

# Ordered Liberty in Worship

Guidelines for the leadership of worship for those ordained or commissioned to such a role in the Uniting Church in Australia.

Paper No.4

**'I was glad when they said to me,  
"Let us go to the house of the Lord!"'**

All of us can hope that as we prepare to lead worship we can echo these opening lines of Psalm 122, with their air of joyful anticipation.

We are likely to be glad when we and those we lead experience worship in its fullness. This is a fullness which makes us all aware, over and over again, of the creating and redeeming love of God - as, e.g. do the varied great prayers of thanksgiving *Uniting in Worship's* service for the Lord's Supper (see pp 93-125). Few of us are attracted by elaborate rituals, but too many of us are all too readily satisfied with a minimal diet of worship, a diet which may lead to spiritual malnutrition. Then we deny ourselves a true sense of being involved meaningfully in the fullness of the good news for all in Jesus Christ.

So what follows has very much in mind what contributes to fullness in worship, in that the essential elements in orders of service are listed to enable us to taste worship in that life giving abundance promised by Jesus in John 10:10.

Along with this goal there is recognition that across all denominations today there is widespread interest in sensitive and relevant worship. A necessary part of informed involvement in such endeavours is awareness of our heritage from the Reformation and the Evangelical Revival, traditions which have done so much to shape us as we are.\*

One of the highly significant aspects of these traditions was their reassertion of that liberty to which we are all heirs through Jesus Christ (see, e.g. Gal.3:1 and 2 Cor.3:17.) Such liberty was and is valued, not only in belief and practice, but also in forms of worship so that dulling uniformity and 'vain repetitions' (Matt.6:7 KJ V ) are avoided.

At the same time as it is the Holy Spirit's role to be 'the Lord and giver of life' we can be sure that the Spirit will enliven set orders and written prayers, including the words of the Lord's Prayer and of Scripture, and, just as readily, will inspire extempore forms.

\*See the Appendix for more information on these traditions and their relevance and importance for us. Whatever may be claimed by those opposed to all set forms, the truth remains that almost all follow an order of service with which they are at ease and accustomed. Even in extempore prayer, treasured rightly as it is in our tradition, phrases used Sunday by Sunday sometimes merely echo or repeat those used on previous occasions.

We have much invested in freedom of worship. As the preface to those volumes of resources we know as *Uniting in Worship* puts it, it is **not** the case

that the services in *Uniting in Worship* are intended to be used rigidly and without imagination ... All the resources...are therefore designed to be used in a flexible way ... But flexibility is more than choosing between printed options, or composing prayers of intercession, or other prayers for local use....This flexibility must be accompanied by responsibility, so that the congregation may be protected from worship which is idiosyncratic or

insensitive (pp. 8 & 9).

Very few leaders of worship have recourse only to what is available in the two volumes of *Uniting in Worship*. They make careful use also of services and prayers from elsewhere which seem to speak directly and relevantly to situations to which they minister. We must feel free to explore and use selectively the treasures of other denominations (see appended select list of resources). Throughout, if we are not to become overly self-focussed we have also to learn from the worship of a church undivided between East and West, let alone between Catholics and Protestants. That does not mean that we become e.g. imitation Anglicans or Catholics, Lutherans or Orthodox.

But it does mean that we need to be both open and discriminating in our use of such resources. In this connection the observations about worship made years ago by Lesslie Newbigin in his *A South Indian Diary* retain their cogency.

it is one of the tragedies.. that the churches which have given their ministers the maximum amount of liberty of liturgical improvisation are those which have given them the minimum training in liturgical principles.

At the same time challenges come to us from the society in which we live: For example our church faced legal demands to define the essential elements in the service for marriage. So these were specified at the 1997 Assembly (Min 97.17.04). In addition, theological and liturgical requirements demand certain fulfilling essentials in this and other services now accepted as the official services of our church ( 1997 Assembly Min 97.17.02) To discover these fulfilling essentials for yourself, in **every** case do not neglect to read and be guided by the notes which precede the wording of each service in *Uniting in Worship*, and the services of ordination, induction and commissioning issued since 1988. There you will find much to aid leaders of worship, and also much to dispel the false notion that the resources published are the only ones allowable.

For further explanation and assistance use Robert Gribben's *A Guide to Uniting in Worship* (UC Press, 1990). In his Preface he refers to *Christian Worship in Transition*, by the American Methodist scholar, James White. In particular Robert Gribben points to White's emphasis on both the essentials and the freedom of worship when he cites a chapter entitled:

"You are free - if", in which he summarised the basic structure and purpose of the major services and sacraments of the church. When you have the fundamentals clear, he said, you may "do" worship any way you wish (p. 9).

Later Gribben writes that

*Uniting in Worship* will guide you through what is essential, and what elaborates the theme, partly through the careful wording of rubrics in the use of "may" or "shall". "Shall" indicates something whose omission would distort what we are doing or saying in this service, and most of these are obvious (p. 14).

And

*Uniting in Worship* is closer to a Directory than a book of common prayer. In the general services, not a word is imposed on ministers or congregations.... The book is chiefly a framework, with prayers which are interchangeable, and with a vast resource of further material for worship from our own historical traditions, and from others, both ancient and modern. (p. 16)

As we turn to the services themselves let us keep two maxims to the fore at all times.

1. Read carefully **all** the notes which precede each order of service.

Those notes of particular significance will be specified as each service is taken up below.

2. Pay close attention to the directions (rubrics) within each order of service.

Recall what Robert Gribben has said about the use of "may" and "shall" in such rubrics.

So, committed to 'ordered liberty', as the United Church of Canada calls it, and in worship to doing 'everything decently and in order' (1 Cor.14:26 and 40), let us look at the major services of worship with an eye to discerning and including always the fulfilling essentials. In every case, the essentials listed are those which enable all to share in the fullness of worship. They are not listed to inhibit our freedom of worship, but to enhance it.

## **THE MARRIAGE SERVICE**

*Read with particular care notes (v), (vi) & (ix) and refer to A Guide to Uniting in Worship, pp. 91-99.*

The 1997 Assembly (Minute 97.17.04) has ruled already on what is essential in this service if a marriage celebrant indicates that the rites used in the ceremony were those of the Uniting Church in Australia. It was recognised that the Marriage Service is a service of worship, with scripture readings, proclamation of the Word, prayer and the marriage rite. Acknowledging that there are given 'freedoms' for the responsible use of alternative wording with the same meaning and intention, the Assembly listed as the essentials of the service:

4 Declaration of Purpose

8 Declaration of Intent

11 The Vows (one of the four forms in *Uniting in Worship* or words consistent with these forms)

13 Proclamation of the Marriage

15 The Blessing

## **BAPTISM and the REAFFIRMATION OF BAPTISM CALLED CONFIRMATION**

*Read with particular care notes (i) - (v), (viii), (ix), (xi) and (xv) and refer to A Guide to Uniting in Worship pp.19-35*

Approving a statement "A Common Understanding of Baptism" the 1979 Assembly resolved that particular elements should find their place in a service of Baptism. (The numbers in parentheses refer to those sections numbered differently in the *Baptism of a Child* service)

3 Scripture (related to baptism)

4 The Meaning of Baptism and Confirmation ( including a spelling out of the significance of the sacrament and of the dependence of all on the initiating grace of God.)

5 Renunciation and Affirmation

6 Prayer of Thanksgiving

7 The Baptism (by the pouring of water and without variation or exception the precise use of the formula):

NN (Christian names), I baptise you

in the name of the Father,

and of the Son,

and of the Holy Spirit. (1988 Assembly Min. 24.3.)

and the declaration to the gathered congregation that the baptised is now received into the holy catholic church and incorporated into the Body of Christ.

9 Laying on of Hands (in the Confirmation or Re-affirmation of Baptism Service)

10 (8) Responses (promises by parents or newly confirmed, and acknowledgment by the whole congregation of the significance of the baptism of each one present in terms of faith and obedience nurtured in worship and growth.)

14 (9) Prayer of the People ( not least for those baptised or confirmed)

## A CONGREGATIONAL REAFFIRMATION OF BAPTISM

*Read with particular care notes (ii) and (iii) and refer to A Guide to Uniting in Worship pp 36-39.*

The essential elements of this service are:

2 Reaffirmation

3 Recollection of Baptism

7 Prayers of the People

### **THE SERVICE OF THE LORD'S DAY and**

### **THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER**

*Read with particular care notes (i) – (vi) and refer to A guide to Uniting in worship pp. 43-75.*

Lay Presiders at the Lord's Supper should consult "Lay Presidency at the Sacraments" – Assembly Standing Committee September 1995

Including the prescriptions of Appendix 1 to the *Basis of Union* the following fulfilling elements are to find their place in the celebration of Holy Communion within the framework of the Service of the Lord's Day.

1 .... Call to Worship

4 -- Prayers of Adoration and Confession and Declaration of Forgiveness

6-9 and 11 Readings from scripture and at least a meditation thereon.

15 .... Prayers of the People

18 .... Setting of the table with bread and wine.

19 .... Great Prayer of Thanksgiving,

either preceded by or including a narrative of the institution of the sacrament, and

including also:

- thanksgiving to God for the marvels of creation, redemption and sanctification
- a memorial (anamnesis) of the great acts of redemption, passion, death, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost, which brought the church into being
- the invocation of the Holy Spirit (epiklesis) on the community and the bread and wine
- consecration of the faithful to God

20 -- The breaking of the bread

22 -- Communion in both bread and wine by minister and people.

26 & 27 Dismissal and Blessing.

## **COMMUNION BEYOND THE GATHERED CONGREGATION**

*Read with particular care all notes on p. 134 and refer to A Guide to Uniting in Worship pp. 76-77;*

It is necessary to include a prayer like that in the lower half of p. 137 of the Leader's Book (and p.76 of the People's Book).

In every case there is to be an invocation (epiklesis) like that in the last four lines of the prayer on p.137 (or p.76).

## **THE FUNERAL SERVICE**

*Read with particular care notes (i), (ii), (vii), (viii) and (xi) and refer to A Guide to Uniting in Worship pp. 115-121.*

Noting especially the content and impact of notes (i) and (ii), it is recognised that the funeral service is a witness to the resurrection of Christ which there are scripture readings, proclamation of the Word, prayer and a committal rite.

7 - Commendation

10 .... Prayer and Blessing

*and at the cemetery or crematorium chapel.*

11 - Scripture Sentences

12 - Committal and Burial

14 - Prayers of supplication or intercession

15 - Blessing

The Funeral Service may conclude with the burial of the deceased. It does not conclude where a cremation occurs until arrangements are complete for the burial or scattering of the ashes. Such arrangements need to be made by the minister and the family or friends of the deceased. See the prayers on pp. 492-3 of *Uniting in Worship Leader's Book* and pp. 50-51 of *Funeral* (1990).

## ORDINATIONS OF DEACONS AND MINISTERS OF THE WORD

*Read with particular care notes 5 -12 in Services of Ordination, Induction and Commissioning JBCE, 1995, remembering that the framework of the service is that of the Service of the Lord's Day, and refer to A Guide to Uniting in Worship pp.123-129. (It must be noted that this Guide refers to the former services in Uniting in Worship, not the more recent Services of Ordination, Induction and Commissioning.)*

These services are services of the presbytery (Regulation 2.3 .1 (c)). Note 12 reads,

*'The presbytery appoints those of its members who are to take part in the laying on of hands. There shall be at least two ordained ministers and two lay persons. (Regulation 2. 3.4). In special circumstances, members of other presbyteries may also be invited to participate in this act.'*

The essential elements on these occasions are:

- 12 - Presentation of the Ordinand
- 13 .... (or later) The Charge
- 14 - Vows as prescribed by the Assembly
- 15 - Ordination - including always prayer and the laying on of hands
- 16 - Declaration of Ordination
- 17 - Presentation of the Bible (and stole or scarf)
- 19 - Prayers of the People

## INDUCTION OF DEACONS AND MINISTERS OF THE WORD

*Read with particular care note 1 in Services of Ordination, Induction and Commissioning which describes the service as an act of the presbytery and notes 3 & 5, remembering that the framework of the service is that of the Service of the Lord's Day, and refer to A Guide to Uniting in Worship pp. 129-132. (It must be noted that this Guide refers to the former services in Uniting in Worship, not the more recent Services of Ordination, Induction and Commissioning.)*

The essential elements on these occasions are:

- 13 - Questions - as prescribed by the Assembly
- 15 - Induction Prayer
- 16 - Declaration of Induction

17 -19 Responses by the Presbytery, People and other church representatives.

## **COMMENCEMENT and COMMISSIONING of a COMMUNITY MINISTER**

Read with particular care notes 3, which describes the role of the presbytery, and 4-6, remembering that the framework of the service is that of the Service of the Lord's Day.

In the commencement Service the essential elements are:

- 2 Questions – as prescribed by the Assembly
- 3 Prayer

In the Commissioning Service the essential elements are:

- 2 Presentation
- 3 vows – as prescribed by the Assembly
- 4 Act of Commissioning – including always prayer and the laying on of hands
- 5 Declaration

## **SERVICE TO WELCOME A YOUTH WORKER**

*Read with particular care notes 2, which describes the role of the presbytery, and 3 - 7 remembering that the framework of the service is that of the Service of the Lord's Day.*

The essential elements of this service are:

- 2 - Questions to the Youth Worker - as prescribed by the Assembly
- 3 - Prayer
- 4 - The Welcome

## **COMMISSIONING OF A LAY PASTOR**

*Read with particular care notes 2, which describes the role of the presbytery, and 3-6, remembering that the framework of the service is that of the Service of the Lord's Day.*

The essential elements in this service are:

- 2 - Presentation
- 3 -- Vows - as prescribed by the Assembly
- 4 - Act of Commissioning - including always prayer and the laying on of hands.
- 5 - Declaration

## **COMMISSIONING OF A LAY PREACHER AND ELDERS**

*Read with particular care notes (i) & (ii), remembering that the framework of the service is that of the Service or*

*the Lord's Day.*

The essential elements of this service are:

- 2 - Presentation
- 3 - The Vows - as prescribed by the Assembly
- 4 - Act of Commissioning - including always prayer and the laying on of hands
- 5 - Declaration

A Final Reminder...

Almost all of what has been presented here concerns words - and they are a necessary ingredient, never to be discounted in importance for they are the major means we have for communication.

But they are not the only means. Music, silence, gestures and movement, church architecture and furnishings, works of art, colour, flowers, aromas, the approach of the leader(s), the overall ambience (atmosphere in the congregation); in baptism water seen and heard, at the Lord's Supper bread and wine clearly visible when broken and poured etc - all these contribute significantly to communication and to the fullness of worship.

So, while the lists of essential elements aim at enhancing such fullness of worship, if we neglect the other contributing factors we are impoverished, no matter how precise our words.

The last word may well be a prayer directed to 'Those who write prayers':

Almighty God: you have no patience with solemn assemblies, or heaped-up prayers for all to hear. Forgive those who have written prayers for congregations. Remind them that their foolish words will pass away, but that your word will last and be fulfilled, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (adapted from a prayer in *The Worshipbook* (1970))

## APPENDIX

Some Guidelines from our Past (Heb 12:1 and 2)

Our Reformation and Evangelical Revival forebears left us a godly heritage in precept and example. Presbyterians and Congregationalists in England and Scotland were guided at first in their worship by the *Geneva Forme of Prayers* which can be traced back to John Calvin (d 1564). The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in the year of Calvin's death, resolved that

"every minister, scholar, and reader shall have one of the psalm books lately printed in Edinburgh and use the orders therein contained in prayer, marriage and ministration of the sacraments"

(G. W. Sprott (ed) *The Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland* Wm Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh, 1901.p. xv)

'This book, sometimes called 'Knox's Liturgy', held sway in Scotland for some 80 years. Then at the Westminster Assembly their representatives in 1644 agreed to a *Directory of Public Worship*, which indicated what was seen as essential in the conduct of worship, the celebration of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the solemnisation of marriage, the burial of the dead, the visitation of the sick, and the singing of psalms.

In the face of the Restoration of Charles II as king, the Savoy Conference met in 1661. There, two proposals were made to produce a service book more acceptable to those opposed to conformity to the worship style of the episcopal Church of England. One proposal sought detailed revisions to the 1604 Book of Common Prayer. The other, prepared by the highly regarded Richard Baxter (d.1691), was for a completely recast service book. These two proposals respectively were rejected and ignored by the bishops. High Church elements in the Church of England frustrated another attempt in 1689 for a revision of the prayer book which aimed at

uniting Anglicans and the more moderate non-conformists in a single non-Roman church. (R.J. Beckwith *in The Study of Liturgy*, rev. ed. London, 1992. p 107)

In the next century, in order to guide his preachers and ministers in the conduct of worship, John Wesley (d. 1794) issued in 1784 a manual called *The Sunday Service of the Methodists*. This was Wesley's abridgement of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* and it imparted an Anglican flavour to Wesleyan Methodist worship when it went its own way from Anglicanism in 1795. To this manual must be added the *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists* ( 1780), largely the work of Charles Wesley (d.1788). Along with the psalms, promoted by the Westminster Assembly, and the virtual paraphrases of Isaac Watts (d.1748), hymns became for the free churches.

that the liturgy is for the Anglican. They are the framework, the setting, the conventional, the traditional part of divine service as we use it. (B.L.Mann cited by A.Dunstan in *The Study of Liturgy* (1992) p.514)

Even those opposed to set orders of service have no problem with set words of hymns or songs, be they in books, on sheets or on overhead transparency screens.

So we have the two strands – 'liberty' of worship, and the underlining of what are seen to be the 'essentials' of Christian worship.

#### **They died – but are speaking still! (cf. Hebs 11:4)**

The 1644 *Directory of Public Worship* has some reflections in its Preface of a continuing and startling relevance for us today. The authors, 350 years ago, opposed imposed uniformity of worship by Prelates (Anglican Bishops) and, with it, the Prelates' conviction that there were no other worship, or way of worship of God, amongst us, but only the Service-book.

They were also aware that the

Papists boasted that the book (Book of Common Prayer) was a compliance with them in a great part of their service.

There was concern

that the liturgy hath been a great means, as on the one hand to make and increase an idle and unedifying ministry which contented itself with set forms made to their hands by others, without putting forth themselves to exercise the gift of prayer.

So they

resolved to lay aside the former Liturgy, with the many rites and ceremonies set in the worship of God; and have

agreed upon this following Directory for all the parts of public worship, at ordinary and extraordinary times.

They were clear that the aim of the Directory was that

ministers may be hereby directed, in their administrations, to keep like soundness in doctrine and prayer, and may, if need be, have some help and furniture, and yet so as they become not hereby slothful and negligent in stirring up the gifts of Christ in them (pp.136-137 of the 1957 edition by William Blackwood & Sons. Ltd.)

The Uniting Church in Australia shares such common concerns that liberty in worship should not become licence, any more than that all the suggested wording in those services approved by the Assembly should be repeated slavishly and without discrimination by leaders of worship