

## Using Common Worship : Daily Prayer for Choral Offices

Some thoughts by Dan Soper

### ¶ Preparation

In ordinary time there's a single response (*O God, make speed to save us / O Lord, make haste to help us.*), which is supplemented in seasonal time by another appropriate response (e.g. *Reveal among us the light of your presence / that we may behold your power and glory.* for Advent). Then should follow one or more of (1) a prayer of thanksgiving (there are several of these, and they tend to end with the "*Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. / Blessed be God for ever.*" response), or (2) a hymn, or (3) a canticle (most, if not all, of these are taken from the Psalms).

In BCP, the opening responses are the same throughout the year, which makes logistics much easier. There are always 4 responses here, which makes it easier to have a musical shape than a single response would.

Obviously, it would be acceptable to sing normal BCP responses here, but as a modern alternative, the following may work:

- O God, make speed to save us / O Lord, make haste to help us sung by the precentor and choir
- (One of the seasonal responses if appropriate)
- The prayer of thanksgiving, recited by the precentor on one or more notes, possibly accompanied, or possibly spoken, or possibly in a simple choral setting.
- The end of the prayer (*Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. / Blessed be God for ever.*) sung by the precentor and choir.

One option for how this might work is here: <https://dansoper.co.uk/images/blogs/2020/cw-responses.pdf>.

A hymn might follow this.

### ¶ The Word of God

This starts with the psalm(s), then is followed by one or more scripture readings, with one or more canticles. The essential is the Magnificat, which is the climax of the service, and would normally end this section of the service.

Having the Magnificat as the climax of the service presents a problem, as the majority of Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis settings are written as a pair, to be performed in that order. I believe this would be acceptable according to the guidelines in *Daily Prayer*, which allows for quite a bit of flexibility here. But for the integrity of the service, Magnificat would be better as the end of the "Word of God" section.

For the first canticle, there are a whole set of canticles that are waiting to be set to music. Some are appropriate for certain seasons, and others are appropriate generally. These could be set to chant, or proper musical settings.

But, one of the guidelines states that "The canticles may be replaced by suitable hymns or songs.", and I'd suggest that a good use of this first slot would be the Anthem. That way, the Magnificat is still at the end of "The Word of God". Having the Anthem here solves the problem that the Anthem doesn't fit well within the "Prayers" section. More on that later.

Also in the Word of God section, immediately before the Magnificat, there is an optional responsory. For example, in ordinary time on Sundays, there's a responsory that starts "The Lord is my light and my salvation". There are several versions depending on the season, but they mostly follow a similar pattern, a bit like the "Into thy hands, O Lord" from Compline. There's scope for setting this to music, potentially sung by

the choir and congregation. A few samples of how this might work are here:  
<https://dansoper.co.uk/images/blogs/2020/cw-responsories.pdf>.

## ¶ Prayers

This section is mostly free choice, but there are a large number of potential intercessions and other prayers that could be used. The prayers always contain a collect and end with the Lord's Prayer.

I'm not convinced with the BCP placement of the Anthem (even though it has been accepted for hundreds of years!). The precentor/choir sing the responses, near the start of which appears "Let us pray". The sung responses are thus the start of the prayers. Then it's the anthem, and this is followed by spoken prayers. The Anthem breaks up the prayer section so that those leading the prayers may sometimes pray for longer than they would if they felt the sung portion was part of the same set of prayers. The anthem would therefore be better either after the Prayers, or earlier in the service.

There remains the question of the sung Responses. If the BCP ones are being used, these could start the Prayers section; after the collects, the spoken prayers could follow, ending with the Grace (instead of the Lord's Prayer).

A modern alternative here could be to start with opening spoken prayers, then close with a sung litany, one collect, then the Lord's Prayer. This sung litany could be taken from here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/daily-prayer/prayers#mm10d8> — where there are 6 different litanies, each with 6 responses.

## ¶ The Conclusion

This just contains one or two simple spoken responses, normally ending with "*Let us bless the Lord. / Thanks be to God.*".

One of the guidelines allows for the Nunc Dimittis "immediately before the conclusion" on Sundays, Principal Feasts and Festivals. It may be sensible to put the Nunc Dimittis here on most other occasions too. The problem with this is that the sung responses (in the Prayers section) would break the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis up (they're normally only separated by a single reading). In that case, the Mag and Nunc could both come in the "Word of God" section, in their normal order. The Anthem would then appear here. This would be less in the spirit of the CW order, as the Magnificat would not feel as much as the climax of the service. I guess this would be a decision that would have to be made, either locally, or based on the settings / anthem being used.

This document was put together to support a blog post, which you can read here: <https://dansoper.co.uk/blog/30-should-we-use-common-worship-for-evensong>.

Dan Soper

Former Assistant Director of Music, St Edmundsbury and Rochester Cathedrals

Now a software developer