How might Morning and/or Evening Prayer be used as a resource to enable the life of the church

Nigel Hardy

217

Morning and evening prayer supports five significant aspects of church life: praise, prayer, community, learning for spiritual growth and evangelism; in ways that can be integrated regularly and frequently into the everyday life of the individual and the church.

Morning and evening prayer “concentrate on prayer and praise” in the style of the ancient people’s services (White, 2001, p. 149). “to offer him praise and thanksgiving” is one of the three stated aims of the meeting in the minister’s words in the prayers of penitence introduction. Alternative introductions and canticles and possibly hymns, songs or anthems take this forward through the service.

The third major section of the services is prayer. Prayer is considered an essential part of spiritual life and development and as White notes, regular public prayer provides the discipline to support private prayer, while private prayer brings energy and focus to public prayer (White, 2001, p. 14). Pubic prayer should provide encouragement for personal prayer in that pubic context (Myers, 2002, p. 100).

Coming together for daily prayer is a major opportunity for creation and strengthening of the church community.

White states that the Reformers tended to make “edification the chief function of daily worship” (White, 2001, p. 148). The major variable part of the service (the propers) - the Ministry of the word - provides for one or two readings. If a lectionary is followed, broad coverage of the scriptures will be achieved over time and a note instructs “care should be taken to observe, as far as possible, the principle of reading Holy Scripture in course.” (BCP, 2009, p. 17) to ensure continuity. While the comprehensive coverage specified in earlier forms has been lost, and White suggests that the chief concern should be with prayer and praise, some regular disciplined reading of the scripture is encouraged. If a sermon is preached (BCP, 2009, p. 15) this may be augmented.

Evangelism is served by the regular witness. “it is the duty of the clergy to say these two offices each day, preferably in church after tolling the bell.” (BCP, 2009, p. 15). Visible and regular attendance and “doing something” by a minister and by other church members can provide to local people, both at the edge of and beyond the faith community a constant advertisement of the availability of the church and of God’s love. Further, a stated aim in the preface of the 2009 services (BCP, 2009, p. 9) is to make this liturgy accessible through a contemporary style.

The regular availability of daily prayer corporately or privately is intended to provide discipline for encounters with God as encouraged by the scriptures (e.g 1. Thes 5:17) and recommended and practiced by the early church through into the late mediaeval period. (White, 2001, p. 132 et seq.). Take-up is encourage is encouraged by four major features: brevity, familiarity, accessibility and the potential integration with daily life.

Through choice of appropriate alternatives the services can be usefully covered is a short time and thus be attractive to incorporate regularly into busy lives. A simple introduction; the single reading pattern for the ministry of the word; no hymns or anthems; a brief but targeted set of intersessions can make a meaningful and rewarding service in under 20 minutes.

Regular, perhaps lifelong use of the services brings familiarity. This provides a sense of ritual and through that a sense of community (White, 2001, p. 19). It can also represent security and lack of threat Christians suffering difficulties of faith.

The services are accessibly to individuals at home, travelling or at work; to small groups at a place of worship or elsewhere. No special equipment, beyond books, or environment are required, and no special people, priests or deacons, are required. Lone worship may reduce the sense of local church community but can provide more realisation of worship with “the company of heaven”.

In addition to the practical time considerations the services are designed to integrate with life at the daily and annual levels. The different elements between MP and EP reflect the needs and circumstances of those times as do elements of other services (Prayer During the Day, Night Prayer) Through the Appendix ii suggested texts (BCP, 2009, p. 77) or chosen alternatives prayer and praise is directed at the major festivals and elements of the church year.

These resources therefore offer attractive and accessible material for support of major aspects of the life of the church.

# Bibliography

BCP, 2009. *The Book of Common Prayer for use in the Church in Wales 2009: Daily Prayer.* Norwich: Canterbury.

Myers, G., 2002. Beyond words. In: J. Fletcher & G. Myers, eds. *Using Common Worship: Daily Prayer.* London: Church House Publishing.

White, J. F., 2001. *Introduction to Christian Worship.* 3rd ed. Nashville TN: Abingdon Press.