

## Other Symbols

Other visual elements might include:

- an **icon** representing Christ or the particular feast,
- **water** during the season of Easter as a reminder of our baptism.

Attention should also be given to **plants** or other **decor** which could enhance the environment and provide a seasonal accompaniment for the rite.

The traditional way of celebrating feasts and seasons has been through the use of different colours. This, together with other aids and the sensitive use of space, should help express the different mood and message of each season: the bareness of Lent contrasted with the richness of Easter.

It is important to have a sense of balance not to overcrowd the celebration with too much nor to use inappropriate objects. A rule to follow is the advice of the church to remain authentic and simple.

## Prayer and Reflection

*The Lord is my light and my help;  
whom shall I fear?*

Psalm 26:1

*How lovely is your dwelling place,  
Lord, God of hosts.*

Psalm 83:2

*How many are your works, O Lord!  
In wisdom you have made them all.  
The earth is full of your riches.*

Psalm 103:24

*If the Lord does not build the house,  
in vain do its builders labour.*

Psalm 126:1

This leaflet is one of 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 those responsible for the Liturgical Environment

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.

## Ministry of preparing the liturgical environment

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

CSEP, page 14

All Christian worship begins with the gathered community of the Church which we call the assembly. It is the primary symbol of Christ present in and with us, so that we all may be one.

In our buildings for worship the needs of the community are reflected in the spatial arrangements. The focal points of altar, ambo and chair show us the action of the eucharistic celebration: the font points out the importance of initiation. When we consider the prayer of the church we find that this does not fit easily into the space arranged for sacramental celebration, it needs its own shape to bring out its significance.

Depending on circumstances practical suggestions might include:

- the use of a separate chapel or space within the building;
- the rearrangement of a small area of the worship space: seats facing inwards, a horseshoe arrangement, or perhaps grouped together in a less formal manner;
- using the main worship space or a large sanctuary but trying to focus on the community, not on elements associated with sacramental worship.

The shape of the arrangement needs careful thought. Whilst there is no *ideal* solution, the symbol of gathering suggests some form of circular or *choral* setting e.g. facing one another.

Whatever space you prepare consider the following:

- enough seating and ease of access;
- provision for the different ministries: reader, musician;
- the physical objects of worship: candle, incense bowl;
- lighting;
- amplification (if necessary).

It is important that the congregation is comfortable with the arrangement and feels part of the liturgy. The celebration of the liturgy of the hours requires a model of worship that allows for a greater flexibility in ministry and roles.

### Light

The associations of **light** with the liturgy are many and varied: *Christ our light*, the resurrection, the baptismal candle, the celebration of Candlemas and so forth. The kindling of lamps as evening fell became a reminder of Christ our light which in turn provided the lucernarium rite. The group may choose to have one centrally placed candle (in the Easter season the Paschal Candle) or a variety of smaller ones according to the festivity providing we remain true to the tradition of a living flame, thus excluding false and artificial candles.

### Incense

Following scripture and the tradition of the Church **incense** has been used as a sign of oblation for the protection and blessing of God. At the evening office it was used as a sacrificial offering — prayer rising to heaven. Fathers of the Church such as St John Chrysostom saw the evening incense as a penitential rite of self offering to God. Traditionally it has been used to incense altar and people — two of the presences of Christ.

Incense is burned during the gospel canticle. People may be invited to put incense on the charcoal if it is used in the Introduction and during the intercessions. There are various ways of burning incense: the simplest method is to place the burning charcoal in a specially prepared heat-proof bowl, and place the incense in a container beside it or a thurible could be used.