm Sunday

Zech 9.9 (10) Zech 9.9 (10) Zech 9.9 (10) Zech 9.9 (10)

Matt 21.1-11 Mark 11.1-11 Luke 19.29-40 John 12.12-16
(41-44)

Lam 5.15-22 Isa 50.4-7Isa 56.1-8Gen 22.1-18

1 Cor 1.18-25 Phil 2.5-11 Heb 10.1-10 Heb 10.11-25

Matt (26.36- 27.31) 15.20)	Mark (14.32- 23.31) 27.31)	Luke (22.39- 23.32-49	Matt (26.36- 27.32-54
(55-56) (40-41)	(55-56)		

or John 18.1-40

On this day and on Good Friday provision is made, as is traditional in some churches, for reading the greater part of the passion narratives, but where these passages are not read in full, the earlier parts of the narratives may be read at evening services during Lent or on the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week.

Maundy Thursday

Exod 24.3-8 11-14	Exod 12.1-8,	Gen 14.18-20	Jer 31.31-34
1 Cor 10.16-17	1 Cor 11.23-29	1 Cor 10.16-17	1 Cor 11.23-29
Matt 26.26-35	Mark 14.12-26	Luke 22.14-38	John 13.1-15

YEAR A YEAR B YEAR C YEAR D

Good Friday

Lam 2.15-19 53.12	Gen 22.1-18	Isa 52.13-Isa 50.4-9	
Heb 10.11-25 5.7-9	Heb 4.14-16;	Heb 10.11-25	Col 1.18-23
John (18.1- 19.16) 19. 17-37 17-37	John (18.1- 19.16) 19. 17-37 17-37	John (18.1- 19.16) 19.	John (18.1- 19.16) 19.
or Matt (26. 36-27.31) 27.32-54 (55-56)	or Mark (14.32- 15.20) 15. 21-39 (40-41)	or Luke (22.39- 23.31) 23. 32-49 or John 19.1-37	or John 18.1- 19.37

Easter Day (first service)

(Gen 1.1-5, 26-31)	(Gen 3.8-13, 22-24) 10-18; 8. 6-18; 9.8-13)	(Gen 7.2-5, 5.1)	(Exod 4.27- 5.1)
Exod 14.15-22 or 14.15-15.1 (Ezek 36.16-28)	Exod 14.15-22 or 14.15-15.1 (Isa 55.1-11)	Exod 14.15-22 or 14.15-15.1 (Isa 54.4-14)	Exod 14.15-22 or 14.15-15.1 (Deut 31.22-29)
Rom 6.3-11	Rom 6.3-11	Rom 6.3-11	Rom 6.3-11
Matt 28.1-10	Mark 16.1-8	Luke 24.1-11	Matt 28.1-10

If the service includes a vigil, all the readings should be used. If it is early in the morning, those in brackets should be omitted.

Easter Day (second service)

Isa 12.1-6	Isa 42.10-16	Jer 31.1-6	Isa 55.1-11
Rev 1.12-18	1 Cor 15.1-11	1 Cor 15.12-20	1 Cor 5.7b-8
John 20.1-18	John 20.1-18	John 20.1-18	John 20.1-18

1st Sunday after Easter

Isa 65.17-25 17-33	Num 13.1-2, 17-33	2 Kings 7.1-16	Exod 15.1-11
Acts 13.26-31	2 Cor 4.7-18	Rev 19.6-9	1 Pet 1.3-9
Matt 28.11-15	John 20.19-31	Luke 24.13-35	John 20.19-31

2nd Sunday after Easter

1 Kings 17. (8-16) 17-24	Ezek 34.7-15	Isa 51.1-6	Isa 61.1-3
Col 3.1-11	1 Pet 5.1-11	1 Cor 15.50-58	1 Pet 1.13-25
Matt 12.38-42	John 10.7-18	Luke 24.36-43	John 21.1-14

YEAR A YEAR B YEAR C YEAR D

3rd Sunday after Easter

Neh 2.1-18	Lev 19.9-18	Exod 16.4-15	Isa 62.1-5
1 Cor 12.3-13	1 John 4.13-21	1 Cor 8.1-13	Rev 3.14-22
John 11.17-27	John 13.31-35	John 6.35-40	John 21.15-25

4th Sunday after Easter

2 Sam 1.17-27	Exod 19.1-6	Deut 7.6-11	Ezek 36.24-28
1 John 2.1-11	1 Pet 2.1-10	Gal 3.23-4.7	Gal 5.13-25
John 14.1-11	John 15.1-11	John 15.12-17	John 15.18-27

5th Sunday after Easter

1 Kings 18.20-39	Gen 18.23-33	Dan 6.10-23	Exod 33.7-11
Heb 7.11-25 (26-28)	Rom 8.22-27	2 Thess 3.1-5	Rom 8.28-39
Matt 6.1-15	John 16.12-24	Luke 7.1-10	John 16.25-33

Ascension Day

Dan 7.13-14	Dan 7.13-14	Dan 7.13-14	Dan 7.13-14
Acts 1.1-11	Acts 1.1-11	Acts 1.1-11	Acts 1.1-11
Matt 28.16-20 or Mark 8.31-9.1	Mark 16.15-20	Luke 24.44-53	John 16.1-11

6th Sunday after Easter

Jer 10.1-10a	Isa 45.1-7Ezek 43.1-7a	2 Kings 2.1-15	
Eph 4.1-16	Eph 1.15-23	Acts 1.12-26	Rev 5.6-14
Luke 24.44-53	John 17.1-13	Matt 28.16-20	John 7.32-39

Pentecost

Joel 2.23-29	Josh 1.1-9	Gen 11.1-9	Ezek 37.1-14
Acts 2.1-11	Acts 2.1-11	Acts 2.1-11	Acts 2.1-11
Matt 12.14-21	Mark 4.26-34	Luke 11.1-13	John 14.15-27

or Mark 3.19b-30

1st Sunday after Pentecost (Trinity Sunday)

Isa 6.1-8	Deut 6.4-9	Exod 19.3-8	Isa 40.12-17
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16-20

Eph 1.3-14	Rom 8.12-17	Acts 2.(14-21)	1 Tim 6.11-16
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22-36

Matt 11.25-30	Mark 1.9-11	Luke 10.17-24	John 14.8-17
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YEAR A YEAR B YEAR C YEAR D

2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Ezek 18.25-32	2 Chr 15.1-8	2 Sam 7.4-16	Deut 6.17-25
Acts 17.22-34	Acts 4.13-31	Acts 2.37-47	Rom 10.5-17
Matt 3.1-6	Mark 1.29-39	Luke 14.15-24	John 3.1-15

3rd Sunday after Pentecost

Isa 60.19-22	1 Sam 16.14-23	Deut 8.11-20	Hab 2.1-4
Phil 2.12-18	Acts 16.16-24	Acts 4.5-12	1 John 2.22-29
Matt 5.13-16	Mark 5.1-20	Luke 8.40-56	John 3.22-36

4th Sunday after Pentecost

Deut 26.1-11	Amos 7.10-15	Ezek 34.1-6	Micah 4.1-7
2 Cor 8.1-15	Acts 13.1-12	Acts 8.26-38	Heb 12.18-29
Matt 5.21-37	Mark 6.1-13	Luke 15.1-10	John 4.5-26

5th Sunday after Pentecost

Isa 49.14-21 5.8 (19-22)	Esther 4.10- 4.1-11	Ruth 1.1-18	Jonah (3.6-10)
Acts 4.32-37	Acts 13.13-25	Acts 11.4-18	Eph 2.11-22
Matt 6.22-34	Mark 6.14-29	Luke 17.11-19	John 4.27-42

6th Sunday after Pentecost

2 Chr 6.12-21	Jer 23.23-32	Jer 38.1-13	Hos 14.1-7
1 Tim 2.1-8	Gal 5.2-11	Acts 20.7-12	Acts 9.36-43
Matt 7.1-14	Mark 8.14-21	Luke 7.11-17	John 4.43-54

7th Sunday after Pentecost

Jer 7.1-7	1 Kings 10.1-13	1 Sam 24.7b-17	Micah 7.14-20
Acts 19.13-20	1 Tim 3.14-16	Gal 6.1-10	Acts 24.10-21
Matt 7.15-29	Mark 8.22-26	Luke 7.36-50	John 5.19-36

8th Sunday after Pentecost

Gen 21.(1-8) 9-21 (32-37)	1 Sam 17. 38-50	Josh 2.1-14	Isa 43.1-13
Rom 9.19-28	2 Cor 6.1-10	Phil 4.1-3	Acts 27.33-44
Matt 8.5-13	Mark 9.14-29	Luke 8.1-3	John 6.16-21

9th Sunday after Pentecost

Hos 6.1-6	Num 11.24-29	1 Kings 19.(1-8)	1 Kings 17.8-16
9-21			
2 Cor 5.14- 6.2	1 Cor 12.14-26	1 Pet 3.13-22	Rom 14.10-23
Matt 9.9-13	Mark 9.33-41	Luke 9.51-62	John 6.22-27

YEAR A YEAR B YEAR C YEAR D

10th Sunday after Pentecost

Jonah 3.1-5 11.1	Deut 10.12-	Exod 22.21-27	Prov 9.1-11
Acts 9.26-31	Heb 12.3-13	Rom 12.9-21	1 Cor 11.23-29
Matt 9.35- 10.16	Mark 9.42-50	Luke 10.25-42	John 6.41-59

11th Sunday after Pentecost

Jer 20.7-13	Isa 54.1-8Ezek 12.21-28	Judg 6.36-40	
Acts 20.17-35	Eph 5.21-6.4	1 Thess 1.1-10	1 John 5.1-5
Matt 10.16-25	Mark 10.13-16	Luke 12.35-48	John 7.1-17

12th Sunday after Pentecost

Gen 24.62-67	Micah 6.1-8	Amos 5.18-24	Job 28.12-28
Col 3.18-4.1 3.9	Eph 4.17-32	Jas 1.19-27	1 Cor 2.11-
Matt 12.43-50 10-17	Mark 10.46-52	Luke 13.(1-9)	John 7.40-52

13th Sunday after Pentecost

Hab 3.17-19	Isa 5.1-7	Exod 23.10-13	Exod 34.4-9
Rom 8.18-25	Acts 13.44-52	Rom 14.1-9	Rom 7.1-6
Matt 13.24-43	Mark 12.1-12	Luke 14.1-6	John 8.3-11

14th Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 3.4-15	Hos 11.1-9	Prov 25.2-7	Exod 13.17-22
1 Cor 15.35-52 13.13	1 Cor 12.27-	2 Cor 11.7-15	Eph 5.11-20

Matt 13.44-52 Mark 12.28-34 Luke 14.7-14 John 8.12-20

15th Sunday after Pentecost

Ezek 37.15a-28 1 Kings 21.1-16 2 Sam 18. Jer 28.1-17

(24-30) 31-33

1 Cor 1.10-17 Gal 1.1-10 Gal 6.14-18 1 John 5.10-21

Matt 18.10-20 Mark 12.35-44 Luke 14.25-35 John 8.(31-36)

37-47

16th Sunday after Pentecost

Gen 45.1-15 Deut 15.1-11 Gen 37.(2-11) Jer 50.4-7

12-28

Jas 2.8-13 2 Cor 9.6-15 Col 3.12-17 1 Pet 2.11-25

Matt 18.21-35 Mark 14.1-9 Luke 15.11-32 John 10.1-6

YEAR A YEAR B YEAR C YEAR D

17th Sunday after Pentecost

Exod 20.1-17 Exod 12.21-27 Amos 8.4-7 2 Chr 7.11-16

Eph 5.1-5Heb 9.23-28 1 Tim 6.1-12 Eph 3.14-21

Matt 19.13-30 Mark 14.10-25 Luke 16.1-13 John 10.22-30

18th Sunday after Pentecost

Eccles 3.1-13 Gen 32.22-32 Amos 6.1-7 Prov 3.13-20

2 Thess 3.6-13 Col 1.21-29 Jas 2.1-9 Rom 11.33-36

Matt 20.1-16 Mark 14.26-42 Luke 16.19-31 John 10.31-42

19th Sunday after Pentecost

Josh 6.1-20 Exod 32.7-14 Lev 25.39-46 Dan 12.1-4

Heb 11.17-22, Heb 6.4-9Philem 1-25 2 Cor 5.1-10

29-31

Matt 21.18-32 Mark 14.43-52 Luke 17.1-10 John 11.1-16

20th Sunday after Pentecost

Deut 4.1-8 Dan 3.13-26 Gen 6.5-8Job 42.1-6
Rom 13.1-10 Acts 5.27-42 Phil 1.1-11 Phil 1.12-30
Matt 22.15-22 Mark 14.53-65 Luke 17.20-37 John 11.28-44

21st Sunday after Pentecost

Neh 6.1-16 Exod 2.11-22 Gen 17.1-10 Judg 11.29-40
1 Pet 4.7-11 Heb 11.23-28 Rom 4.1-12 Heb 9.11-15
(16-22)
Matt 25.14-30 Mark 14.66-72 Luke 19.1-10 John 11.45-54

22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Isa 45.14-25 2 Sam 16.1-13 Num 27.15-23 2 Sam 23.13-17
Acts 15.1-2, Acts 7.54-8.1 Acts 8.5-8, Acts 6.1-7
22-29 14-17
Matt 26.6-13 Mark 15.1-21 Luke 20.1-8 John 13.12-30

Last Sunday after Pentecost

Isa 33.17-22 Isa 25.1-9Judg 7.1-8, Jer 29.1, 4-14
19-23
Rev 7.9-17 Rev 7.2-4, 9-12 Heb 11.32- Phil 3.7-21
12.2
Matt 25.1-13 Matt 5.1-12 Luke 19.11-27 John 17.13-26

YEAR A YEAR B YEAR C YEAR D

Harvest Festival

Gen 8.15-22 25-32	Lev 25.15-22 or Lev 19.9-18	Gen 41.1-7,	Deut 26.1-11
Gal 6.7-10	Phil 4.10-20	Rev 14.14-18	2 Cor 9.6-15
Matt 6.25-34 13-20	Mark 4.1-9,	Luke 12.16-31	John 12.23-28