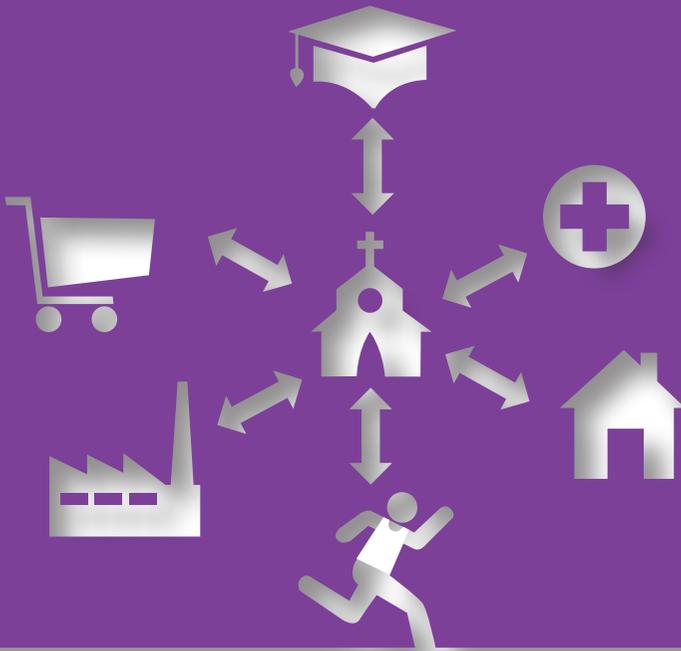


grove worship

Gathered to be Sent

Worship that Connects
with Everyday Faith



W241

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1

Introduction

People who plan worship can spend hours honing and refining services, taking great care over their selection of Bible readings, themes, songs and hymns. Care and attention are given to the core ideas and prayers that will be offered, but sometimes little thought is given as to how the service will start and how it will finish. Yet how church services begin and end can be just as crucial to congregational worship.

These moments encompass when the congregation is first gathered together for worship and when God's people are sent out to build the kingdom, and doing it well can be the difference between a time of worship which engages the congregation and one which misses the mark. The words and music we choose to employ for this task need to be carefully thought through and those leading services need to deliver these sections of the liturgy in a way which engages the congregation fully.

The publication of the *Mission-shaped Church* report in 2004 was a watershed moment for the Church of England.¹ It marked a recognition of the changing context in which the church found itself and identified the need to understand that the church exists in a missional paradigm and of course our corporate worship should reflect this too.

One of the challenges the Church of England faces is that its core liturgical texts were revised and adopted just before the publication of this report. The main volume of *Common Worship* was published in 2000 and the tone and style this offered were continued in the subsequent *Common Worship* publications. What impact might the *Mission-shaped Church* report have had if it had been published early enough to influence this major reimagining of the liturgical landscape?² One consequence might have been a greater provision of liturgy reflecting the church's renewed understanding of mission.

How we worship and pray shapes what we believe about God

The act of worshipping God obviously has value in its own right, but it is also a formational activity.

How we worship and pray shapes what we believe about God and how we embody that belief in our lives. The challenge therefore becomes that if our liturgy is not shaped for a missional paradigm, then we may not be formed as missional disciples either.

'Setting God's People Free,' the recent report to the Church of England's General Synod, aims to bring about a shift in culture in the Church of England which empowers the lay members of the church to become missional disciples of God in the whole of their lives.³ It identifies cultural shifts which need to take place in the church to allow this to happen—and identifies worship as a lever to bring about some of this change. Its ambition for worship makes the following suggestions:

Worship is the purpose of the church and the heart of our life as Christians. It is profoundly expressive of our common life, our vocation as whole-life disciples and our baptismal mutuality. We feel that steps should be taken to bring to the fore two aspects of worship that are present but typically under-emphasized...The first is the purpose of worship in emphasizing our baptismal vocation...The second is the relationship between corporate worship and daily life.⁴

This booklet aims to remedy the disconnect between people's everyday lives and the gathered worship of the church as the body of Christ, which I will refer to as our corporate worship.⁵ This disconnect can affect the whole of an act of worship, but I will focus particularly on how thinking more deeply about the beginning and end of our worship services—the key transition points between worship in everyday life and corporate worship—might overcome this division.

To do this, I will first explore a biblical understanding of how worship should connect to our everyday faith. Next, I will examine why the beginning and end of our services might be the best place to begin to build connections between corporate worship and everyday faith. Finally, I will explore what type of liturgical language might be most suitable to build these connections. A significant proportion of this booklet will then be given over to offering an appendix of resources to illustrate some ways forward which can be adapted and used by congregations.⁶

2

Worship in the Everyday in Scripture

Worship is the foundation of humanity's relationship with God. Through the centuries, Christians have created patterns of corporate worship which respond to the nature of God, glorifying him and seeking encounter with him. At its best, this pursuit of the transcendent nature of God results in beautiful corporate worship which lifts the soul and transforms us to reflect God in our lives. When we explore worship and divine encounter in the Bible, we find such moments where the otherness of God is evident. Think of Moses' encounter at the burning bush (Exodus 3), Isaiah's vision of the Lord in the Temple (Isaiah 6) or the transfiguration of Jesus (Luke 9.28–36). These moments stretch our understanding of God and help us deepen our knowledge of God's character, but there is a risk that we leave our faith at the top of the mountain. There is a danger that we build a division between the sacred and the secular which God's people find hard to cross.

The Old Testament portrays a faith which was connected to everyday life and this earthed experience flowed through into the worshipping life of the early church. I want to focus on the role of the Shema and the law in Jewish life, and the Lord's Prayer, and Paul's teaching in the life of the early church. Through these examples, I will show that worship connected to everyday life is as much a biblical model of corporate worship as the pursuit of a more transcendent pattern of corporate worship. It is important to note that this short exploration is only a small part of what a biblical overview of worship looks like, but it is an aspect of biblical worship which I think is both significant and often overlooked.⁷

The Shema

To observant Jews, the *Shema* was the pattern of daily commitment to their faith which shaped their personal devotions. These few short verses of Scripture were said in the morning and the evening, and we meet them on the lips of Jesus in the gospels. They are familiar words to Christians too, as they form half of the summary of the law found in many services of Holy Communion.

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. (Deut 6.4–5)

This short affirmation reminds God's people that they are to love God with every part of their being. Our relationship with God should therefore engage our intellectual thought, our emotions and our actions and this should overflow into our worship of God. These themes are supported in the subsequent verses of Deuteronomy 6 with instructions on how the devotion should be used and the first of these is that the words should be kept in God's people's hearts. This instruction implies that there should be no part of our lives which is not committed to God and that limiting our worship to ritual acts of corporate worship would be an insufficient response to our relationship with God.

The instructions go on to encourage the devotion to be shared between the generations. It is to be recited when you are at home and when you are away, when you get up in the morning and when you go to sleep. The instructions are reflected very literally in the Jewish practices of tefillin and mezuzah where parchments bearing the verses of Scripture are worn on the head and hands and affixed to doorframes. It is a way of worshipping which carries God's invitation for us to be his people into every moment of our lives.

The Jewish Law

If the *Shema* carries the divine into everyday life, then the law shapes everyday life for the divine. As Christians, called to live under grace rather than the law, we can be guilty of dismissing the Jewish law rather quickly. We know that we are saved by faith in Jesus, in his death and resurrection, and what we do can never earn us the right to be forgiven and redeemed. This gives us a great freedom in how we live our lives but this freedom does come at a cost to our understanding of everyday worship.

Imagine how your understanding of which parts of your life God is interested in would change if your faith required you to eat certain foods, wear particular types of cloth, and work only on particular days. The scope and impact of the law on everyday life as outlined in Leviticus and Deuteronomy is significant for those who observe parts of it, and all-consuming for those who attempt to keep the law as fully as possible.⁸ The law is connected to worship through the offerings required by many of the laws, and the intent of the law which might be summed up in the phrase, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy' (Lev 13.45b).

The law gave a framework for every aspect of life to be connected to God and obedience to that became an act of worship reflecting and honouring God's holiness. The removal of the burden of the law by grace breaks these connections, but reclaiming the connection without the burden offers us an important pattern for developing everyday worship.

The Lord's Prayer

When Jesus' disciples came to him to ask him to pray, he offered them the pattern of the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6.9–13 and Luke 11.2–4). This pattern of praying has become as basic to Christians as the shema is to Jews and it has several petitions which root it in the everyday experience of life. It invites earth to become like heaven, it asks God to provide our daily bread, to guide us and protect us, and it asks for us to be forgiven those things which separate us from God.

We most frequently employ the Lord's Prayer as a set liturgical form, often used in daily Christian worship. But it is one of the clear instructions Jesus gives us as to how we should pray. So we should also allow the text to be a set of guiding principles about our corporate worship, as much as a set prayer. The shape of the prayer assumes multiple connections with everyday life and so our corporate worship too should have multiple connections with our daily lives.

Paul's Teaching

The epistles give us the best glimpse into the life of the early church, identifying key individuals, events and patterns of worship which were present. I want to focus on two passages which help to demonstrate that, growing from its Jewish roots, early Christian worship was connected with everyday life.

Paul's Letter to the Colossians ends with various instructions and rules for the early church. Contained within these instructions is advice on worship:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Col 3.16–17)

We see here encouragement to reflect on Scripture, to preach, to give thanks and to sing hymns and songs, all of which we are familiar with as aspects of our worshipping lives. Whilst the expression of how we might do those things varies in different churches, we recognize them as the fundamental building blocks we use to shape our corporate worship. But Paul does not stop there; he goes on to say that 'whatever you do, in word or deed' can be done as an act of worship.

We are reminded elsewhere in Paul's writing that through his life he has lived as an observant Jew, holding faithfully to the law (see Phil 3.4–6). So we know that Paul understands how the whole of life can be shaped by the practice of

religion. When he says 'whatever you do, in word or deed' we can understand the scope of his statement. Paul really is encouraging us that every part of our lives can be lived as worship to God, and setting that statement in the context of giving instructions about corporate worship should encourage us to allow one to shape the other.

We see also see Paul exploring this idea together with the language of sacrifice in his letter to the Romans:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Rom 12.1)

If we carry forwards the idea of the Jewish law being a framework which connects every aspect of life to God, then Paul takes this idea a step further in this verse. Where once a sacrifice was offered to connect one aspect of someone's life in worship to God, now Paul encourages us to offer the whole of our lives as a living sacrifice. This is a continual act which means everything we do can, with the right attitude, become an act of worship to God. The metaphorical language of sacrifice roots his instruction in the Jewish law, linking worship and everyday life, but steps away from the need to observe the law because we are justified through faith in Christ (Rom 3.28). Instead, this spiritual worship becomes the framework of Paul's description in Romans 12 of how Christians should live their lives.

3

Gathering and Sending

As worship which connects to everyday life is a biblical pattern of worship, you could argue that this approach should be integrated, alongside other biblical approaches, into every aspect of our corporate worship. I think this is a laudable ambition, and there are contexts where making these connections would be relatively easy. Worshipping communities where a significant amount of self-determination in what worship resources are drawn on can make sure these connections are present and churches familiar to frequent changes in the resources used may accept these changes readily.

However, for some churches this can feel more difficult and particularly so for churches whose worship is centrally determined. The framework of *Common Worship* relies on set texts for particular liturgical elements and frequently people use it solely as a suite of options to choose prayers from. However, it provides Anglican churches with a great deal more flexibility in planning worship than many people give it credit for. When we start to understand rubrics as being permissive rather than prescriptive, we begin to see the creative possibilities that exist. The centrality of liturgical shape in the resources can become a great strength to making connections with our everyday lives.

When we understand rubrics as permissive we see the creative possibilities

It is common for churches with liturgically based worship to adopt a fourfold shape to their services, namely: gathering; word; response and sending.⁹

This shape of service can be used to design either a Service of the Word, or a service of Holy Communion, where the celebration of communion would take place in the *response* portion of the service. It represents a shape which facilitates a movement of the people of God from their everyday lives into an encounter with God which worshippers respond to before being sent by God back into the world again. This reflects the nature of many churches where the people of God are gathered in and sent out Sunday by Sunday.

In this type of service, the gathering and sending portions of the service become the interfaces between the worship of people's daily lives and the corporate worship they have gathered to participate in. If we want to find ways to incorporate the biblical pattern of everyday faith into our services, then the gathering and sending portions may represent a good place to make these connections. As the people of God gather to worship, they arrive with

their minds full of the experiences and realities of the week that has passed and rather than leave these experiences with the damp umbrellas in the porch, should we not invite people to carry them into their encounters with Christ? We long for worship that, through encounter with God, leaves us changed and better equipped to be God's people. For that change to affect our lives, we need to find ways of making connections between our experience of being in church and the rest of our lives. In the same way, if we want our response to God to be carried out of the church building rather than left with the crumpled pile of abandoned pew sheets, we need to make space in our sending liturgies to create bridges back to the world.

The gathering and sending parts of a service represent a good area for this type of liturgical material to be introduced. For the Church of England they are areas where the liturgical requirements are not too tightly drawn, neither are they areas where different church traditions have a strong influence on which material is acceptable. Gathering prayers, calls to worship or commissioning rites could be used in place of, or just after, a liturgical greeting or dismissal without disrupting the overall flow of the service. Furthermore, where a fixed order of service, such as *Common Worship* Order 1 Holy Communion, is used, these materials could be fitted at the beginning and end of the service and printed on an additional sheet. Again, this would offer a way for this type of material to be introduced without disrupting well-established worship patterns.

Adding everyday worship material into only the gathering and sending portions of a liturgical service may feel like a token gesture towards what is an important part of our understanding of worship. Of course, there are other

ways of making this type of connection. Inviting members of the congregation to share stories and testimonies from their everyday lives can be powerful. This is sometimes called 'This Time Tomorrow,' where congregation members are asked what they will be doing in the week

Inviting members to share testimonies from their everyday lives can be powerful

ahead and how their faith shapes that. It introduces an opportunity to pray for people in similar work contexts and to remember that people's working lives are part of their worship.

Corporate worship is the sum of its parts and adding or changing one ingredient can have a radical impact on the overall effect. To borrow from a biblical image, remember what an impact yeast has on a batch of bread. Only a small amount of yeast leavens three measures of flour (Matt 13.33). As we begin to make connections between our everyday lives and our corporate worship, so the whole of that worship will be changed. If a congregation has never managed to make connections between the liturgy and the rest of their

lives, growing and nurturing these links can have a big impact on how they understand their discipleship and their role in building the kingdom of God.

The words we use to gather God's people and set the scene for a service can make a difference to how we understand the purpose of our services. When our corporate worship becomes an end in itself, we can gather with words which exclude the daily experience of God's people. I have attended services where I have been encouraged to leave my everyday life at the door and draw my focus only towards God. At times, this can be of great benefit to our spiritual life—for instance, if we need to take our focus off a problem that we are facing and see it in a bigger perspective. But if this becomes our regular aim and expectation of worship gatherings then the corporate God-focused part of our life may become separated from our daily life, and we stop looking for God there. This serves to reinforce the boundaries between our experience of corporate worship and the rest of our lives. Using gathering liturgies which encourage connections between our everyday lives and our corporate worship can help us see corporate worship as a time of refreshment and preparation for the week ahead, a pit stop to help us keep going, rather than the main event itself. To a lesser extent, this is also true for how services end. If our words are focused on the ending of what we have been doing, we may sever what has happened in the service from what will follow when we leave. When we are sent out from our services, we begin the arc of the week ahead knowing that we will return the following Sunday, to gather as God's people once more.

The Sending Out of the 72 (Luke 10.1–12)

Once Jesus had taught his followers the urgency of proclaiming the kingdom of God, he appointed the 72 and sent them out in pairs (Luke 9.57–62). He gave them practical instructions, telling them how to behave, what to carry and what to say. He gave them room to succeed, proclaiming the kingdom and healing the sick. He gave them room to fail, wiping the dust from their feet. The 72 were sent out but, crucially, they were gathered back in as well (Luke 10.17–20). Here we see a pattern of God's people being sent into the world and gathered back into Jesus' presence. This cycle is the missional movement which the church needs to recapture, connecting the everyday experience of being in the world with our corporate worship services on Sundays. It is a paradigm for how the church should function, where our experience of seeing God at work in the world shapes our corporate worship.

4

Liturgical Themes and Language

How effectively our corporate worship can connect with everyday faith will depend on the language which we use. There is much debate surrounding liturgical language, and those charged with writing commended or approved liturgies for denominations walk a treacherous path between the differing demands that stakeholders have. People complain that liturgy has either too many words or too few, that they are too complex or too simple, too churchy or too mundane, too floral or lacking in poetry. Whilst personal taste and local context make a big difference as to which words will work best in worship, I think there are some aspects of language which influence how effective liturgies which connect with everyday faith can be.

If we want to explore what language should be used in worship material which connects with everyday faith, we will need to begin by exploring liturgy which is rooted in the theme of mission. As an Anglican priest and liturgist trying to explore this, I began by looking at how *Common Worship* resources approach the subject. I started with the most commonly used Anglican liturgy, *Common Worship* Order 1 Holy Communion and, whilst there are connections to mission, the language used expresses this in very general terms.¹⁰ There are no clear-cut instructions as to what we, the people of God, ought to go and do in response to our experience of worshipping God. We see an example of this in the words of The Dismissal:

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.¹¹

From this, we understand that we should go, in love and service of God, but the impact of this is often lost by the fact that the first place many Christians go to after hearing it is to wherever the tea and coffee is served in the church. Furthermore, to make concrete sense of the idea that we are the people of God sent out in mission to the world by God requires a depth of nuance and missional understanding that may be lost on many members of the congregation.

The shorter of the alternative congregational prayers after communion contains a reference to Rom 12.1 reminding us each to be 'a living sacrifice' and 'to live and work to [God's] praise and glory.' The longer prayer offers us more inferred language that we are to 'live [Christ's] risen life,' 'bring life to

others' and 'give light to the world,' all of which is commendable, but leaves us with the question of who should do this and how?

If we look more broadly, both in Order 1 and the wider *Common Worship* resources, we will find references to following Christ, being sent, seeing God at work and proclaiming God's word.¹² These ideas are a little stronger than the dismissal elements of Order 1 but still rest on the edge of an implied sense of mission and expressed only in generic terms. If we examine liturgical resources used to gather God's people, they frequently take the form of simple greetings or invitations to praise. They make no reference to where God's people might have been or what they might have been doing to build God's kingdom.

Whilst this is only the briefest survey of the liturgical resources available, the observation I would make is that references to mission and everyday faith in the vast majority of Anglican liturgy are implicit rather than explicit and expressed only in generic terms. This is understandable for a catalogue of liturgies designed for corporate worship across a wide range of contexts, but I do not believe that it is the most helpful approach to connect our corporate worship with everyday faith.

Understanding Mission

Part of the challenge that the church faces is that congregation members neither have a deep understanding of what mission is, nor do they understand that it is the task of the whole people of God. Without this starting point, implicit and generalized invitations to carry our faith into everyday life may either go unnoticed, misunderstood or both. To avoid this, it is therefore important that liturgy is written to develop connections with everyday faith using explicit and specific language wherever possible.

Our sense of identity and self often grow from how we spend the majority of our time. For most members of a congregation this breaks down into time spent at work or at home engaged in the activities of daily life. Yet activities described in liturgy are often limited to church activities, such as praying or sharing the good news of Jesus. Whilst we hope that these are things that people do, they do not form the majority of how people spend their time. They sound like things that a full-time church minister might do. This reinforces the sense that mission is the task of ministers rather than the whole people of God.

Before I went to train for ordained ministry, I worked as a consulting civil engineer. I spent my time doing calculations, writing reports and trying to shape the world. It is 10 years since I turned on my calculator in earnest, and

Congregation members do not have a deep understanding of what mission is

yet I still think of myself as an engineer (an ongoing connection which I suspect those who have retired also feel). Engineering was a profession that I pursued for many years, which dominated my life and that still shapes how I look at the world around me. Yet, aside from the striking hymn, *God of Concrete, God of Steel*, I have never found any specific liturgical connection with that whole part of my life.¹³ Whilst my experience of work outside the church relates to the field of engineering, I am not alone in experiencing a disconnection between my working life and corporate worship.

But this lack of a connection is interesting. In Scripture, we read about a wide variety of work activities. Jesus talks to tax collectors and fishermen; his parables and metaphors relate to merchants and farmers. Jeremiah visits a potter at work and Nehemiah undertakes a building project. But for all this richness, very little of this language translates into the worship texts of the church.

We are blessed by preachers who admirably forge links between Scripture and contemporary life, who translate biblical image and experience into our day-to-day lives. This is such a significant part of their craft that we might think that a preacher who never attempted this process was in dereliction of their duty. So why is it that we do not have the same expectation of liturgical texts and hymnody?

Transcendence and Incarnation

There is a widespread desire for our worship to possess a transcendent quality which points to God and lifts us from our earthly existence. This helps us to develop an understanding of who God is but where this desire dominates, the transcendental boundary cuts us off from who we are, from our experience of life. We worship an incarnational God, who stepped into our earthly reality to draw us back to himself and we need to learn how to reflect that in our liturgy. I believe we need to write liturgies which make specific reference to the world around us and the activities we engage with day by day. We root

our sense of self in what we do and where we go and we need to show God's people how God's love connects with this reality.

The challenge is that we cannot possibly make specific reference to everybody's work or home context. But rather than accept defeat before we

We worship an incarnational God and we need to reflect that in our liturgy

have begun, we need to open ourselves to the possibilities of offering specific ideas which open a general context. Whilst the detail of my engineering work would be lost on many, I worked in an office using a computer, which is a shared experience. Similarly, talking about shops connects with not only those who work in retail, but those who go shopping. The more of these shared

experiences we can connect with, the more connections with everyday life we can stimulate and the more people will begin to see their everyday lives reflected in the liturgy.

If our identity is rooted in what we do, so too our identity is rooted in where we do it. The places where we spend time during the day also carry how we understand ourselves. If we think of Scripture, the biblical texts are full of the names of places where events took place. These names are there to remind the readers that the narratives are of real events in real places. So too, when we try to tell our story to people, we share where it happened. We show our children the places we used to live to help them understand us better. The quirks of language mean that we localize the names of places according to our context as well. What is the High Street in one town is Front Street in another and in many places, the actual name of the road might be how locals refer to the row of shops. So if we want to connect our liturgy to places, we need to allow the particular names and terms people actually use to form part of our liturgy too.

Liturgies such as these are open to the criticism that they become very rooted in today and they will not be prayers that have a long shelf life. I think this is true, but far from this being a bad thing, we need to embrace the opportunity this affords. Where once we relied on expensive books which needed to last for many years, it is now common for liturgy to be led from screens and booklets. This means that the services we use can be refreshed and reshaped regularly; they can be honed and changed to keep making connections with people's everyday faith. A liturgy can be localized to suit the context in which it will be used and, whilst this makes it less transferable, it may have a deeper impact.

The task is for us to use language in our corporate worship that is most effective in making connections with people's everyday lives. We might find that this is language that is different in tone from much of the language of our liturgy, but this difference is probably necessary to accomplish the task before us. What is key is understanding the community who will use the prayers we choose. Who are they? What do they do? And how can we best connect their worship of God in the everyday to their worship of God on a Sunday?

5

Conclusion and Next Steps

Whilst shaping our liturgy to make connections with everyday faith has its roots in a biblical pattern of worship and should be included on that basis, my starting point for reflecting on the subject was rooted in the function of our corporate worship. Our engagement in the pastoral, formational and missional dimensions of corporate worship are all strengthened by making more connections with everyday life. However, there is no silver bullet where a single change will dramatically shift the whole landscape. Instead, I think it is important for us to make small changes which alter our journey through the landscape, helping us to go further and deeper as a church together. Where the liturgies offered in the final chapter of this book have been trialled, they

Gathering and sending liturgies are a good place to introduce material which connects with everyday life

have been well received and have helped congregations begin to make more connections between corporate worship and everyday faith.

As a starting point, gathering and sending liturgies are a good place to begin to introduce material which connects with everyday life but clearly there are other areas where it could be introduced. Most obviously, the prayers of intercession offered should reflect the concerns of everyday life and the world around us. The shaping and writing of these prayers is a subject in and of itself and is supported by many good books but many of the questions about liturgical themes and language may be equally applied to these prayers.¹⁴

How we make use of prayers of confession and particularly how we introduce them is another area where natural links may be formed with everyday life. These prayers are usually included by liturgically-based worshipping communities and are a great gift for creating space to reflect on the choices we make every day. Using questions and silence could help to invite personal reflection, even where authorized forms of confession are used.

A final area where simple changes could be implemented is offertory prayers. These are very often short and are sometimes focused solely on money. They may also be spoken during a hymn without being addressed to the whole congregation. Adapting these prayers to reflect the offering of our whole lives to God in response to his generous love to us could be another way of making connections with everyday faith.¹⁵

Beyond the regular liturgical elements of our corporate worship, further connections can be made with people's everyday lives through prayer and commissioning. Whilst we may expect to pray for people as they start new ministries in church, do we pray for people as they start new jobs or enter new seasons of their lives? Praying for teachers and pupils at the start of a new school term, or builders starting a new project locally, reminds us that God cares for us during our day-to-day work, as well as our corporate life. Do we bring a tone of lament into our services when local or national events prompt us to do so? Remembering that God is with those who suffer may comfort those who are suffering or in a season of sorrow in their own lives.

As we make more connections between our corporate worship and our everyday lives, I hope that the church grows in its confidence and ability to allow corporate worship to be a dynamic expression of the missional life of the church. Through this, I hope the church becomes a community of deeper discipleship, stronger pastoral care and joins more fully with God as he builds his kingdom.

How Do You Plan Your Corporate Worship?

It is common for corporate worship to be planned by an individual, often a church's minister. This can be an effective way of planning worship and makes use of the specialist knowledge they possess. However, does this model offer the best way of making connections to people's everyday lives? A model heavily focused on one person has a greater risk of services reflecting their individual perspective and a narrow experience of life.

How can you involve more people in planning, shaping and leading worship to make connections with the lives of a greater range of people? Growing a team to plan services may be one step towards this but it might be helpful to hold a workshop to help write gathering and sending liturgies for your church. People could gather together to talk about how they spend their time and how they understand the local area around them. Prayers and responses could then be written which reflect these concerns and where people discern that God is calling their congregation to build God's kingdom.

6

Example Liturgies

This appendix offers examples of liturgies which could be used to try and incorporate the ideas and themes of this booklet into corporate worship. I have tried to offer samples of both gathering and sending for each category. I think it is worth stating that these texts would be most effective when they are adapted to suit the local context. I also hope that these examples can be springboards and seed ideas for people to write their own material.¹⁶

Simple Prayers

It is important to remember that introducing this type of material to the worshipping life of the church may be a big change for some communities. Starting with the simple addition of a prayer at the beginning and end of the service, after the liturgical greeting as they gather and before the words of dismissal as they are sent out may therefore be a good place to start.

A Gathering Prayer

God of love,
you called the disciples
to sit at your feet and learn from you.
As we gather today, help us to hear your voice
which calls us in our homes and our workplaces,
in our busyness and in our rest.
As we answer your call and gather to worship you
we pray for those places and activities.
At your invitation, we come
to sit at your feet and learn from you.
We do this in the power of the Spirit
and in Jesus' precious name.
Amen.

A Sending Prayer

God of hope,
you filled the disciples with the power of the Holy Spirit.
Fill us with that same Spirit and send us out.
Help us to see your hand at work on our high streets and in our homes,
in the lives of our families, friends and colleagues.
Give us seeds of hope to take wherever you send us
and through our work bring the fruit of your kingdom.
In Jesus' name.
Amen.

Longer Liturgies

In comparison to the whole duration of the services, gathering and sending sections are often very short. As we develop how we use these portions of a service to make more connections to everyday life, longer liturgies may become more appropriate. As we seek to form and shape God's people, it is also important that we allow them to take part in these liturgies actively, so adopting a responsorial liturgy may be an important next step for communities.

This gathering liturgy, based on Ps 107.1–3, aims to show the diversity of where God's people spend the majority of their time. Adapting it to fit the major employers and places in your local area may help to affirm its relevance.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
his love endures for ever.

Let the redeemed of God share their story,
for he has set us free.

From north and south, east and west,
God calls his people to come.

From office and school, factory and field,
God calls his people to come.

From site and plant, hospital and home,
God calls his people to come.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
his love endures for ever.

This dismissal echoes the Prayer after Communion used in many churches based on Rom 12.1, and it is focused on the activities that shape our lives.

Let us now go and offer our lives as living sacrifices,
holy and pleasing to God.

This is our worship.

As we work in offices and industry,

this is our worship.

As we buy and sell,

this is our worship.

As we teach and learn,

this is our worship.

As we cook and clean,

this is our worship.

As we rest and relax,

this is our worship.

As we care and support

this is our worship.

We are sent by God to serve him in the world.

This is our worship.

All-age Services

Making connections with everyday life is a concern for all of God's people, so including this type of material in our all-age worship is important. This might also be a good way to introduce material into the worshipping life of the church as changes are often more readily accepted in this type of service.

This simple liturgy aims to gather and welcome us, reminding us of our unity in Christ despite our diversity in other ways. It lends itself to simple adaptation by adding in pairs of descriptors which suit the context.

From Barrow and Hollowmore Heath,
we welcome you.

From school and workplace,
we welcome you.

Young and old,
we welcome you.

Happy and sad,
we welcome you.

Member and visitor,
we welcome you.

Quiet and noisy,
we welcome you.

People of God,
we welcome you.

Using simple, repeated phrases gives room for those who cannot read to join in with responses. It helps complex ideas become more accessible and owned by everyone.

God gives us the talents and gifts to shine like stars in the world.
In the power of the Holy Spirit,
God sends us out.

To our schools, work and rest,
God sends us out.

To those with plenty and those in need,
God sends us out.

From Deeside to Merseyside,
God sends us out.

To build God's kingdom and show God's love,
God sends us out.

To bring back stories of all that God has done,
God sends us out.

Formational Liturgies

As we seek to grow and develop understanding about what mission is, we can use liturgy to reinforce ideas and teach the congregation. In this liturgy, based on Matt 25.31–46, we focus on how our faith is served practically in the world. When using these responses, you might like to invite people to think where and when they have done these things in the week that has passed.

The Lord blesses those he calls.

We serve him with our lives.

Where we meet the hungry and thirsty,

we give them food and drink.

Where we meet the stranger,

we invite them in.

Where we meet those who need clothes,

we clothe them.

Where we meet the sick,

we care for them.

Where we meet those who are imprisoned,

we visit them.

As we serve those most in need,

we serve Christ.

As we gather today,

we worship Christ.

To help introduce new material, we can develop liturgies from existing ones. This dismissal has the familiarity of the Anglican *Common Worship* Order 1 Communion dismissal but extended and shaped around the 5 Marks of Mission. Alternately, you could write a response based on a church's vision statement to help people understand it better and shape the week ahead around it.¹⁷

Christ calls us to worship and serve him.
He sends us out to build his kingdom.
Tell the good news of Jesus Christ.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Teach the faith of the church.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Serve the needs of others.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Transform society and stand against injustice.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Treasure creation and renew the earth.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Reflective Liturgies

As we build links between everyday faith and our corporate worship, we should allow our liturgy to invite theological reflection on our experience of the world around us and prompt us into action.

We have gathered here
to seek the Lord.

In town, city and countryside
we have heard God's voice.

In art and music
we have met God's beauty.

In offices, schools and shops,
we have seen the work of the Lord's hand.

In homes, high streets and hospitals,
we have seen the needs of God's people.

As we reflect on God's word,
teach us to build the kingdom.

As we lift the needs world
we pray that God would hear us.

As we seek the Lord
we gather here to worship.

Where reflective liturgies are used as dismissals, they may take the form of a commissioning. This is adapted from the *Common Worship* material for Pentecost and this process of adapting existing liturgy may be a helpful starting point for developing this type of material.¹⁸

Almighty God,
in the power of the Holy Spirit,
send us out into the world
to build your kingdom.

Here I am, send me.

Will you go and pray for each other
until your hearts beat with the longings of God?

We will go.

Will you go and carry the hope of Christ into the world?

We will go.

Will you go and faithfully build the kingdom of God?

We will go.

Will you go and stand with the hurt and the broken?

We will go.

Will you go and stand with the old and the young?

We will go.

Will you go and stand with the rich and the poor?

We will go.

Will you go and carry the light of Christ,
bringing light to the dark places of the world?

We will go.

Seasonal Material

The cycle of the church year offers opportunities both to engage in different themes and also to change the liturgy we are using. Some seasons of the year offer greater opportunities to engage in material which connects with everyday life and with mission. These liturgies are written to be used for the Baptism of Christ.

Gathering

John the Baptist saw the Christ and said
behold the Lamb of God!

Jesus invites us to follow him saying,
come and you will see.

He calls us from our homes;
come and you will see.

He calls us from our occupations;
come and you will see.

He calls us from rest and relaxation;
come and you will see.

As we meet Christ, let us declare,
behold the Lamb of God!

Sending

We have come to Christ, the living water.
He has washed us and made us clean.

We have come to Christ, the bread of life.
He has fed us and made us whole.

We have come to Christ, the light of the world.
He calls us to shine his light.

In our homes and in our relationships,
he calls us to shine his light.

In our occupation and in our rest,
he calls us to shine his light.

Wherever he leads us, in all we do,
he calls us to shine his light.

So, go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

Hymns and Songs

Reinforcing the themes of our liturgy with suitable hymns and songs helps to connect our gathering and sending with everyday faith. These hymns and songs, together with those in 'Gathering' and 'Sending' sections in hymnbooks may be helpful.

It is worth sounding one note of warning in picking gathering songs. Occasionally, you will discover that the lyrics for gathering songs include a theme which seeks to reject or step away from our everyday life in order to worship God. Clearly this type of lyric goes against the connections that I am arguing we should seek to establish. It is another reminder that the songs and hymns we sing should be selected on the basis of their lyrics as well as their music qualities.

Be the God of all my Sundays (Martin Leckebusch)

Before You I Kneel (A Worker's Prayer) (Keith Getty, Kristyn Getty, Jeff Taylor and Stuart Townend)

Called by Christ to be Disciples (Martin Leckebusch)

Christ Be in My Waking (Stuart Townend & Simon Brading)

Come, People of the Risen King (Keith Getty, Kristyn Getty and Stuart Townend)

Forth in Thy Name, O Lord, I Go (Charles Wesley)

God's is a world of beauty (John Bell and Graham Maule)

In the Light of Your Mercy (Sam Hargreaves)

Lord of All Hopefulness (Joyce Placzek (Jan Struther))

Sisters and brothers, with one voice (John Bell and Graham Maule)

Teach Me, My God and King (George Herbert)

We Are Called to be God's People (Thomas A Jackson)

We Seek Your Kingdom (Noel Robinson, Andy Flannagan and Graham Hunter)

Notes

- 1 Church of England, *Mission-shaped Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).
- 2 Mark Earey explores some of the broader implications of this in *Beyond Common Worship: Anglican Identity and Liturgical Diversity* (London: SCM Press, 2013).
- 3 Archbishops' Council, 'GS 2056, "Setting God's People Free," A Report from the Archbishops' Council' (London: Church of England, 2017).
- 4 *ibid*, p 22.
- 5 For a fuller exploration of what this approach to worship might be like see Sam and Sara Hargreaves, *Whole Life Worship* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2017).
- 6 For a very useful guide to writing liturgy see Mark Earey, *How to Use Words Well: Key Skills for Worship Leaders* (Grove Worship booklet W231).
- 7 For a far more detailed exploration of a biblical theology of worship see David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992).
- 8 For a humorous look at how all-consuming following the law as literally as possible might be see comedian A J Jacobs, *The Year of Living Biblically* (London: Arrow Books, 2009).
- 9 For a longer discussion of this typical fourfold liturgical shape see Mark Earey, *Liturgical Worship: A Basic Introduction—Revised and Expanded Edition* (London: Church House Publishing, 2018) p 117.
- 10 Church of England, *Common Worship* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000) pp 167-183.
- 11 *ibid*, p 183.
- 12 To see a wide range of Anglican liturgy, see Church of England, *New Patterns for Worship* (London: Church House Publishing, 2002) particularly Resource Sections A and J.
- 13 *God of Concrete, God of Steel* is a hymn declaring God's sovereignty over the whole of the modern world written by Richard Granville Jones in the late 1960s (Words copyright © 1968 Stainer and Bell). You can read the hymn at www.godofconcrete.org
- 14 Amongst them within the Grove Worship series see A De Lange and L Simpson, *How to Lead the Prayers: A Training Course* (Grove Worship booklet W169)
- 15 A helpful reflection on this subject has been produced by the National Stewardship Team of the Church of England; see Church of England, 'Reimagining the Offertory' (London: Archbishops' Council, 2015) available from <https://www.parishresources.org.uk/offering/>
- 16 For a very useful guide to writing liturgy see Mark Earey, *How to Use Words Well: Key Skills for Worship Leaders* (Grove Worship booklet W231).

- 17 For more links between vision and worship see Matthew Swires-Hennessy, *Connecting Worship and Vision* (Grove Worship booklet W215).
- 18 Church of England, *Common Worship: Times and Seasons* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006) p 501.

Gathering for worship enables us to bring the whole of our lives before God—yet too often we leave our everyday realities at the door and by the end of the service we fail to connect our corporate worship with the worship of our lives.

This challenging study offers reasons why we need to make these links, and includes practical suggestions for how we can connect the gathering and dismissal parts of our corporate worship with the rhythms and patterns of everyday faith.



Andy Stinson is Rector of Barrow and Worship and Liturgy Missioner for the Diocese of Chester. He is passionate about creative worship and liturgy and tries to find ways to use his skills as a musician and poet to do both. He is married to Cat and is dad to Isaac and Nathan.

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