



“Here Other Intercessions May Be Offered”: Crafting the Weekly Intercessions

When we gather for worship, we pray. We pray aloud and we pray silently. We pray as we gather and as we are sent. We pray for one another. We pray for ourselves.

One form of prayer central to Lutheran worship is intercessory prayer. By definition, intercessions are prayers on behalf of others. While these prayers attend to the needs of the gathered assembly, they are more outward than inward facing; we are to pray for the needs of the whole world.

The intercessions follow the reading of scripture, preaching, and the hymn of the day. As noted in *The Sunday Assembly*, “If the readings followed by the preaching are together meant to bring us again to trust in God, to bring us again to faith, then one of the first ways we are invited to exercise that faith is by praying for the needs of the world” (Augsburg Fortress, 2008, p. 167).

Evangelical Lutheran Worship offers an outline for these prayers (pp. 105–106):

Prayers reflect the wideness of God’s mercy for the whole world—

- for the church universal, its ministry, and the mission of the gospel;
- for the well-being of creation;
- for peace and justice in the world, the nations and those in authority, the community;
- for the poor, oppressed, sick, bereaved, lonely;
- for all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit;
- for the congregation, and for special concerns.

Additional prayers may come from the assembly.

Prayers of thanksgiving for the faithful departed may include those who recently have died and those commemorated on the church’s calendar.

The intercessions offered in *Sundays and Seasons* follow this template. Contributors from around the church craft the weekly intercessions, interpreted in light of the liturgical season, the readings appointed for the day, and the secular calendar. Editors and reviewers examine these prayers for the whole year, paying particular attention to the depth and breadth of the church’s prayer. These crafted intercessions serve as

a helpful template, but assemblies wisely heed the rubric in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*:

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion, using the following pattern or similar appropriate form.

If your worshiping assembly does not currently craft intercessions locally or adapt those presented in this volume, how might you do so?

Why prepared locally?

The intercessions presented in *Sundays and Seasons* are written more than a year in advance due to publishing schedules. While this advance preparation ensures these intercessions are carefully written, edited, and reviewed, they will need adapting for your context. These intercessions are provided for thousands of congregations in diverse settings, which requires a more general approach. It is up to local congregations to make the general more concrete. Like the food we eat, attending to what is sourced locally benefits the local community.

Adapting to a place

How might the intercessions better reflect your local worshiping community? Many assemblies have regularly added names of those who are ill or hospitalized. Others remember those who have died and those who grieve their loss. Yet there are still more ways to contextualize these prayers.

Consider the petition that prays for the earth and all of God’s creation. If the prayers reference bodies of water, what are the water-related needs for your place? What streams, rivers, and lakes might be named? What about prayers for those who work at water filtration plants? Is there a local need for access to safe drinking water? Can you pray for local farms and farmers affected by drought or flooding?

Or consider prayers for those who are hungry. While we pray for the needs of all who hunger throughout the world, how might you pray for local food banks, for those who work or volunteer there, and for people who depend on them? What about those who organize and tend community gardens? Do you pray for school nutrition programs?

Lutherans affirm that all vocations are holy in God’s sight. Over the course of the year, we intercede for physicians and

nurses, for teachers and church leaders, for politicians and judges. What other vocations could be named that are specific to your congregation? How can the diverse ministries that belong to all the baptized be affirmed and celebrated?

Note the word *especially* used throughout the intercessions in this volume. While this suggests how local names or situations may be added, know that such “especially” are not limited to petitions where it is explicitly mentioned.

Adapting for the time

Adaptations of the intercessions attend to the local needs of place, but this intersects with time. Changes and additions need to be made based on local and world events. A national or international event may be prayed for around the world but still might be contextualized locally.

As this is written in the fall of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic rages on. Prayers abound for medical workers, for those who are sick, for the development of a vaccine. This is a timely concern. Yet as schools began distance or hybrid learning at the start of the school year, we prayed for children, teachers, and school administrators. As the connections between racism and the effects of this pandemic became more clear, prayers rightly reflected this. As nursing home workers and residents were especially vulnerable, this shaped our prayers. In this way a recent event that concerns people around the globe is contextualized according to its local impact.

The need for prayers to be timely will mean that even prayers written on Thursday might need to be updated by Sunday. Whether a new petition is offered or a current petition is adapted, flexibility remains key.

Crafting and leading the intercessions

Who writes or adapts the weekly intercessions in your community? *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* suggests that these prayers be led by an assisting minister, but there is freedom and flexibility within this model. Perhaps a person in your worshiping community enjoys and is skilled at writing but prefers not to be “up front” in worship. Consider having this person prepare the prayers while the assisting minister prays them aloud in worship. Perhaps your church has a prayer team that writes the prayers together and one member of the team prays them. How could young people and elders alike be a part of the process? In other communities, the same person crafts and leads the prayers. Such flexibility allows a variety of gifts to be nurtured, all under the same spirit of caring for the church’s prayer.

When it comes to the task of writing the prayers, the *Sundays and Seasons* intercessions model a few key characteristics.

- These prayers ask God to act. While God’s Spirit is at work in and through us, prayers that only use language such as “help us do such and such” suggest that we don’t trust the unexpected ways God’s will, not ours, is done.
- The prayers are not sermons or announcements. We need both in our worship, but the prayers genuinely need to be prayers.
- The language of the prayers needs to be understood when heard aloud for the first time. Very long phrases or extremely complicated language can be inaccessible. In addition, those who are writing need to consider the person speaking. Do the words flow clearly? Does language need to be adapted based on who will be reading them aloud?
- The prayers use “we” rather than “I” language. These prayers are spoken by one on behalf of many.

Adapting the prayers based on recent events will be something that an assisting minister or prayer leader will need to consider when leading the prayers. Some assemblies have a book in a common area where worshipers are encouraged to write names and concerns. The person responsible for the prayers would then add those to the spoken prayers. Others invite generous silence for the assembly to add prayers during the intercessions. Some communities embrace saying names or concerns aloud; others add their concerns in silence. In some assemblies, music surrounds the prayers in various ways. Whatever the local practice, the person leading the prayers will want to be well prepared so they can lead with confidence.

For further study

As you continue to hone the intercessions in your assembly, the following resources offer more extensive guidance than what is possible to share in this brief essay.

- *In Praying for the Whole World: A Handbook for Intercessors* (Augsburg Fortress, 2016), Gail Ramshaw proposes a weekly model for crafting the intercessions. Anyone responsible for preparing the intercessions—veteran or new to this role—would be greatly helped by this volume.
- *Using Evangelical Lutheran Worship: The Sunday Assembly* addresses the intercessions and their role in the larger pattern of worship (Lorraine Brugh and Gordon Lathrop, Augsburg Fortress, 2008).
- *Serving the Assembly’s Worship: A Handbook for Assisting Ministers* (Augsburg Fortress, 2013) considers the intercessions as one of the roles of an assisting minister. Attention is given to preparation as well as leadership.

Blessings as you prepare, craft, and lead intercessions that attend to the needs of the whole creation and your corner of it.