

2. The Church Service Society does not contain such a wide variety of points of view among its membership as it once did,
3. The distinctive aims and objects of the Scottish Church Society are not so well known because its membership is smaller and it has not issued so much in the way of publications.
4. The Scottish Church Society has been more concerned with worship than with other matters and its wider concerns have not been so obvious.

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- * An exposition of the Society's doctrinal position can be found in H.J. Wotherspoon and J.M. Kirkpatrick, Manual of Church Doctrine.

PREPARING MORNING SERVICES FOR A RURAL PARISH

For the past four and a half years I have ministered in a rural parish. The two places of worship are $8\frac{1}{2}$ miles apart, and the services are at 10.45a.m. and 12 noon. The first service is a little more restricted in time than the second - usually 50 minutes as compared with 60. The children like everyone else are brought to church by car; Sunday Schools are therefore held at the same time as the services, with the children leaving after the second hymn. Apart from the place of the dedication of the offering, the order of service is the same in each church. I always aim at giving the service "shape", following with some variation the order given in the Book of Common Order (1979) pages 42 - 43. My order is as follows :

Intimations

APPROACH TO GOD

Call to worship

Praise

Call to Prayer

Prayers of Adoration/Thanksgiving, Confession, Absolution, Supplication,
ending with Lord's Prayer

THE WORD OF GOD

First Scripture Reading (sometimes omitted at first service)

Children's Address

Praise - Children's Hymn

Second Scripture Reading

Praise

Prayer for Illumination

Sermon

RESPONSE TO THE WORD OF GOD

Prayers of Intercession and Communion of Saints

Dedication of Offering and Prayer of Thanksgiving/Committal (First service)

Praise

Dedication of Offering and Prayer of Thanksgiving/Committal (Second Service)

Benediction

The reason for some of the changes will be obvious. Because of the limitations of time I do not normally have a separate prayer of thanksgiving, but either begin my opening prayer with thanksgiving instead of adoration, or include the element of thanksgiving in the dedication of the offering.

I feel that the young people (the most vocal part of the congregation) should have the opportunity of joining in the Lord's Prayer. In both churches the offering is put in a plate or plates as the worshippers enter; when I came there was no dedication of the offering, and one Board member said to me "I don't see the point of praying for filthy lucre; but if you insist I'll not stand in your way." In the second service, where the gallery is entered by two ramps from the back, an elder sits upstairs, and during the last hymn he rises, tips the contents of one of the upstairs plates into the other, proceeds outside (rain or shine) to the downstairs porch, enters and tips what he has brought into the downstairs plate, and brings this forward as the hymn closes! He remains standing for the prayer and benediction.

I have been blessed with a certain liberty of expression, and prefer normally to use extempore prayer, but always with a pattern or sequence of worship in mind. I normally prepare in the following order;

1. Sermon (and Children's Address?)
2. Scripture Readings
3. Praise
4. Scripture Sentences (Call to prayer)
5. Outline of Prayers and Benediction
6. (Sometimes last of all, the Children's Address!)

1. SERMON AND CHILDREN'S ADDRESS On a typical week I have the subject of the sermon in mind by Monday evening; on Tuesday morning I jot down my ideas and consult commentaries, making notes; usually I then let it "cook" in my mind till Wednesday or Thursday morning, when I type out the outline. By Saturday morning, using the outline and timing myself, I have "preached" the sermon aloud at least once in my study, and made alterations as necessary to the outline. The outline is usually typed on two faces of a folded foolscap sheet, using red and black for clarity; apart from titles and phrases, it normally includes all the Scripture verses that I'll be quoting, though occasionally if the passage is 4 or 5 verses long, I have the place marked and read it from the Bible. For many in my congregation the morning service is probably the only place where they will hear or even read the

Word of God, and I feel that the teaching aspect of the sermon is very important. I find the Christian Year helpful, but I do not follow it slavishly - for example, I do not always preach on the Trinity on Trinity Sunday! While I have preached on isolated texts, I have tended increasingly towards teaching series - topical, doctrinal, and especially expository. Topical like The Problem of Evil; doctrinal like a series of 13 sermons on What we Believe, following the Apostles' Creed, and three on Baptism; expository like series on The Christian Way of Life (Sermon on the Mount), Stories Jesus Told, and The Young Church in Action (Acts 1 - 12). One practical advantage in a series is that you don't spend the first days of the week seeking for guidance as to what you should preach about. I feel too that I should seek to speak out from the Bible, learning myself as I seek to expound, rather than bring ready-made ideas, and try to read them into the Bible.

The Children's Address comes into the section "The Word of God". Often I find that I have an illustration in my sermon which can be lifted out and made the basis for a Children's Address. I remember a remark made to me when I was a Divinity Student: "I usually go to sleep during the sermon, but your Children's Address was so interesting that I decided to stay awake!" I try in my Children's Address either to make the same point as I do in the sermon, or to take a related topic arising possibly from the first Scripture reading. Here are two examples.

Subject of Sermon: The preparation of Joshua. First Reading Exodus 17:8-13.

Children's Address: Why does the Minister raise his hands when he gives the benediction ?

Subject of Sermon: Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. One of the points made was the exactness of God's timing of the meeting.

Children's Address: Timing, e.g. the precision needed for accurate bombing of the Falklands Airstrip; God's timing e.g. the earthquake that blocked the Jordan miles up-river several hours before Joshua made the crossing.

Sometimes no obvious Children's Address occurs to me at the time, and it may even be Sunday morning before it "comes"; but I have learned from experience that it will come!

2. SCRIPTURE READINGS. If the sermon is expository, the main passage is already chosen for me, and in other cases it is dictated by the need to put a text in context, or to give particular teaching on a doctrine or topic. If there is a related passage, usually from a different Testament, I choose that in addition - if there is not an obviously related passage, I often choose a Psalm, or some great Bible passage that people should be hearing.

My normal practice is to have one passage from the A.V. and the other from the Good News Bible, and if I am doing an exposition, to base it on the Good News Bible, using other translations to correct or supplement as necessary. The G.N.B. has its obvious faults, but I find that in general it communicates

clearly, and this makes up for a great deal!

3. PRAISE. I always have my Praise chosen by Friday morning, so as to give sufficient notice to my organists. Of the four singings, one is usually a Psalm or a Paraphrase, and one the Children's Hymn. We use the R.C.H. I haven't felt that in a congregation that just manages to "pay its way" the expense of change-over to CH3 was a priority, though I have introduced some of its hymns and tunes to the congregation, usually through getting them sung by the young people at a Family Service. I usually begin the service with a Psalm, but not invariably. There are hymns like "Holy, holy, holy!", "O worship the King" and "Awake, my soul" that come most fittingly at the beginning of a service, and I like to give them a regular turn. Sometimes a Psalm is suitable for singing before the Sermon, like 62: 5-8 - "My soul, wait thou with patience" - or a Psalm or Paraphrase may fit in with the theme of the sermon (e.g. when I preached on the Ethiopian Eunuch I used part of Para. 25 before the sermon). Others may well come at the end of a service, like Psalm 72: 17-19 - "His name for ever shall endure" - or Psalm 28: 6-9 "For ever blessed be the Lord", which I sing to the beautiful but neglected tune Arnold.

My general practice is to choose a Children's Hymn (if possible) and one more Praise item that fits in with the subject; to open the service with Praise or Thanksgiving; and to use at some point in the service one of those great singable hymns where the congregation, if they will, can let themselves go. I try to avoid sameness in metre: if I find that my three Hymns are all C.M. or L.M. I either change one of them, or pick a Psalm to a tune like Darwall or St. John.

I consult the Handbook to the Church Hymnary to find if there is any hymn that has a special connection with the text or subject, and if the words are not familiar, I consult the Metrical Index of Tunes to find if there is a known singable tune that can be wedded to it. In this way, unfamiliar hymns can be "painlessly" introduced. I find A Year's Praise a constant source of help for the Christian Year, especially in its selections of Psalms and Paraphrases.

4. SCRIPTURE SENTENCES. I make use of many Service Books as aids in choice of verses for the Call to Prayer - some are richer than others, and I range from the wide selection in Orders and Prayers for Church Worship (Baptist Union 1960) through our own Prayers for Sunday Services to the Anglican Alternative Service Book of 1980. Often I select or adapt my own, ranging among the many available modern translations of the Bible, looking here not necessary for accuracy of translation, but for dignity, simplicity and expressiveness that communicates a spirit of worship. Sometimes the words are a fitting sequel to the Psalm that has been sung, as when I followed the singing of Psalm 36: 5-9 with the following Sentences:

With God is the fountain of life. In his light we see light.

Jesus said: "I am the Light of the World. If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink."

The aim in the Sentence is to continue the sense of worship and approach to God begun in the Call to Worship and the opening Praise - possibly by a statement of pure worship, or of thanksgiving, or recalling God's holiness and nearness, his invitation and promises. The approach can be many-sided and varied. While I may use sentences over again after several months, I do aim at freshness and variety. This part of my preparation often takes me about half an hour.

5. OUTLINE OF PRAYERS, AND BENEDICTION. The opening prayer follows the general sequence - Adoration or Thanksgiving / Confession / Absolution / Supplication / Lord's Prayer. Within this general sequence there is room for a great deal of variety, and my usual method is to build up my sequence on the Scripture Sentences just used. Here are some examples:

A. Sentences: With God is the fountain of life, etc. (as above)

Prayer: Thanksgiving - for satisfaction; for light.
Confession - lack of a Christian lifestyle. Absolution.
Supplication - for grace and openness to learn, and do.

B. Sentences: Isaiah 55: 6 and second half of 2.

Prayer: Thanksgiving - that God may be found, that he speaks.
Confession - we have not sought, or listened. Etc.

C. Sentences: Praise the Lord's glorious name; he rules as King for ever.
The Lord gives strength to his people and blesses them with peace.

Prayer: Adoration - the Lord rules
Confession - disobedience, no strength, no peace. Etc.

As will be seen, the Sentences may affect not only the adoration/thanksgiving, but may lead to variety in the confession, and possibly to the things asked for in the supplication. After the confession, I try to bring assurance of forgiveness in various ways. Sometimes I quote a verse like I John 1: 9, or words of Jesus like "Son, your sins are forgiven. Daughter, go in peace", or I thank God that he has forgiven us; or I may use the quotation "Help us to know that we are forgiven even when we find it difficult to forgive ourselves".

I do not vary the prayer for illumination much. I often use "May the words of my mouth ..." or "Father, grant that as your word is preached we may see Jesus," or other short prayers for opening of hearts, minds and wills to what God has to say to us.

In the Intercessions I normally follow the pattern - Church/Nation (s)/ Sick and Suffering. I always make a point of listening to the B.B.C. News on Sunday morning, and leave blanks in my written skeleton to be filled in then. I pray by name for those who are seriously ill, and for the recently bereaved - often my outline has a list of names in it, lest I forget. Particular groups or classes of people, like the unemployed, travellers, troops serving in places of danger, and so on often find their way into the

intercessions, as do places in the world where there is tension or war.

Sometimes the prayer may open as a follow-up from the sermon, that the Church may experience or have or show or do something.

I feel it important, at the end of the Intercessions, to remember briefly the Communion of Saints. Often this can be done in a way that links up with something that has been said in the sermon. We should be conscious of our fellowship in worship with the Church Triumphant; this should encourage and strengthen us, and fill us with joy. On occasions such as Trinity Sunday and All Saints' Day this sense of fellowship in worship may come more naturally into the opening Prayer of Adoration.

At the Dedication of the Offering I may include a brief thanksgiving for all God's gifts, or combine the offering of ourselves with that of our gifts, or speak of Christ's offering, or (at the monthly Family Service, when one family in the congregation brings up the offering) commend to God and offer him the service in his Family of all our families, especially the one named, etc., etc.

The Benediction I vary quite a lot. I have found it a useful exercise to make a list of the many benedictions in the New Testament, and look them up in the various modern translations. Often, when it suits the subject of the sermon, I use one of these, followed by "and the blessing of God Almighty.." Here are two I use frequently:

"May God, the giver of hope, fill you with continual joy and peace because you trust in him, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, your whole life and outlook may be radiant with hope" - Rom, 15: 13 (Weymouth + Phillips).

"May the God of all grace, who calls you to share his eternal glory in union with Christ, make you whole and secure and strong" - I Pet. 5: 10 (G.N.B. + Phillips).

At other times I use II Cor. 13: 13 or Numbers 6: 24 - 26, preceded by "Receive into your hearts the blessing of God"; or "Grace, mercy and peace.." I have found helpful the practice of a minister now retired, of saying "one God and our God" after "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" - it seems to me to make it very personal.

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