

Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi[®] – Our Worship Forms Us
some thoughts on our recent liturgical changes
by The Very Rev'd Chad Vaughn

We have embraced a pattern of seasonal liturgical changes at St. Bede's for a while now. We use the changes of the Church seasons to embrace different Eucharistic Prayers, new settings for service music, different forms of confession, and even the way we greet each other liturgically at the beginning of our worship. We make those changes as the seasons of the Church year change – with one addition, and that being that we split up the long season after Pentecost and make some changes at Rally Day each year for the second half of that long season.

This season we are welcoming back the language of *Enriching Our Worship* – the authorized supplemental liturgical materials for the Episcopal Church that were approved for use in 2000. This has been our pattern for the past few years in the second half of the Season after Pentecost.

Principles Informing Liturgical Change

In addition to those regular seasonal changes, we have also made a few changes that may become more normative for us going forward. These changes are based on two principles. The first of these principles is the desire for an even greater use of inclusive and expansive language in our worship. Inclusive language means language that is more inclusive of the entirety of humanity. Thus collective terms such as “God and man” would become “God and humanity” and “mankind” becomes “humankind”. Historical masculine collective terms will not go away entirely (our hymnody is replete with them). We hope, however, to find in our scripture and prayer life together that we can embrace and foster a greater sense of God's inclusive love and grace for all people.

Expansive language concerns the way we talk about God and the Divine. God is masculine and feminine – the Bible tells us this right in the second chapter of Genesis. God is also beyond gender. There are many names for God and ways to refer to God – Father, Mother, Holy One, Creator, I AM, Jehovah, El, Yahweh, etc. And while the term “Father” is a very important attribute of God and important to our understanding of the nature and relationship of the Trinity, “Father” is not the only or even necessarily the privileged name of God. And so we will continue to speak of “God” as a “Father,” *and* (as has been our pattern for some years now) we will also embrace prayers that expand our notion of God's identity – or, if you will, God's *Godness*.

The second principle informing liturgical change involves time. Your clergy hear feedback that worship sometimes seems too L O N G– and sometimes it very well may be. But instead of addressing that concern with only a stopwatch, it would be better to consider how our worship can be more cohesive, comprehensible, inspiring, and empowering. Two Greek terms concerning time are often used in liturgical circles – *kairos* and *chronos*. *Chronos* is human time. It is counted in minutes, hours, and days and measured with clocks and calendars. *Kairos* is God's time. And while it is not measured with instruments of human making, there are no doubt times in your life when you may have felt that you were living in accelerated *kairos* and then there may have been times when you have felt like *kairos* has ground to a halt. God's time

is the time that we all hope to fully inhabit in *the fullness of time*, but on this side of life eternal we experience the reality that all of those glimpses of *kairos* must occur within the reality of *chronos*. And so with all of that said, the efforts your clergy are making in considering certain liturgical changes are not so much informed by a desire to make our worship of God “shorter,” but, rather, to make it more focused, comprehensible, and relevant to living the Gospel in our own lives.

What are the Changes?

Collects

The first change sequentially you may notice in worship is the use of some new collects (the prayers we use to open our worship together, which are “proper” or unique to each Sunday or special celebration). The collects we are embracing come from a variety of sources but have been curated and edited for trial use by the Liturgical Commission of the Anglican Church of Canada. We will use these collects along with some old favorites from the *Book of Common Prayer* as well. Many of the sources of these new collects embrace the principle of inclusive/expansive language. This work of curating a new series of collects is also important because as we switched to the Revised Common Lectionary a decade ago, some of the scriptural themes for certain Sundays changed in a way that no longer resonated with the collects associated with the same Sundays.

The Lessons

While we will continue to use the Revised Common Lectionary as is authorized for the Episcopal Church, we have begun reading only one lesson (from either the Old or New Testament, as selected by the preacher) along with the Gospel appointed for the day. This option is imagined and allowed for in the rubrics (or guidelines) of the *Book of Common Prayer* and is actually a regular pattern in earlier forms of worship in the Episcopal Church. This change is not intended to discourage the reading of scripture, but rather to further focus the assembly’s engagement in particular texts for any one Sunday Gathering. Upon reflection, we realized that on many Sundays, anywhere from 800-1200 words of scripture were being read without being further engaged or explored by the preacher or congregation. That’s a lot of words! But they are not lost and if you would like to continue to engage those lessons that we don’t read (along with other optional texts appointed as possibilities for any given Sunday) you can by visiting the Lectionary Page on the internet: <http://www.lectionarypage.net>

As to the Psalms, they are not going away either. While there will be no regular place for a recitation of Psalms between a first and second lesson, we will visit the Psalms through hymn paraphrases and choir anthems (did you notice that the choir anthem for last Sunday, September 11 was a Psalm?). John Whitt and I are also discussing how the Psalms may be woven in during other times as well. And the preacher also always has the choice of selecting the appointed Psalm(s) for use as the lesson to be read. So fear not.

The Creed

Beginning in the mid-1980’s, The Episcopal Church began a movement back toward the original text of the Nicene Creed as was adopted at the fourth-century Ecumenical Council of Constantinople. The version that we have been using in the Western Church was a version that was altered in the sixth-century at a regional synod in Toledo, Spain to address the pervasiveness

of a heresy concerning Christ's divinity (the Arian heresy). As this version became more widely accepted in the Western Church it led to divisions with the Eastern Church. The Episcopal Church's decision to embrace the original text of the Creed (in translation, of course) is an ecumenical effort to further reconcile the Church – East and West. Please do not worry or be anxious if we fumble or stumble for a while with the subtle changes in the language of the Creed.

Movement of the Announcements

The announcement period in our common worship has become too long and intrusive. I profess my guilt in indulging in over annotating announcements that might otherwise be brief. I am proud of all of the ministries and offerings we have at St. Bede's and in the Diocese of Atlanta and I like to be cheerleader-in-chief sometimes. Mea culpa. Your clergy have mutually agreed that we will begin to focus on just a very few announcements that are of concern to the whole community. We will also welcome anyone who (briefly) wants to give a plug for an immediately upcoming opportunity (not every week for six months in advance). We are going to then trust that most folks can read the rest the printed announcements on their own.

By moving the announcements to near the end, we are hoping to better connect the idea of the Dismissal to that of "engagement" verses that of "recess." The Dismissal is not when our engagement with God ends – it is where it truly begins – where our faith meets the pavement. By moving the announcements here we are hoping that folks can better remember opportunities that await them outside the church doors and feel filled-up with worship and empowered to engage them. This may be one of the most awkward feeling changes at first, but we'll give it a try for a while and see how it goes.

Dismissing from the Chancel

We have begun the practice of dismissing from the Chancel before the processional hymn. This means that you are dismissed to go as soon as the hymn ends – although you may wish to remain in place and pray or listen to the beautiful offerings of John's organ voluntaries. Ceremonial church processions have always been intended to be just that – ceremonial. The real procession occurs when the whole Body of Christ moves out into the world to share God's reconciling love and grace. So when we pass by in procession, please consider that just the beginning of a much grander procession that will lead each and everyone gathered out into the ministry that awaits us in the world.

Final Thoughts

So WOW, that's a lot. I hope this helps begin to make some sense of the tweaks and changes that have occurred. Please know that these are not capricious, unadvised, or even out-of-line with the tradition of the Church. Great thought and discernment have gone into these considerations along with and in response to considerable feedback from many in the parish. Please know that any of your clergy are available to discuss or explore further these changes or any of the ways in with our patterns of worship form (or are intended to form) us.

Pax vobiscum,
Chad+

* "Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi" is Latin for "the way of prayer is the way of belief" or "praying shapes believing". It is the term used in liturgical traditions to define the significance of worship for forming us to live the Gospel in the world.