

Principles to Guide the Development of Liturgical Texts Adopted by the 80th General Convention of The Episcopal Church

Introduction

The 2018 General Convention authorized the ongoing work of liturgical and Prayer Book revision “for the future of God’s mission through the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement,” drawing upon “the core theological work of loving, liberating, life-giving reconciliation and creation care.” This liturgical and Prayer Book revision is to “continue in faithful adherence to the historic rites of the Church Universal as they have been received and interpreted within the Anglican tradition of 1979 Book of Common Prayer, mindful of our existing ecumenical commitments, while also providing space for, encouraging the submission of, and facilitating the perfection of rites that will arise from the continual movement of the Holy Spirit among us and growing insights of our Church.”ⁱ

The General Convention called for bishops to “engage worshiping communities in experimentation and the creation of alternative texts to offer to the wider church” and encouraged each diocese “to create a liturgical commission to collect, reflect, teach and share these resources” with the Task Force on Liturgical and Prayer Book Revision. As dioceses and congregations participate in this work, the principles that follow offer guidance for revising existing prayers and rites and for crafting new ones. Suggestions for liturgical revision invite creativity but are not intended to limit the possibilities.

In describing characteristics of new liturgical texts, the 2018 General Convention enumerated the following:

- to “utilize the riches of Holy Scripture and our Church’s liturgical, cultural, racial, generational, linguistic, gender, physical ability, class and ethnic diversity in order to share common worship”;
- to “utilize inclusive and expansive language and imagery for humanity and divinity”;
- to “incorporate and express understanding, appreciation, and care of God’s creation”; and
- to “engage the deep Baptismal and Eucharistic theology and practice of the 1979 Prayer Book.”

As background, the Task Force on Liturgical and Prayer Book Revision reviewed earlier work of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, which identified a number of qualities that make public prayer recognizably Anglican:

- It resonates with Scripture and proclaims the gospel.
- It is rooted in Anglican theological tradition.
- It has high literary value; it is beautiful according to accepted and respected standards.
- It uses the recurring structures, linguistic patterns, and metaphors of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*.

- It is formal, not casual, conversational, or colloquial.
- It is dense enough to bear the weight of the sacred purpose for which it is intended.
- It is metaphoric without being obtuse.
- It is performative: that is, it effects what it says.ⁱⁱ

In light of this earlier work by the SCLM and the directives of the 2018 General Convention, the Task Force has developed the following principles to guide liturgical and Prayer Book revision. These principles also draw upon the work of the International Anglican Liturgical Consultationⁱⁱⁱ as well as liturgical practices and Prayer Book revision in other provinces of the Anglican Communion.

At the end of each section, possibilities for liturgical revision are offered and set apart in italics. The revisions might include new or revised texts as well as new or revised rubrics (directions for conducting worship). Some of these revisions are in use in parts of The Episcopal Church and in Provinces of the Anglican Communion. These suggestions are not meant to be exhaustive nor recommendations for specific revisions.

Scriptural Foundations

Christian liturgy is rooted in the riches of Scripture in number of essential ways:

1. The Bible is read within the context of public liturgy and is proclaimed as the Word of God.
2. The language and content of Christian liturgy are in accord with Scripture and affirm beliefs that are congruent with Scripture as interpreted by the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.^{iv}
3. The language of the rites draws on biblical vocabulary and phraseology in such a way as to indicate the rootedness of the language in Scripture. This extends to the actual quotation of biblical language within a liturgical text or the appropriation of verses or passages into a rite such that they become part of the liturgy (for example, opening sentences in the Daily Offices), as distinct from the ordered reading of Scripture by way of a lectionary.
4. Christian liturgy is itself a response to a directive in Scripture, such as Jesus' command to "do this" at the Last Supper or to baptize all nations in Matthew 28.
5. Christian liturgy is scriptural when it uses images, metaphors, and prayer forms found there as the basis for praising and petitioning God as revealed in Jesus Christ.
6. Christian liturgy is scriptural when it asks God to act in accordance with the ways in which Scripture reveals that God has acted in the past, as the classical collect formulas often do ("O God who [*insert past action of God*]...").

Anglican Theological Tradition

The Preamble to the Constitution of The Episcopal Church makes clear that the Book of Common Prayer sets forth "the historic Faith and Order" of this Church.

The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds summarize core Christian teachings that are recognized ecumenically. The nineteenth-century Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, one of the Historical Documents contained in the 1979 BCP, identifies the Apostles' Creed "as the Baptismal Symbol" and the Nicene Creed as "the sufficient statement of the Christian Faith."^v

Ritual Texts

Liturgy is a form of ritual, a genre that has certain characteristics:

1. **Ritual texts are prayed aloud**, which means that they must be characterized by a poetic sensitivity and rhythm that make them comfortable to be prayed in unison and also move easily into the memory of those who use them.
2. **Christian liturgy is dialogical by nature**, involving an assembly speaking to God in words of praise, thanksgiving, confession, intercession, and sometimes lament; God speaking to the assembly through scripture and in words of welcome, healing, absolution, and blessing; and members of the assembly speaking to one another, including verbal exchange between presider and congregation.
3. **Christian worship builds up the body of Christ**, in language and ritual action intended to form the whole person.

Expansive and inclusive language. We seek to *maximize rather than erase language from our liturgical lexicon*.

- **Language matters.** It shapes our sense of reality and is therefore crucial for our understanding of God and others. Through language we forge and maintain our relationships with God and one another.
- **Expansive Language.** Expansive language seeks to tell as much truth about God as we can, utilizing the full range of language available to us. It does not displace traditional language for God but uses additional metaphors. Of course, no human language can contain God. Even so, our theologies of creation, the Incarnation, and the Resurrection affirm that the material world, including language, is a means to understand God in a more faithful way.
- **Inclusive Language.** Our language often has built-in biases that exclude and harm some persons. When exclusive language is used, we fall short of our calling to respect all who are created in the image of God. By using inclusive language for humanity, we respect the dignity of every human being.

Worship and Culture

Christian worship is always celebrated in a local cultural context. The Nairobi Statement of the Lutheran World Federation identifies four ways in which worship is related dynamically to culture,^{vi} which we commend:

- **Transcultural.** "The resurrected Christ whom we worship, and through whom by the power of the Holy Spirit we know the grace of the Triune God, transcends and indeed

is beyond all cultures.” Core elements of worship transcend cultural context, including baptism with water in the Triune name, the celebration of Eucharist, the proclamation of Scripture, intercession for the needs of the Church and the world, and use of the Lord’s Prayer and the ecumenical creeds, i.e., the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds.

- Contextual. “Jesus whom we worship was born into a specific culture of the world. In the mystery of his incarnation are the model and the mandate for the contextualization of Christian worship.” In contextualization, the meanings and actions of worship are expressed in the language and forms of the local culture, where those are not contrary to Scripture. Elements from the local culture that are in harmony with Scripture may be added to enrich the worship.
- Counter-cultural. “Some components of every culture in the world are sinful, dehumanizing, and contradictory to the values of the Gospel. From the perspective of the Gospel, they need critique and transformation. Contextualization of Christian faith and worship necessarily involves challenging of all types of oppression and social injustice wherever they exist in earthly cultures.”
- Cross-cultural. Sharing “elements of worship across cultural barriers helps enrich the whole Church” and strengthen our bonds as the Body of Christ. “Care should be taken that the music, art, architecture, gestures and postures, and other elements of different cultures are understood and respected when they are used by churches elsewhere in the world.”

Rites

1. **Holy Baptism**. “Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble” (BCP p. 298). The International Anglican Liturgical Consultation has identified key characteristics of baptismal rites^{vii}:
 - a. They are celebrated with the gathered community of faith and normatively take place within the context of the Holy Eucharist.
 - b. They are for people of any age.
 - c. The administration of water follows a profession of faith (and presumably catechesis in that faith) in Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity and renunciation of all powers that rebel against this God.
 - d. Baptism is administered in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
 - e. “Baptism once received is unrepeatable and any rites of renewal must avoid being misconstrued as rebaptism.”

Liturgical revision might include new or revised texts for the rite:

- *opening sentences*
- *questions of renunciation and adherence to Christ*
- *questions in the Baptismal Covenant*

- prayers for the candidates
- the Thanksgiving over the Water
- the prayer for the sevenfold gift of the Spirit (BCP p. 308)
- the formula accompanying the laying on of hands with consignation (signing with the cross on the forehead) and chrismation (anointing with the baptismal oil called chrism) (BCP p. 308) and
- the welcoming of the newly baptized.

Different structures might be considered, for example, placing the Baptismal Covenant immediately before the water.

New texts might be composed for naming the candidate immediately before the administration of water and for the presentation of a candle.

Other elements from Christian history or contemporary cultural contexts may be added as explanatory actions, for example, the presentation of white garments.

2. **The Holy Eucharist.** The action of the Eucharist has historically been marked by a structural shape within which specific kinds of praise and petition are articulated. The International Anglican Liturgical Consultation has outlined the following structure^{viii}:
 - a. Gathering and Preparation: The gathering draws the assembly together as the Body of Christ, setting the tone for worship and preparing the assembly to hear the Word and participate in the Sacrament. In the 1979 BCP, the gathering includes an acclamation, a song or act of praise (for example, *Gloria in excelsis*, *Kyrie*, or *Trisagion*), and an opening collect. Historically, Anglican rites have included the Collect for Purity. Many newer rites, including the optional Penitential Order in the 1979 BCP, also have a general confession of sin as part of the preparation.

Liturgical revision might allow for both a more streamlined gathering and a more extensive one, enabling congregations to decide what form of gathering best suits their local context and needs.

Additional options for gathering could be developed, for example, a remembrance of baptism or a revised penitential rite.

New liturgical texts for the acclamation, Collect for Purity, and salutation (“The Lord be with you”) could be written.

Liturgical revision might also consider developing a three-year cycle for the Collect of the Day, allowing those texts to echo the appointed scriptures for each Sunday of the three-year lectionary.

- b. Proclaiming and Receiving the Word of God: The reading of at least two passages from Scripture, including one from the Gospels, has been normative, followed by an explication of the Scriptures in a sermon or homily. The proclamation of Scripture normally is followed by some response, often in psalmody, canticles, or hymns. The response to the Gospel is the sermon and the Creed. The 1979 BCP requires a sermon and calls for the Nicene Creed to be used on Sundays and other Major Feasts.

Liturgical revision might consider responses other than a sermon, such as group lectio divina.

The use of the Apostles' Creed might also be considered, and some have suggested alternative creedal formulations.

- c. Prayers of the People: Essential to the gathering of God's priestly people is their communal intercession on behalf of the Church and the world, the living and the dead. Thanksgiving for the communion of saints is also common. The 1979 BCP lists areas that must be included in the intercessions (the universal Church, the Nation and all in authority, the welfare of the world, the concerns of the local community, the sick and suffering, and the departed) and the BCP invites congregations to craft their own intercessory prayers. In the 1979 BCP, following the pattern of earlier prayer books, a general confession and absolution follows the prayers of the people. The Peace provides a ritual expression of the unity of the Body of Christ as they come together to offer the Holy Eucharist.

Liturgical revision might consider whether to add to the list of required areas of concern in the Prayers of the People, for example, care of creation, and prayer that recognizes various forms of government, for example, Indigenous nations.

The 1979 BCP allows the confession to be omitted on occasion or moved to the Gathering and Preparation. Liturgical revision might consider whether to suggest occasions when this would be appropriate.

New liturgical texts might also be crafted for the confession of sin and/or absolution. Liturgical revision might provide forms of introduction for the confession and for the Peace.

- d. Celebrating at the Lord's Table, which the 1979 BCP calls "The Holy Communion" (pp. 333, 361):
 - I. Preparation: The bread and wine are prepared for the celebration, and other gifts of the assembly are gathered and presented. In the 1979 BCP, the rubrics for Rite I and Rite II call this the "Offertory."

Liturgical revision might consider additional offertory sentences and thematic prayers over the gifts.

Since the primary offering occurs within the eucharistic prayer, liturgical revision might consider whether to use a different title (or no title) for this action.

- II. The Eucharistic Prayer: The Eucharistic Prayer includes both thanksgiving and intercession. Eucharistic prayers in The Episcopal Church are shaped by a structure introduced from the Scottish Episcopal Church in the eighteenth century, which includes a number of identifiable features:
 1. Opening dialogue (“The Lord be with you... give thanks and praise”)
 2. Praise and thanksgiving for creation and the work of redemption
 3. The Sanctus and Benedictus
 4. Praise and thanksgiving for creation and the work of redemption continue after the Sanctus and Benedictus
 5. Institution Narrative (Jesus’ actions at the Last Supper)
 6. Anamnesis (remembrance of Christ’s death and resurrection and anticipation of his coming again) with an explicit offering (“oblation”) of the gifts of bread and wine
 7. Epiclesis (invocation of the Spirit) over the bread and wine, joined to prayer for the gathered community
 8. Anglican eucharistic prayers have also included a self-offering of the people and prayers for the acceptance of the offering, and occasionally more extensive supplications. In contemporary eucharistic prayers, this supplication typically includes an expression of hope, such as participation in the heavenly banquet at the end of time.
 9. Trinitarian doxology.

As new texts are written for the eucharistic prayer, attention to these features will provide continuity with earlier prayer books of The Episcopal Church.

10. The Lord’s Prayer usually follows the eucharistic prayer.

- III. Breaking the Bread: The 1979 BCP highlights the action by calling for silence after the breaking the bread and providing a fraction anthem that may be said or sung.

Liturgical revision might offer new texts to follow the breaking of the bread and the invitation to communion.

- IV. The Reception of Communion: The 1979 BCP provides several options for the words said at the administration of communion. The Additional Directions in the 1979 BCP call for the celebrant to receive first, followed by other clergy at the altar/table.

Liturgical revision might offer additional options for the words said at the administration of communion and might consider whether to allow other practices, including the celebrant receiving last.

- e. *Sending (Going Out as God's People)*: A prayer after communion may include communal expression of thanksgiving for the gifts received and/ or reference to the gathered community being sent into the world. A trinitarian blessing is common, though not necessary, and the final words of the liturgy are a dismissal, sending the assembly into the world.

Liturgical revision might provide new forms for these texts.

Liturgical revision might also develop rites for use by congregations that do not have a priest. These rites might include prayers for the distribution of communion from the reserved Sacrament by a lay person or deacon authorized by the diocesan bishop.

3. **The Daily Office**: Of all the historic Christian rites, the texts of the Daily Office rites have been more explicitly scriptural than any other, as the majority of the language was directly taken from the Bible. In the 1979 BCP, the Daily Offices maintain the structure introduced in the first English Book of Common Prayer (1549). Fundamental features of Anglican Daily Offices include:
- a. The 1979 BCP calls the opening section "The Invitatory." This takes the form of a verse and response, followed by a trinitarian doxology. An invitatory Psalm (Venite or Jubilate) has been part of Anglican Morning Prayer since the sixteenth century. For Evening Prayer, the 1979 BCP introduced the ancient Greek hymn "O gracious light." An opening sentence of scripture and a general confession and absolution (or declaration of pardon) may precede the opening verse.
 - b. The recitation of a portion of the Psalter, as designated in a lectionary.
 - c. The reading of portions of Holy Scripture, also designated in a lectionary.
 - d. Response to the reading in praise, with texts usually taken directly from Scripture (i.e., canticles).
 - e. Prayer that since the sixteenth century has included the Lord's Prayer, suffrages (a series of verses and responses), and collects. The 1979 BCP adds a prayer for mission and allows for authorized intercessions and thanksgivings to follow the collects.
 - f. The offices have also included the recitation of the Apostles' Creed as well as hymns and anthems.

- g. Since the seventeenth century, Anglican Offices have concluded with the Prayer of St. Chrysostom and the Grace (2 Cor. 13). The 1979 BCP allows for either the General Thanksgiving or the Prayer of St. Chrysostom or both, and adds the optional verse “Let us bless the Lord” before the Grace.

Liturgical revisions for the Daily Offices might consider revised prayers and new canticles from Scripture and Christian tradition, as well as different structures.

Liturgical revisions might also consider how a Daily Office could best be used for the weekly worship of congregations that do not have a priest to preside at the eucharist.

In the 1979 BCP, the Great Litany and the Supplication follow the Daily Offices. Liturgical revisions might consider how these prayers may be used with communities in response to traumatic events or disaster.

4. **Pastoral Offices.** Several resources approved by the General Convention since 1979 offer alternatives or supplements to pastoral offices:
 - a. Enriching Our Worship 2: Ministry with the Sick or Dying and Burial of a Child
 - b. Enriching Our Worship 3: Burial Rites for Adults, together with a Rite for the Burial of a Child
 - c. Enriching Our Worship 5: Liturgies and Prayers Related to Childbearing, Childbirth, and Loss
 - d. Liturgical Resources 2: Marriage Rites for the Whole Church
 - e. The Book of Occasional Services 2018

These resources offer a starting place for consideration of revisions of pastoral offices. Liturgical revisions might respond to the needs of people in various cultural contexts.

Confirmation, with forms for Reception and for the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows, and A Form of Commitment to Christian Service are also Pastoral Offices. Liturgical revisions might consider the Church’s experience with these rites since 1979.

5. Episcopal Services.

Enriching Our Worship 4: The Renewal of Ministry and the Welcoming of a New Rector or Other Pastor offers a starting place for consideration of revisions of the BCP office for the Celebration of a New Ministry.

*Proposals for revisions to the ordination rites might be offered for the consideration of the whole Church. **The Preface to the Ordinal requires the use of the ordination rites as presented in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, and therefore the Task Force on Liturgical and Prayer Book Revision advises against the use of any alternative ordination rites until those rites are authorized by General Convention.***

6. The Calendar of the Church Year and Proper Liturgies for Special Days

The 1979 Book of Common Prayer introduced Proper Liturgies for Special Days.

Liturgical revisions for the calendar might consider whether and how to implement proposals advanced since 1979, for example, a season of creation and a seven-week Advent.

Liturgical revisions of Proper Liturgies for Special Days might consider the Church's experience with these rites since 1979.

7. Other Portions of the BCP

The Psalter. Additional translations of the Psalter might address concerns about inclusive and expansive language.

Prayers and Thanksgivings. Liturgical revisions might include revised texts that address concerns about inclusive and expansive language, and prayers that address new concerns in various cultural contexts, including care of creation.

An Outline of the Faith, or Catechism. Revision of the Catechism might take account of scholarship since 1979, inclusive and expansive language, and understandings of Church and mission that have emerged since 1979.

Notes

ⁱ Resolution 2018-A068.

ⁱⁱ “Principles for Evaluating Liturgical Materials,” “*I Will Bless You and You Will be a Blessing*, Liturgical Resources 1, revised and expanded (New York: Church Publishing, 2015) 229.

ⁱⁱⁱ International Anglican Liturgical Consultations: A Review, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/120963/IALC-Review.pdf>. For more about the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, see <https://anglicanliturgy.org> and <https://anglicancommunion.org/theology/liturgy.aspx>.

^{iv} An Outline of the Faith, BCP 1979, 853-54

^v BCP 1979, 877.

^{vi} Lutheran World Federation, Nairobi Statement, <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/nairobi-statement-on-worship-and-culture-full-text>. All quotations in this section are from the Nairobi Statement. For an Anglican perspective, see International Anglican Liturgical Consultations: A Review, 4-8.

^{vii} International Anglican Liturgical Consultations: A Review, 8-9.

^{viii} “The Structure of the Eucharist,” in *Our Thanks and Praise: The Eucharist in Anglicanism Today*, ed. David R. Holeton (Toronto, Ontario: Anglican Book Centre, 1998) 284.