

LEADING PUBLIC INTERCESSIONS

PART I - Understanding worship and public intercessions and their relationship

1. PURPOSE

'Would you take the prayers please?' This article is written to help three different sorts of folk:

- Those whose hearts sink when they are asked!
- Those who would like to understand it better and do it *really* well.
- Those who organise or take leading parts in services generally.

Public intercessions/prayers are **part of worship** and cannot be understood unless *worship* is understood. Worship, like a good meal, can be a rich experience without analysing its contents. But public intercessors need a basic understanding of worship if their contribution to worship is going to be an appropriate part of it.

2. WORSHIP EXPLAINED

a) The two main 'directions' of worship

Just as natural conversation is two-directional and moves back-and-forth, so natural worship is two-directional and is best described as moving 'up' and 'down'.

1. Its 'downward' movements are GOD's responses ↓ to US

2. Its 'upward' movements are OUR responses ↑ to GOD

As you will see, grasping this simple truth has important practical implications for leading public intercessions. Look to see where your ministry of 'intercession' comes in the following two lists.

- ↓ **GOD** responds '**downward**' to us using words, silence, actions or things:
 1. WORDS used 'downwardly' – e.g. scripture, teaching, testimony, prophecy, exhortation, declarations of forgiveness, commissioning, blessing, etc.
 2. SILENCE used 'downwardly'.
 3. ACTIONS used 'downwardly' – e.g. breaking, pouring, touching, feeding, washing, anointing.
 4. THINGS used 'downwardly' – e.g. bread, wine, water, oil, touch.
- ↑ **WE** respond **upward to God** using the same four ways (words, silence, actions and things).
 1. WORDS used 'upwardly' – e.g. confession, praise, hymns, songs, psalms, prayers, intercession.
 2. SILENCE used 'upwardly'.
 3. ACTIONS used 'upwardly' – e.g. speaking, singing, kneeling, use of hands, use of voice, use of body.
 4. THINGS used 'upwardly' – e.g. the 'offering' of money, gifts, bread, wine.

Good worship is a conversation between God and his gathered people, and goes alternately 'up' and 'down' as each responds to the other's last item. For example we hear ↓ of God's holiness and respond by acknowledging ↑ our sinfulness; God then responds by declaring ↓ his forgiveness and we respond by giving ↑ him thanks.

This is the *natural* movement of worship. Just as conversation is a strain when the back-and-forth momentum is lost, so worship is a strain when its up-and-down ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ momentum is lost.

b) The 'horizontal' element of worship

Worship itself needs no 'horizontal' element, but a gathering of people always does. Christian worship, therefore, inevitably has to fit-in at some place in its up-and-down conversation between God and us some 'horizontal' communication **between ourselves**. You'll be familiar with the sort of things I mean:

We begin our service by singing hymn number 20.

Your prayers are asked for Mrs. Blenkinsop . . .

We welcome as our guest preacher this morning . . .

I publish the Banns of Marriage between . .

Our congratulations on their Silver Wedding to . . .

There'll be coffee and biscuits in the hall afterwards.

Such comments, instructions and information are 'horizontal' ←→.

- You will realise straightaway that since comments, instructions and information are 'horizontal' they should not appear in the prayers you lead addressed to God.
- You will also realise why notices/intimations feel like interruptions – they are!

One other apparently 'horizontal' element is the Giving and Receiving of the **Peace**. It is frequently misunderstood both by those who detest it and by those who do not mind. I have put my comment on this as an **Appendix** to this article.

c) The 'forward' element of worship

Worship deals with the past and prepares us for the future. Take 'confession' and 'commissioning' for instance, they would obviously come in that *same order* as confession deals with the past while commissioning is for the future. The first aim of worship is to meet God, the second is to be sent out by him in the power of his Spirit.

Bear this movement in mind. Note where your intercessions occur, and avoid moving the worship backwards or slowing-up this movement forward.

3. THE 'DIRECTION' OF INTERCESSION

a) Now we understand worship's up-and-down rhythm, it is obvious that INTERCESSION is

- AN 'UPWARD' USE OF WORDS, US TO GOD

Many neither know this, nor apply it. Grasp it, and it will help you greatly.

b) INTERCESSIONS ARE *N O T* MULTI-DIRECTIONAL

Were you ever reprimanded by: **Remember who you're talking to?** The advice applies here. The following is a parody of a prayer when the intercessor forgets who he/she is talking to, and

the 'direction' of intercession is forgotten. The words explode in all directions like an ignited box of fireworks!

(1) Heavenly Father	↑ Address to God
(2) We ought to support missionaries	↓ Teaching to Christians
(3) Please bless our Sales on Thursday	↑ Intercession to God
(4) at 2 o'clock, tickets from Mrs. Smith	←→ Notice to Christians
(5) through Jesus Christ our Lord	↑ Prayer to God.

Sections, (1), (3) and (5) are addressed to God; (2) and (4) to the congregation!
We'll see how it should be done later.

4. PUBLIC INTERCESSIONS DIFFER FROM PRIVATE

Public prayers are NOT private praying done in public. Public and private praying aloud are so different that the ability to do one well is no guarantee whatever of success with the other! At the end of this paragraph is a good private prayer. Its sentiments appear in the Psalms. [Compare e.g. Psalm 6. Note: nearly half of the Psalms are *laments*, 3,4,5,6,7,12,13,22,25, etc.] Apart from it being a **private** prayer, it has all the merits you would aim for in your public intercessions. The prayer below is –

- personal, relevant, authentic
- God-dependent
- full, but succinct
- naturally structured
- not geared to impress others
- free of cliché
- jargon free

Here it is:

Oh God! I'm absolutely fed-up! I can't go on. What shall I do?

It is a good and authentic personal prayer, but it would only begin to be an appropriate *corporate* prayer if the entire congregation felt that way! Public praying is **not** saying one's private prayers publicly.

5. THE ROLE OF SILENCE

You might instinctively want to use silence, or the thought of it might scare you. Either way you need to understand it a little.

In group worship the up-and-down dialogue is fitted into a pattern into which people enter because it is a corporate affair not a private one. That means that for perhaps an hour, worshippers are expected to go with the ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ flow.

A congregation is a gathering of individuals, and their needs vary. One may need to spend time listening to God, another pouring their heart out to him; one may need healing, another may need to be convicted of sin; and so on. The enormous advantage of silence is that it allows **freedom both of direction and content.**

While some may think that in silence everything 'stops', in fact a corporate Christian silence should be overflowing with God's activity. (This may come as a surprise to those who have attended prayer-meetings where the expectancy is such that any drying-up of verbal input is regarded as failure!)

Silence coming in corporate worship, as distinct from experienced on a hilltop, comes in a setting that acts as a considerable safeguard against misleading religious impressions.

PART II – The Structure, Style and Language of Public Intercession

6. WHAT TO AVOID!

Here is an example of what to avoid. It shows that good public praying does not come automatically to the sincere.

"And we do just pray on this lovely morning, dear Father, that you would vouchsafe particularly to bless our Ash Wednesday, no, umm, Maundy Thursday service this coming Thursday evening at, - umm – seven-thirty when John Smith the vicar, no, Rector, of St. Mary's just up the road is going to preach for us here in the evening. Vouchsafe, particularly, we beseech you to bless him as he prepares to bless us, particularly as his wife told me last week when I met her in Sainsbury's that he had a heavy cold, and during the next few days when I know he is so busy and won't have much time to spare and he's got three funerals, poor man. And we pray, dear Father, that you'd particularly bless any newcomers we get at that service on Thursday evening, we'd like lots of them. May they come to know you, well, I mean Jesus, well both of course and the Spirit too."

It is a prayer of great love and caring concern, a personal prayer of deep sincerity, but it is not in its style the best sort of prayer for public intercessions. It shows why I wrote this article, and why I want to turn in this part to the Structure, Style, Language and Length of public intercessions

7. The STRUCTURE of PUBLIC INTERCESSIONS

“!D'recbntaaifruortdueofs” – or to put the same thing in another way -

“Don't be afraid of *structure!*”

a) Having structure in public intercessions –

- ensures the onward flow of worship
- safeguards against individuals taking-over
- prevents digressions and 'red herrings'
- ensures time is not wasted
- helps keep prayers clear and to the point
- enables worshippers more readily to trust what is going on, and thereby
- frees worshippers to focus on God.

Structure is not contrary to the working of the Holy Spirit, but enables the flow of the Spirit, just as water flows better through a carefully dug channel than through a rough ditch.

b) The Lord's Prayer, for example, is brief but very carefully and deliberately structured:

- it begins with God,
- it moves to the coming of his Kingdom on earth,
- it then deals finally with our needs,
- and returns in thought to God again.

As intercessions are almost always preceded by items that focus on God, the following is a natural and logical outline:

1. Church
2. World
3. Us

It has something of a ‘boomerang’ movement.

1. We lead God’s Family at prayer, so –
2. We think of his Family locally and world-wide
3. We then pray in love for God’s world (which the Church exists to redeem and serve)
4. We conclude by sharing with God our own needs

You can fit all your intercession topics into just one ‘boomerang’ trip. Once the boomerang has returned 'home', avoid sending it off again to pray for summits in Strasbourg, lepers in Lesotho, hurricanes in Honolulu, or bombs in Belfast!

c) Avoid moving in two directions at once.

Leave such tricks to stunt pilots and politicians!

Suppose there's been a rail crash just before the service. Many will not have heard about it, but need to know, so there is an 'horizontal' communication to be fitted in. Some would speak to the congregation in the middle of addressing God, thus:

(To God) *We ask your blessing, Father, on the train crash casualties*

(To worshippers) *which took place a short while ago at Waterloo, killing three people.*

(To God) *Be with those who mourn, those who suffer and those who help*

A better solution is for you, or someone else, to address the congregation first -

When in our prayers we refer to a train crash, one occurred just an hour ago at Waterloo killing three people.

And then pray to God thus:

We pray for those at Waterloo, for those who suffer, etc. . . .

As the leading intercessor it is your responsibility to be as up-to-date as possible. It is a horrible experience to pray for a sick member and to be told after the service 'Oh I thought you'd have known, he died in the night!' Members of congregations assume everyone in any leadership role has miraculous powers of foreknowledge!

Use your friends, radio, T.V. to keep you in touch until you leave home, and ask some of your fellow worshippers always to alert you before the service to anything you might have missed.

8. THE STYLE OF INTERCESSIONS

Your beliefs and aims will dictate your style.

If you believe you are speaking on behalf of local Christians to your loving heavenly Father, then you will naturally address yourself to God with a style that is clear, straightforward, trusting, relaxed and confident.

Were you to believe, however, that your task is to address and impress the congregation – then your style would be attention-getting, impressive and assertive; ideal for a successful audition but totally wrong for successful worship.

Get your **aim** right, and your style is likely to be appropriate; misunderstand your task and your style will be wrong.

Because those who stand up and speak during worship are usually teaching us, it is easy to assume that it must also be one aspect of leading intercessions. No! A congregation might indeed learn a lot about God from good praying, but the ministry of intercessors is *not* to teach. (Nor, I might add, is it to amuse or entertain. Amusement, entertainment and teaching may all have a right place in worship, but they are 'downward' addressing people, not 'upward' addressing God.)

By the way, don't be impressed by the "sincerity" that oozes from politicians on TV prior to an election! Christian sincerity is simply trust in God, it has nothing at all to do with sugar-coating your voice, tone, speech and choice of words. Such "sincerity" is false, self-centred and off-putting. Forget completely about "sounding sincere" - just do it!

9. THE LANGUAGE OF INTERCESSIONS

If your belief and aims are right, your style will be right (see section 8). If your style is straightforward, trusting, relaxed and confident, then your language should be – but it is worth checking!

We may feel shy, insecure, or scared stiff when we do things in public. We might find ourselves becoming pompous and overblown in our language and style as an unconscious way of covering-up our unease.

I shall deal with whether to pray off-the-cuff (extempore), with notes, or with a script, in section 13. Whichever you opt for, here are some guidelines.

Avoid religious jargon, terms that visitors would not understand, or which are known only to the 'in-group'. Don't expect phrases whose meanings are familiar to you to be familiar to all your listeners. Some will think that the *Bride of Christ* is the Virgin Mary, the *Prince of this World* is Prince Charles, and the *Apocalypse* is a film about Vietnam!

Avoid being false, pompous or unreal. God does not want his children to be strained and stilted but relaxed and real. You wouldn't say to a friend: *Mary, I do just ask that you would vouchsafe to lend me a quid.*

It does not glorify God, edify worshippers or attract visitors if normal language is avoided when addressing God. ***The Word became flesh.*** False language undermines the message of God's incarnation in Christ by making God appear even more distant, and it suggests that religion is removed from reality. *Eschew out-of-date language I beseech you brethren (!)*

- Avoid using long and complex words when short ones will do. *Our neighbourhood endeavours and initiatives in ecumenical evangelization* probably means: '*The ways we local Christians tell others about Jesus*'. If it does mean that, just say so! Jesus spoke simply – don't be afraid to follow his example. (Over 70% of our Lord's Prayer consists of one-syllable words.)
- Phrases and words with unfortunate double-meanings should be avoided. A term like '*lay-training*' might well produce a giggle, and therefore distract from what is being said. The Bishop who, to impress troops, boasted to them how he got up early, said his prayers, had a cold shower and then '*felt rosy all over*', deserved to be interrupted by the question -'*What's she think about that then?*'
- Avoid the use of initial letters apart from universally-known ones like R.A.F. To use them in any company when they are unknown to some creates division between those in-the-know and the ignorant. To create such unnecessary division in worship of all places, is

thoughtless, arrogant, impolite and insensitive. If the items signified are important enough to pray for, give them, if possible, the respect of a full title.

- Churches, like companies, introduce new initials every month! I've been an 'N.S.M.' If a visitor comes to my church and the NSM's are prayed for, if they do not know what it means, we add to their unease. [It isn't as if churches ever provide any means to help folk find out!] As time passes, the 'ignorant' become more and more embarrassed at not knowing what our hieroglyphics mean, and become increasingly afraid to ask. Such totally unnecessary strains which we impose on folk can contribute to their giving up worship altogether.

10. THE LENGTH OF PUBLIC INTERCESSIONS

The full version of the Lord's Prayer lasts no longer than half a minute.

You are diligent to be reading this. Don't let your obvious thoroughness lead you to think that biggest is best. You don't have to make a big show!

A great deal will be happening between the congregation and God both before and after your praying. The whole encounter does not depend on you. All you have to do is to make your particular contribution appropriate.

Forget Hollywood's courtroom dramas! As a Christian intercessor you will *not* be trying to win a case by clever arguments or passionate appeals to an unreasonable judge regarding people he dislikes! Your task is publicly to express the main children's longing to their loving Father, who *knows what you need before you ask him*. [See Matthew 6:8 where it comes immediately before the Lord's Prayer partly, I feel, to explain its unexpected brevity] You cannot, need not and should not cover *everything*! Do not be so thorough that you turn something that should be a relief and a refreshment into something discouraging and tiring. Some churches restrict their public intercessor to just two sentences per topic followed by half-a-minute's silence. If you feel this is skimpy, look again at the Lord's Prayer!

I shall consider intercession lists in section 12, but I will say meanwhile that the aim of intercessions is not endlessly to list names you cannot pronounce, of people you do not know, doing jobs you can only guess at, in places of which you are totally ignorant!

11. THE CONTEXT OF YOUR INTERCESSIONS

To be **appropriate** should be your overriding aim. It is necessary to state it because of the tendency to be inappropriate, whether by wrong language, speaking in the wrong direction, or by insensitivity to the situation. Your public intercessions are made on behalf of those present. They may be rich or poor, white or coloured, well or sick, persecuted or free, a handful or a stadium-full. Such factors must influence the language, content and style of your prayers. Being appropriate requires sensitivity and flexibility, especially if situations change. If, for example, there's been a national or local tragedy, or the visiting preacher ignores his advertised topic.

As worship is an on-going dialogue, it is absolutely essential that you take note of the 'conversation' that your praying will follow.

- Take steps to be familiar with the preceding **Scripture** readings, and obtain, if possible, an outline or text of any preceding teaching or **sermon**.

- Have a notebook and pencil handy during the 'Ministry of the Word' so that you can easily incorporate any phrase or theme that the Holy Spirit seems to be pin-pointing. Worship can have a real thrill and power to it when its individual items really 'come together', but this requires sensitivity, hard work and flexibility on the part of a whole team of people – musicians, readers, leaders, preachers, and intercessors.

PART III – Some Practical Points

In this part I shall deal with the use of lists; the use of a script, or notes; where to be, and the mechanics of speaking well.

12. THE USE OF INTERCESSION LISTS

a) General Lists can be useful. Cycles of prayer ensure that we keep aware of aspects of the Christian family and the world that we might otherwise ignore. It helps keep our own lives in perspective. A too-rigid addiction, however, can be inappropriate. If you are scheduled to pray for inner-city work in Birmingham but have a speaker from the Missions to Seamen, pray appropriately on the themes that have naturally arisen, and let the prayer for Birmingham on that day be carried by other Christians. They are guidelines, not tramlines. Use detailed information *selectively*. God is capable of answering our prayers about a church without reminding him of the names and ranks of all twenty of its staff!

b) Sick lists. Prayer for the sick is a topic in itself [see the article on this website **HEALING PRAYERS BASED ON SCRIPTURE**]. Make sure the 'sick list' is up to date! People do recover and also people die. Arrive early enough to find out who has walked off with the list!

1. There are two categories of folk who can get overlooked: the **housebound and those with long-term illness**.

How should we pray for them? Always? This might mean that they are named at every service for twenty years! This naturally blunts the importance of their needs in the minds of the congregation. They become like verbal wallpaper, always there, but never noticed. Never to pray for the housebound or those with long-term illnesses is also inappropriate. Their crisis is never over, and its unending nature may require even more spiritual resources than those whose crises pass. It strikes worshippers as odd if the disabled worshippers they see around them are never publicly prayed for. Those of us with long-term illnesses do not want to be a burden and impose unnecessarily on the prayers of the Christian family, but neither do we want to be left-out altogether.

I would suggest that if numbers are small, then at certain times, (festivals? fifth Sundays? monthly?) some of the long-term ill are prayed for by name. If the numbers are high then one long-term sufferer might be prayed-for each Sunday.

2. What about the use of **names**?

- Some are touchy – often for wrong reasons - about having their names mentioned. Since neither the nature of their ailment nor its cause need be mentioned, and praying for people is a helpful act of love, there is usually no good reason why folk should not be mentioned (but see below).
- If they are known to object then a pastoral visit should help them. Do they think that mention heralds death? Is their suffering really guilt in need of forgiveness rather than sickness in need of healing? Do they demand practical support but reject the spiritual? Be sensitive to them but do not be dictated to by them. The Church's job is care and prayer. Get on and do it!

However, the suffering of some closely involves *others* and must be kept private, e.g. beaten wives. It is quite possible to cover the needs of such people in general terms without being personal.

- My strong insistence on distinguishing the different directions in worship and keeping to them has to be relaxed when only short phrases or small topics are concerned.

My guidelines do not mean having to do this -

*'When we pray for Mrs. Smith, we shall be referring to the Vicar's mother-in-law'
'Let us pray for Mrs. Smith . . .'*

Her status is an important 'horizontal' bit of information, but very *brief*, so it can happily be contained within the prayer to God *Let us pray for Mrs. Smith (the Vicar's mother-in-law) . . .* Her detail does not have the importance of the train crash information (in section 7).

13. SCRIPT, NOTES or OFF-THE-CUFF?

a) Praying off-the-cuff ('extempore')

My parody of a prayer in section 6, showed what can happen when sincere prayer is made off-the-cuff (extempore). Had it been written it would have been much clearer, much less muddled, much less distracting and less than a quarter of the length.

...and we ask your special blessing on our Maundy evening service and particularly on Mr. Smith as he prepares to speak to us. Help us to welcome newcomers and may they truly encounter you, the Living God.

Muddled praying is most certainly good enough for God who delights when his children share verbally with him. But when we lead public intercessions while we are addressing God, we have to 'take with us' some 5, 25, 50, 200, or 1,000 other people. The style of our speaking needs to be one with which they will identify easily.

When we pray off-the-cuff (extempore) all our thinking has to be done *as we go along*, hence the usual er's and um's. A British Party-leader when asked what his main strength was gave his reply off-the-cuff: 'Well, er, um, I suppose it might be, er – decisiveness!'

Extempore praying suits the many less-formal Christian occasions, but there are not many who can lead public intercessions well without either notes or script.

b) Writing notes or script

When we write a prayer, however, our thinking can be done before others hear its results! Most of us cannot think clearly and quickly enough to produce straight out of our heads words of the order, precision and clarity that we would produce on paper.

- Whether you write in notes or in full, write on **alternate lines**. This will allow you room for last minute notes or changes.
- If your pages are separate, number them in case you drop them.
- Write clearly. It is very embarrassing in public suddenly to be faced with a word you cannot read, which you knew the previous evening, but which you have forgotten!
- Show your script to others. Families can be very helpful here, and younger people in particular, see things that may escape us.
- Take seriously the reactions of your critics and the points they raise. Don't be too proud to learn from them and modify what you say if you feel it right.

- Allow plenty of time to prepare. The BBC assumes one hour’s preparation for one minute’s spoken script. Just as you would not be expected to preach at short notice, so resist the assumption that the great ministry of public intercession can or should be done at a moment’s notice.
- Do not be daunted by the task, God’s grace will be enough if you do it acknowledging your dependence on him.

14. FROM WHERE?

If you pray in front of the congregation and facing them it feels to you and them as if you are talking **to them** not talking to God on their behalf.

Often the intercessor is placed in that position unthinkingly simply because there is a microphone handy! But, unlike the proverbial children, intercessors need to be heard, not seen.

There are few churches nowadays who would not have someone able to install a temporary microphone. (But see my comments about speaking in the next section 15).

Praying from such a wrong place imposes restraint on intercessors not to draw attention to themselves by unnecessary eye-contact, body-language or impressive appearance.

Facing the congregation is also the stance required by T.V. crews when they televise worship, and feel impelled to photograph the action by filling the screen with the intercessor's face.

Try and avoid this inappropriate position if possible. Opt for something that visually indicates what you are doing, by, for instance, standing or kneeling at the head of the congregation, or in the midst of it, and facing the same way as they are. (Unless the building has a seating-pattern of a circus rather than the usual bus-arrangement!)

15. SPEAKING WELL

This article would be incomplete were I not to mention something about speaking!

We can all talk well, but few can talk well in public without some guidance.

Note the following

- Nervousness makes us speak faster, and decreases our volume because our chests tighten and our breathing gets restricted.
- Do all you can to be well-prepared and relaxed.
- Don't rush to the place from which you are speaking.
- Remember notes, pencil (and the right pair of glasses).
- Write your script/notes clearly on numbered pages.
- Write/type your script with space between lines for notes made during the service.
- Produce your own volume (see below), don't rely on a microphone to do so. A 'mike' enhances your volume it does not create it.
- People and clothing absorb sound, so your voice when practised in an empty church will need to be louder with a congregation.
- Voices take time to travel, and the larger the building the slower you must be to prevent the sounds being jumbled.

Speaking

Much speaking in public does not necessarily mean that a person does it well - and there are British Royalty (no names!) to prove it! Being heard is all about breath and projecting the voice.

There is a guaranteed way to *reduce* breathing and voice-projection to their minimum.

You will have seen it often: hold your script tight to your waist, tuck your chin in and keep your head down. If, in addition, one is nervous, then there's a wonder that any voice can escape at all!

The answer is very simple.

1. **Look straight ahead.** This frees your chest to breath, unlocks your throat, and allows your voice (which is simply air plus noise) to escape as from a trumpet.
2. **Breathe.** This is recommended for living generally(!), and especially for speaking in public. Near-failure to do so (because of nerves) will deprive the voice of one of its ingredients, and will result in strangulated croaks! Nervousness reduces breath so reduces volume. A slow deep breath before each sentence is a good idea. It checks the tendency to rush, and provides air for the voice to use for the forthcoming sentence.
3. **Notes up.** Keeping your head up and facing forward, lower your eyes, so that you are *looking down your nose*. Now, bring your notes up so that you can read them, but not high enough for them to get in the way of your voice.
4. With your eyes looking down your nose you will be able to see if your chest is **breathing fully** at each new sentence, because it will expand. Don't start the next sentence until it has. (I used to stammer and it is still around. Fifty years' experience has taught me that such breathing is the main way to combat it, since it also relaxes the body and fights the terrible anxiety that every stammerer faces.)
5. **Keep Checking again and again** against the tendency for your head to lower, your chin to tuck-in, your breathing to decrease, your volume to diminish, and your script to sag lower and lower. This can result in the top of your head addressing the microphone!

PART IV – CONCLUSION and Appendix on 'The Peace'

16. PRAYER and PRAYER SUPPORT

If your prayers are to be appropriate a spiritual sensitivity is necessary. So arrange things, that you will not embark on this ministry flustered, angry or unprepared. It might do your leaders good if you protested – or even refused - whenever you are asked to do it at unreasonably short notice.

In the days preceding, pray for the service, its leadership and those attending. Pray that the Spirit of Jesus would go ahead of you to provide an atmosphere of prayer into which your ministry will flow.

Other members of your Church should be praying for you and your ministry of intercession. Public intercessors in particular ought to find it easy and natural to pray for others who share their ministry – as they know its effort and cost!

17. SUMMARY

There's more to Leading Public Intercessions than meets the eye!

Those who are chosen to do it have an important ministry both to God and the worshippers. While we would not expect someone to preach well at very short notice, leading intercessions (like reading and preaching) requires preparation to do really well.

I have tried in this article to provide a thorough grasp of the subject, its aim, and the factors that influence it. I believe that a good understanding of it provides a firm foundation for those who want to do it well or to teach others about this grossly underrated but very important ministry.

18. Appendix: The PEACE

The Giving of the Peace is not always a peaceful subject! Understanding its 'direction' can be very helpful; in fact it has more than one, and this is where the problems lie!

On the surface the Giving of the Peace seems obviously horizontal ←→. This is why, like the notices, it is felt by some to be an intrusion into worship, as we '*greet one another*'.

I feel that the real 'direction' of the Peace given and received is not 'horizontal', but in fact, **downward**. We give *God's* Peace, not ours. It is a 'downward' act by word, touch and manner. It is not really a 'horizontal' imparting of our own peace or our own affection – we may ourselves have both or neither.

An example of the way the Peace is a spiritual affirmation rather than merely a social encounter was the occasion when an overweight person lacking all self-esteem experienced in the 'Peace' God's acceptance, and found instant healing.

Knowing the main 'downward' directions of the Peace should help those who find it difficult

- to receive the loving affirmation as from God himself.
- to give it to another on the basis, not of their own emotions, but of their belief in God.

Knowing the 'downward' direction of the Peace should help those who enjoy it as a social break to –

- have a greater sensitivity to its spiritual and healing content and their role in using it sacramentally, i.e. as an outward sign of God's affirmation of the other.
- a better awareness that the Church is still the Church when its members leave worship and that its important social bonding has many of its most suitable expressions outside worship.