For World leaders:
may they work together to bring about peace and justice for all nations.
We pray to the Lord.

c) Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
For this Faith Community:
may we resist the illusions of this passing world and decide to follow Jesus.
We pray to the Lord.

d) The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom should I fear?
For the Sick:
may the light of Christ’s healing grace ease the darkness of pain and suffering.
We pray to the Lord.

e) One thing I ask: to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.
For our beloved dead:
may they experience the light of eternal life in God.
We pray to the Lord.

Further reading:
Harrington, Elizabeth. “Writing General Intercessions” Liturgy Lines (Catholic Leader), 25.2.01.

Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn
The Liturgical Commission

The General Intercessions

The Liturgy of the Word concludes with a litany of intentions for prayer. Sometimes called Prayer of the Faithful or the Universal Prayer, the General Intercessions are an important aspect of the Mass.

Some theological considerations
Care for others has been historically, and is now, a characteristic of Christian life. This care is revealed in ways such as practical assistance, planning for justice, and prayer. Paul, for example, recommended that people everywhere should lift up their hands and pray together for those in need (1 Tim 2:1-8). Luke emphasises the need for persistence (11:8) and a steadfast heart (18:1).

Praying for others is not only a privilege, but a responsibility and a duty arising from baptism. Christians are baptised into Christ as

- prophet: they are called to speak God’s Word and align their lives with Christ,
- king: they are challenged to become pastoral and servant leaders; and
- priest: they are invited to intercede in prayer and offer sacrifice for others.

Praying for others encourages Christians to move beyond personal preoccupations and become alert to the sufferings and possibilities in the world. It encourages linking liturgy to daily life in a concrete way and fosters action on behalf of others (Christian mission).

Worship and prayer remind Christians that God alone is Creator, Source, Provider. Prayer can change attitudes, help hearts soften and open up. In liturgy, gathered Christians, the Body of Christ, pray together with and in Christ, the Head. They come confidently before God, confident not only of God’s mercy and love, but confident that God views them through the prism
of “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9). In that sense, Christians are a holy, priestly people, and stand to pray the intercessions.

The General Intercessions bring the Liturgy of the Word to a close. They form a link between the readings of the particular day and the intentions that emerge. In the General Intercessions, the people, having listened carefully to the whole Liturgy of the Word, are better prepared for the remainder of the Eucharist (Lectionary for Mass: Introduction, 30). That is, they have heard God’s words of comfort, love, challenge or hope, and are ready to respond in praise, thanks and blessing. The intercessory prayers need to link the daily lives of people (as members of the world) and the particular concerns of the local community.

**Historical Background**

One of the parts of the Jewish (synagogue) liturgy was a series of eighteen blessings, containing requests for individual and universal needs. At a very early period of Christian history, a similar prayer became a stable part of the liturgy, as Justin Martyr (+165) revealed. At baptism in Rome, he wrote, the assembly “offer prayers in common for ourselves … and for people everywhere.” Augustine frequently asked the assembly, after his homily, to intercede for others.

These intercessions were the prayers of the baptised, the priestly people of God. Those who were in the catechumenate therefore, left the assembly at the end of the homily to reflect on the readings of that Sunday.

By the fourth century, Solemn Prayers of Intercession in the Roman Rite comprised nine sets of intentions and prayer. This particular form is now found only in the Solemn (Intercessory) Prayers for Good Friday.

The Roman Rite took up customs from other places. It became popular for a deacon to introduce the intentions that were followed by a short response such as “Lord, have mercy.” This approach became the norm from the fifth century.

---

**Examples of General Intercessions**

Examples taken from Holy Week:
(Sample prayers: the congregation is free to adapt.)

a) For the world in which we live:
that God may give us health and peace through the blood of Christ.
We pray to the Lord. R: Lord, hear our prayer.

b) For the sick and suffering:
that God may give them courage and strength to share the suffering of Christ.
We pray to the Lord. R: Lord, hear our prayer.

c) For believers and unbelievers everywhere, for all our brothers and sisters around the world:
that the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ may lead us to the glory of rising again.
We pray to the Lord. R: Lord, hear our prayer.

Another style, that links the readings very specifically with the intercessions, is used by Celebration Magazine. Following are the prayers for the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A (Celebration, January 2005, p. 48).

Presider: Mindful of our call to discipleship, let us ask the Lord for the grace to be faithful followers of the Lord.

a) **Come after me and I will make you fishers of people.**

For Church leaders:
may they follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ by proclaiming a gospel of repentance for the people who walk in darkness.
We pray to the Lord.

b) **I urge you, brothers and sisters, that there be no divisions among you.**
Intentions should be specific and concrete. They should not “preach”, offer simple solutions or partisan views.

Better “For the world: that we strive for justice and peace in Iraq” than “For the world: that the Lord rewards the hard work of Australian and American soldiers in Iraq.”

Courage is needed to pray about real issues, even the controversial ones. The whole assembly needs to be able to pray the intention.

Many parishes pray for the recently deceased members of the parish, or for those whose anniversaries occur at that time. Mentioning those people by name in the intercessions reminds us that we are able to pray for our community and its specific needs – including those members of our parish community who have died. It could be helpful to put the phonetic spelling of names in brackets for ease of pronunciation for those reading the intercessions.

Where are these prayers read from?

As prayers of the priestly people, intentions are usually announced from the ambo. They can also be lead from another suitable place such as a lectern on the opposite side of the sanctuary from the ambo.

Presentation of the General Intercessions

One reader is normally preferable to a series of readers. The latter can highlight the reader more than the intention, create unnecessary movement and so distract from the flow of the liturgy.

The way the General Intercessions are presented to the assembly is important.

- The reader needs to allow adequate silence for people to form their prayer.
- The folder in which the Intercessions are stored is telling. Its presentation is important and ideally shows due reverence and dignity for the Liturgy of the Word.

Over the centuries, the Eucharistic Prayer came to include certain intercessions (for the church, the communion of saints and the dead). The General Intercessions themselves disappeared from the Mass for about 800 years. They were restored by Vatican Council II to their traditional place at the conclusion of the Liturgy of the Word.

Practical Considerations

What do they consist of?

It is desirable that General Intercessions be included in all Masses celebrated with a congregation. The sequence of intentions is normally:

- for the needs of the Church;
- for public authorities and the salvation of the world;
- for those oppressed by any need;
- for the local community.

In some celebrations, such as marriages, funerals, confirmations etc., the series of intentions may refer more specifically to the particular occasion. “The intentions announced should be sober, composed freely though discreetly, and succinct, and should express the prayer of the entire community” (GIRM draft 3rd edition, 2002, 71).

The presiding minister directs these prayers. After a brief introduction he invites the assembly to pray. Preferably, the intentions are announced by a deacon, but in his absence by a cantor, the rostered reader or a member of the assembly. The actual prayer is “Lord, hear our prayer” or Christ hear us” etc., and is prayed by the whole assembly, whilst standing. The presiding minister reads the concluding prayer. The intercessions may be sung.
### The Structure of the General Intercessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Invitation to pray</td>
<td>Presiding minister</td>
<td>My brothers and sisters …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Silence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Intentions</td>
<td>Deacon / Reader / Cantor</td>
<td>For the sick: Pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Intention</td>
<td></td>
<td>May the light of Christ’s healing grace ease the darkness of pain and suffering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pause</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Silence</td>
<td></td>
<td>In the silence, the people make their own prayer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Invitation to respond</td>
<td></td>
<td>We pray to the Lord.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Response</td>
<td>Assembly</td>
<td>Lord, hear our prayer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Concluding prayer</td>
<td>Presiding minister</td>
<td>God of light …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assent</td>
<td>Assembly</td>
<td>Amen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**In these prayers, the role of the reader is not to address prayer to God, but to announce the intentions to the people.** The “you” in the form of address to God is out of place. For example: “We ask you, Lord, to send abundant rain to our dry countryside.” A correct form is: “For our dry countryside: that our loving creator would send abundant rain.”

An easy formula for composing is: “For …… that ….” This form emphasises the intention.

Another form is:

“For the sick / the tsunami victims / our church.” PAUSE to let those present silently insert a specific intention. The actual prayer only comes with the people’s “Lord, hear us.” (It’s a bit like pressing the “send” button on email!) This form emphasises the silences.

Some writers link a phrase or sentence from the readings of the day with the intention. For example:

*Come after me, and I will make you fishers of people.*

**For Church leaders:** (pause) may they follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ by proclaiming a gospel of repentance for the people who walk in darkness (pause). We pray to the Lord.  
(from *Celebration*, January 2005, p 48).

For more examples, refer to the next two pages.

### Writing and Reading the General Intercessions

As the petitions need to be attentive to the current needs of the world and the local community, the Intercessions for Mass are not to be found in the ritual book. There are Books of Intercessions available and collections on the Internet (of varying quality). These may serve as models.

The weekly task of writing intercessions for the Sunday Eucharist may be undertaken by an individual or group within the parish. Reading and prayerful reflection on the scriptures of the day are encouraged before writing the Intercessions. A group of readers and others usually has a number of advantages over an individual, in terms of breadth, interest base, vision, less likelihood of unconscious bias etc. Well-written intercessions have strong ideas and are expressed simply.