is to be offered. Then let the Spirit of God give you the poise and fullness of voice to speak forth the congregation’s praise of God.

A Pattern for Prayers

A simply pattern for prayers can be used by all who pray at Christ’s table. Because the pattern is compact and focused, it encourages the development of prayers that are a good length for use in the communion service. Using this pattern also helps to keep the focus sharp and well directed.

Call God by name: Prayers in public worship can be thought of as open letters, or perhaps open post cards, to God. They are sent to God but in a way that encourages the congregation to read and affirm the text. Prayers therefore begin by speaking to God by name: Dear God… Eternal God… God of love… Holy One…

Honor God by stating one of God’s characteristics or actions: This part of the prayer bases everything in God and is the foundation for the rest of what we say and do at the table: You have given us life and promise to support us as long as we live… you have given us this beautiful world as our home and entrusted us with its care… in Jesus Christ you came to live among us and reconcile us to yourself…

Speak the main point of the prayer which is to remember Jesus Christ: Thank you for the new life you give us through Jesus Christ who meets us at this table… With this loaf and cup we remember our Savior Jesus Christ… We praise you for bringing us into a new community of love through Jesus Christ who asks that we remember him with the loaf and cup…

State the result that is hoped for: This part of the prayer may include a phrase like this: By your Word and Holy Spirit bless these elements and congregation that we may receive Christ’s own life given for us. Then follows the result: Forgive us and strengthen us… Help us be Christ’s body in the world…

Conclude in the name of Jesus: The classic form of Christian prayer begins by naming God and concludes “in the name of Jesus Christ.” The final word is “Amen.”

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Prayers at Christ’s Table

The Importance of the Communion Prayers

The Sunday celebration reaches its climax when we come together at Christ’s table. Here we are closer to God than at any other time in our worship. This simple action with loaf and cup connects us to Jesus’ death and resurrection long ago and gives us a preview of the life to come when we return to be with God. The communion service is primarily action:

- we set the table with our gifts;
- break the bread and hold the cup;
- eat and drink with one another and God.

The prayers that are offered at the table tie these actions together:

- they sum up the meaning of the actions at the table;
- offer these actions to God;
- and open the door for our personal communion with God.

Because these ideas are so close to the heart of why we worship God, these prayers are the most important words spoken in the service.

The Major Themes

Thankful Praise is the first theme. Everything we are and can ever hope to be comes from God who created the world and continues to create with every new moment of life. God loves the world, keeps it going, and renews it when everything seems to be running down. God inspires prophets and martyrs to witness to God and call humankind to a new life. A scriptural affirmation of this theme is in Colossians:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:16-17).

Remembering Jesus Christ is the second theme for prayers at the communion table. In Jesus the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Through his life, teachings, sacrificial death, and eternal life
with God, Jesus becomes the way by which God reconciles the world to God’s own self. This idea is expressed in a hymn that is preserved for us in Philippians. Paul encourages us to follow the example of Jesus Christ:

who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross (Phil. 1:21).

Often the remembrance includes a reference to the communion bread and fruit of the vine which are signs of all of the goodness that comes to us from God. At the same time, they represent Christ’s own life given for us. On the night of his betrayal, Jesus gave the loaf and cup new meanings:

My body given for you; My blood of the covenant poured out for you. Do this to remember me.

Calling on the Holy Spirit is the third theme of communion prayers. We ask God, through the Spirit to do all that God intends: unite us with Christ and one another; offer forgiveness and a new life of peace and joy; redeem the world and complete God’s intentions for creation. This theme is expressed in an eloquent passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians:

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance... so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:11a, 12-14).

This part of the prayer can vary widely in form and contents because the results of communion are so widespread.

In most churches around the world, these themes are combined into one prayer usually offered by a pastor of the church. The text is carefully prepared so that it includes the appropriate ideas, is worded in language suitable for public worship, and expresses the climax of worship. In congregations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) the custom has been to use two or three shorter prayers with these themes divided among them. Each congregation develops its own pattern, but the following are the most common:

1. offering prayer by pastor; prayer for bread by one elder and prayer for the cup by a second elder;
2. offering prayer by one elder and communion prayer by a second elder;
3. offering prayer by pastor or an elder and communion prayers by an elder and pastor.

How to Prepare

The communion prayers come at the high point of the celebration, and they sum up the primary reason for our coming together. Therefore, it is important that those who offer these prayers prepare themselves for the occasion. Most important is the personal preparation as we ask that God help us with our leadership. We can read again passages from the Bible that tell about the Lord’s supper and the new life that Jesus gives us. Among the Bible references are the following:

Matthew 26:26-29   Mark 14:22-25
1 Corinthians 10:16-17   1 Corinthians 11:17-34
2 Corinthians 5:16-21 Colossians 3:12-17

Then begin to prepare the words for the prayer. Some people think about the ideas that they want to include in the prayer but wait until they are at the table for the words to come spontaneously, perhaps letting the scripture readings and sermon help them with language. Others write out their prayer and memorize it before coming to worship. Still others take their written prayer to the table and read it when the time comes.

God’s Spirit works in each of these methods; and each one who prays must find a method of preparation that works. Come to the celebration in good time so that you are not hurried. Be sure that you know where you are to stand and when in the celebration the prayer