

Issues in Common Worship

Some notes from a meeting of the PCC Worship Committee at which we discussed moves to comply more fully with the provisions of Common Worship, 2000.

a) Brief History

In the early church, worship was spontaneous and not according to any agreed Order or Rite. People being people, they liked borrowing each others good ideas and there developed a format which although different from place to place, started to evolve into a standard practice. As the Church spread under the Roman Empire, this process of standardisation accelerated, partly as a general desire for control by authority (a tendency in most human activity) and partly as an attempt to stamp out practices which were deemed theologically wrong and misleading to people.

In England, the development of several strands of worship patterns was called to a halt as Roman religion became the norm following the Synod of Whitby 664 AD. In the period before the Reformation, worship in churches was only in accordance with the rules set out by the Pope, with some regional exceptions, eg the Sarum Rite in England, which although being in principle the same, had minor differences to the Roman Rite. Following the English Reformation, worship in Church of England churches was constrained by the Law which enshrined a series of Books of Common Prayer (BCP) as the only form of worship. In 1662 a new BCP was authorised and became the sole authorised Order for all worship. This position was unchanged until 1928 when a revision was agreed by Parliament.

More revisions were demanded in the light of changing language and liturgical developments.

In the 1960's, rather than clog up parliamentary time and partly because many Mps were uninterested in church matters, Parliament enabled the Church's Synod to authorise worship forms and a series of new Services was rapidly produced, each one more radical than the last, or so it seemed at the time! From 1973-1980, Series 3 led the way in radical departures from the BCP.

At Holy Cross in the 1970s, the PCC decided to publish separate leaflets for services such as The Parish Mass and Holy Baptism. This process of extracting individual booklets was widespread and was intended to aid the congregation by offering them easy-to-use paper-work, rather than give them a large volume to handle requiring frequent announcements about page numbers and dodging about from one end of the book to the other.

Series 3 was the precursor to the biggest change in liturgy in the Church of England for 450 years, the Alternative Service Book (ASB) of 1980. Intended for a 10 year period only, the ever changing liturgical scene demanded that more time be given for reflection, and so the ASB was authorised until 2000 by which time, work would be done to produce a new Book for the whole church.

Additional material was authorised in the intervening period. In 1986 Lent, Holy Week and Easter was influential. In 1991, The Promise of His Glory had a similarly strong impact. Other books were also published, changing the face of Anglican liturgy.

In 2000, the Synod agreed and published Common Worship (CW) and this is now the only fully authorised source for worship, in addition to the BCP which remains permanently authorised. The rubrics of CW also frequently allow variations by saying "these are other suitable words may be used." The Synod authorised Initiation services in advance of the main CW book.

b) Holy Cross issues

As we approached the advent of CW, the Worship Committee of the PCC agreed that it could not go over wholesale to comply with the Initiation rites since they were impractical, long, very wordy and had a variety of objectionable bits in them. We decided to comply partly and await developments, hoping that some new initiatives would rid us of the nastier elements.

As for the other services, there were several issues.

1) unlike the BCP, CW offers a wide range of alternative ways of doing the same thing. In fact, if the Synod ever thought that CW would produce common practice, they were clearly wrong.

2) because of the choices, the CW is a large volume (some 850 pages) and the PCC Worship Committee saw that it would be impractical to use the whole book as it is published and so continued with the long-standing parish policy of publishing individual leaflets.

3) Because the parish sings some of the text, a problem emerged about changes to the words. The new words did eventually have musical settings published but these were later than the publication of the words and not as attractive musically as the settings which are in use at present. The change of words suggested a wholesale change in music and since we were happy with our musical settings and since there were no suitable alternatives, we decided to retain the old words. The changes required would be minimal...for example the Gospel acclamations:

“Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to N.

All Glory to you, O Lord.

At the end

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

All Praise to you, O Christ.”

Other changes would be required such as in the Sursam Corda – It is right to “give thanks and praise” rather than “give him thanks and praise.”

As far as most of the other words for the Mass are concerned, what we do is an authorised version of CW with minor defects which could be regarded as acceptable. Our words for Gloria, Creed, Agnus Dei, etc. are all as in CW.

4) Variants-

The CW book offers a wealth of seasonal alternatives and what we have done is to produce a series of leaflets which incorporate the differences in a handy format. We have separate booklets for:-

i) All Saints Sunday ii) Advent Sunday and iii) Advent season, iv) Christmas Eve, v) Epiphany Sunday, vi) Candlemas, vii) Ash Wednesday, viii) Lent season, ix) Palm Sunday, x) Maundy Thursday, xi) Good Friday, xii) Easter Vigil and Mass, xiii) Easter Season, xiv) Pentecost Sunday.

In addition, we have separate leaflets for occasional offices – Baptism at the Parish Mass, and outside the Parish mass, an annually produced Confirmation order, and there is a Youth Sunday edition of the Parish mass. There are Marriage Orders in 2 formats, a funeral order, and other occasions are catered for from time to time. There is also an Order for Morning and Evening Prayer available and the rite of Compline is used at times throughout the year in 2 formats.

So the PCC has 25 separate Orders of Service currently in use, all reflecting the variety of provision available. Currently there is no regular worship according to the BCP but this is because of there being little or no perceived demand rather than for any theological reasons.

c) need for change

1) Initiation services, including baptism and confirmation will need major surgery to comply with CW;

2) minor tidying up of other orders, including changing some words which we now sing to old text and the possible use of other variants and alternatives available.

d) practicalities

1) timescales

2) costs

3) PCC need to agree proposed texts, timetables and costs.

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