

Welcome to the Book of Common Prayer

The Daily Office and Daily Prayer

Prayer was an important part of Jesus' daily life. He began his ministry by heading into the desert to fast and pray. He spent part of his last night praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. And throughout his ministry Jesus would take time to pray. Jesus also encouraged his followers to pray. He told his listeners about "their need to pray always" (Luke 18:1). He also taught his followers how to pray (Matthew 6:5-15).



In the early church, not only did the Christians meet regularly for Eucharist on Sundays, they also were steeped in a religious tradition that called them to prayer and the repetition of the songs of Judaism several times throughout the day. This was Jesus' tradition as well. The Daily Office as we have it now in the BCP (35-146) evolved from the ancient Jewish and thus the early Christian practice of setting aside certain times of the day for prayer and song, especially the reading and chanting of psalms.

The word "office" in the Daily Office is a word to describe a scripted set of prayers, and can be used interchangeably with words like service, liturgy, or rite. They are called the Daily Office because these are the offices that we are meant to do daily.

Thomas Cranmer, the author of the first Anglican Book of Common Prayer in 1549, believed that daily prayer should be available to all people, not just priests or those living in monasteries. One reason the BCP is called "common" is because it is a way of prayer for common (non-clergy) people. Originally, Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer were the two Daily Offices included in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. Noonday Prayer and Compline, two other traditional daily offices, were added to our BCP. This allows for four prayer times or services throughout the day.

In simplifying the hours of prayer, Thomas Cranmer did something radical. He tried to make continual prayers of the church around the world and make it available to everyone. A gift of the BCP is that it offers patterns of prayer that anyone can use.

At Good Shepherd we can all participate in Morning Prayer with Deacon Rich Wilson on Wednesday mornings at 9:15 either in person in the chapel or live stream. On Thursdays Morning Prayer is available in our sanctuary at 9:00.

As I discovered the first time I opened my BCP to The Daily Offices, it can seem confusing. There are several different rites and many options. But once you take a moment to look at the different pieces, you see a structure and an order that is consistent throughout. An excellent way to become familiar with the Daily Office is to attend the Morning Prayer on Thursday mornings. In that way you will be guided through the Office.

The Daily Office is a rich Anglican and Episcopalian way to pray. It is an important part of our heritage and a way that we connect through time and space to other Christians who have prayed and are praying in these same forms.

But the Daily Office is not the only way to pray using the Book of Common Prayer. The BCP offers hundreds of useful resources for prayer. They include:

- Daily devotions for individuals and families (136-140). These prayers follow the basic structure of the Daily Office, but in a much-shortened form.
- Grace at meals (835).
- Prayers for the sick (835) offer options for prayer when a family member of someone else close to us is sick, and we don't know what to say.
- Prayers and Thanksgivings (809-841). These prayers and thanksgivings are a broad collection of prayers for all sorts of occasions and situations. They include prayers for a birthday, for families, for guidance, for travelers, for the poor and neglected, and others.

But remember, almost any action taken with intention, directed toward God, can be a kind of prayer. The important thing is not how we pray, but that we pray and strive to make prayer a part of our daily life. God wants to be engaged with us on a regular daily basis. Challenge yourself to a daily conversation with God and see where it leads!

That completes today's exploration of the BCP. I hope you enjoyed our time together. Next time we will explore the Church Calendar and Liturgical Year. See you then.

In Christ, Deacon John

"Welcome to the Book of Common Prayer" by Vicki K. Black, Morehouse Publishing, 2005

"Walk in Love, Episcopal Beliefs & Practices" by Scott Gunn & Melody Wilson Shobe, Forward Movement, 2018

"Praying Shapes Believing, A Theological Commentary of the Book of Common Prayer" by Leonel L. Mitchell (updated by Ruth A. Meyers), Seabury Books, 2016