

Introduction

There are many occasions when clergy and readers are asked to provide one-off special services for local groups, whether uniformed organisations, local charities, hospices, commercial, educational, cultural or other associations. Then there are civic and legal services and military commemorations, etc; services for local or national celebration, thanksgiving and commitment; memorial services – commemorations for local or national disaster e.g. in wake of 9/11, the Potters Bar rail crash. Forms of liturgy already exist for Remembrance, carol and Christingle services, although much of what follows may still be applicable to these. Authorisation for special services falls under the provisions in Canon B5 (and also those for the Service of the Word under Canon B2).

Theological and Pastoral Context

In a post-modern society where people increasingly locate themselves in networks of human contacts and relationships rather than in geographical localities, we have a unique opportunity to reach the unchurched through special services – and to touch the minds and hearts of those who, otherwise, rarely attend church services. As in the Common Worship Pastoral Services, special services are moments of encounter along life's journey and opportunities for pastoral care and sensitive pre-evangelism and evangelism.

The task

The first context of all worship is vertical, i.e. a relationship of creature with our Creator - God himself, before whom we gather. So, part of the task is to enable this particular group of people to be transformed by their encounter with the living God. The second context is horizontal, i.e. our relationship with each other and the dynamic that derives from shared experience. So we need to ask:

- What is the pastoral context of this service? Is it local or national? Is there the need to be a part of a local or national event in some way (e.g. 9/11, 7/7 or the death of Diana, Princess of Wales)?
- What are the feelings and desires people will bring with them? Is it celebration or sober reflection? Is the prevailing mood one of thanksgiving/ grief/ confusion?
- How may we articulate the mood, feelings and beliefs of those present; afford them liturgical expression (be it a tightly or loosely structured form) before God; offer interpretation in the light of the Gospel and a way forward, perhaps even resolution, i.e. a moving on to a new place along the journey's path?
- The essential principle is appropriateness: which includes sensitivity to the pastoral situation, allowing the Gospel to speak to the context and also enable people to move on to the next stage.

Whilst the Common Worship Pastoral Services provide liturgical forms for the Occasional Offices, special services of this kind usually start with a blank piece of paper on which one will need to place some landmarks! Discussion with the organisers or representatives of the organisation or association is vital, from which an idea of shape will emerge – for further moulding! There will also be the need to reflect theologically before diving in. The following is a checklist of matters to consider, and whilst not exhaustive, is intended to provide some overall guidance.

Content – some basic questions

- Aims – what are we trying to do? Tease out from their ideas what it is that needs to be expressed.
- Who will be there? What are their ages/ gender/ situations eg: status, health or disability?
- How will people participate? The aim should be to create a dynamic rather than a static service. The standard hymn sandwich can be dull and is rarely, if ever satisfying. Active participation is generally preferable.
- What kind of service? Generally these services are non-Eucharistic (which is the kind of service envisaged here), but if Holy Communion is to be celebrated then authorised forms will largely determine the shape and content of the service.
- What will be the musical resources, if any?

Content - Shape and Direction

- How long should the service be? The maximum length for such a service is usually 1 hour and may well be shorter!
- The service itself is a journey for people on a journey. Therefore it should have a recognisable beginning, middle and end! It ought not to be a random sequence of items, a fact which is not always recognised by organisers unfamiliar with liturgy! Each part or component should have an identifiable function. Good questions to ask are, "Why are we doing this? What is its purpose and proper place?"
- What might/ does the Gospel have to say to this context/ group?
- What is the inner direction of the service? Is there a recognisable pivotal point? What change of mood or intention is desirable and at what stage(s) in the service?
- What will happen before the service? Will any music played/ sung set the mood appropriately?

- How will people assemble? Is there to be a procession, and what does this convey about what is happening? Are there local VIPs who need welcoming?
- The opening: What is the recognisable start of the service? Is it a hymn, processional or song? Processions are usually best effected under the cover of a hymn.
- The Gathering: collecting people together in unity of purpose may best be served by a formal welcome and introduction or bidding, briefly stating the purpose of the service.
- Who is to preside? Who else will have a major role? The latter should not obscure the presidency of the principal leader who has the main task of visibly holding the service together.
- Will there also be (for example):
 - Prayers of thanksgiving/confession; reading(s); an act of remembrance; choir or musical item(s) (live or recorded); dramatic or dance presentation; an address; procession/ movement; sending out?

Further matters to consider

- Language - will this be traditional or modern (and inclusive)?
- Silence is valuable in enabling reflection, but needs to be deliberately planned.
- Space and movement:
 - How will the available space be used? What clutter may need to be removed?
 - What consideration should be given to the building as 'sacred place' (as distinct from space)?
 - Movement – should have a purpose and meaning: processions may include people, symbols, emblems, etc
 - Will there be dance and/or drama?
 - Seating – of leaders of worship, main participants as well as congregation: this may be determined to some extent by the building; but can either help articulate or confuse what is being expressed.
 - Symbols – and their meaning eg, candles, smell, etc; resonate deep within our psyche, (e.g.: to the military mind, a regimental standard is focus of corporate memory, identity and belonging and therefore has an almost a sacramental significance.) It is important to ask, 'Why are we using a particular symbol?' Not just because it 'looks nice'! Symbols are tools in our post modern context.
- Hymns and songs need to be chosen with considerations of text and intelligibility. Tunes should be well known (this is especially important for the first hymn) and appropriate to the words. The mood, metre and key, and text need to be appropriate to the part of the service, eg: praise, contrition, commitment, etc.
- Music (choir and or instrumental) placed appropriately, may enhance the high points of the liturgy and is to be welcomed; but the danger of turning a service into a concert or entertainment needs to be recognised.
- Are the musical resources appropriate for the size and acoustic of the building and for the music itself?
- Readings - There should be at least one biblical reading. Consider carefully who should read and do it well.
- Address – should attempt to pick up the prevailing theme and mood, reflect upon it and interpret it in the light of the Gospel. What is the teaching point?
- Prayers – theme and content; who will write them and who will read them?
- Posture - is there sufficient change of posture for the congregation throughout? What does a posture say?
- Lighting can create or kill mood. If there is flexibility, then consider using it.
- Dismissal and subsequent movement, i.e. how are people to leave? What will this convey?
- Post service music; choice is important as it will enhance or kill the end of the service

Practicalities – organisation

- Aim for a seamless flow. Prepare well.
- Printed Order of Service - is one needed? In a formal service a full text may be preferable; informal services may require fewer details but should still be well prepared. The cardinal principles are clarity, consistency and ease of comprehension. Multiplicity of typefaces is best avoided. Rubrics should be just full enough to enable people to participate without copious oral instructions. They are better printed in *italics*. Congregational responses are best printed in **bold type** rather than in capitals. Proof reading by a third party is essential!

Putting it together

- Rehearsal is vital! Prevention is better than cure.
- Readers, musicians, actors, intercessors all need to be rehearsed, using the microphone if there is one and ensuring that the texts (e.g. readings) are both provided and large enough to read
- Stage directions (choreography!) for assistant ministers, stewards, vergers, helpers
- Protocol regarding the greeting of VIPs (if any are present) needs to be checked to avoid giving offence.
- Microphones - are there enough of them and are they working properly?!
- Disability - have arrangements been made for those with impaired sight/ hearing/ other disability?
- Health and safety issues – have these been considered, e.g.: especially in the use of candles?

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