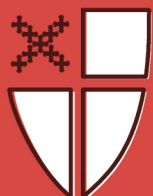


INTRODUCTION TO

The Book of Common Prayer



The Book of Common Prayer is essential to Episcopal and all Anglican spirituality, as the prayers express our Church's beliefs. For Episcopalians, using common written prayers should not mean rote or mindless recitation. Rather, regularly saying these prayers helps impart these beliefs to us and unites the whole Church in worship.



The current Episcopal prayer book, from 1979, is the latest in a series of revisions. Thomas Cranmer wrote the first *Book of Common Prayer* for the Church of England in 1549. Revisions followed in 1552, 1559, 1604, and 1662. The first American version in 1789 drew on the Scottish Episcopal tradition in addition to the English *Book of Common Prayer*. Our prayer book was revised in 1892 and 1928 before the 1979 version.



The 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* orders our Christian life according to three cycles. First is the ordering of daily life through the Daily Office. Second is the ordering of the year through regular Holy Eucharist liturgies and special liturgies of the Christian year. Third, such liturgies as baptism, confirmation, ordination, burial, and marriage order our life cycle.



One feature of the prayer book that many people overlook is the italicized text because these words are frequently left unsaid. When found in the main body of the liturgy, these texts are called rubrics (because they were originally written in *ruber*, or red, ink); they offer instructions about what to do and say in the liturgy. Rubrics also bookend the liturgies, but these are often not italicized.



Found throughout *The Book of Common Prayer* is a special form of prayer called a "collect," perhaps because the priest says it to gather the prayers and intentions of the whole congregation into one.

The first block of prayer book liturgies are Morning, Noon, and Evening Prayer and Compline, together called the Daily Office. These services can be led by lay or ordained people and are meant to be a form of communal worship. They can also be used for private daily devotions.



The second section of the prayer book is the Proper Liturgies for Special Days. These are the services for Lent and Easter: Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and the Great Vigil of Easter.



Third come the liturgies related to Holy Baptism. This includes baptism itself, as well as the renewal of baptismal vows and the forms for use at confirmations and receptions into the Church. This concludes with instructions for how any baptized person may baptize in emergencies.



The fourth block has the liturgies for Holy Eucharist. The prayer book offers both a traditional-language service of the Word and a contemporary-language version, as well as two forms of the service of the table (eucharist) in traditional language (Rite I, Eucharistic Prayer I and II) and four in contemporary language (Rite II A, B, C, and D). Also offered is a penitential service with the Ten Commandments for use along with a eucharist or as a service on its own.



The final prayer book liturgies are pastoral services that do not occur on a fixed schedule: confirmation, commitment to Christian service, marriage, reconciliation or private confession, ministrations to the sick, ministrations at the time of death or last rites, burial, ordination, celebration of a new ministry, and consecration of a church. Of these services, confirmation and ordination require a bishop.



Following the specific liturgies in *The Book of Common Prayer* is the entire Psalter or the book of Psalms. While the prayer book does not include any other whole book of the Bible, it includes Psalms because the Psalms are themselves a kind of prayer book and because the prayer book has traditionally included its own distinct translation of the psalms.



The Book of Common Prayer concludes with various documents important for the Episcopal Church. These include individual prayers and thanksgivings, the catechism (summary of the faith), various Anglican historical documents, and the lectionaries (schedules) of readings for the Daily Office and Eucharist.

