

Foreword

Worship: from the United Reformed Church

These resources for worship are offered to the church as a contribution to the conduct of public worship at the beginning of the 21st century. In 1980, eight years after the foundation of the United Reformed Church, *A Book of Services* was issued by the Doctrine and Worship Committee under the wise and able guidance of John Huxtable. In his short preface he wrote, *'The orders found here are not prescribed. It is not expected that they will be used in our churches to the exclusion of others. Yet we believe most of these services reflect the ethos of our Church and of its inherited traditions.'* These sentiments applied also to the 1989 *Service Book* and still hold true for this publication.

What has changed at the beginning of the 21st century is the context in which public worship is offered. We now find ourselves in a missionary setting where the church can no longer take for granted that most people understand the religious language and imagery of past generations. Language is changing and the language of worship has to take account of this. Our words may be beautiful and doctrinally sound, but if they are not *'something understood'*, they do not aid our worship. There is, of course, a measure of ambiguity and mystery lying at the heart of the most telling language of worship. However, we should aim at clarity as well as elegant expression. We should be expressing old truths in new ways.

We also need the language to express new truths in thoroughly Christian ways. Contemporary liturgists search for such language – and this quest can bring a creative tension with the traditional language of the church.

At the time of original publication, the then Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee had been aware of the need for continuity and change within the worship of the church. We have provided worship resources deeply rooted in our Reformed heritage, along with resources which develop our liturgical tradition in the spirit of the dictum *'the Reformed church is ever in need of reformation'*. We are aware of the breadth of liturgical expression within the church and we have sought to provide a range of styles of services. The rubrics have deliberately been kept to a minimum, thus encouraging worship leaders to develop styles appropriate to their situation. There are exceptions, such as 'prayers for healing' and 'laying-on of hands', where it was felt greater guidance would be welcomed. The Baptism service contains wording required by the General Assembly. It is our hope that all the services act as guides to the development of the worship life of the church, and all to the glory of God.

This publication includes an element in the form of an order for daily worship. The first Order of Holy Communion and the Baptism service

had originally been issued in draft form and the comments received from the church have been taken into account in the final texts.

The committee owes a debt of gratitude to all contributors to this publication, which uses the work of many talented liturgists.

John A Young,
*Convener, Doctrine, Prayer and
Worship Committee, 2003*



Introduction

The Worship, Faith, and Order Committee commissioned reworked services for Initiation, Ordination and Commissioning after hearing requests for material to be provided with more expansive language. The Committee decided to retain the wording in Schedules A, B, C, and F of the Basis of Union. The language of the Holy Trinity within them is the language the Church has used for centuries to describe 'the God whom Jesus called Father'. It emphasises the relationships within the Trinity that are key to our understanding of the Triune God. Such language and understanding is shared with the whole Church, across the world and through the ages.

However, the Committee believed that it is good and helpful to add a wide range of biblically grounded images for God in language that is ecumenically informed, expansive, elegant, and worthy of worship, to go alongside the traditional formulations. This means that the language of the Schedules is placed in a broader context, and that those leading will have more expansive language to draw on in the rest of the service. It is important to remember that apart from the Schedules

themselves, the prayers, readings, and feel of the service are for those leading to shape and voice, according to their choice. But it may be helpful to have some forms and models that might be widely used.

The rubrics of the services are designed to make it more explicit where the Schedules provide more freedom than might be assumed. For example, in the services of baptism and confirmation there is an option to compose your own affirmations within a certain framework (a Trinitarian formulation of faith, repentance of sin etc...). Efforts have been made to make this more obvious as an option, and an example is provided.

New material that uses expansive language has been suggested in a way that, it is hoped, does not draw attention to itself, but simply prays or speaks using metaphors, images or ideas that are broadly based. There are new translations and versions of the Aaronic blessing that are faithful to the Hebrew. There are alternative blessings that use new Trinitarian language and seek to express in new ways something of the fullness of

the Trinity. 'Lord' has not been used when it might be taken to refer to or to privilege a male hierarchy, but where it reflects a Christlike subversion of Lordship (it is Jesus, the servant, who is our Lord – not Caesar...). The 1997 inclusive language Statement of Faith has been introduced into the body of the text so that it might be more readily used – and a responsive version of it (without changing a word since it has been approved by Assembly) has been provided. All references to the person or persons being baptised, received, ordained, inducted, or commissioned are in plural and in italics – they, those, them – to leave options open and to resist a binary description.

The existing texts did not reflect some of the changes that there have been made in the URC over the past 20 years; the transfer of some functions from District Councils to Synods, the strength of the distinction between Assembly Accredited and Locally Recognised Worship Leaders, and the reality that congregations may not always have a minister, or a minister present, and these have been amended. The further promise that Assembly agreed should be made by Elders at ordination and induction has been added. The decision of General Assembly 2005 that the ordination of Elders should recognise that Elders serve the whole Church and not just the local church has been reflected in the revised service.

Some Scripture sentences are offered in new translations and versions still faithful to the original languages from the NRSV. Prayers have been created for when the Lord's Supper is celebrated at the ordination and induction of Elders and commissioning of Lay Preachers or Worship Leaders,

since it would normally be the case to share Communion at these services. In many services it is suggested that a 'welcome' might be given, and the biblical origin of the 'right hand of fellowship' is explained.

Prayers using traditional Trinitarian language have not been excluded, but the URC's resolution to expand language has been honoured. No language, when used of God, can be either literal or adequate, for all is metaphor and glimpse. But God gives us the sources of tradition, our mother tongue of the Scriptures, and the wells of our imagination with which to pray, praise and bless.

These prayers and liturgies are offered so that they can be adopted or adapted – or discarded – as worship leaders feel led, to wrap around the Schedules approved in the Basis of Union.

Susan Durber
Andy Braunston
February 2024

Other parts of our worship, such as occasional acts of worship or parts of services infrequently used by churches, are available to download for free from the URC website:

www.urb.org.uk/worship-book

Printed editions of the URC Worship Book are available to buy from the URC shop: **www.urbshop.co.uk**

The Communications Committee expresses thanks to all the contributors who made this publication possible.

Andy Jackson,
Head of Communications, 2024