

Patterns for Developing Our Personal Prayer Life



A Resource for Clergy



Diocese of Guildford

"I warmly and enthusiastically encourage the use of this excellent booklet as a serious spiritual resource.

Among its many treasures, is a very simple, practical guide to a daily prayer life, whether this is called office, quiet time or whatever. For me, the psalms are the heart of my prayer. This doesn't always mean I am fully attentive, nor does it mean that I am always in agreement with the Psalmist! But, the use of psalmody (whether we use long or short selections) has been a tried and tested vehicle of prayer for century upon century. I find the thought of St Augustine of Hippo striking here: 'The psalms are the voice of the whole Christ, head and body. Christ prays for us and in us and we make our prayer to him. He prays for us as High Priest, he prays for us as Head and we pray to him as our God.'

If you want a more contemporary inspiration than St Augustine, what about Archbishop Michael Ramsey? He was once asked how long each day he spent in conversation with God. Surprising for an Archbishop of Canterbury, he said, 'only two or three minutes,' but then he added that he had been 'at his prayers' in chapel for an hour for that three minutes.

Whatever your rhythm of prayer is, or may become, I commend this booklet to the clergy and people of this diocese as a resource for your further journey into God."

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Christopher Guildford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. Below the signature is a long, horizontal, slightly wavy line that spans most of the width of the signature.

This booklet has been compiled for clergy who struggle with maintaining a personal discipline of prayer in a demanding role and environment.

It will aid personal reflection and discussion with a friend.

It may also provide a guide for a cell group or Chapter.

THE DAILY OFFICE



20 MINUTES

ALL OF THE CLERGY
PRAY THIS EVERY DAY



40 MINUTES

IF THEY ARE TOO BUSY THEY MAKE
UP FOR IT THE FOLLOWING DAY



5 DAYS

SOME CLERGY PREFER TO DO
A YEAR'S PRAYING ALL AT ONCE



6 MONTHS

OTHERS SAVE IT ALL UP AND DO
ONE LONG STINT BEFORE RETIREMENT

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Keep Praying - especially through the tough times.

I Introduction

- a) Struggle
- b) What is Prayer?
- c) Desire and Discipline
- d) Honesty
- e) Encouragement

II Resources for Daily Prayer

- a) The Daily Office (various forms)
- b) Internet Resources
- c) Corporate Prayer
- d) Intercession
- e) Rule of Life
- f) The Roman Catholic Breviary

III Encouragements

- a) Spiritual Reading
- b) Spiritual Direction
- c) Retreats and Quiet Days

IV Integration

Introduction

a) The struggle

The story is told of two Christians from different churches who were discussing the nature of a miracle.

"We think," muses one, "that it's a miracle when God does what our Vicar asks Him."

"Is that so?" replies the other. "In our church we think it's a miracle when our Vicar does what God asks."

Two views which no doubt beg more questions than they answer offer two perceptions on prayer: is it a monologue from us to God, or vice versa? Actually it's a conversation; but how do we keep this intimate relationship with God going when there are three funerals and a PCC that day? Most of the laity, if they think of it at all, probably assume their clergy must be enjoying a dynamic, disciplined and "successful" prayer life. In reality we know all about struggle.

That assumption, by us if not by them, puts us under considerable pressure. Prayer is a hard road and all of us struggle with it, sometimes doubting if anyone is listening at all. But sometimes we don't like to own these struggles, fearing they indicate a lack of faith or discipline, and assuming that all the other members of the Chapter rank somewhere just below Mother Julian or George Müller (depending on churchmanship) in the prayer league. In fact dark periods are often a sign that we are doing well in our discipleship.

Experts in any field of human endeavour succeed in making their art, craft or skill easy. When I was a professional bassoonist, for example, many people assumed I had another job during the day and that I simply turned up in the evening and made beautiful music. The audience doesn't see (or hear, thank God) those hours of individual practice, or the frustration of making and adjusting reeds, or the further hours of orchestral rehearsals.

There are no experts in prayer, so if we are making it look easy, someone is not being honest.

The truth of the matter, based on anecdotal but extensive experience, is that most clergy do not pray nearly as much as they say they do or we assume they do. Some have even allowed prayer to slide off their agenda altogether. It is said that when the going gets tough, first to go is prayer, with reading a close second. If this applies to you, you are in company with many others and you do not have to struggle on alone.

So, get honest, but don't get guilty as that will only hinder growth. There is no prayer without honesty before God, and life is so much easier for everyone if we take the risk of being honest without judgement with at least our colleagues. Chapters can be revolutionised if someone will take the risk of admitting failure or disappointment or struggle. I'm not talking about moaning here; that is risk free, it discourages and has no place among us. But a simple admission of our struggles with, perhaps, a request for help, can break the ice of even the most hardened Chapter with benefits all round.

b) What is Prayer?

You will have your own definition. Most, though, are too narrow. Many people will say that they don't pray, or don't pray much. They are often wrong because they have simply drawn their definition too tightly.

Prayer can include, but is not exhausted by, intercession, praise, thanksgiving, confession, meditation, contemplation, journaling, even painting, sculpting, listening to suitable music, walking in the garden and much more. In fact prayer is a way of life rather than merely an activity in which we engage for short periods of the day.

Disciplined prayer times are crucial if we want to foster a life of prayer, but if we think of the rest of life as "not praying" our prayer will stagnate. There must be a balance between those intimate times with God alone and times of work and pleasure, which are in company with God, but with our minds on others.

c) Desire and Discipline

We start with our desire. Unless we want, at some level, to pray then it isn't going to happen. But those who are really in touch with themselves at a deep level know their need of God. *"Almighty God, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you..."*

Desires, especially more frivolous desires, fluctuate and that's where discipline comes in. We need not fear the word discipline. It simply means being a disciple and in our case a disciple of Jesus. Following Jesus sometimes means saying "No" to other activities and busyness, for example. We will be more productive in less time if we take time for God.

Discipline means we will be less influenced by our fickle feelings and more in touch with our deepest desires. While there are few "dos" and "don'ts" in the life of prayer we do well, from time to time, to ask ourselves a few questions about our discipline and see if we are happy with the answers (See Part II - e).

d) Honesty

If we want a decent relationship with another person, let alone God, we need to be aware of ourselves. Knowing our own heart honestly is a good way in to a relationship with someone else. So in all that follows, let's try to be real, honest, open and candid with ourselves; but in all things let us avoid judging ourselves. Jesus came to save the world not judge it (John 3:17), and He came to save us, and accept us as we are, not to judge us.

e) Encouragement

And be encouraged. There are tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of Christians in Surrey all struggling to pray with you, for you and alongside you. And throughout

the world millions more are offering prayers for you and me and all God's Church.

Resources for Daily Prayer

a) *The Daily Office*

All Anglican clergy say Morning and Evening Prayer daily....Not!

If you don't, you are not alone! But why not reconsider?

The sense of obligation is never helpful in our life of prayer and discipleship, but maybe the Daily Office could instead be a resource, an encouragement, which keeps us focussed when everything else seems out of focus. A Christian friend once told me that in a dark period of his life the daily Psalms in the Office were the only thing he had to hold onto. We can use as many or as few Offices, from one to seven, as we feel is right for our prayer discipline. And there are many versions.

Maybe you're an Evangelical and you are suspicious of tradition. However, there is almost nothing in the Office which is not Scripture, the written and living faith of the Church. It may be helpful for you to think of the

Office as the daily disciplined and prayerful reading of Scripture. Cranmer invented "Through the Bible in a Year" 450 years ago!

Maybe you're a Catholic and you much prefer the daily Mass. However, this is not an "either/or". The great traditions of Catholicism have been based on the Breviary as much as the Missal. Word and Sacrament, Synagogue and Temple companions together.

Maybe you're a Charismatic and you think you need only the guidance of the Spirit. But, remember how Dennis Bennett, author of *Nine O' Clock in the Morning*, testified that the Spirit often chooses to use the lectionary. Many of us can say the same from experience. Without it some of us end up using a very few favourite passages of Scripture in our prayer.

Maybe you just get bored by the daily repetition of words which lose their power through familiarity. Take a look at the newer forms of the Office which use seemingly endless variety.

Whatever your own solution, remember: *"All these patterns are variations on a common theme – praying the Bible together. A church in which people pray the Bible together becomes a church which is equipped for proclamation and service."*¹ Here is the strength of the Daily Office; even when we use it alone we know there are thousands of others praying the same way,

¹ Common Worship: Daily Prayer p. 21

using the same Scriptures and voicing the same concerns. In this individualistic age when we are all looking for new forms of community, this could offer much needed encouragement for those of us who often feel alone in ministry and prayer.

Here are some possibilities:

The Daily Office in the Book of Common Prayer.
Morning and Evening Prayer Daily Throughout the Year.

The Daily Office in Common Worship. (ISBN 978-0-7151-2073-6) Provides a reflective Office, "Prayer During the Day", plus Morning, Evening and Night Prayer. There is appropriate seasonal and daily variation of Canticles and Responsories which makes this a refreshing experience, but there is the (optional) daily repetition of *Benedictus* and *Magnificat* for those who like consistency. The lectionary offers shorter, but still substantial passages of Scripture and more varied Psalmody. There is a treasure trove of other resources. The services can be downloaded from:

www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/dailyprayer/feed

A simpler version is Time to Pray (ISBN 978-0-7151-2122-1) Taken from the material provided in *CW: Daily Prayer*, it includes: Prayer During the Day (for every day of the week); Night Prayer; and, Selected Psalms. The material offers the reader two simple daily offices that provide a flexible structure for daily prayer.

Celebrating Common Prayer (ISBN 0-264-67284-4) A Franciscan version has many similarities with Common Worship which was heavily influenced by it. This offers Morning, Midday, Evening and Night Offices for each day with appropriate variation. There are prayers for before and after the Office and a wealth of other resources, including a lectionary.

A simpler pocket version of CCP is Celebrating Daily Prayer (ISBN 978-0-8192-8134-0)

Among other versions of a simple structure of daily prayer you might look at:

Woven into Prayer (ISBN 1-85311-247-X) A much simpler version by Angela Ashwin offering a daily Office with seasonal variation. There is a lectionary and, for each season, "A Quiet Space" offering suggestions for meditation and other ways of praying.

There are, of course, many more, including Office Books from other Churches both within and outside the Anglican Communion, and religious orders. Here is a selection:

A Celtic Version is available from the Northumbria Community:

www.northumbriacommunity.org/PraytheOffice/index.html

A shorter Benedictine version is: *Benedictine Daily Prayer* by Maxwell E Johnson (ISBN 0814628338 OR 978-0814628331)

The Scottish Episcopal Church office can be downloaded at www.scotland.anglican.org/index.php/liturgy/liturgy/daily_prayer

b) *The Internet*

The Church can keep up with new technology. There are a host of Internet resources to encourage and resource daily prayer. The following partial selection may help. Note that there are many more resources to be found on the Internet:

www.sacredspace.ie offers a daily ten minute guided prayer with Scripture based on Ignatian principles.

www.rejesus.co.uk/spirituality/daily_prayer/index.html offers, among other resources, daily prayer, meditation and intercession.

www.taize.fr/en_article75.html Taize offers a daily meditation.

www.prayingeachday.org has simple daily prayers and reflections and a wonderful series of links for those of a more catholic approach.

www.pray-as-you-go.org offers daily Ignatian prayer for your MP3.

www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=openpod.potd comes from the Methodist Church and offers a useful prayer section.

www.prayerguide.org.uk comes from the Teal Trust and offers a simple daily structure for prayer.

www.24-7prayer.com doesn't offer online resources but is well worth a look.

www.freshexpressions.org.uk/section.asp?id=3017 Daily Prayer from the Fresh Expressions team.

www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qmpj You can listen to the BBC's Prayer for the Day without having to get up at crack of dawn.

www.orthodoxnet.com/worship/morningprayers.html#trisagion sets out daily prayers from the Orthodox tradition.

c) *Corporate Prayer.*

It pays to remember that our prayer life is not a grim lonely struggle, but a deeply corporate activity. We do not pray alone. Not even the hermit is alone, especially not the hermit. When we pray the Daily Office we do so in company with thousands of others. Through the Diocesan Calendar of Prayer you and your Parish are prayed for twice a year throughout the Diocese and beyond. This gives both encouragement

and accountability, and there have been local examples of extraordinary coincidental answers to these prayers. Tell others that you are praying for them, just as the cathedral does.

The Congregation

Attempts to involve the congregation in the daily life of corporate prayer are very likely to meet with success. Here are some suggestions:

- The Daily Office:
 - You can invite members of the congregation to take part in the Daily Office. Many of them may be willing to officiate, say once or twice a week.
 - Those who can't or won't join you can be encouraged to join in at home.
 - The Lectionary for the week can be published in the weekly bulletin so church members can at least use the readings for each day.
 - An Intercession list can be included in the bulletin so there is concentrated prayer for specific needs.

- Daily Quiet Meditation:
 - You can contract to be in church at a specific time for an hour (or perhaps half an hour) a day and invite church members to join you. Put up a notice outside inviting anyone to join in. Be clear they may come for a minute or two or stay the whole hour or anything in between.
 - Make sure someone else covers your day off.

- Church Prayer Meetings:
 - In advance of special events or important meetings why not invite church members to pray with you. This can be done:
 - § Daily for, say, a month.
 - § Weekly for, say, a year.
 - Regular Prayer Meetings can be given greater prominence. Why not get a number of people to commit to them for a year?
 - In any Prayer Meeting why not get a variety of people to lead in a variety of ways - silent, said, sung, using symbols or music, or actions or ... the variety is limited only by the imaginations of the people involved?

- Church Retreats:
 - Offer a Parish Retreat over a weekend.
 - Where a retreat is impossible (financial or time constraints may be reasons) a Quiet Day in the church is always possible.
 - Get someone else to lead, ask DVMT or St Columba's for suggestions if you're stuck.

- PCCs:
 - Most PCCs offer only a "nod to God" in their meetings.
 - You can set aside a decent time (say 15 to 30 minutes) during each meeting for prayer.
 - Appoint someone to monitor the proceedings and when necessary, (when tempers flare or a consensus seems impossible for example,) suggest a break to pray.

- PCCs can go away together for a Quiet Day, see above.
- If people don't or won't join in why not offer some help? 'Closer to God', a five-week course in practical and varied prayer is available through the Bishop's Spirituality Adviser.

Colleagues

- Ministry Team. Pray with the ministry team of the Parish, and if there are no other licensed ministers ask the Wardens and those with leadership roles in the church.
- Chapters. Are Chapters any better at prayer than most PCCs? Speak to the Rural Dean.
- Cells or prayer triplets/quartets etc. If you aren't a member of a cell group outside the Parish, join one. Cells commit to share their lives together and to pray for and with each other regularly.

d) *Intercession*

There are two dangers:

Prayer can become a mere shopping list.

Intercession can get squeezed out, for a variety of reasons.

Prayer is primarily about our intimate relationship with God. However, if we forget that it is closely linked with our worship, the way we live our lives, and the needs of the world it will quickly degenerate into an exercise in navel gazing and become sterile.

Intercession is standing in the gap, being with God with others on your heart. Jesus intercedes for us (Hebrews 7:25). It is being with others in the centre of God's love.

Why do it? Because:

- We are instructed to. (1 Timothy 2:1)
- Love demands it.
- Sometimes we are the answer to that prayer.
- We may then understand another's need better.
- We may share others burdens.
- Perhaps the other has no faith to draw on, or has exhausted their reserves of faith.
- We may need to change.

Resources are many:

- The Diocesan Prayer Calendar, available by subscription from Diocesan House, or online (www.cofeguildford.org.uk – go to "Prayer and Worship" and follow the links).

- The Anglican Cycle of Prayer, included in the Diocesan Calendar or online (www.anglicancommunion.org/acp/).
- Every mission agency seems to produce a cycle of prayer (contact details are published in Diocesan Directory under “Local Representatives”).
- Maybe your parish publishes a prayer cycle, if not why not initiate one; you don’t have to do it yourself (!).
- Your own intercession list.
- A prayer diary in which you can record your intercessions and the result.

You cannot pray for everything or everyone! If we try we end up “praying for the whole world” which isn’t much use! Therefore we cannot use all those prayer cycles which pop through the letter-box. Better to use one or two well. Similarly, we cannot use our entire prayer list every day and if we can then it is too short! Also we need to leave time to allow God to prompt our intercessions. Many people have been prayed for in this way with amazing results.

There is more than one way to skin a cat. There is also more than one way to intercede. Not everyone is sick or at death’s door as many a Parish intercession might suggest. Even if they are sick pray for people positively. Imagine them getting better, well even. Ask God how to pray for them. Imagine Jesus touching them and you may discover how to pray yourself. Do not feel you have to know everything as we can safely leave all things with God.

A friend told me this true story:

Someone presented for healing during a healing service. She asked for prayer for her sister, but the minister felt she needed prayer herself even though she protested not. Eventually he said, "May I pray for you anyway?"

Next day he got a phone call. "Did you pray for me in tongues yesterday?" *"Probably."*

"And could I have understood what you said?"
"Probably."

"Well, I did understand. I was much too embarrassed to tell you what my problem really is, but you prayed exactly for my situation."

Win/win. She kept her secret. Yet God intervened to intercede directly and specifically.

e) *Rule of Life*

Religious Communities have a Rule of Life. The Rule of St Benedict (ISBN 0-85244-168-1) is perhaps the best known. Though this ancient Rule applies to people living together in community the principles are important. Oblates and Tertiaries of most religious orders are required to have a personal Rule of Life, usually formulated in conjunction with a Spiritual Director.

If you do not have a Rule of Life it's worth at the very least pausing now and again to reflect on your spiritual discipline. This needs to be done prayerfully and honestly but without self judgement, most of us do that too much already.

If it helps you could use (prayerfully) the following questionnaire, perhaps on a regular basis.

Rhythm Rules



Be sure to get really still before attempting to engage with the questions.

ONE: I consider the rhythm of my life. What percentage of my time is spent in the following ways?

To make it easier, call 1 hour per day 4% (NB there may be some overlap – e.g. Family time could also be leisure time, and the figures may add up to more or less than 100):

Work: _____ % Leisure: _____ %

Church activities: _____ % Sleep: _____ %

Prayer: _____ % Family: _____ %

Worship: _____ % Study: _____ %

TWO: Is this a satisfactory allocation of time? _____

THREE: If not, what is stopping me changing it?

FOUR: Do I try to live on an endless high? Or do I accept the lows with the highs?

FIVE: How often do I have a rest day? How do I spend it?

SIX: Can I face pain and find in it opportunities for growth?

SEVEN: When I meet others do I do all the talking? Or all the listening?

EIGHT: When I pray do I allow time for God to speak?

NINE: Do I regularly reflect on my experience?

TEN: Is there a discernible relationship between my prayer and the ordinary events of daily life? How do they inter-relate?

ELEVEN: Am I the same person with my friends, with my colleagues, with my family, in my church? Should I be?

TWELVE: How often do I laugh? Is it enough?

THIRTEEN: I imagine that tomorrow, as if by magic, I will be able to do absolutely anything I wish, without restraint. How will I spend the time?

FOURTEEN: When did I last do something I really wanted to do?

FIFTEEN: Are there any areas about which it might be worthwhile to seek the help of a prayer guide/director? If so, what are they?

f) The Roman Catholic Breviary

But who can afford the three volumes ... and who wants the seven offices a day?

Available from the Breviary are Morning and Evening Prayer, Collins, ISBN 0 00 721133 3.

A series of offices is provided for the seasons around Christmas and Easter, and for the ordinary weeks of the year it has a four week cycle.

For those who love the Psalms, this Office Book is a gift, for most of the Psalms are said over a four week cycle. Along with the Psalms, during each office there is a biblical passage set as a Canticle. The Gospel Canticles are Benedictus for the morning and Magnificat for the evening. A short scripture passage is also set at each office, along with an outline of intercessions.

It may feel gender exclusive due to the style, but can be used inclusively, and there are the references to the Pope, but here it is easy to substitute *Justin our Archbishop*.

If we remember that the purpose of having the Psalms in the Office is to 'soften us up' to do Lectio Divina with the reading, then the logic of the office structure, and this one in particular, becomes very apparent.

If within the Office, you want more scriptural input, then there is a wealth of reading schemes available (even including the CofE lectionary, although many find the selection somewhat limited).

Encouragements

a) Spiritual Reading

Any half-decent Christian bookshop will contain thousands of books on prayer and spirituality. 95% of them will not touch us so we need to find those which resonate in our souls. Because there are so many books, and of those few will really resonate with each of us, I am not offering a list.

But there are also periodicals. Why not look at some of these?

Grove Books publish a spirituality series of booklets. To subscribe go to www.grovebooks.co.uk

The Bible Reading Fellowship publishes a spirituality journal: *Quiet Spaces*. To subscribe go to www.quietspaces.org.uk

The Jesuits publish *The Way*, a journal of Ignatian spirituality. To subscribe go to www.theway.org.uk

The Irish Dominicans publish *Spirituality*. Go to www.dominicanpublications.com

Radical Grace is published by the Center for Action and Contemplation (Franciscans) in New Mexico. www.cacracticalgrace.org

Quiet Garden produces a newsletter. www.quietgarden.co.uk as do many other organisations.

b) Spiritual Direction

More and more Christians of all theological persuasions are seeking a spiritual director or soul friend. The Diocese of Guildford has an extensive network of spiritual directors which can be accessed by contacting Gill Welford gill.welford@cofeguildford.org.uk or 07760 881339

c) Retreats and Quiet Days

Taking a longer time apart with God is vital from time to time. There are many retreat houses and each will have a favourite. *Retreats* magazine, published annually by the Retreat Association has a comprehensive list with programmes. www.retreats.org.uk/general/journal.htm

A selection of local retreat houses are:

St Columba's House (Woking)

www.stcolumbashouse.org.uk 01483 766498

Ladywell Convent (Godalming)

www.fmdminternational.co.uk/site/index.php?id=13

01483 425775

Acorn Christian Healing Foundation (Bordon)

www.acornchristian.org 01420 478121

The House of Prayer (East Molesey) www.christian-retreat.org

020 8941 2313

St Michael's Convent (Ham Common)

www.sistersofthechurch.org.uk 020 8940 8711

Alton Abbey (Alton) An Anglican Benedictine House

www.starcourse.org/abbey 01420 562145

Old Alresford Place (Alresford)

www.oldalresfordplace.co.uk 01962 732518

St Cuthman's Arundel and Brighton Diocesan Retreat House

www.dabnet.org/stcuthmans 01403 741220

A few retreat houses further afield.

St Beuno's (St Asaph) www.beunos.com 01745 583444

Loyola Hall (Liverpool) www.loyolahall.co.uk
0151 426 4137

Stanton House (Oxford) www.stantonhouse.org.uk
01865 358807

Penhurst Retreat Centre (Penhurst)
www.penhurst.org.uk 0845 4580602

Lee Abbey (Lynton) www.leeabbey.org.uk 01598
752621

Society of Mary and Martha (The Sheldon Centre at
Dunsford) www.sheldon.uk.com 01647 252752

Green Pastures (Poole) www.green-pastures.org 01202
764776

Crowhurst (Crowhurst) www.crowhursthealing.org.uk
01424 830 033

A full list is available on www.retreats.org.uk

Integration

“Can only help you lose weight as part of a calorie-controlled diet”. In other words it's no good eating only crunchy flakes low-fat cereal for breakfast if we eat a 2lb steak and chips followed by suet pudding for supper. If you want to lose weight you have to set it as a priority.

So with spirituality. The resources and encouragements mentioned in this book can only help as part of an integrated life in which God has become the first priority. Christian spirituality is concerned with growing into union with God in Jesus Christ. Along the way we also grow into deeper union with ourselves, experience greater peace and harmony within, and experience eternity, if only in part. This is the beginning of integrity and wholeness.

This is not an arduous task. Made in the image of God, the desire for union with God is implanted in us in the centre of our being as the chief desire of our hearts. Getting in touch with this desire and following its promptings is the essence of genuine spirituality.

May God bless you beyond your dreams.

Compiled from the original version of
Revd Richard King

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