



OPENING THE TREASURES OF THE PRAYER BOOK



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(Includes: Outline of Faith, Historical Documents,
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AN INTRODUCTION

This is the first in a series of short articles exploring the Book of Common Prayer which for more than five centuries has contributed to the life, not only of the Anglican (Episcopal) Church, but to the beauty and formation of the English language. For Episcopalians, the Book of Common Prayer is both a resource for worship and an inspiration for daily living. In the months to come we will explore this wonderful gift by taking this journey in faith.

Much can be learned from the words "Common Prayer." Common does not imply "usual" or "ordinary," but rather it speaks to us of *community*, reminding us that we need never travel life's journey alone. The phrase, "The Lord be with you," is a constant reminder of that. Not only do we share our lives with God, we are infinitely bound together in a great family we call the Church of God. This is why, except for the individually centered prayers for one who is ill, the prayers of the prayer book are all plural (we-us). This reminds us that, as the poet Edward Markham observed, "None goes his way alone..."

If you do not own our own Book of Common Prayer, they are available at the Cathedral Bookshop. You may wish to refer to your own Prayer Book and highlight parts that have special meaning for you.

MORNING AND EVENING PRAYER

Book of Common Prayer (BCP), pages 37 - 126

Trinity Cathedral offers **Morning Prayer** every weekday as a part of our scheduled services. The genius of the Prayer Book, however, is that one can enter at any time into a time of prayer and reflection with people all over the world who are also *praying the office*. Begin by finding a comfortable, quiet place and then select one of the four *Offices* starting on page 37. (Of special help is the seasonal booklet, "Forward Day by Day" available in the Bookshop.) Then, with your Prayer Book and a contemporary translation of the Bible, you are ready to join with others throughout the world who are also *praying the office*.

In addition to ***Morning and Evening Prayer***, there are shorter Daily Devotions for ***Noonday, and Evening*** as well as ***Compline*** (at the end of day).

Explore the treasures of the Prayer Book and find what fits best for you and your schedule, then "*take the plunge*." Setting apart this quiet time during the day can make all the difference! It is, as someone once observed, *better than a hot shower*.

AN ORDER OF WORSHIP FOR EVENING

BCP page 109

When I was a little boy and spent a weekend with my grandmother, we always said bedtime prayers together. I still recall these times. They remain part of my fondest memories, and I am aware now that they influenced my adult life in a positive way.

For anyone wanting to deepen their lives, the brief "***Order of Worship for Evening***" is a wonderful way to begin. If the family is involved, parts may be assigned, and candles lit, as the canticle "*O Gracious Light*" is said together.

Before beginning this brief devotion, a reading from the Bible and an appropriate psalm should be chosen. The Booklet "Forward Day by Day" is a good resource. Taking a moment to reflect on the readings makes them personal. The old saying that says, "The Family that prays together stays together," still holds true today. Perhaps each member of the family may have his (her) own Prayer Book.

COMPLINE

BCP, page 127

Setting apart times during the day for prayer and reflection comes from the *monastic tradition* that began in the Second Century. Life then was hard, and Christians were severely persecuted because of their faith. Some sought a place of peace, in which to study, pray, and live their lives in community. Thus was born the monastic movement from which the great universities of Europe came into being.

Central to these communities was *work, prayer, study, and recreation*—a balanced life. The monastic day was defined by seven periods of common prayer. These were later condensed into our Prayer Book Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer. The bedtime office, called **Compline**, is found by many to be a wonderful way to end (complete) a busy day.

There are three other short offices for morning, noonday and evening that you may wish to explore (pages 137-143). *The Book of Common Prayer* has something for everyone who longs to find a deeper meaning and purpose.

THE COLLECTS

BCP, pages 159 - 261

The Book of Common Prayer is a repository for prayers ancient and modern. Because *The Lord's Prayer* comes to us from Jesus himself, it binds us close to him every time we repeat it. Other prayers come from the saints of old, such as the beautiful *Prayer of Saint Francis* on page 833 and on the final page of this series. It asks that we might become instruments of God's peace. This is a good prayer to commit to memory for those times when we need to step aside from the stress of daily life.

Many prayers in the Prayer Book are called **COLLECTS** because they *collect* the thoughts appropriate for special occasions. One of the most meaningful collects begins the service of Holy Communion. It is one we might pray at any time because it asks that we might reflect God's love in the world around us.

The word **COLLECT** refers to a short prayer expressing a single purpose encompassing the traditional "**ACTS**" of prayer:

Adoration,
Confession,
Thanksgiving,
Supplication.

Each Sunday of the Christian year has a special prayer that "*collects*" the thought characterizing that particular day in the Church Year. The Collects for the church year use a language choice that is appropriate to the service be used, whether traditional or contemporary. In addition, there are collects for special days and occasions throughout the year.

A **COLLECT** has four parts making it quite simple to construct a prayer appropriate for any occasion:

First comes the **salutation**. It may be as simple as, *Almighty God.*

This is usually followed by stating an **attribute** of God, such as "*... you are with us always, at all times and in all places.*"

Next comes the **purpose** of the prayer: "*be with us this day to guard and protect us on our journey.*"

A **conclusion** wraps up our prayer and may be as simple as "*this we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.*"

Explore other collects beginning on page 211 and note how, in a clear and simple way, they express our needs and those of the whole world. Mark those that mean the most to you and use them in your daily prayer time. By changing the pronoun, you can make any collect your own!

ASH WEDNESDAY and LENT

BCP, page 264



Ash Wednesday begins the season called **Lent**, which follows the season of Epiphany and lasts for six weeks. Historically, in the early Church, Lent was practiced as a time of preparation for **The Paschal Feast**, known in the western world as **Easter**. In the 2nd century, this time of preparation lasted for two days prior to the Paschal Feast. It was later extended six days, and finally forty days in memory of Jesus' 40 days of fasting in the wilderness.

The name **Ash Wednesday** derives from the ancient custom of using ashes both as a sign of penitence and a reminder of one's mortality. It is customary for a cross to be traced on the forehead with ashes made from the palms that were carried on Palm Sunday of the previous year. The words "*Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return,*" are a solemn reminder that we are to make the most of whatever time we have been given.

The use of ashes to signify penitence comes from the Old Testament where ashes expressed penitence and sorrow. This theme is reflected in the opening collect for the Ash Wednesday service, asking that "*God, create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain perfect remission and forgiveness...*" The Litany of Penance that follows carries out this theme with a confession, and concludes with the assurance of God's forgiveness for all who, with sincere hearts, truly repent.

The Episcopal Church, and other liturgical churches, take Lent seriously by providing both time and space for God's people to put their lives together and begin anew. Since the word "*lent*" comes from an Anglo-Saxon word for "*springtime*," the season of Lent has become a time of refreshment and new beginnings—a time set apart for us to reflect and to prepare for Easter and the new life that Easter represents.

This time of fasting and penitence was important, especially for recent converts from paganism who were to become indoctrinated into the Christian faith. Likewise, Christians who had fallen away from the faith were restored after a time of penitence. The last three days of Lent are called **The Triduum** and include **Maundy Thursday**, **Good Friday**, and **Holy Saturday**. The **Book of Common Prayer** explains that Lent should properly be observed by, "*self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self denial, and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word.*"

THE GREAT LITANY

BCP, page 148

On the First Sunday in Lent, **The Great Litany** is sung in procession around the Cathedral. The word *litany* means *asking*. The centuries old custom reflects a time when people processed around their village, *surrounding it with prayer*. As we begin the season of Lent, we seek God's blessing on our world, our community, and ourselves, and pray that we may enter into **The Great Forty Days** before Easter finding them a time of refreshment and strength. As the procession moves around the Cathedral and down the center aisle toward the altar, we pray for God's protection against all that may cause harm, discord or strife, not only in our lives and in our communities, but in our nation and the world. Nothing is omitted in these powerful and all-encompassing prayers.

In advance of *the First Sunday in Lent*, read and reflect on the petitions contained in **The Great Litany**. Seek to enter personally into the prayers and be strengthened to do God's work as an agent of ministry in the world.

HOLY WEEK

SUNDAY OF THE PASSION (*Palm Sunday*) and the days that follow.

Book of Common Prayer (BCP), page 270

The liturgy for ***Palm Sunday*** marks the beginning of Holy Week, the most solemn period of the Church's year. From the fourth century of the Christian era, the important events surrounding Jesus' passion have been dramatized. Holy week may be experienced as a drama beginning with Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, led by a crowd carrying branches of palm.

The Palm Sunday Liturgy begins with the blessing of the palms; all are invited to join the procession into the Cathedral and enter into an event that took place 2000 years ago. ***Palm Sunday processions*** date from the Fourth Century when pilgrims made their way from the Mount of Olives to the newly constructed Church known today as both *The Church of the Holy Sepulcher* and *the Church of the Resurrection*. This ancient rite is carried out today in the Episcopal and other liturgical traditions beginning with ***the blessing of palms*** followed by a solemn procession into the Church, re-enacting Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem. In some places, the procession may begin outdoors and completed at the altar. The mood changes as the service proceeds and the Gospel lesson tells of Christ's passion. It is customary for the Palm Sunday Gospel to be read as a drama with the clergy and congregation reading various parts.

Tenebrae (a word implying "***shadows***") takes place during Holy Week (Tuesday evening at the Cathedral). *Tenebrae* is a service consisting of psalms and readings recalling Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross and sets the mood for the remainder of the Holy Week. *Tenebrae* had its origin during the middle ages. It is not included in the liturgies of the Prayer Book; however, it has gained popularity in the Episcopal Church during the past half-century. *Tenebrae* dramatically concludes with the sound of thunder, after which the people leave in silence.

Maundy Thursday (BCP, page 274) re-enacts the Last Supper and includes the washing of feet, a dramatic reminder of the caring servant ministry all Christians are called to perform. The Bishop, if present, blesses the *holy oils* that are to be used for unction (healing) and chrism (baptism). The Blessed Sacrament is taken to the altar in the East Transept which is known as "The Altar of Repose." Following the Maundy Thursday liturgy, the high altar is stripped of its vestments, washed, and the Cathedral is prepared for Good Friday. The people leave in silence.

Good Friday (BCP, page 276) The Book of Common Prayer provides an outline for the observance of Good Friday that includes readings from scripture and special prayers commemorating Jesus' death on the cross. Following the Eucharist on Maundy Thursday, Holy Communion is **not** celebrated until *Easter*, the *Feast of the Resurrection*. At Trinity Cathedral, it has long been the custom to observe ***The Three Hours*** Jesus hung on the cross. The three hours service begins at noon with the Prayer Book Good Friday liturgy, followed by seven meditations based on the events or personalities surrounding Jesus' Crucifixion. The service concludes with the Anthems (page 281-2) and the solemn tolling of the Cathedral bell. The evening service at Trinity Cathedral is a choral setting of the Good Friday Liturgy and includes receiving Bread consecrated on Maundy Thursday. At the completion of this service, the clergy, choir and congregation leave in silence.

Holy Saturday (BCP, page 283) There is no celebration of the Holy Eucharist on Saturday. However, provision is made for a simple prayer service to take place on Holy Saturday morning. This service was especially popular during the middle ages. It spoke to that part of the Creed that states: "He descended into hell . . ." freeing souls from bondage (the "*harrowing of Hell*" is an old English expression meaning "the *robbery* of Hell.")

These three services, *Maundy Thursday*, *Good Friday*, and *Holy Saturday*, are traditionally considered as one, and are historically referred to as the ***triduum***.

THE GREAT VIGIL OF EASTER

BCP, page 285

Easter is the feast of Christ's Resurrection. Its name, according ancient writings, is derived from the name of the Anglo-Saxon Spring goddess **Eostre**. As the Christian Church became established in the ancient world, ancient pagan festivals were "*Christianized*," and given new meaning. Easter is also known as The **Paschal Feast**, reflecting the Jewish Passover and "the eighth day of cosmic creation."

The observance of **The Feast of Christ's Resurrection** begins on Easter Eve, also known as **The Great Vigil of Easter**. It consists of four parts: (1) *The Service of Light*, (2) *The Service of Lessons*, (3) *Christian Initiation or the Renewal of Baptismal Vows*, and (4) *The Holy Eucharist with the Administration of Easter Communion*. At Trinity Cathedral, the service begins in darkness on the Cathedral steps with the lighting of the paschal fire from which the Paschal candle is lit and then carried in procession into the darkened church. The Deacon then chants the **Exultet** (an ancient song of light). This is followed by the Service of Lessons and concludes with a reading from the Holy Gospel announcing the victory of the Risen Christ, new life, light and peace!

It is customary at this service for the Bishop to celebrate the Eucharist and lead the congregation in the renewal of Baptismal Vows. Adults and older young people, who have been prepared in advance, receive the sacrament confirmation.

Keeping the Easter Vigil reflects back to the earliest days of the Christian era. In a real sense we are joining with Christians past and present as we affirm a new life in Christ.

Before the Easter Vigil or services on Easter Day one might wish to prepare in advance by reading and reflecting on the lessons and collects assigned for the Vigil (page 288-291)

The season of Easter lasts for forty days (corresponding to the forty days of Lent).



POMEGRANATE

An old symbol of the Resurrection and the power of our Lord, who was able to burst the tomb and come forth.

HOLY BAPTISM

BCP, page 298

The order for **Holy Baptism** in the Book of Common Prayer is intended to be infused with that of Holy Communion rather than used as a separate service. There are times, however, when it is not possible to celebrate the Eucharist, in which case, Baptism may stand alone as a separate and unique service. The opening sentences remind us that there is **One Lord, One Faith, and One Baptism**. In other words, baptism in the name of the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is not to be repeated. When one is baptized with water and in the name of the Holy Trinity, that sacrament is indelible and cannot be repeated.

The Baptismal service begins on page 299 as the opening of the Eucharist and includes the lessons and prayers assigned for the occasion—Holy Day or Season. Following the homily, the candidates are presented by their sponsors or in the case of children, their Godparents who, along with the child's parents, express their will that the child presented be brought up in the Christian Faith and Life. There follows a series of questions asked of the parents and godparents on behalf of the child, or directly to the candidates if they are able understand and take these promises for themselves. They affirm that (1) they will stand against what is evil in this world, (2) seek to believe what is true and good, accepting Christ as Lord and Savior, and (3) follow Christ in trust and obedience.

At this point, any who are being confirmed are invited to affirm these promises as well. Reciting the words of the Apostles Creed together allows all who are present to express the historic faith of the Church and affirm our willingness to continue in that faith, persevere in resisting evil, proclaim the Good News, serve others and strive for justice and peace, respecting the dignity of every human being.

The Prayers for the Candidates ask God to deliver and uphold those being baptized "as their days increase," and to send them into the world as witness to God's love, bringing them to the fullness of joy and peace.

The priest then blesses the water, setting it apart for a special purpose, baptizing the candidates in the Name of the Holy Trinity, and finally tracing the sign of the cross on their forehead in recognition that they are marked as "Christ's own forever."

Baptism with water in the name of the Holy Trinity is not to be repeated. At Trinity Cathedral, the newly baptized are presented with a white baptismal stole indicating their inclusion into "the priesthood of all believers, and a lighted baptismal candle signifying that they are to **shine forth** like a light in the darkness.

Additional Directions (pages 312-314) provide for Conditional Baptism when it is unclear whether one has or has not been previously baptized with water and in the name of the Trinity. In an emergency, **any** baptized person may administer the rite of Holy Baptism by simply pouring water over the head and praying the words,

"I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."



THE HOLY EUCHARIST

Book of Common Prayer, pages 315 – 382

The Holy Eucharist is at the heart of the worship of the Church. It was commanded by Jesus at the Last Supper that we, *“Do this, in remembrance of me.”* This command has been followed by the faithful of every generation since that time.

The word ***Eucharist*** means thanksgiving. It comes from the Greek language spoken widely during the first century of the Christian era. Other names describe this central act of worship: Holy Communion, The Lord’s Supper, The Mass, and The Divine Liturgy. However, Eucharist is the name most commonly used today in the Episcopal Church.

The Prayer Book presents **The Holy Eucharist** in both traditional and contemporary language. Many Episcopal Churches use the traditional (Rite I) form at the earlier service on Sundays or on occasions where such language seems more appropriate. The Rite I language is very close to that in older versions of the Book of Common Prayer, written in the Elizabethan language of Prayer Book of 1559. Today, many Episcopalians prefer the contemporary version used in the Rite II Eucharistic Prayers.

The first part of the service is called the ***Ante-Communion***, what we refer to as **The Liturgy of the Word**. When a priest is not available, a deacon or a layperson may lead this part of the service. The ***Ante-Communion*** includes the **Nicene Creed**, which is an outline of the Christian faith dating from the 4th century. The **Prayers of the People**, which gather together the intentions of those present, conclude this part of the service. Several forms are provided offering variety and appropriateness to the occasion.

The Great Thanksgiving is the people’s offering in thankfulness to God and in remembrance of God’s mighty works among His people. The Last Supper is remembered in the sense that the acts of Jesus, in blessing the bread and the wine, are continued in the present time. The **Proper Preface** sets the tone for the day or season. The **Prayer of Consecration** concludes with the **Lord’s Prayer**, the **Breaking of the Bread**, and the **Communion of the People**.

For Episcopalians, the **Holy Eucharist** is at the center of our worship of God. It is perceived as our entering into a living relationship with Jesus, who has promised to be with us always, *“to the end of the ages.”* (*Matthew 28:20*) Following communion, we are sent into the world to be as Christ’s hands and feet in our daily lives.

To enter into a deeper understanding of the meaning of Holy Communion, read the prayers both in Rite I and Rite II and reflect upon what they teach us. Both of them recall Jesus at the Last Supper and transport that life-changing event from the “Upper Room” into the present time.



CONFIRMATION, RECEPTION & RE-AFFIRMATION

Book of Common Prayer page 413)

The *Rite of Confirmation* came into the life of the Church around the 10th Century, and has long been considered "*the completion of baptism,*" because the candidates accepted for themselves the promises that had been made on their behalf as infants.

The Rite of Confirmation requires the laying on of hands by a Bishop representing the whole (catholic) Church of God.

Confirmation is no longer widely viewed as *the completion of Christian Initiation*; rather, it is understood to be **a mature affirmation of the Christian faith** as expressed in the baptismal promises (page 302-3).

Those who have previously been confirmed may have their commitment **Reaffirmed** in the presence of the Bishop; others who have been confirmed in communions other than in the Episcopal Church may be **Received** by the Bishop who represents the whole (*catholic*) Church of God.

At Trinity Cathedral, one prepares by attending classes that allow for questions, answers, and open discussion regarding **all** aspects of the Church's faith and life.

Read again the promises of baptism and reflect on how these influence your own life as a Child of God. Then reflect on the Bishop's words on pages 309-10.

THE CELEBRATION AND BLESSING OF A MARRIAGE

Book of Common Prayer, pages 423 – 438

The Episcopal Church considers marriage "*an outward sign of an inward and spiritual grace,*" and therefore, "*is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.*" (page 423)

The introduction to the marriage ceremony (page 243) defines what Christian marriage entails. Those contemplating marriage as well as those already married will find inspiration and encouragement by reading together this introduction, paying attention to such words and phrases as: mutual joy, comfort (strength) given in good times and bad, and the nurture of children in God's love.

Only after the couple ratifies their solemn promises, and those witnessing have promised their support, is the marriage blessed and sealed. This emphasizes the teaching that Christian marriage involves **the whole community**.

Prayers on page 429 provide insight into ways the couple, joined together, may fashion their lives in such manner that they might continue to love, honor, and cherish one another, in faithfulness, patience, wisdom, and godliness so that their home may indeed become a "haven of blessing and peace."

THANKSGIVING FOR THE BIRTH OR ADOPTION OF A CHILD

BCP, pages 439-445

One of the most memorable services at which I have officiated employed the liturgy for the adoption of a child. In it, the child *adopted* her parents as the parents *adopted* the child.

The introduction to this rite (page 440) sets the theme for what is to follow. Whether the child is adopted or not, the family relationship is the same. What makes this service especially meaningful is that the **whole** family is involved in adopting one another in creating new and lasting relationships of love and trust in the presence of relatives and friends.

This liturgy takes adoption from a legal to a spiritual realm!

This Prayer Book rite also includes a thanksgiving for the birth of a child and that child's inclusion into the wider family of the congregation. It does not, however, take the place of Holy Baptism which is the **Sacramental "engrafting"** of one into the whole Church of God.

As with other rites and ceremonies of *The Book of Common Prayer*, this service is best understood through the prayers that are offered (pg 443-445). They not only define the relationship created through birth or adoption, they present ways in which families and the greater church community may grow into a loving expression of God's Kingdom on earth.

(Note the rubric on page 445 at the end of the rite reminding parents of their responsibility to make "*prudent provision*" for the well being of their families.)

THE RECONCILIATION OF A PENITENT

BCP, page 446

"Do you have confession in the Episcopal Church?" she asked. "I thought only Catholics went to confession."

It seems to come as a surprise that clergy of the Episcopal Church hear confessions—not on a regular basis necessarily, but when the need arises. There is an old expression: "**All may, some should, none must.**"

What is generally called "**Confession**" appears in the Prayer Book under the title "**The Reconciliation of a Penitent.**" It is designed to meet the very human need *to forgive and to be forgiven.*

The introduction, "*Concerning the Rite*" provides a clear explanation both of its purpose and the manner it may be carried out, before the altar or in an informal setting. Either way, the purpose is to help one come to terms with matters of conscience, find a path to reconciliation and experience the assurance of God's forgiveness.

The need for the rite is made clear by reading both forms provided (pages 447—452). In an entirely confidential setting, one is invited to express in words that which is troubling. The priest, who listens, may offer spiritual advice and then pronounce God's forgiveness through the words of absolution, the assurance that Christ "*conferred power to his Church to forgive, absolve, and restore.*" Many have found in this experience both profound relief and a new beginning.

"The secrecy of a confession is morally absolute for the confessor, and must under no circumstances be broken." (BCP, page 446)

MINISTRATION TO THE SICK

BCP pages 453-461

In the letter of Saint James the writer encourages his readers: *“Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the Church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sin will be forgiven. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.” (James 5:13)*

In the spirit of Saint James, the Church considers the ministry of healing essential to the life of the community. The Book of Common Prayer makes provision for ministration to those who are ill, through prayers for healing, selected readings from Scripture, the laying on of hands, anointing with oil that has been set apart for the healing of body and spirit, and the reception of Holy Communion. The prayers for healing are explicit: that the one who is ill may be upheld and filled with grace, experience the forgiveness of sins, and be filled with grace (God’s free gift of power, love and strength).

The Prayers for the Sick not only express the intent of the Church in carrying out its ministry of healing, but offer special intentions and special needs: for a child, before an operation, for strength and confidence, special prayers for doctors and nurses, and thanksgiving for the beginning of recovery.

The prayers on page 461 (for use by a sick person) are the *only* prayers in *The Book of Common Prayer* given in the first person. They each provide an affirmation of God’s presence and love leading toward trust, finding strength in pain, restful sleep, and facing a new day. The positive nature of these prayers makes them ideal for quiet meditation.

MINISTRATION AT THE TIME OF DEATH

Book of Common Prayer, pages 464-467

The Book of Common Prayer is concerned with life in its fullness—from birth to death and beyond into the life to come. Whereas, for some, death means the end of life, for Christians death is *“an entrance into the land of light and joy”* (page 470) In the service, special prayers are offered for a person near death. The prayers are pastoral in that they include all who are close to the one who is dying.

It is encouraged that the priest or other minister of the congregation be notified so that the family and significant friends may join together in praying the litany at the time of death. In this corporate act of prayer, *The Commendation at the Time of Death* (page 464), the person being prayed for is “lifted up” into God’s gracious keeping

It has been my experience that this service serves three very important purposes:

- 1) It prepares family and friends for the fact that death is imminent.
- 2) It makes it much easier for them to accept their loss.
- 3) It provides a positive and life-affirming vehicle for letting go. “Acknowledge, we humbly beseech you, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock. . . .” and “Receive *him/her* into the arms of your mercy . . .”

The Book of Common Prayer Book does not pretend that there is no death; rather it accepts death as the entrance to a place of refreshment, “. . . in that kingdom where there is no death, neither sorrow nor crying, but the fullness of joy with all your saint . . .” (page 498)

Keep watch, dear Lord,
with those who work, or watch,
or weep this night and give your
angels charge over
those who sleep.
Tend the sick, Lord Christ;
give rest to the weary,
bless the dying, sooth the suffering,
pity the afflicted, shield the joyous;
and all for your love’s sake. Amen



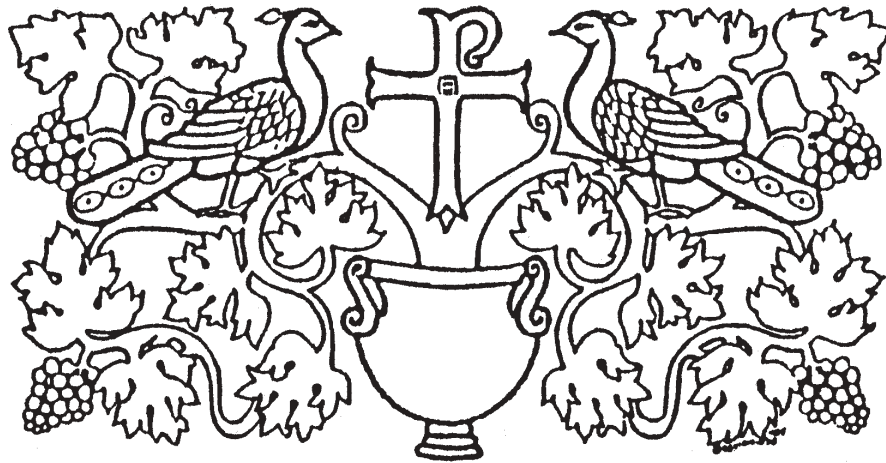
BURIAL OF THE DEAD

BCP, Page 508

The Book of Common Prayer anticipates rare occasions when the traditional Prayer Book Burial Office may not be deemed appropriate. *An Order for Burial* offers flexibility in lieu of the formal burial office. This allows for pastoral discretion, greater informality, and a choice of venues other than in church. It is expected, however, that prayers are offered (including the Lord's Prayer) and that appropriate passages from Scripture are read.

Situations where such a service may be appropriate include a cemetery or columbarium, natural settings (parks or seashore), homes, mortuaries, auditoriums, sites for the scattering of ashes, or venues not usually associated with religious observances. Participation at such services is entirely at the discretion of the clergy. The rubrics (instructions) pertaining to this section serve as a reminder that **The Liturgy of the Dead** is in fact an Easter liturgy and finds its meaning in the resurrection, and is characterized not by *sorrow*, but by *joy*.

Yet even at the grave we make our song.



Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia

THE CELEBRATION OF A NEW MINISTRY

Book of Common Prayer, pages 559-566

One thing I would like to stress when a congregation anticipates the coming of a new rector is that a priest is "**called**." The relationship between parishioner and priest is **special**. He or she is not hired to do a job, but **called** to share the work of ministry with those who are likewise called to be members of the **flock of Christ**.

"The Celebration of a New Ministry" is essential to the life of a parish. Through it, a bond is established, uniting the new Rector with the members of the congregation so that, together, they may serve in the **shared ministry** of love and trust as is reflected in the prayer on page 560.

The "gifts" presented to the new minister by the congregation prove of utmost significance in forging this new relationship: a Bible, Water, Stole, Prayer Book, Oil, the Book of Canons (the rules governing the Church), and Bread and Wine. In addition, other gifts of symbolic meaning may also be presented. All are significant in defining the role of the new priest as well as the responsibility of the people of God in building together a ministry of **mutual responsibility and interdependence - - working together to build and strengthen the Kingdom of God**. To learn more about the commitment and responsibility of both priest and congregation, read thoughtfully the prayer on page 562.

THE DEDICATION AND CONSECRATION OF A CHURCH

Book of Common Prayer, pages 566 – 579

Our word **church** has various meanings and all of them are important in our understanding of what it means **to be members one of another** in that community we share together. The English word "**church**" derives from the Greek **ecclesia: a people called out**. It has little to do with a building but **everything** to do with the people who worship in that building we call **church**.

From ancient times, there have been special places set apart for worship. Episcopalians highly regard the building we call **church** because, for us, it has been set apart (consecrated) to be **the house of God**. Someone once observed that, while God may be worshiped ANYWHERE, it is important to find God SOMEWHERE.

At the center of our worship is the **Table** around which the family of God gathers to be fed the spiritual food of Christ's Body and Blood. This is why in Episcopal houses of worship the altar is most prominent. While building designs have changed over the centuries, the altar remains the primary focus of interest. Bishops have been given authority to consecrate (set apart) places of divine worship and to bless and consecrate all parts of the building and the accoutrements that will be used for worship. For this, the Book of Common Prayer provides a special service: **'The Dedication and Consecration of a Church.'** (pages 567-579)

The rite begins with the opening of the doors of the church building to be dedicated to the glory of God. The bishop then consecrates (sets apart) everything designated as essential to the life of God's people: **the font** (for baptism), **the lectern** (for the reading of Scripture), **the Pulpit** (where the Word will be interpreted and proclaimed), and finally **the Altar**, praying that "All who eat and drink at this table may be fed and refreshed ..." This rite proclaims that, while the Church is indeed **the people of God**, the **building** in which faithful people gather is **sacred space** where God may be encountered and God's people united and strengthened for service in the world.

When a church building is no longer to be used as a place of worship, it must be deconsecrated in much the same manner as it was set apart. Of special interest is **A Litany of Thanksgiving for a Church** (pages 578-579). Reading it carefully, one may discern the theological basis for setting apart special places for worship.

THE PSALTER

Book of Common Prayer, pages 582-808

The longest section in the Book of Common Prayer is devoted to the Psalter - - a collection of 150 hymns from the Old Testament. Many were sung in ancient Israel long before the reign of King David (ca 1010-940 BC). The Davidic period, however, is known as a time when art and literature flourished, influencing generations to come.

The Psalms were composed to be sung rather than recited. These songs, reflecting different periods in Israel's history, were compiled for use in "The Second Temple Period" (ca. 515 BCE.) Later, they were divided into five parts (the Prayer Book refers to them as "books") each concluding with a "doxology" or "praise to God." (See page 642).

The 150 psalms were compiled both for community and individual devotion. They reflect every human emotion from ecstatic joy to utter despair - - one reason why they continue to be read, sung, and loved by Christians and Jews alike.

From the time of ancient Israel, the Psalms have been set to musical forms. In the Episcopal Church, psalms are appointed for celebrations of the Eucharist, Morning and Evening Prayer, and other services.

Concerning the Psalter (pages 582-584) provides guidelines for using psalms in worship, explaining how translators have worked to maintain the integrity of the ancient texts and their usage through the centuries.

THE PSALTER IN WORSHIP: *Praying the Psalms*

It has been said that the Psalter was Jesus' "Prayer Book." All four Gospel writers indicate that Jesus knew many of the 150 Psalms by heart and often quoted or referred to them in his discourse. Most touching is the reference to Psalm 22 as Jesus hung on the cross and cried out "***My God, my God, why have you forsaken me...***"

The psalms reflect every mood, every feeling, and every aspiration known to humankind. Some reflect the sadness of a people who had been enslaved and removed forcibly from their native land (Psalm 60: 1-5, and 137). Others offer the assurance of God's help in time of trouble (Psalm 23) and consolation in time of need (Psalm 116).

There is a difference between ***reading*** the psalms and ***praying*** them. While not all appear appropriate for prayer, *all* are worthy of meditation, discerning how their words apply to our human condition. In such manner, the Psalms often provide insight, inspiration, and encouragement just as they did long ago.

One suggestion is to dedicate a month to prayerfully reading all of the 150 Psalms, marking those that hold the deepest meaning. To facilitate this, the prayer book version divides the Psalter into thirty-day segments (morning and evening). As we become familiar with these great songs of faith, we may more fully understand how the Psalter has continued to touch the lives of God's people.

PRAYERS & THANKSGIVINGS

Book of Common Prayer, *pages 810-841*

This section of the Book of Common Prayer contains prayers and thanksgivings not included in the context of Prayer Book services. These are arranged by categories which include the world, the church, national life, the social order and the natural order, family, personal life, and prayers of thanksgiving.

The prayers in this section are especially helpful when one may be asked to pray for special needs. It has been poetically expressed that *“Prayer is the souls sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed.”* (*James Montgomery, 1771-1854*). While effective prayer may indeed be extemporaneous, *“common prayer”* proves advantageous in situations requiring careful consideration and word choice. In addition, not everyone feels comfortable offering prayers extemporaneously.

Many of the **Prayers for National Life** (pages 820-823) hark back to the first American Prayer Book of 1789, used by George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.

Thanksgiving for the Social Order reflect societal changes of the past century including the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's.

Prayers of a more intimate nature are also included: for a birthday, for the absent, for the bereaved, and for the victims of addiction.

One of the most beloved prayers in this edition of the Book of Common Prayer is the prayer attributed to **Saint Francis** which begins: *“Lord, make us instruments of your peace.”*

The section *“Prayers and Thanksgivings”* concludes with prayers appropriate for special days: Thanksgiving for National Life, For Heroic Service, For the Gift of a Child, and for the Recovery from Illness. Since the prayers included in the Book of Common Prayer reflect our theology, they are worthy of contemplating *what we believe*.

In conclusion, it is well for us to remember that the purpose of **The Book of Common Prayer** is to provide the opportunity for us to pray together in community. That theme is no more apparent than in the prayer **For the Diversity of Races and Cultures** on page 840. It goes as follows:

“Enrich our lives in ever-widening circles of fellowship, and show us your presence in those who differ most from us, until our knowledge of your love is made perfect in our love for all your children; through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Amen.

A Prayer of St. Chrysostom

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will be in the midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. Amen

THE END OF THE ROAD

At the conclusion of the Book of Common Prayer there are sections worthy of our exploration:

An Outline of the Faith, Historical Documents of the Church, Tables for Finding Holy Days, The Lectionary, and The Daily Office Lectionary.

I. The Outline of Faith: The Catechism (page 844)

It has always been expected that those preparing for Confirmation or Reception understand the basic teachings of the Christian Faith. Today we cover this material in conformation/inquirer's classes, but in times past candidates were expected to correctly answer questions relating to the church's teaching and life. The form of question and answer was called "the catechism."

The outline of faith as presented in the Book of Common Prayer is a suggested outline covering the complexities of theology and church structure. It is written in simple question/ answer format and many find it helpful in offering simple answers to complex questions.

II. Historical Documents of the Church (page 864)

This section contains several documents that influenced the early Episcopal Church in America including ***The Preface to the First Book of Common Prayer*** (1549) and ***The Articles of Religion*** adopted by the Episcopal Church in America in 1801. Known as *The Twenty-Nine Articles*, they have influenced the structure and teaching of the Episcopal Church in America. At one time, each new priest had to sign a document stating his conformity to these articles before he could be ordained.

Of special importance are the documents relating to ***The Chicago Lambeth Quadrilateral 1886, 1888***, and ***The Lambeth Conference of 1888***. These played (and continue to play) a role in clarifying our identity as Anglicans.

III. Tables for Finding Holy Days (page 880)

The Golden Number While useful prior to computers, these tables have little significance today.

IV. The Daily Office Lectionary (page 934)

Concerning the Daily Office Lectionary (page 934) is a plan to help one to pray The Daily Office. **Year One** refers to those years ending in **odd** numbers (2009). **Year Two** refers to years ending in **even** numbers (2008). Lessons and psalms are appointed for each day of the year to be read either in community or in private. If one follows this plan, in the course of two years he or she will have read the essential parts of the Holy Bible in an orderly and meaningful manner. A companion in ***praying the office*** is the seasonal Episcopal publication, ***Forward Day by Day***, available in The Cathedral Bookshop. This little booklet both lists the daily readings and provides a brief meditation for the day.

This final section in the Book of Common Prayer has been of great value to those determining lessons for Sunday Eucharist and the Daily Offices.

The Lectionary contains the lessons assigned for Sunday celebrations of Holy Communion covering a three-year period. The Episcopal Church has recently adopted what is known as "The Common Lectionary," this lectionary is no longer appropriate. Nonetheless, the three-year cycle remains the same. In the course of a three-year period, the lessons appointed for Sundays will cover essential texts from both the New and the Old Testaments as well as selected readings from the Apocrypha.

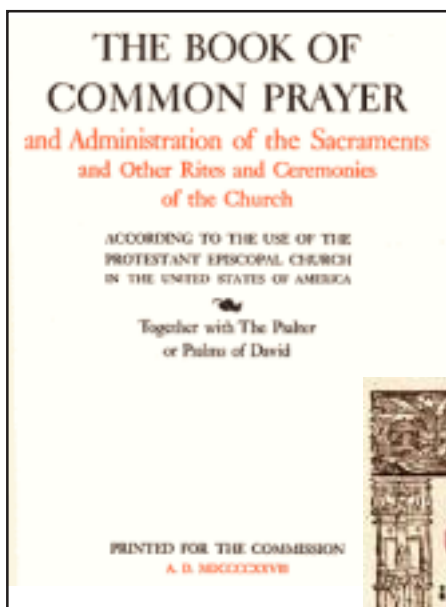
Readings assigned for *The Daily Office* remain unchanged and allow one to determine what readings are assigned for each day of the year covering a two-year cycle. The left hand page (Year One) is for **odd numbered years**; the right hand page is for **even numbered years**. Holy Days are shown on pages 996 – 1001. Since the present Prayer Book was authorized in 1976, many additions have been made to the Book of Lesser Feasts and Fasts, in which case the best bet is to refer to an Episcopal Church Calendar.

In conclusion

I hope that these articles on the Prayer Book have proven helpful and having “read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested” them, you have found the journey both interesting and edifying.

The Book of Common Prayer is more than a guide to worship in the Episcopal Church. It is a treasure chest of faith as well as one of the greatest literary and religious gifts to men and women of faith. It does not belong to the Episcopal Church - - rather, it rightly belongs to the ages.

*The Rev'd Dr. Grant S. Carey, Canon Residentiary
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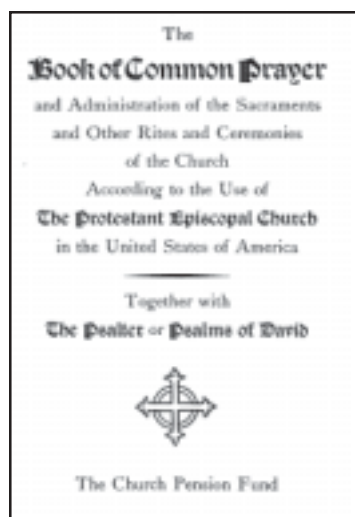
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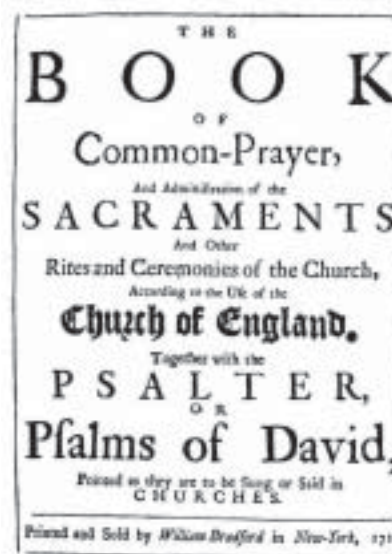
BCP, printed 1550



BCP 1549



BCP 1928
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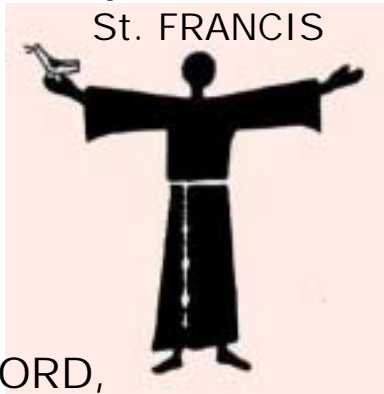


BCP, printed in 1710

WEBSITES OF INTEREST

- <http://anglicansonline.org/resources/bcp.html>
- <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/world.htm>

A Prayer attributed to
St. FRANCIS



LORD,

make us instruments of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is discord, union;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
Grant that we may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born
to eternal life. **AMEN.**

This series appeared in "The Cross,"
the Trinity Cathedral newsletter, from
November 2007 through September 2008,
with great thanks to Canon Carey.