



Daily Prayer
Time Made Holy

Editor's Reflections

We assemble at noon, but the chimes join us when they are ready. Often it is the day's psalm that faces the competition several minutes after the hour. Sometimes the reader of the epistle is forced to pause. But we continue, drawn by the same rhythm that first called us to common place and purpose. We gather around the Lord's Table or the piano to listen and respond, sometimes singing, always praying.

Several months ago the associates of the Office of Theology, Worship, and Discipleship decided that we should gather daily for midday prayer. In part it was because of the commitment to the Company of Pastors many of us had made (see page 12), although the practice of daily prayer was not new to any of us. We generally number no more than eight, although during the first weeks of the war in Iraq the participation from the rest of Presbyterian Center did increase. But while the quantity of people has since diminished, the nature and tenor of the services hasn't really changed, and that is how it should be. Crisis may give us new cause for common prayer, but the standard and constant reality truly is sufficient: we were made to worship and enjoy God forever and always.

John Calvin writes in the *Institutes* that "since our weakness is such that it has to be supported by many aids, and our sluggishness such that it needs to be goaded, it is fitting each one of us should set apart certain hours for this exercise." He designates "certain hours" as arising and retiring for the day, before and after eating, and before beginning our daily work (III.xx.50). Our contributors to this issue on daily worship have largely lifted up the time-tested rhythm of prayer that we find in the *Book of Common Worship* and its companion volume *Daily Prayer*: psalm, scripture, and prayer, one or more times a day. But as William Paulsell helpfully points out in his book *Rules for Prayer*², a variety of patterns have been employed by those seeking to live out Paul's charge to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Dietrich Bonhoeffer made time each day for silence and solitude, Martin Luther King, Jr. prayed daily that he might be used by God, and John Wesley suggested praying on the hour. Indeed, hourly chimes — chronologically challenged though they may be — can prompt us to pause and lift up a biblical verse appropriate for the hour, day, or season. Those times in-between one event and the next can be an opportunity for attentiveness to God's activity in the world, a call to praise, gratitude, or confession.

Ultimately, each of these daily practices help in their own way to frame our lives with a sense of God's abiding presence. These are frames of different size and shape and hue, hung where we might see the image regularly, whether at particular times of the day or throughout. But it is not for the borders that we have come. As necessary as they are, each frame pales in comparison with the singular image never to be fully contained within.

Behold the beauty of the Lord.

Grace to you all, and peace,

Steve

Daily prayer... structures our day in such a manner as to remind us that all our times are lived in God's presence. Time is transformed from a measuring device that marks off our chronology into a kind of time that is filled with the presence of God and divine promises for the future.¹

¹*The Companion to the Book of Common Worship*. Ed. Peter C. Bower. Louisville: Geneva Press, 2003.

²William O. Paulsell. *Rules for Prayer*. NY: Paulist Press, 1993.

Cover photo of Russian woman praying courtesy of David Young, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Praying for Metropolitan Richmond

by Ben Campbell

A Place of Prayer in the Capital of the Confederacy

In 1866, one year after the Burning of Richmond and the surrender of the Confederacy, the Roman Catholic bishop of Richmond asked for help from the Sisters of the Visitation in Baltimore. They came to the Confederate Capitol and established a monastery in an abandoned mansion on the highest hill in the city, the hill where William Byrd had laid the city out 130 years before. And they began to pray.

purchase the monastery, start a religious community, and continue the life of prayer. They called their group “Richmond Hill,” the original name that William Byrd had given to the hill in 1737 and for which the city was named. A number of developers sought to purchase the prominent site for commercial and residential purposes, but through a seemingly miraculous series of events, after nearly two years, the ecumenical Christian group became the owners of the property.



View of Richmond the day after the city burned in April, 1865, when the Confederacy fell. On the hill on the far left is the Virginia Capitol. On the hill on the far right is Richmond Hill.


The prayer of the Sisters followed the rule of their order. Five times a day they stopped what they were doing — whether teaching the girls in the school which they started, or performing the endless tasks of the household — to read and sing the daily offices. Mass was celebrated every morning by a visiting priest. They prayed daily for the coming of Christ’s kingdom, for the church, for special intentions requested by citizens, for their own community, and for the city of Richmond. They prayed, they believed, with the saints and with Mary, the patron of their order.

When the Sisters decided in 1985 to leave the old monastery in the center of the city and move to a new monastery in the suburbs, an ecumenical group of Christians from seven denominations — Episcopalian, Southern Baptist, African-American Baptist, Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Lutheran — began to pray that they would be able to

Visions and prophecies suggested that this had been a place of prayer for far longer than a century. Richmond Hill’s monastery was located only a block from a burial ground of Powhatan’s people, who had occupied the hill when John Smith and Christopher Newport first came in May 1607. The promontory overlooked the Falls of the James River, with a view sweeping 270 degrees across the horizon. The sunrises and sunsets were overwhelmingly beautiful. Clearly, it had always been a place of meditation and prayer.

The walls of the building and the property seemed to be “soaked” with prayer. As the founders of Richmond Hill came to the monastery, and showed others around, it seemed that some persons were struck with the power of the place. Others seemed to notice nothing.

The vision of a continuing residential prayer community and retreat center in the old Monte Maria Monastery on Richmond Hill gathered together

The Rev. Benjamin P. Campbell (Episcopal Church, USA) has been the pastoral director of Richmond Hill since 1989. 

RICHMOND HILL'S WEEKLY CYCLE OF PRAYER

EVERY DAY

For the healing of metropolitan Richmond; for the sick and those on our hearts; for the welfare of all our citizens; for the establishment of God's order in our community; for peace.

MONDAY

Our citizens who live in the city of Richmond, the Mayor, Manager, City Council, and School Board. Non-profit organizations and their ministries. All schools: students, teachers, and staff. Day care centers. All who suffer from addiction, dependency, and co-dependency. The Council, residents and staff of Richmond Hill.

TUESDAY

Our Citizens who live in Hanover County, the Board of Supervisors, School Board and Administrator. The print and broadcast media. Churches of metropolitan Richmond. All who live in poverty. All who suffer from mental illness.

WEDNESDAY

The Governor of Virginia, the General Assembly, and all who work in State Government. All who work in businesses which provide service to others. All who work in construction. Hospitals and nursing homes: patients, residents and staff. All who provide health care. Victims of violent crime; all who commit violent crime. All senior citizens.

THURSDAY

Our Citizens who live in Ashland, Hopewell, Colonial Heights, and Petersburg; the town and city Councils, Mayors and Managers. All who work in banks and finance; all making financial decisions for greater Richmond. Prisons and jails of metropolitan Richmond: prisoners and staff. All those unemployed or underemployed. All public servants.

persons from Christian groups who had been unable to cooperate effectively in Richmond before, as well as Christians who had experience in ecumenical relationships. By the time the property came into the hands of the new group, members of twelve denominations, as well as a number of independent churches, were involved. All of them wanted to continue the prayer for the city that had been taking place on Richmond Hill since 1866.

The Sisters left the Monastery in the spring of 1987. That winter, the new Richmond Hill community took up the vocation of daily prayer and intercession for the city of Richmond.



The Chapel holds more than a century of prayer

Daily prayer at Richmond Hill

Religious communities all over the world honor their commitment to God through the regular ordering of the day by times of prayer. Benedictine spirituality, to which Richmond Hill owes much of its shape, is rooted in this discipline.

At Richmond Hill, the daily prayer offices occur at 7 a.m., noon, and 6 p.m. Work stops. The Community of Richmond Hill — all residents, non-resident staff, adjunct ministers, and volunteers on site — gathers in the Chapel for fifteen to twenty minutes. Everyone on site is invited to join in the prayers. Retreat groups and meetings are asked to break and respect the prayer time. Persons who feel that they cannot in good conscience join in the Christian prayers in the Chapel are asked to take the time in silence for themselves in the Garden or elsewhere.

The daily prayers are intended to interrupt whatever is going on. At the sound of the bell, all are invited to a time of personal recollection and community prayer. The more important the excuse for missing prayer, the more important that it be resisted.



How might you adapt this prayer card for your community, and make it available to the people around you?

Richmond Hill's daily offices are similar in content to those used by Christian communities of all denominations for nearly two millennia. Morning and midday prayers include a selection from the Psalms and a Scripture lesson — the day's Gospel reading in the morning and the Epistle at midday. Evening prayers are a time for holy reading from other sources. One residential member, a storyteller, tells a story once a week at evening prayer. On Monday evening there is a community Eucharist, followed by supper for all who attend. All three services include the intercessions for the day, following a weekly calendar of intercessions for the people and needs of the city (see sidebars). In the morning a daily list of intercessions for people in particular need is offered. Retreat groups are prayed for the week before they come and the week after they go. At midday a hymn is always sung. The Psalter used is the *Daily Prayer* edition of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s *Book of Common Worship*. Music comes from the ecumenical Catholic hymnal *Lead Me, Guide Me*, from the *Taizé* community, and from other sources. Prayer leadership is shared among members of the Community. Significant time is always left for silent or spontaneous intercessions.

United by specific petition

Regardless of the purpose of their visit or gathering, persons who are at Richmond Hill for any purpose — secular or religious — find themselves in the Chapel praying together for the common needs of metropolitan Richmond. They gather with persons from other parts of the city, from other denominations and races and institutions, joining in the prayers of and for the people of Richmond.

The experience of simply praying together for the city — the one entity which we have in common — unites us across ethnic, class, and religious lines in a subtle but unprecedented way. It is, gently but truly, a Gospel moment. And it happens every day. The Word is read for this time. The psalms are said for this place. The prayers are said by these people. Richmond is special in the eyes of God. It is only one community of God's children, but it is as especially beloved as all the rest.

The Benedictine practice of daily common prayer, often called the Liturgy of the Hours, is designed to restore a normal order to human life. Persons who come to Richmond Hill or live in the community speak often of the sanity of being required, or summoned, to come to prayer regardless of what they are doing.



FRIDAY

Our Citizens who live in Henrico County, the Board of Supervisors, School Board and Administrator. All who work in manufacturing industry in metropolitan Richmond. The police, fire, and rescue workers. The courts. All young people. All families. All who hurt, need inner healing, or are unable to love.

SATURDAY

Our Citizens who live in Chesterfield County, the Board of Supervisors, School Board and Administrator. All who work in retail trade in metropolitan Richmond, and those who own our businesses. Counselors and Spiritual Directors. The Sisters of the Visitation of Monte Maria. All victims of abuse; all perpetrators of abuse.

SUNDAY

Our Citizens who live in the counties of Charles City, Goochland, Powhatan, and New Kent, the Board of Supervisors, School Board and Administrator. An end to racism and racial prejudice. All places of prayer or worship: churches, mosques, and synagogues. All who seek God. Universities, colleges, seminaries, and technical schools.

But seek the welfare of the city ... and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Jeremiah 29:7

These sidebars are adapted from the "Pray for metropolitan Richmond" prayer card provided by the Richmond Hill Community. The actual dimensions are approximately 2.1 inches wide and 11 inches long, when not folded in the middle. For a copy of the card, contact Richmond Hill at www.RichmondHillVa.org, or 804-783-7903.

It is not only the benefit of regularity, interrupting the so-important tasks of every day, which they cite. It is the benefit of expressing a common life. Prayer is always personal, and daily individual quiet needs to be a part of any Rule of Life, but the expression of the common petitions of the community must also be a part.

These petitions represent the daily life of the participants as thoroughly as their own private petitions do. But these are the petitions which bind them together, and which help them be a redemptive fellowship, bound together by unseen cords, seeking to do the work of God in the city. The petitions are not usually prescriptive — although sometimes someone strays across the line out of passion or naiveté. Solutions are up to God's Spirit working through us. But the topics of concern cannot be omitted from the prayers of the day. Things that are not prayed for, people who are not prayed for, become invisible in the common mind of the spiritual community. Then the common agenda is expressed only in the least helpful, most prejudiced ways — by television shows and politicians and spot coverage by newspapers. The common agenda of a metropolitan city, which belongs most certainly and most importantly to God, is abandoned to the partisans.

Rigorously Christian, rigorously hospitable

Strangely, the daily life of prayer for the city as practiced at Richmond Hill seems to evoke very little denominational controversy. It is very specific, but the specifics are supplied by the needs of the community rather than by the theology of the leaders. It is virtually impossible in the silence which accompanies every prayer service to tell what is the denomination of those who pray silently. The psalms were composed long before Christian divisions, uttering timeless, intense pleas. The hymns provide a universal language which, in the common culture of the American South, unites the worshippers. We find

that people enjoy the prayer time who would not otherwise find themselves in such a place. Muslims, who understand the rhythm of prayer from their own practice, will often attend when they are in the house for a meeting. Jews, agnostics, and Christians of every stripe join in.

They do not have to endorse personally the unreservedly Christian address of the petitions, only to respect that this is our prayer for a community that includes them as well as us. Visitors are, often as not, caught in the spirit of the prayer, the time of respect

and quiet, and the unexceptionably serious nature of the common petitions. The prayers emerge from the Community of Richmond Hill, and others are invited to join. We believe that the more Christian we are, the more we will be open and accessible to persons of other religions, to searchers, and to people who do not consider themselves religious. There can be no question from those who

participate in these offices that they are the work of a Christian community. We pray that there can be no question, as well, that the spirit in this prayer utters the deepest prayers of every human heart for this community in this time.

The Richmond Hill Community is committed to keeping Richmond Hill in trust as a place of prayer for the people of the metropolitan city of Richmond. This is a hard concept to sell to many investors, especially when they ask for the concrete results of their contributions. We believe there are many concrete results, but they are seldom measurable. We can trace a number of programs — related to public education, the homeless, metropolitan cooperation, interracial and ecumenical partnerships, employment, and public transportation — to work which had at least a part of its origin in relationships and efforts happening at Richmond Hill between the prayer times. Richmond Hill sits in the middle of an implicit network — a network to which many belong but for which there is no official membership — of nearly 150 churches and many community organizations. But there is no way to




Richmond Hill's historic mansion shares skyline with Richmond banks



claim credit — nor would it be right to do so — for most of what we see happening. The community of prayer is a part of something larger, and the more it tries to be an honest servant of that larger purpose, the more the larger purpose seems to advance.

Changing the spirit of a city

Prayer is, above all, a process of developing spiritual capital — something that has been badly squandered in the last five decades of American life. The prayer of a praying community gives depth and centeredness to all who are touched by it. Prayer deals with spiritual transformation, and this affects the transformation of the community. Spiritual transformation translates into a different attitude — one of prayerful hopefulness rather than cynical selfishness. Prayer is incomprehensible, but it is not a matter of indifference. The devotion of time and resources to prayer brings results which are immeasurable not because they are insignificant, but because they permeate many other efforts and situations. True prayer inevitably results in individual vocation and social transformation. True efforts to minister to the indifference and misery of the modern American city must inevitably drive us to prayer.

And so we pray at Richmond Hill three times daily for the healing of metropolitan Richmond, for the welfare of all our citizens, for the establishment of God's order in our community, and for peace. 

*For more information about the life and ministry of **Richmond Hill**, contact the community at 2209 East Grace Street, Richmond, VA 23223, by phone at 804-783-7903, or through the web at www.RichmondHillVa.org.*

And make plans now for a visit to Richmond Hill during your trip to the city for the 215th General Assembly, June 26 - July 3, 2004.



Oblates of St. Benedict

Living the monastic life insofar as one is able

Oblates of St. Benedict are men and women who associate themselves with a Benedictine community in order to strengthen their faith. Such persons seek to live out their baptismal commitment to serve God and neighbor, informed by the *Rule of Saint Benedict*, “insofar as their state in life permits.”

This proviso means that oblates can be single or married, Roman Catholic or Protestant. There are oblates that are members and pastors of Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopal, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist congregations. While the majority of oblate programs are Roman Catholic, there are several that are Episcopalian (Anglican) and Lutheran. Among the Presbyterians who have made a commitment to Benedictine values are authors Kathleen Norris (*The Cloister Walk*), Eric Dean (*St. Benedict for the Laity*), and David Robinson (*The Family Cloister* and “Cloister Flowers: Benedictine Spirituality for Presbyterians” in the Fall 2000 issue of *Hungryhearts*).

Why might a Presbyterian seek to become an oblate? The word itself may provide an answer. *Oblation* means offering, and this commitment indicates a person's desire to make a gift of his or her life through a balance of prayer and work, *ora et labora*. While remaining true to the Reformed tradition, a person may feel drawn to the order and rhythm of monastic life, understanding it as a means of being open to the transformation initiated and sustained by God. Or it could be the knowledge that this is a truly communal way of life, that others are praying for us even as we pray for them.

“Prefer nothing to Christ” (*The Rule*, chapter 72) is more than just a slogan for the Benedictine way of life. It is an invitation to Christ's church beyond the local congregation or denomination, and a formative means of observing the extraordinary in the ordinary.

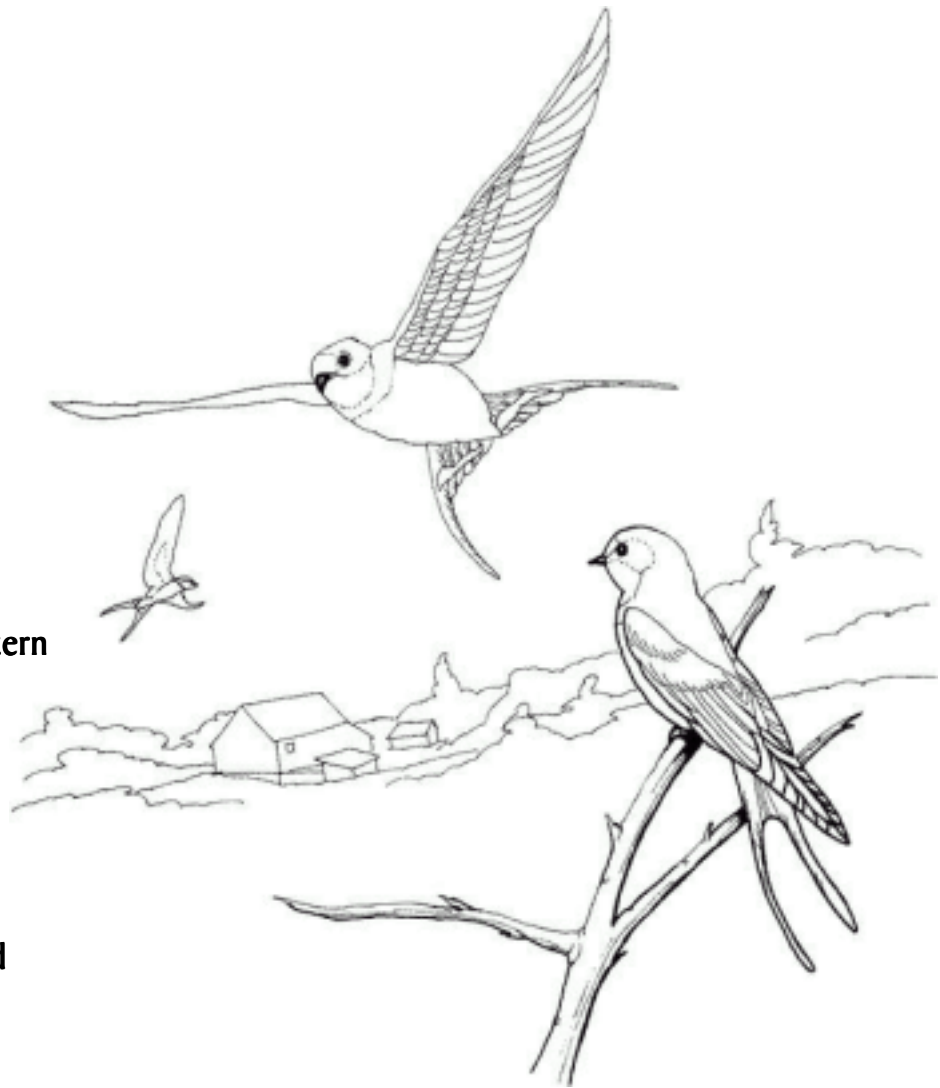
For more information on oblates and oblate programs, contact a local Benedictine monastery or see <http://www.osb.org/obl/index.html>

Swallows
swoop down
catch
lift up
swoop down
catch
lift up.

This simple pattern
of nourishment
echoes
the feeding
of my soul.

I get scared
of the downward
swoops,
want only the
lifting up

but the swallow
in me
knows better,
and continues
to swoop down
catch
lift up.



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Form and Freedom in Common Prayer

by Joseph D. Small

John Irving's novel *A Prayer for Owen Meany* begins with an odd profession of faith. "I am a Christian," the narrator says, "because of Owen Meany. I make no claims to have a life in Christ, or with Christ – and certainly not *for* Christ, which I've heard some zealots claim. I'm not very sophisticated in my knowledge of the Old Testament, and I've not read the New Testament since my Sunday School days, except for those passages I hear read aloud to me when I go to church. I'm somewhat more familiar with passages from the Bible that appear in the *Book of Common Prayer*. I read my prayer book often, and my Bible only on holy days – the prayer book is so much more orderly."

For many Christians, the orderliness of prayer books is one of their virtues. They provide orders for Lord's Day worship and for Daily Prayer, consistent liturgies for the sacraments, a structured liturgical year, systematic lectionaries, and a methodical arrangement of prayers for every occasion. Prayer books have the virtue of providing believers with disciplines of worship that transcend personal quirks and limitations. But for others, the orderliness of prayer books is not a virtue but a straightjacket that inhibits genuine, heartfelt prayer. Instead of personal prayers arising from the gratitude and need of the believer, prayer books substitute someone else's words, inserting someone else's quirks and limitations between us and God.

Order and Freedom in the Book of Common Worship

The *Book of Common Worship* professes to honor "the Reformed approach to worship, freedom within order," but eleven hundred pages of liturgies may appear to bury freedom beneath a mass of printed words. The book's bulk is an outgrowth of its essential freedom, however. None of the liturgies and prayers is obligatory, and the *BCW* provides a variety of options at every point. The Preface notes that "Some will find strength and a sense of unity in the prayers shared in common with the whole church and so will use the liturgical texts as they appear in this book. Others will find it more appropriate to adapt the prayers for use in a particular setting. Others will be prompted to follow the structure of the services as they are outlined and use the texts as models for a more free and spontaneous style of prayer." The *BCW*'s freedom remains "freedom within order," however, for it presumes that even free and spontaneous prayer will be modeled on its forms and texts. Why this presumption that order precedes – and even shapes – freedom?

The beginning of an answer may lie in the venerable Latin adage, *lex orandi, lex credendi*. Literally, "rule of praying, rule of believing," it is usually taken to mean that the church's worship is a norm for its belief: what is prayed shapes what may and must be believed. It is grammatically possible to reverse its force, however, making belief the norm for worship: what is believed shapes what may and must be prayed. Does worship shape theology or does theology shape worship? It works both ways, of course. Clearly, the hymns we sing (and those we avoid), the way we pray (or fail to pray), what we pray for (and what we ignore in prayer), the Scripture we read (and the passages we disregard), the ways in which we participate (or remain passive) all influence the shape of belief. Just as clearly, we make conscious choices about how we worship, at least some of which are theological.



Joseph Small is Associate Director of the Office of Theology and Worship of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Previously, he served on the staff of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and was pastor of churches in Maryland, Ohio, and New York. His most recent publication is *Fire and Wind: The Holy Spirit in the Church Today* (Geneva Press, 2002).

The dynamic interaction between doctrine and liturgy is continuous and necessary. Worship, including personal and corporate spiritual practices, is the primary force in Christian formation. But because faith and faithfulness can be malformed by inappropriate or indiscriminate practices, worship and piety must be tested against the gospel. The Reformed tradition has been acutely aware of the ambiguity of all human response to God's initiative, and so Presbyterians have insisted that biblical and theological norms should govern liturgical development and spiritual disciplines. And yet, the Reformed tradition has been insufficiently appreciative of the lived experience of the Christian community. Too often, it has failed to recognize that piety can be a critical corrective to biblical and theological thought that has become divorced from the community of faith. It would be naïve to think that "right doctrine" can or should exercise exclusive control over corporate worship or personal piety. It would be irresponsible to imagine that any and all liturgical practices and spiritual disciplines are faithful to the gospel.

Lex Credendi

The *Book of Common Worship* is straightforward about its theological assumptions: "In an age dominated by individualism and secularism, it is particularly important to embrace forms of worship that are firmly rooted in the faith and have a strong sense of being united with God, with the community of faith in every time and place, and with a broken world in need of God's healing touch." Is it stating the obvious to say that worship is communal and that it should be rooted in the gospel? Perhaps, but the *BCW* recognizes that it is not only the "age" that is dominated by individualism and secularism, but also the church – its faith, its worship, and its personal piety.

It might seem self-evident that *common* worship would cut against the grain of North American individualism, fostering the reformation of *communities* of faith. But a collection of people on Sunday morning – not to mention individuals and their personal spiritual practices – does not make a

community. The *Book of Common Worship* is intentional in its provision of services that engage all persons in worship, binding them to one another in a community of faith that provides an alternative to the individualism of our culture.

Similarly, it might seem self-evident that common *worship* would cut against the grain of North American secularism, fostering the reformation of communities of *faith*. But the presence of people in a sanctuary does not guarantee that they will find themselves within the Word of God, drawn deeper into faith and faithfulness. The *Book of Common Worship* is intentional in providing texts that boldly proclaim the gospel as a compelling alternative to the culture's version of reality.

"An important characteristic of Reformed worship is that it centers on God rather than on ourselves and our feelings." If that is the case, it may be said that much of Presbyterian worship and spirituality is not fully Reformed. Calls to worship, hymns, prayers, practices of Scripture reading, and sermons too often center on ourselves rather than the triune God who created and sustains all things, who was revealed in Jesus Christ the Lord, and who is among us as the giver of life. Clearly, we should not choose between worship and spiritual practices that focus on human needs and aspirations while ignoring God, and worship that focuses on God to the neglect of human realities. It does make a difference, however, whether worship begins with people, providing God as the response to the need for human fulfillment, or with the God to whom we respond and, thereby, discover fulfillment. The *Book of Common Worship* is firmly committed to worship and spiritual practices in which God's initiative in Christ is primary.

Lex Orandi

Most Protestant traditions suggest that the Christian life should be marked each day by Bible reading and prayer. The *Book of Common Worship's* orders for the daily cycle of prayer have an expansive capacity to enrich these core disciplines. This "rule of praying" gives Scripture and prayer the freedom to

form Christian faith and faithfulness.

The *Book of Common Worship* suggests that Scripture be read daily according to a two-year lectionary. The New Testament readings are semicontinuous, so that the normal pattern is to read through the Gospels, Epistles, and other writings over the course of the two-year cycle. While the Old Testament readings are not complete, they cover the great narrative cycles and many passages from the prophets and writings. A lectionary is simply a chart that shapes one way of reading the Bible, but the lectionary for Daily Prayer has three great advantages over other ways I might read Scripture.

First, I read *all* of the Bible over and over again. Because the lectionary presses me to parts of the Bible I might not read if left to my own choices, the daily table of readings overcomes the most blatant limitations of my self-selection. By presenting the whole Bible, the daily lectionary invites me to hear Scripture over and again as God's word to me.

The second great advantage of the lectionary is that I do not read the Bible alone. No one else may be with me when I read, but I know that as I read according to the lectionary, I am one of a large number of brothers and sisters reading the same texts on the same day. My fellow readers are not simply an anonymous collection of lectionary followers, but include hundreds of members of the Presbyterian Church's "Company of Pastors," many of whom I know by name. Because the daily lectionary is an ecumenical venture, I also know that I have fellow readers in the Roman Catholic Church as well as other Protestant churches. The Scriptures, read daily in community, are more clearly the church's book and not merely my private source of spiritual fulfillment.

A third great advantage of the lectionary is its presentation of the psalms, morning and evening. The psalms are not "readings," but rather corporate prayers that I am invited to pray with my brothers and sisters in the Company of Pastors and with the church throughout time and space. The psalms invite me to pray with the communion of saints, teaching me how to pray, and engaging me in a dialogue of prayer in which God speaks to me

before I open my lips.

These three advantages of the Daily Prayer lectionary derive from an overarching theological affirmation: the Word of God chooses me, and the witness of the Word of God precedes me. The Bible is not something I am free to acknowledge or ignore, to hear fully or selectively, to objectify or individualize. The Word comes before me, and I am answerable to it before it is answerable to me. In good Reformed fashion, address precedes response, grace precedes repentance, and gospel precedes law.

Together with the lectionary, Daily Prayer presents me with set forms and prayers. This "set-ness" is not a restraint, but a framework that disciplines praying, providing a richness and depth that we cannot reach on our own. Set prayers of thanksgiving and intercession shape my personal prayer in ways that enlarge me, for I know from long experience that, if left to myself, my prayers tend to narrow in on me and my too-small world. The prayers of Daily Prayer expand my horizon.

First, I give thanks as well as ask. And my thanksgiving always begins with gratitude for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. Without this disciplined approach, the salvation we share and the gospel that is new each day may become taken-for-granted assumptions rather than daily miracles of grace. Thanksgiving does not stop there, but branches out into the familiar and the unexpected. And, of course, thanksgivings are not limited to those in the set prayer, for they only prompt more complete gratitude to God.

Secondly, Daily Prayer expands my horizon through intercessions that invite me to pray for people and circumstances that seldom would occur to me if left to my own devices. Because of Daily Prayer I pray at least weekly for refugees and homeless people, not only when they make their way into the news. Because of Daily Prayer, I pray regularly for those from whom I am estranged, realizing that the list is always in danger of enlargement and is reduced by the very act of my praying. Because of Morning Prayer, I pray each day for the church in a different region of the world.



Similarly, Evening Prayer calls me into a rotation of intercession for other church families.

Finally, the set prayers of Daily Prayer expand my horizon by their consistent use of biblical phrases, words, and images. My language is elevated – not aesthetically, but “Christianly” – so that I am not captive to cultural categories and my own assumptions about prayer’s shape and vocabulary. As with Scripture, the church’s prayer precedes me, teaching me how to pray.

* * * * *

The biggest – and happiest – surprise in the ten year life of the *Book of Common Worship* has been Presbyterian recovery of the disciplines of daily prayer. Long a staple of Reformed church life, daily Bible reading and prayer were discarded by several generations of Presbyterians as vestiges of a lost and unlamented piety. The *Book of Common Worship*’s orders for Daily Prayer, formed by an explicit “rule of believing,” now provide Presbyterians with a “rule of praying” that engenders deep communion with God and neighbors. *BCW* Daily Prayer is not the only shape of Scripture and prayer, of course, but it provides form that cultivates freedom, and supports freedom that conforms us to Christ.

Soli Deo Gloria. 



The Company of Pastors

Your congregation expects many things from you: preacher, teacher, programmer, manager, counselor! And you do a lot to meet those expectations. But what about the desire you have to help people think prayerfully and practically about the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit? In fact, what about the desire you have to do that *for yourself* so that you will be prepared to help others? You know you’re not alone, but it often feels like it. In response to such expressed needs of Presbyterian pastors, the Office of Theology and Worship has established **The Company of Pastors**.

The Company of Pastors is open to all ministers, commissioned lay pastors, Christian educators, inquirers and candidates for ministry, and seminary faculty. Those who join **The Company** commit themselves to daily disciplines of prayer, reading of Scripture, and reading a brief selection from the *Book of Order* or the *Book of Confessions*. Members also agree to read selected books of theological significance, as well as *The Register*, a journal of theology written by and for pastors. There are also annual opportunities for members of The Company to gather, to this point at the General Assembly.

To get more information about the price of membership and benefits you can anticipate, contact

Nohra Carrillo

Office of Theology and Worship

100 Witherspoon Street

Louisville, KY 40202-1396

(888) 728-7228 x5335

For more information and access to a printable response form, go to:

www.pcusa.org/taw/compastors.htm

Insites

Daily Readings

found as a link on www.pcusa.org

Links can be found here to the daily lectionary, *Mission Yearbook*, and the day’s question from *The Study Catechism*.

Daily Office (Episcopal)

www.missionstclare.com

Universalis (Catholic)

www.universalis.com

Make connections with the complete daily office for each day.

Short Breviaries of the Twentieth Century

www.kellerbook.com

A fascinating and thorough look at the history of the daily office and prayer books.

Spiritual Disciplines to Sustain the Pastoral Vocation

by Sheldon W. Sorge

Three years ago the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s Office of Theology and Worship launched *Excellence From the Start (EFS)*, a program to strengthen new pastors as they prepare for ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament and move into their first years of parish ministry. Assisted by a \$750,000 grant from the Lilly Endowment, we enrolled 77 ministry candidates from five seminaries in a project designed to establish habits of vocational nurture to fund a lifetime of pastoral excellence. Participants were enrolled in two groups, 39 in Fall 2000 and 38 in Fall 2001, from Austin, Columbia, Fuller, Pittsburgh, and Princeton seminaries, primarily providing those involved a network of vocational and personal support.

EFS is built on two premises: (1) that pastors who maintain a disciplined life of prayer and study for personal spiritual nurture are thereby more richly equipped for vocational excellence and satisfaction; and (2) that such commitments are most likely to be sustained over the long haul when done in company with colleagues who encourage and admonish one another, and hold each other accountable to their common covenant. *EFS* participants covenant to practice a particular set of spiritual disciplines for a four-year period, first of all as seminary seniors in company with a group of fellow-seminarians, under the guidance of faculty mentors. Upon graduation, they are matched with graduates of other seminaries into groups of no more than ten, under the guidance of two veteran mentor-pastors. For the next three years, these groups gather for several days twice a year to pray, study, share pastoral joys and struggles, and nurture bonds of friendship. *EFS* aims to establish participants in spiritual practices that will take deep enough root to last for a lifetime.

While a number of other programs have been recently developed to strengthen pastors as they

enter called ministry, *EFS* is distinct from most of the rest in at least two significant respects.

Most programs of this nature provide support either during seminary, or after pastors settle into their first call. *EFS* begins during seminary, continues with its participants through the call process, and stays with them for three years after they graduate from seminary. Additionally, unlike those programs which seek primarily to equip pastors with practical and social tools needed in parish ministry, based on the assumption that such skills cannot be fully learned in seminary, *EFS* focuses instead on the development of personal spiritual disciplines. This is grounded in the belief that a pastor whose soul is well will be better able to summon resources sufficient to meet whatever challenges might arise in a life of ministry.

Both *EFS* participants and mentors have expressed profound gratitude for its benefits, some of which have been quite unanticipated. For instance, several of the veteran pastor-mentors report a renewal of passion in their own ministries as an unforeseen consequence of their sustained investments in the lives of new pastors. Additionally, several *EFS* participants tell of experiencing such deep difficulties in the passage from seminary to parish life that they may well have thrown in the towel midstream were it not for *EFS* standing with them. Though *EFS* is barely three years old, it is worth noting that not a single one of its members has yet departed vocational ministry.

Each *EFS* pastor (including mentors) adopts the covenant of the PC(USA)'s *Company of Pastors*, which includes a commitment to a specific set of daily scripture and confessional readings, daily prayer, and study of significant books. This 600-member covenant community is based upon John Calvin's practice of periodically gathering pastors in a particular location for the purpose of nurturing their common vocation by praying and studying together,



After pastorates in North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia, Sheldon W. Sorge is now an Associate in the Office of Theology and Worship, and as Director of *Excellence From the Start*.

while encouraging each other's practice of daily spiritual disciplines. *EFS's* semiannual gatherings of new pastors revolve around the rhythms of daily prayer (morning, midday, and evening), conversations about common readings, theological reflection on the joys and struggles of parish ministry, and table fellowship. Many participants report that these gatherings have been for them a spiritual and professional lifeline. In fact, several of the groups already are making plans to continue gathering at their own expense once the grant funds expire.


While their gatherings are proving profoundly beneficial, many report that they have struggled to keep up with the daily *Company of Pastors* disciplines between gatherings. Some have abandoned this commitment altogether, in favor of some other pattern of daily spiritual disciplines. However it is not yet clear that they are able to keep these alternative commitments any more faithfully. Indeed, daily exercise disciplines of any sort are immensely difficult to maintain. And when we fail, we often search for other regimens that we think might constitute a better fit for us.

All of this leads to a few significant preliminary conclusions, at least. First, it is painfully difficult individually to maintain our solemn promises to keep common disciplines. Our lives are deeply harried by the pressures of ministry; we prefer shaping our own individualized programs; and our resolve falters all too easily. Clearly, if we wish to keep the promises we make together, we need to be resolute in holding each other's feet to the fire.

Second, we tend to set aside promises we find hard to keep, rather than earnestly seeking resources to help us keep them. We have lost the graces of confession, forgiveness, and penance that could set us back on paths from which we've strayed. Our response to our own failures is more

often defensive than penitent. We need to establish a community where we are secure enough that admitting failure without fear of rejection is possible, so that failures can be honestly admitted and repentance productively engaged. Such community cannot be built overnight; it takes time and much intentional effort to develop the necessary common trust.

Third, we have been made freshly aware of how deeply we all resist embracing set disciplines. We would rather fashion our own, at which of course we can fail with far less embarrassment or guilt. The ancient wisdom that the care of our souls is too important to be left to self-direction has become foreign to us. Recovery of such wisdom is a monumentally counter-cultural project. As pastors, we have professed submission to "orders" — that is, to a given set of ordination vows. We are discovering that staying faithful to vocational vows requires for most of us a community of rich friendship and trust in which we covenant to hold one another accountable to our common promises.

The jury is still out on whether it is possible for new pastors in our place and time to commit themselves for the long haul to a set of common spiritual disciplines. But *EFS* has at least demonstrated this much already: When pastors regularly see others with whom they have covenanted to maintain spiritual disciplines, they remain keenly aware of just how important such disciplines are to their vocational welfare — even if they struggle mightily to keep them. They come to know deep within their bones that a pastor's life of prayer apart from pastoral care, and of study apart from sermon and lesson preparation, really *does* matter for nurturing the pastoral soul. And if they have gotten at least this far, they may well yet negotiate the hurdles associated with translating this abiding conviction into actual practices. 

Prayer is at the heart of worship.

Book of Order W-2.1001

Renewing the Covenant

by Robert H. Bullock, Jr.

We are saved by grace through faith, not by works of the law, according to the Apostle. Faith, the trusting relationship with God our Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is at the heart of the Christian life, and must be the starting point for the renewal of its covenant with God by the Presbyterian Church.


Faith, itself a gift, involves both simple trust and knowledge of God and ourselves. At times the church has emphasized one or the other aspects of faith, but for the full strength of faith to be manifest, there must be knowledge as well as trust. Faith always seeks understanding.

Faith does not originate with individuals or the church, and yet without the church, faith could not be transmitted from generation to generation. Presbyterians have had the gift of understanding of faith as radical trust as well as sure knowledge of God derived from God's Word, centered in the person and work of Jesus Christ, as set forth in Scripture, and applied to our hearts and minds by the inner work of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, God's people should place themselves daily in a posture of humble receptivity, believing that God's word is ordinarily received

through the reading and study of Scripture, the preaching and sacraments of the church, and through the prayers of God's people.

Again and again, the need for the recovery of basic individual and group disciplines such as Bible reading, meditation, prayer — daily encounters with God and making use of the means of grace given — must be emphasized. In fact, until much of the Presbyterian Church literally gets on its knees in prayers of repentance, petition, and intercession, it's difficult to comprehend how renewal of the church can ever take place. Covenant renewal in the Presbyterian Church begins with God, speaking to us in individual and corporate worship — the praise of God — and with a renewal of the practice of the disciplines of faith.

Pray to God, then, that the whole church will turn to God in prayer at this time, asking for forgiveness, asking for guidance, praying for one another, the church and the whole world. In the words of the psalmist, "Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them" (Psalm 32:6). 

Robert H. Bullock, Jr. is the editor of *The Presbyterian Outlook*. This editorial, "Renewing the Covenant II: Faith" was originally published on February 17, 2003. Reprinted by permission of the editor, *The Presbyterian Outlook*, Richmond VA.

Spiritual formation is the activity of the Holy Spirit which molds our lives into the likeness of Jesus Christ. This likeness is one of deep intimacy with God and genuine compassion for all of creation. The Spirit works not only in the lives of individuals but also in the church, shaping it into the Body of Christ. We cooperate with this work of the Spirit through certain practices that make us more open and responsive to the Spirit's touch, disciplines such as sabbath keeping, works of compassion and justice, discernment, worship, hospitality, spiritual friendships, and contemplative silence.

Office of Spiritual Formation, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)



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is a newsletter of the Spiritual Formation Program of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), a ministry of the General Assembly Council.

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Editor Steve Shussett
Circulation Cathy Duncan
Mailing Address 100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville KY 40202-1396
Toll free 888-728-7228, ext. 5306
Direct dial 502-569-5306
Website www.pcusa.org/spiritualformation

The Office of Spiritual Formation

Associate for Spiritual Formation
Kris Haig KHaig@ctr.pcusa.org
Associate for Spiritual Formation
Steve Shussett SShussett@ctr.pcusa.org
Administrative Assistant
Cathy Duncan CDuncan@ctr.pcusa.org

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