

The repetition of the psalms enables us to take to heart the words, so that their language becomes part of our language of prayer. This repetition also emphasises our continuing call to conversion as we listen to the voice of God in the psalms.

The preferred method of reciting the psalms is using a psalm tone. This allows the liturgical text to be used and the simplicity of the tone allows the text to speak. It should be sung with a light clear voice at a pace suitable for proclamation. Each psalm is provided with a tone and an optional response. These can be used in the following ways:

- The whole psalm can be sung by everyone throughout.
- It can be sung antiphonally either between cantor and everyone or the assembly divided into two groups.
- A response is provided which can be sung at each end of the psalm.
- It can be used as a response between the verses sung by a cantor or proclaimed by a reader.
- The response may be omitted.
- When introducing a psalm tone to an assembly it is often best to sing it to the text of the *Glory be...* which is familiar to people.

## Prayer and Reflection

*Sing psalms to the Lord, you who love him,  
give thanks to his holy name.* Psalm 29:5

*Sing praise with all your skill.* Psalm 46:8

*My song is of mercy and justice;  
I sing to you, O Lord.* Psalm 100:1

*Sing a new song to the Lord,  
his praise in the assembly of the faithful.* Psalm 149:1

This leaflet is one a series of resources prepared by the Liturgy Office to accompany the publication of *Celebrating Sunday Evening Prayer* and to support parish celebrations of the Prayer of the Church. Excerpts from *Celebrating Sunday Evening Prayer* and this leaflet © 2006 Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. Excerpts from *The Psalms, a new translation* © 1963, The Grail, England. *Celebrating Sunday Evening Prayer* is published by Canterbury Press [www.scm-canterbury.co.uk]. Further resources can be found at [www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Hours](http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Hours)

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# CELEBRATING SUNDAY EVENING PRAYER

## A Guide for Cantors

Evening Prayer is part of the ancient tradition of the Church.

Christians have always marked the morning and evening hours of the day with prayer. The earliest sources outside the New Testament tell us that they prayed the 'Our Father' at morning and evening. Other early documents tell us that they blessed the lighting of lamps at the hour of sunset by calling on Christ, the 'joyful light of God the Father.'

Still today, as the light of day dims, the Church gathers for her Evening Prayer, to offer thanksgiving to God for the gift of Christ, the light of the world.

In her prayer the Church also calls to mind her baptismal vocation to die to sin with Christ and live with him in holiness.

At Vatican II the Church urged that this ancient tradition of prayer should truly become once more the prayer of the whole Church. In particular it was said that:

*Pastors should see to it that the chief hours, vespers particularly,  
are celebrated in common in church on Sundays and the more  
solemn feasts.* Sacrosanctum Concilium 100

The intention was to correct a tendency to see such prayer as more or less reserved to the clergy.

Over the past forty years, and especially since the texts have been published in English many other people have begun to pray Morning and Evening Prayer. However the published form of this prayer is sometimes seen as a little complex for those who do not pray the Office together every day.

Recently an adaptation of Evening Prayer has been prepared, firmly based on *The Divine Office* but better suited for parish use, and especially for weekly Sunday celebrations. *Celebrating Sunday Evening Prayer* has been authorised

for use in England and Wales by the Bishops' Conference Department for Christian Life and Worship

The use of this form of prayer provides a very healthy complement to the parish's celebration of the Eucharist, and helps it with the worthy keeping of Sunday, the Lord's Day.

## Structure

The liturgy of Evening Prayer, sometimes known as Vespers, has the following basic format. There might be slight variations how your community chooses to celebrate Sunday Evening Prayer.

### Introduction

- Hymn
- Opening Responses
- Opening Rite: Light *or*
- Opening Rite: Incense *or*
- Evening Thanksgiving

### Psalmody

- Seasonal Psalm  
*followed by* Psalm Prayer
- Second Psalm  
[optional]
- New Testament Canticle

### Word

- Scripture Reading
- Silence *or*
- Response
- Magnificat

### Prayer

- Intercessions
- Lord's Prayer
- Concluding Prayer & Blessing

## Ministry of Cantor

*All ministries are ministries of service, enabling the prayer of the community.*

CSEP, page 14

Music is integral to liturgy. The human voice has always been the primary instrument of worship and the principal minister of music is the assembly.

Many of the texts of Evening Prayer are intended to be sung: the hymn, the psalm and canticle and the Magnificat. Music brings another dimension to the celebration. It allows all to sing with one voice and it can help give expression to the text. Communities should choose carefully what it is sung according to what is available and to their resources. Through repetition it is hoped that people will become familiar with settings.

A **cantor** can lead the assembly, sing alone as required and also teach new settings. A second cantor or musician may seem a luxury but they can provide a lead for the assembly and a contrast and help to the cantor.

The role of the cantor will vary depending on the choices made by the preparation group. It may include the following:

- singing the verses in the Opening Rite: Light or Incense;
- leading the Psalm;
- proclaiming the verse of the New Testament Canticle and the Magnificat;
- chanting the Response to the Scripture Reading;
- praying the intentions in the Intercessions.

Where there is no accompaniment the cantor will also begin those items sung in common such as the hymn.

## Psalm

The psalms are the kernel of the Prayer of the Church linking us with the Hebrew tradition of daily worship. From the Gospels we learn that the psalms were constantly on the lips of Christ, in prayer and in teaching.

In praying the psalms today, we pray with and through him, we make his prayer our own. The psalms express the range of human emotions: praise, thanksgiving, sorrow, supplication, hope and despair, shared by all at different times.