



Liturgical Notes on Eastertide: Easter Sunday to Pentecost

Prepared by the Bishop's Liturgical Advisory Panel
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These notes are the third in a series of “evergreen” documents that have been prepared by the Bishop's Liturgical Advisory Panel. Previously the panel offered notes on “Advent, Christmas and Epiphany” as well as “Lent and Holy Week.” Before summer we intend to send material on “Sundays after Pentecost (including Creation Season).” In subsequent years all the notes will be revised and expanded. The notes are approved by our Bishop, and intended to assist parish clergy and worship planners by providing guidelines and encouraging creativity as we move through the liturgical year as a diocese.

EASTERTIDE

Each year parishes observe Easter Sunday with joy and enthusiasm, enhancing worship with flowers and celebratory hymns. It is important to remember that Easter is not just ‘one great day’, but rather the beginning of a seven-week celebration of the resurrection. There are gestures that work together to create and sustain a distinct atmosphere of joy each Sunday throughout the season. These could include:

- flowers every Sunday
- drawing attention to the paschal candle and font, signs of the risen Christ. They can be enhanced with groupings of potted flowers, and by keeping the font filled with water. People can be encouraged to touch the water as they pass by, as a reminder of their own baptism and new life in Christ
- displaying symbols of the resurrection with projected and printed images. Consider selecting a variety of images to use throughout the season. Families wanting to donate memorial funds could be encouraged to commission professionally designed banners displaying symbols of new life in Christ.

Gathering of the Community, Collects & Readings

A celebratory tenor to the liturgy is set when people proclaim the Easter greeting response with enthusiasm (as well as the ‘Alleluia’ at the dismissal). The presider can work with the choir, servers and/or Parish Council members in order to establish a lively response as the norm. A notice in the bulletin or service leaflet can serve as a reminder

to the congregation. Key to the success of this will be the enthusiasm with which the presider greets the congregation!

Alternative forms for use in both Lent and Eastertide are contained in *Gathering Rites for the Paschal Cycle* (found at www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/Gathering-Rites-for-the-Paschal-Cycle.pdf). They signal the importance of baptism in our faith, with distinct perspectives for both seasons. Consider experimenting with various forms, carefully evaluating their effect.

Rather than following the *Gathering Rite's* suggestion to say the Prayer over the Water at the font each week, which might become tedious, try using one of the introductory phrases, such as “Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism, we are raised to new life in the Spirit. Let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.” An act of praise would then follow, either the Glory to God or a hymn or chant celebrating baptism or the resurrection. Some congregations would welcome the sprinkling of the assembly during the singing. The Peace could happen either before the hymn or at its usual place in the liturgy.

Familiarity with the weekly lections helps the presider decide whether or not to select a Collect of the Day from the Alternative Collects (see <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/Alternative-RCL-Collects-Final-2019.pdf>). There are two alternative choices for each week, with the Scripture passages noted for easy reference.

In 2023 General Synod authorized *Alternative Old Testament Readings in Eastertide*, in keeping with the early church's reliance on the Hebrew Scriptures as a resource for understanding the Paschal mystery. The readings for each year can be found here <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/Alternative-Old-Testament-Readings-Easter-Season.pdf> or in the *Book of Alternative Services (BAS)* section of *McCausland's*. The accompanying essay on General Synod's website is helpful.

In keeping with the idea of finding multiple ways to mark the unity of the Easter season, consider using a joyful Alleluia refrain before the gospel reading. The abundance of Easter hymns available makes it easy for most hymns to have a resurrection focus.

The weekly sermon is an obvious opportunity to keep the community's focus on the Paschal mystery. Whether one uses the Revised Common Lectionary or the *Alternative Old Testament Readings for Eastertide*, the preacher has a rich variety of material to choose from.

The lections provide opportunities for mystagogy, that is, reflection on the experience of baptism and what it means to be made a new creation in Christ. For example, the Second Sunday of Easter always raises the question of how to live by faith without having seen the risen Christ. The Fourth Sunday points to the nature of authority in the Christian community. Later Sundays move increasingly to aspects of life in the Spirit.

Eucharistic Prayers

The BAS provides six eucharistic prayers, including Eucharistic Prayer #3 which has prefaces for Easter, Ascension and Pentecost Sunday. In addition, there are three Supplementary Eucharistic Prayers that can be found <https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/Eucharist.pdf>. Again, the lections of the week are the best guide for selecting which of the nine eucharistic prayers to use on any given Sunday.

In order to further distinguish the season and give it unity, consider selecting a Eucharistic Prayer that is not used at other times of the year for use during the Sundays of Eastertide.

Many congregations replace the Agnus Dei with #746 in *Common Praise* - 'The disciples knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread.'

Prayers of the People

The Prayers of the People can reflect the theme of resurrection in a variety of ways, ideally keeping a unified pattern throughout the season. Although the use of the BAS Easter litany on page 122 is not mandatory, variety can be found with revised petitions and the same cue phrase and response - 'let us pray to the Lord. **Hear us, Lord of glory!**'.

The penitential emphasis of the Lenten season shifts in Eastertide to the joy of sins forgiven. The use of a baptismal memorial during the alternative gathering rite (see above), or a short petition for forgiveness during the Prayers of the People can be appropriate alternatives to using the general confession and absolution on page 191. Other expressions of penitence which are found in the liturgy such as the petitions for mercy in the 'Glory to God', the exchange of peace, the plea for forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer, and communion itself which is 'for the forgiveness of sins.'

PENTECOST

Although the Day of Pentecost is an integral part of Eastertide, it is a distinct principal Feast, and an emphasis on certain elements in the liturgy brings out the unique aspects of this significant day. A change in the colour of vestments and hangings, from white to red, is only the beginning. Some presiders prepare the congregation several weeks in advance to dress in 'colours of fire' in an effort to awaken people to the meaning of the day.

Lifting up the Day of Pentecost as a major celebration that reflects a mature theology of the Holy Spirit's presence in the church is most appropriate. As Pentecost Sunday does not mark the birthday of the church, care should be taken to avoid birthday-themed decorations.

Special musical offerings are welcome on this day as well as festive refreshments after the liturgy. Distinctive flowers are a desirable element, especially near the font and

paschal candle. Although environmental concerns have diminished the previous use of streamers and balloons, it is possible to incorporate reused or recycled material into festive decorations suitable to the occasion.

Some congregations choose Pentecost as a time for the renewal of baptismal promises.

Carefully choosing the reader(s) is important so the congregation can experience the richness of the Scripture readings. Some congregations have the capacity to read the passage from Acts in multiple languages. Alternatively, having others gather around the gospeller to read the gospel simultaneously in different languages can be very moving. If that is not possible, multiple voices reading in English can awaken a fresh hearing of scripture.

Unity of the Season versus Theme Sundays

As noted at the beginning, it is important to create a sense of unity across the fifty days of Easter, highlighting the liturgy's focus on the celebration of the Paschal mystery. We have suggested several ways to emphasize and build on that unity.

It must be admitted that there are competing forces within society and the church that make this unity of focus difficult to maintain. What can seem like a plethora of 'theme Sundays' - from Good Shepherd Sunday, Theological Education Sunday, Earth Day, Jerusalem Sunday, Ascension Day, Mother's Day to the Victoria Day long weekend - can tug attention away from the celebration of the resurrection. This challenge of course is not unique to this season of the liturgical year.

What is needed is an awareness of the importance of Easter while still remaining connected with the cultural context in which we live as well as the many issues the Anglican Church of Canada has become aware of in recent years.

Thankfully there are creative and meaningful ways to address significant themes without literally renaming the Sunday as something other than "The Xth Sunday of Easter." Projected or printed images, careful selection of hymns, thoughtful sermons, explanatory material in the Sunday bulletin, educational events for the parish as well as contextualized Prayers of the People can all combine to create the awareness of an important theme or issue without undermining the unity of the Easter season.

MISCELLANEOUS

Some parishes cherish the tradition of holding an Easter Sunrise Services. Although such liturgies are often held outdoors it is not a requirement. If a parish also celebrates an Easter Vigil, be careful not to make the sunrise service a second vigil. That said, an Easter Vigil could be held just before sunrise.

It is desirable that Ascension Day be marked by a celebration of the eucharist, if not in every parish, then perhaps within a deanery or cluster of parishes.

Perhaps it is obvious, but it is always good to commend the great Fifty Days as an appropriate occasion for baptism.

Plain wax candles can be decorated with fresh numbers each year. Keep wax paschal candles out of direct sunlight, especially in warmer weather. When it is unlit, remove any heavy follower in order to avoid bending the candle. If humidity and/or heat in the church is high, consider storing it horizontally in a cool place.

The Vigil of the Resurrection found on page 133 of the BAS can be held on any Saturday evening but is especially appropriate during Eastertide.