

About COMMON WORSHIP: DAILY PRAYER

Structured or fixed-hour daily prayer has been a part of Christian spiritual practice since the beginning. Jesus prayed regularly, and the apostles went up to the temple at various “hours” of the day to offer prayer (see Acts 3:1). Throughout Christian history, the daily round of fixed-hour prayer coupled with the gathering of believers on Sunday, the day of the Lord, to celebrate eucharistia, “thanksgiving,” formed the bedrock of all Christian spirituality. Over the centuries the shape of these hours of prayer developed, underwent embellishment, and became quite stylized. With the advent of the printing press, portions of these “hours” (by now quite elaborate and time-consuming) were compiled into breviaries—abridgements of the Daily Office for personal use.

The last breviaries of the Church of England were printed in the 1540s and were editions of the famous Sarum Breviary. The Sarum Breviary developed from the 11th century to the 16th as the definitive Anglican book of the Divine Office. It is similar in many ways to contemporary Roman breviaries, though with a number of small but significant differences that set it apart as the English Use.

In 1549 Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury under Henry VIII and Edward VI, published the first Book of Common Prayer and the old order was swept away. Gone were the seasonal variations, common offices of the saints, antiphons to psalms, and canticles to aid prayerful use of the psalter. In its place were two services of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, stripped to the bone and bereft of most of the beauty of the old breviaries. Sadly, even our own 1979 Book of Common Prayer reflects this austerity.

For the next 500 years, that was it. Down the intervening years many people had reconstructed parts of the old breviaries for personal and even church use, but none of these were authorized services of the Church of England. That authorization was important. Section B of the Canon Law of the Church of England permits only the use of authorized services. The canon was widely disregarded as the forms of service in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, the only authorized service book for more than 400 years, increasingly failed to meet the needs of a very diverse population.

*In 2005, after three years of study and feedback from a preliminary edition, the Liturgical Commission of the Church of England and Church House Publishing produced the definitive edition of *Common Worship: Daily Prayer* to the delight of many who rued the rigors of Cranmer’s beautiful but austere prose. They are to be congratulated for the outstanding work done in producing this little volume. This revision of the Church’s daily round of prayer should set the standard for other revisions throughout the Anglican Communion. Particularly noteworthy is the overall structure of these offices, their flexibility, and the tone and mood set with each seasonal variation.*

Common Worship: Daily Prayer is a great achievement: it makes available to the ordained and non-ordained alike a round of daily prayer that is simple enough to be used widely, flexible enough to allow for local adaptation, and of ample inspiration and appeal as to invite use in daily prayer.

COMMON WORSHIP: DAILY PRAYER

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KNOWING WHICH PSALMS & READINGS TO USE *The psalms and readings assigned for any day of the year can be found in The 1979 Book of Common Prayer, pages 936-1001, arranged in a two-year cycle. This year (2007) we are in Year One; next year we will be in Year Two, etc. To begin, consult a liturgical calendar to determine the day in the Liturgical Year (e.g., Wednesday of the Sixth Week of Easter) and proceed from there. As you will note from the General Introduction (page x), in England Common Worship: Daily Prayer is intended for use with the*

Common Worship Lectionary which provides the assigned Bible readings and psalms for Sundays, principal festivals, and weekdays.