

The General Intercessions
Guidelines for the Archdiocese of Hobart
*Enlightened by God's Word, the people exercising their priestly function,
intercede for all humanity. GIRM 45, LMI 30*

The prayer of the interceding Church

Seated at the right hand of the Father, Jesus is the most powerful intercessor for believers in all the struggles of daily life. The Church, the Body of Christ, makes its prayer in and through Christ who is the head. We join our prayers with Christ who brings salvation through his life, death, resurrection and coming again. The prayer is the fruit of the workings of God in the hearts of the faithful.

The General Intercessions is the prayer of faithful believers who have confidence in God's mercy and goodness. Prayer can also change our own attitudes so that there is more room in our hearts for those in need. God wants us to ask for our needs; in and through our prayer, we are reminded that God, alone, provides for us.

History

In the time of the early Church, Christians were urged to pray for one another and for all people. Timothy urges that people in every place should pray, lifting up hands without resentment or argument (see 1 Tim 2:1-8) and intercessory prayer is featured in the early writings of Justin Martyr. In both the East and West, a prayer in common was offered for all after the homily. Over the centuries the intercessions have varied; the Good Friday prayers preserve the Ancient Roman form.

The Second Vatican Council restored the General Intercessions as the universal prayer: 'Intercession shall be made for holy Church, for the civil authorities, for those oppressed by various needs, for all people and for the salvation of the entire world.' (SC 53). The prayers take the form of a litany.

Liturgical prayer

The Church dares to raise its voice in prayer because it knows itself, through baptism, to be a 'chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation' (1 Pet 2:9). Like our sharing in the Eucharist after the great prayer of thanksgiving, the Eucharistic Prayer, the General Intercessions are the conclusion to the Liturgy of the Word. They link the liturgy to our daily lives and call us to action. The Intercessions, therefore, are an integral part of every Mass celebrated with an assembly (see GIRM 45). Commercially prepared intercessions are not alive to current needs and may diminish the prayer of God's priestly people.

The Universal Prayer is seamless and has frequent pauses to enable the assembly to hear, internalise and pray for each intention. It is of note that the assembly's response expresses the prayer, not the reading of the petitions. A single reader is always to be preferred. The text requires worthy folders for ministers.

Music can enhance the prayer of the assembly, particularly the assembly's response. The invitation to respond may change from week to week. For special occasions and ritual Masses there may be more intentions included for the local community.

Structure of the General Intercessions

Invitation to Pray		(Presiding Minister)
Silence		
Intentions	Intention	(Reader)
	Silence	
	Invitation to respond	
	Response	(Assembly)
Concluding Prayer		(Presiding Minister)
Assent		(Assembly)

Writing intercessions

It is helpful to read and reflect on the scripture readings assigned to the liturgy and allow one or two key phrases, strong verbs or images to colour the prayer. The psalms can be particularly helpful. The

Intercessions, however, are not a personal response to the readings or the homily but more about the concerns of the faith community. Current events in the Church, in the wider world, nation, local area and parish should be reviewed in the writing process. The General Instructions indicates four categories of intentions to be included and suggests that the order moves from the general to the particular (GIRM 46).

The 4 categories of intention:

1. The Church.
2. Public authorities and the salvation of the world.
3. The suffering.
4. The local community.

Intentions should be specific, rather than abstract, and avoid offering partisan views or solutions to political issues or be didactic. Courage is also needed to pray about some real and controversial issues. Inter-cessions are included for the sick and the dead, especially on Sundays.

A single pattern or style is devised before writing the intentions. A pause is included for each intention and a consistent phrase calls the assembly to prayer. About 5-7 intentions are included. In keeping with the Roman tradition, the length of each should be shorter rather than longer.

Beginning the prayer

The brief invitation to the people by the presiding minister is addressed to the assembly, not God. It is a simple invitation to pray.

Intentions

Employing a single pattern or style, the intentions should be simple and brief :

That the sick, especially N.... , will be comforted by Christ, the Good Shepherd.

Prayers of thanksgiving i.e. 'We thank you Lord...' are not intercessory in character and belong to other ritual prayer forms.

SOME SAMPLE PATTERNS:

- For *someone*, (pause) that they will *something*.
- That *someone* will know the Lord's *something* in *something*. (pause)
- For *someone*. (pause)
- That the *something* of the Lord will do *something* for (or in) *someone*. (pause)

SOME READERS' INVITATIONS:

- We pray to the Lord.
- In your mercy.
- To God we pray.
- In your goodness.
- For this we pray.

Concluding Prayer

Loosely based on the structure of an opening prayer, the concluding prayer is addressed to God. It asks God to hear the petitions and neither repeats or adds new intentions. It concludes with a formula such as 'through Christ our Lord'— a reminder that we do not pray on our own but with and through Christ, our most powerful intercessor.

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General Instruction of the Roman Missal

Lectionary for Mass: Introduction

Robert Cabie· The Church at Prayer: The Eucharist, ed. A. Martimort et al (trans. M. O'Donnell), The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1986

Walter Huffman The Prayer of the Faithful: Understanding and Creatively Leading Corporate Intercessory Prayer, revised edition, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, 1992

Ralph Keifer To Hear and Proclaim: Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass, The Pastoral Press, Washington DC, 1993

Michael Kwatera Preparing the Intercessions, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1996