

May 2019.      **Re: Public Prayer**

Dear Prayer Leaders,

Thank you for leading prayers in our Sunday Services.

Some of us have been leading prayers for many years and others are newer to the task. Whichever category we are in, I hope that you can find the following a helpful reminder. Leading the congregation in prayer is a vital ministry. We are not praying *for* them or praying *instead* of them. We are leading them. That is why it is a mighty task, because it is putting into words what is on the hearts of the people of God, as Jesus leads our prayers into the throne room of the Father.

If you have been asked to lead prayers, you have an important task amongst us.

Paul said to Timothy to 'fan into the flame' (2 Tim 1:6) the gift that was within him. And I think the same can be said about all the gifts that God gives us; particularly one as essential as speaking to the Living God.

Please cultivate a **daily prayer life**, during which you also study God's Word. I would recommend making notes of things that speak to you about Jesus and the gospel, so that you can draw on your relationship with Jesus in public prayer. For example, just yesterday, I noticed that in Psalm 147:18 and Psalm 148:8 that God speaks of the powerful creation as a proof of the power of his Word. The Scripture is something we will often want to refer to in public prayer, and it will help set our agenda as we think about various concerns. The Word tells us what to pray for different people, and you may want to make a note of it as you read.

Ask the Lord what you should **focus** on. And pray for those things yourself, before you put pen to paper. Don't feel you have to cover everything in your prayers. For example, we have opportunity as a church to praise God in prayer and confess sins at other points in the service and we do not necessarily want to duplicate what has gone before.

Congregations find it helpful when the prayers **link with the sermon**, so why not leave a little gap to insert a line or two from the sermon. You might like to refer to a point the preacher made, or an application. If you find the thought of this intimidating, why not email the preacher and ask him what his main point is? Marian could direct you towards who is preaching. If the sermon is not yet written, we will have to ask for *your* forgiveness!!

**Pray for our local church.** It is good to pray for something coming up that week that is special, or perhaps a regular ministry of St John's. Don't feel you have to cover everything. Just one or two!

It is good to pray for *spiritual priorities*. Philippians 1:1-26 is a master class from the Apostle Paul on how to pray for a local church. He prays for them to persevere, grow in godliness, bear fruit, glorify God.... See what you can spot! Fergus and I are grateful for prayer as leaders of the church and indeed depend on them! It would be good to keep referring to the measurable aims of St John's in the Vision Document: 'Our Gospel DNA'. You will find these summarised as '2 for 22', '3 for 23' and '5 for 25'.

**Keep the timing right.** Sometimes prayers can be too long. But I sense that we are more inclined to be too short sometimes. We can only underline how important prayer is, if we give ourselves to it.

Please join preachers around the world, by **avoiding hobby horses!** As Richard Bewes writes in a chapter on 'Leading In Public Prayers': 'these are not opportunities to issue sidelong rebukes, preach mini-sermons or make political points...'.

**Pray for our community.** You might like to be specific, referring to the links we have with our community e.g. taking school assemblies, services in care homes. Congregations have missionaries in all the workplaces we represent. So we could touch on some of those places in creative ways!

**Pray for the world.** Try to avoid statements that are too general, like: 'we pray for all poor people in India.' If we are praying for them, what are we asking God to do? Are we asking God to alleviate the needs of a certain kind? Or to use a particular organisation, or the Christians living there? Remember that while physical needs matter to God, the Scripture calls us to be gospel centred in our concern for people to know Christ in the face of difficulty and for suffering Christians.

1 Timothy 2:2 says that petitions, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for all people, 'for kings and all those in authority, that we may lead peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.' While we do not want to trot out that line every time we pray, it is good to do what it says!

**Pray for our partners.** Please cycle through our mission partners and partner churches. We think it would be helpful to follow the weekly plan below. To keep up the spirit of prayer, it is good to be aware of current needs by checking prayer letters. Avoid jargon and make sure that people know who you are talking about. For example, 'our mission partners in Argentina, Andrew and Bethany Walker.'

First Sunday: The Walkers in Argentina [www.crosslinks.org/people-and-places/americas/andrew-and-bethanie-walker/](http://www.crosslinks.org/people-and-places/americas/andrew-and-bethanie-walker/) OR

Albanian Evangelical Mission. <https://aemission.org/> Prayer letter in church.

Second Sunday: Lamb Project and Hospital [www.lamproject.org](http://www.lamproject.org) OR

The Leprosy Mission [www.leprosymission.org.uk](http://www.leprosymission.org.uk)

Third Sunday: Ann Christian working with SIM to facilitate workers taking the gospel into Asia. (The work is highly sensitive and so we have little information we can publicise, but visit [www.sim.co.uk](http://www.sim.co.uk))

Fourth Sunday: The churches of our Mission Community (St Andrew's, Mirehouse and St Bridget's, Moresby) and other gospel churches in our region. It would be good to pray sometimes for the group from St John's exploring church planting in Cleator Moor, led by Joe Pearson.

Fifth Sunday: Carlisle Diocese, the North West Partnership, ReNew or GAFCON. See 'How do we relate to the Church of England?' in the FAQ section of *Our Gospel DNA* if you want to pray in an informed way at [www.stjohnshensingham.org.uk](http://www.stjohnshensingham.org.uk)

**For those in need.** Marian will provide a list of the sick and bereaved. Please note that the Anglican church is clear that while we give thanks for their life, we do not pray for those who have died to rest in peace because 'the sentence of God is now unchangeable' (*Homily on Prayer*). Instead, on a Sunday it is better to pray for those who are grieving their loss if they are not known to us.

Give us an idea that you are closing the section, or the whole time of intercession, by giving us a clear '**In Jesus name.**' It is through Jesus that we confidently offer our prayers as God's children and only through him are they heard.

If you would like any more guidance, do speak to Si or Fergus as they would love to help.

Thank you once again for sharing in this precious ministry. Let's grow in it together!

Si and Fergus, Vicars.