



When the church gathers, we pray for the needs of the world. Like preaching that is both rooted in scripture shared across time and space and attentive to the local assembly at the present moment, the sense of “praying for the world” is expansive but also attentive to a particular context.

Evangelical Lutheran Worship encourages that “The prayers [of intercession] are prepared locally for each occasion” (ELW. p. 105). How can this be done? What practices are useful? What resources can help? Listed below are several resources from ELCA Worship or Augsburg Fortress.



For What Shall We Pray? This weekly resource invites individuals, groups, and congregations to lift up our world in prayer. This resource is prepared by a variety of leaders in the ELCA and includes prayer prompts, upcoming events and observances, and prayer suggestions from existing denominational worship materials.

You are encouraged to use “For What Shall We Pray” prompts as a starting point in contextualizing the intercessions each week. An assisting minister or other prayer writer can access this midweek and use it to craft the prayers, adding local concerns as well. Further guidance on the importance of adapting the intercessions for local use can be found in the Additional Resources linked below. Some may also use the weekly prayer prompts to add prayer concerns or collects to their worship folder or a newsletter, or for other prayer settings outside of Sunday worship. The resource is also a good reminder of that week’s commemorations or other noteworthy observances.

Sundays and Seasons. This annual worship planning guide available both in [print](#) and via an [online subscription](#) provides crafted intercessions for each Sunday and festival in the church year. Worshiping assemblies are strongly encouraged to adapt as needed for local use. While these intercessions are steeped in the imagery and themes from the day’s scripture texts and the church year, their design for the larger church means they may not sufficiently address your local context or immediate concerns. Using “For What Shall We Pray” can be one way to help in that contextualization process.

Additional Resources from ELCA Worship

How Do We Craft the Prayers of Intercession? This FAQ summarizes the task of preparing intercessions. A list of further resources that dig deeper into the task is included.

Here Other Intercessions May Be Offered. This *Sundays and Seasons* essay offered by permission of Augsburg Fortress gives practical tips on what it means to pray contextually and gives concrete examples.

A Template for the Prayers of Intercession. This template prepared by Gail Ramshaw is an excerpt from *Pray, Praise, and Give Thanks: A Collection of Litanies, Laments, and Thanksgivings at Font and Table*. It is offered by permission to assist in the crafting of comprehensive intercessions.

Prayer Ventures. These petitions, one for each day of the month, are offered as guides to prayer for the global, social and outreach ministries of the ELCA, as well as for the needs and circumstances of our neighbors, communities and world. While helpful for personal devotion, they could also be a helpful resource when preparing intercessions.

Additional Resources available from Augsburg Fortress

Praying for the Whole World: A Handbook for Intercessors. This concise handbook proposes seven steps, from Monday to Sunday, to assist in preparing the weekly intercessions.

The Sunday Assembly. This first supporting volume to *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* includes guidance on the role of intercessions in the Sunday assembly (pp. 167-172).

Leading Worship Matters: A Sourcebook for Preparing Worship Leaders. A comprehensive guidebook, this resource devotes a chapter to preparing and leading intercessory prayer (pp. 69-94). Practical tips for preparing the prayers are included at the end of this resource document.

If you have not yet encouraged lay people to craft and lead prayer in your assembly, may these resources be an encouragement in that holy work. As noted in *Leading Worship Matters*, “The intercessions are best prayed in different voices, by a variety of people with divergent experiences of life, who not only can articulate their own perspectives on the needs of the world but can gather up the needs of those around them (p. 71).

Blessings on your work of encouraging, teaching, and most of all, praying.
“Mercy, we abide in you. Stir in us, we pray” (ACS 1077).

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Tips for Intercessors: Preparing the Prayers

Evangelical Lutheran Worship states, “The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion” (p. 105). Yet many congregations pray using words that are not locally prepared; that is, they use published prayers from a variety of sources. It’s also common that if a congregation’s prayers *are* prepared locally, they are prepared and led each Sunday by the pastor or presiding minister.

But having lay members of the congregation write and lead the prayers for each Sunday enriches the prayer lives of both the congregation and the individuals who participate in the prayer-writing ministry. Typically, congregations that entrust this ministry to laypeople have a group of six to twelve members who follow a rotating schedule for preparing the prayers. Your church may have many more than that or only a handful. The important thing is that laypeople are the right people to offer the prayers of intercession, also called the prayers of the people.

Here are twelve tips for individuals or committees presently engaged in writing the prayers of intercession or considering embarking on such a prayer ministry for Sunday worship.

1. Remember that the intercessions are the assembly’s prayers; they are not your personal prayers. As the writer and leader of the prayers on a given Sunday, you are giving voice to the assembly’s collective concerns, shared by the assembly because of events that are happening in the community, nation, and world. These are concerns that arise in our collective hearts and minds through God’s word, read and proclaimed on a particular Sunday.
2. At the beginning of Luke 11, one of the disciples asks Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray,” and Jesus teaches the disciples the Lord’s Prayer. Each week God also teaches us to pray through the words given in the lectionary. Those readings from the Old and New Testaments give us insights into things for which we are to ask God and the ways we can ask them. Prepare to write the prayers for Sunday by first reading the appointed scripture readings for that day. It can even be effective to draw words or language from the readings and use them in the prayers you write. Worshipers will have heard those words read earlier in the service and perhaps will have heard the pastor preach about them. The words may then resonate with the assembly, helping worshipers feel that the prayers are their own.
3. The theologian Karl Barth advised preachers to prepare with the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. That’s good advice for writing prayers as well: the Bible gives us words for our prayers, and the newspaper and its broadcast and digital descendants help inform our collective concerns at local, national, and global levels. Prayer writers will want to pay close attention to the news so that the needs of people and the earth are included in the prayers.
4. The pattern for prayer suggested in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (pp. 105–106) is that the prayer concerns be organized into petitions followed by a call and response, for example: Hear us, O God. / **Your mercy is great.** An orderly expansion of concerns helps members of the assembly wrap their minds around one theme at a

time, and the call and response invites them to make the petitions their own. This shared liturgical action helps members of the assembly own the entire set of petitions, even if the intercessor is the one giving voice to the petitions. A single, long, uninterrupted prayer is not comparably inviting to the rest of the assembly.

5. In addition to using techniques to make the prayers “our” collective prayers rather than “my” personal prayers, always be aware of the *direction* of your speech. You are addressing God, not the assembly. We can remind ourselves and the assembly of this direction of our speech by introducing some petitions with phrases like “Merciful God,” “Eternal God,” and “God of all creation.” If you notice that *you* are addressing the assembly in something you are writing, you are in danger of becoming preachy. Petitions are to ask God for help, not tell the assembly what to do.
6. When preparing the prayers, don’t avoid sticky or controversial issues. Sunday worship should be a place where we can all bring all our concerns before God, even if we may not be in agreement about them. When giving voice to a controversial matter, don’t take sides, and don’t presume to instruct God how to resolve it. But when we bring an issue to God in prayer, there are any number of things we can all agree to ask of God regarding that concern. We can ask that God care for those suffering in the midst of some situation, for example, or that God give wisdom and courage to those who are addressing the concern.
7. A petition in which we pray for persons who are sick, dying, grieving, or imprisoned can provide an opening that invites members of the assembly to name specific individuals for whom they want to pray.
8. In addition to providing an opening in which members of the assembly can offer up individual names, you may include a separate opening, between prepared petitions, in which you invite members of the assembly to lift up other prayer concerns. This can encourage a livelier and more spontaneous prayer life in the congregation. By keeping the two openings separate and distinct, you avoid confusion. The congregation will learn the pattern: that in one space they are invited to name individuals’ and families’ names, while in the other they can raise other prayer concerns, whether of thanksgiving or intercession. Whenever you open a space in your prayers for others to voice names or concerns, allow plenty of time, be comfortable with silence, and help the assembly to be comfortable with the silence.
9. For someone who is preparing prayers for the first time, it’s okay not to start off writing all the petitions from scratch. A comfortable first step may be to study the lectionary readings for Sunday, then choose from among the prepared prayers in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (pp. 72–87). Choosing petitions is a step toward writing petitions oneself. Next time you prepare the prayers, replace some of the phrases in a petition of your choosing to make the petition more fully address concerns in the context of *now* and current events. Soon you’ll be writing whole petitions from scratch. You might try this with the weekly intercessions provided in *Sundays and Seasons*. Those petitions include references to recurring observances and events on church and secular calendars—the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity or presidential elections—but of course cannot foresee wars or earthquakes.
10. Read your prayers aloud before worship. Proofreading your prayers silently is important but won’t help you identify the word or phrase that ties your tongue. Reading your prayers out loud ahead of time will also allow you to focus during worship on giving your words a prayerful intonation.
11. Giving thanks for the saints in your last petition signals to the presiding minister that it is, indeed, your last petition. The presiding minister can then conclude the prayers. Giving thanks for the saints, however, is far more than a signal to the presiding minister. It is an important way of weekly remembering with gratitude

that it is through the lives and witness of those saints that God has brought us to faith these two thousand years after Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. Consider naming the saints whom the church commemorates during the coming week (Sunday through Saturday). *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* provides a convenient list of saints and their commemoration dates (pp. 15–17).

12. Finally, in addition to drawing inspiration for prayers from the Sunday's scripture readings and from the newspaper, you can also draw inspiration for tone and language from the seasons of the church year. Epiphany invites language about light; Lent invites attention to those preparing for baptism; Christmas celebrates becoming human in the incarnation of Jesus. Think about the church calendar when considering imagery for your petitions.

You will never know the riches to be gained in writing prayers of intercession if you don't try it. Be at peace, for Christ is with you!

—Fred Quivik