

Anglican Diocese of San Joaquin

Lay Reader Study Guide

(Note: Lay Reader candidates are also responsible for the material contained in the LEM and PLEM training guides.)

Canonical/Historical Background

The office of Lay Reader is the first licensed lay ministry of the Anglican Church. It evolved in response to the desire of rural congregations to worship on Sunday even when the services of a priest were not available. Lay Readers were commissioned to officiate at non-sacramental rites—i.e. Morning and Evening Prayer. As congregations began to celebrate the Eucharist more frequently in the wake of the Catholic revival of Anglicanism in the nineteenth century, Lay Readers began to administer the chalice at Holy Communion. Consequently, Lay Readers will often function, when needed, as Eucharistic Ministers.

In an era of increasing clergy shortage, particularly in smaller communities, the original need that brought forth the Lay Reader's license still exists—that all the faithful be afforded the opportunity to duly observe the Lord's Day by participating in corporate worship of Almighty God. However, even in urban and larger congregations today with adequate clergy staffing, licensed Lay Readers can be of substantial assistance by being trained and available to preside at Morning and Evening Prayer on weekdays. These services constitute the daily prayer of the Church, and are an important element in the regular worship life of a healthy parish. While someone certainly does not require a license to read the daily office on one's own, or in an informal group setting, a Lay Reader's license authorizes an individual to officiate at these services when they are prayed publicly at previously announced times for the church.

The Daily Office—Background

The custom of daily prayer at set times is rooted securely in Judaism, and we see evidence of it in both the Old and New Testaments. Early Christianity adopted the practice, and distinctive liturgical forms evolved in the different regions of the Church. When the western monastic tradition went through its critically formative stage under the leadership of St Benedict in the sixth century, Benedict's rule called for communal prayer seven times a day. These services all consisted of some combination, in varying proportions, of chanted psalms, scripture readings, and prayers.

When Archbishop Thomas Cranmer undertook to simplify the liturgy for ordinary English laity in the sixteenth century, he merged the seven "canonical hours" into two: Morning Prayer (known as Matins when sung) and Evening Prayer (known as Evensong when sung). In recent decades, the pendulum has been swinging away from such "simplification" and back toward "enrichment."

The Daily Office--Structure

The Daily Office in the present Book of Common Prayer is four-fold: Morning Prayer, Midday Prayer, Evening Prayer (early evening), and Compline (late evening). There are three fundamental parts of each office: (1) psalms, (2) scripture, and (3) prayer. These elements may vary widely in length and in proportion to one another, but they constitute the core of the Daily Office. You should thoroughly acquaint yourself with these services in the Book of Common Prayer (p. 11-88.)

The smaller italicized sections of the Daily Office are the rubrics, mandatory instructions that must be followed. In addition to the rubrics there is an unofficial unwritten tradition with respect to the daily office. This study guide attempts to elucidate some aspects of that tradition, as well as offer comments on the texts and rubrics.

Opening Sentence (MP p. 11)

This is optional, and varies by season or occasion. In addition to the standard ones at the beginning of each office there are optional seasonal sentences following each office. Only one opening sentence should be used, if any. The sentences help to serve as a reminder of the liturgical season or occasion.

Confession of Sin (MP p. 11)

If, as a Lay Reader, you are officiating at a Morning or Evening Prayer service which functions as that community's only Sunday corporate worship (i.e. the Eucharist will not be celebrated), the Confession should be included. (It is appropriately omitted on Sundays "after Christmas" and "of Easter," as well as on the actual days of Epiphany (6 January) and All Saints (1 November). On other occasions after the confession remain kneeling and use the last form of absolution marked for a deacon or layperson.

The Invitatory (MP p. 13)

The main body of the Office begins with "O Lord, open our lips." At Morning Prayer, one of the seasonal antiphons may be used both before and after the invitatory canticle. The antiphon should be recited or sung by all in unison. As a concession to practicality, however, there is a custom that for the beginning antiphon the officiant says or sings the first part, and all give the common response which is in bold, "Come, let us adore him."

In the larger western tradition (with its roots in the Rule of St Benedict, dating back to the fifth century), the *Venite* has a certain pride of place as the morning invitatory canticle. Some scheme of alternating *Venite* and *Jubilate*, however, is not inappropriate.

The Pascha Nostrum is mandated for use as the invitatory during Easter Week (not to be confused, per the common mistake, with Holy Week), but it is customary to use it during the entirety of the Great Fifty Days.

In Anglican circles, *Venite* is pronounced to rhyme with “nighty” but many pronounce the last e like the ay in “bay.” *Jubilate* is pronounced with a hard “J” as in ju-bi-LAH-tay.

The evening invitatory is the canticle *Phos hilaron*—**O Gladsome Light**. This is an ancient Greek hymn that has appeared in Anglican hymnals for more than a century. Its use at this point in the liturgy is an innovation, albeit a welcome one. The rubric also permits “some other suitable hymn or Psalm” to be used in this spot. Alternatively, the whole canticle may be omitted, proceeding directly to the Psalter.

The Psalter (MP p. 16)

The Psalms are the heart of the Daily Office. In some monastic communities, all 150 Psalms are prayed every week. In the 17th century English community of Little Gidding, under Deacon Nicholas Ferrar, the entire Psalter was exhausted on a daily basis! The Prayer Book lectionary is more relaxed, taking one month to complete the circuit. (There is also an optional psalm lectionary that covers the Psalter in 60 days.)

The Psalter is, in essence, the Jewish hymnal. Psalms are intended to be sung; anything else is not the norm, but due to pastoral concerns its now more often the exception rather than the rule. As a Lay Reader, you will almost certainly say rather than sing the Psalms. The rubrics on p.734 list the most common methods of corporate recitation and the situations when they are most appropriate. In communities that pray the office together regularly, it is customary, following Benedictine practice, to observe a break at the asterisk in the middle of each verse. This should be at least a discernible pause, but three or four seconds is probably too long. A leisurely “one-one thousand” is a good benchmark. However, when the congregation consists mainly of those who do not ordinarily worship together, it is probably more trouble than it is worth to impose this custom, as it will take a while for many people to catch on.

There are a few different ways to pray the Psalms. Many churches pray the Psalms in unison, where everyone prays the same words at the same time. Some churches will pray the psalms “antiphonally,” which means with different groups praying different parts aloud. For example, “antiphonally by whole verse” generally means that the officiant will pray the first line aloud, the congregation will pray the second line aloud, and then it will alternate back and forth. Some congregations will pray the Psalms antiphonally, but with the different sides of the aisle alternating. Both praying the Psalms in unison and antiphonally have their benefits, but if the Psalms are prayed antiphonally it’s best to pray them by whole verse. Some churches will pray the Psalms

antiphonally by half verse, which has the unfortunate side effect of breaking up the flow and thought in single verses of the Psalm.

When the Psalms are chanted, the goal isn't to chant them loudly, but to chant them in unison and meditatively. This is a time to both pray through the Psalms as well as to contemplate them and their meaning in our lives.

At the Daily Office (as distinguished from the Psalm used in the Eucharist), the *Gloria Patri* should be used in connection with the Psalms. It is used at the conclusion of the Psalms appointed for that particular Office

Preferences vary as to congregational posture during the Psalms. In the classic Benedictine pattern, however, the community is seated.

The Lessons (MP p. 17)

The lectionary provides four lessons per day, two for each service — generally two from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament. After each of the readings, a canticle is sung or recited in unison. The Apostles' Creed follows the reading, but it may be omitted when the Eucharist is to be celebrated subsequently.

The Prayers (MP p. 21)

The Lord's Prayer may also be omitted when the Eucharist is to immediately follow. In some ways the Lord's Prayer forms the core of the prayer section of the Daily Office. In the Didache, a writing on Christian living and practice from the 2nd century, Christians are instructed to pray the Lord's Prayer three times a day, sort of an early form of the Daily Office. The Lord's Prayer is followed by the suffrages which should be prayed responsively.

The rubric then prescribes “one or more of the following Collects.” This offers a great deal of latitude, but, once again, the weight of tradition suggests three:

- **The Collect of the Day**—If it is a Principal Feast, Feast of Our Lord, or a Holy Day, the collect appointed for that occasion is used. In most other cases, the appropriate collect is that of the preceding Sunday. (The major exceptions to this rule would be when Christmas, Epiphany, or Ash Wednesday have occurred since Sunday—in which case the collect for those days is used—and the weekdays after the Day of Pentecost and Trinity Sunday, to which the “numbered propers” [see below under “Lectionary”] apply.)
- **A Day-of-the-Week Collect**—Collects for days of the week are listed after the Collect of the Day in the BCP.
- **A Prayer for Mission**—Three are provided. In the morning, the third one suggests itself especially for Wednesday and Friday, the traditional days for remembering the cross. For similar reasons, the second of the evening prayers for

mission may best be used on those days. The prayer for mission is to be omitted when Eucharist follows the office.

“Authorized intercessions and thanksgivings may follow.” Rely on instructions from your priest and/or your own pastoral discretion in how to handle this. Different communities have different needs and expectations. Some congregations will have set forms for these additional prayers.

The General Thanksgiving and the Prayer of St Chrysostom are both optional. When Morning Prayer is the principal service on Sunday, it is probably best, from a pastoral standpoint, to use both of these forms. During the week, particularly if the office is an everyday event, it will probably be best to omit them on most occasions. If Eucharist is to follow the Office then the General Thanksgiving shouldn't be used because the Eucharist itself is a prayer of thanksgiving.

Hymns

If you are presiding at Morning or Evening Prayer as a community's principal act of Sunday corporate worship, and there is a desire to include congregational singing, the one place in the office when a hymn is specifically sanctioned is after the third collect, and before any closing prayers. (If there is to be a homily, it is delivered after this hymn.) Technically, there is no provision for an opening or closing hymn, but if it is pastorally desirable to sing at these spots, one can easily decide that these moments are outside of “liturgical time,” so explicit rubrical permission is not required.

Lectionary & Calendar (p. 734)

The Daily Office lectionary is on a one year cycle that may be modified into a two year cycle. If adapted to two years, Year One begins on the First Sunday of Advent preceding odd-numbered years. If you are presiding at Sunday Morning or Evening Prayer in a community that does not have access to the Eucharist, it may be pastorally desirable to use the three-year Sunday lectionary instead. Doing so provides a valuable element of commonality with the wider church.

The long season “after Pentecost” can be confusing, calendar and lectionary-wise. It is not the season “of” Pentecost—Pentecost is merely the marker from which the following Sundays, between then and the arrival of the new church year in Advent, are numbered. But while the names of the Sundays are anchored to Pentecost, the appointed lessons and collects are anchored to fixed dates in relation to the beginning of the next Advent season—these are known as “Proper X”. So, while the second Sunday in June 2002 was the “Third Sunday after Pentecost”, in other years it might be the third or the fifth or some other “Sunday after Pentecost,” depending on the date of Easter. But it is nearly always going to be Proper 6, which is defined as the Sunday closest between June 12 and 18. The Sunday before Advent is always Proper 29, however many Sundays after Pentecost it is.

Practical Issues

Your supervising priest will deal with practical issues in detail. If what you read here conflicts with his instructions, follow his instructions! Nonetheless, we offer the following:

When you are officiating at services (or even just reading a lesson):

- Speak slowly and enunciate. This applies particularly to consonants. What sounds exaggerated and silly to you will just sound normal (and audible!) to people in the congregation.
- Pay close attention to not letting your voice trail off at the end of sentences.
- At the same time, try to read in a way that's natural to you. Many clergy will effect what's often called a "stained glass voice," where they drastically change their voice to something they think sounds more formal or "churchy." What you want while leading worship is your normal voice but spoken in a way that's clear and allows people to follow along.
- Minimize the giving of page numbers and directions. The infrastructure should not overwhelm the substance of the liturgical drama. Nonetheless, be pastorally sensitive to who is actually in the congregation on any particular occasion, and give them as much help as they need to participate comfortably.
- When leading unison prayers, slow down even more; don't get ahead of the congregation.
- When you say something to which a response is expected (like "The Lord be with you" or "Let us pray" or "Let us bless the Lord"), **WAIT** for the congregation to give the response (or change postures)—don't turn away or change positions until they have done so.

Appendix: A Guide to the Recitation of the Daily Office

This refer to Morning Prayer, but the same principles apply to Evening Prayer.

Page	Optional	Essential	Encouraged
11, 27-29	Opening Sentence (according to season)		
11-13			Confession of Sin
13-14		Versicle & Gloria	
14, 29-30	Invitatory Antiphon (according to season)		
82-83		Invitatory: Venite, Jubilate, or Christ our Passover	
270-467		Psalm(s)	
16		Gloria Patri	
		First Reading	
17-20, 79-88		Canticle	
			Second Reading
17-20, 79-88			Second Canticle
20		Apostle's Creed	
21		Lord's Prayer	
21-22		Suffrages	
598-640		Collect of the Day	
22-24			Collect of the Day of the Week as indicated
24-25		Collect for Mission	
25-26	General Thanksgiving <i>or</i> Prayer of St Chrysostom		
26		Closing Sentence	

