

# Liturgy on the Edge

*Pastoral and Attractional Worship*

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To all who make and have made  
St Martin-in-the-Fields  
an experiment in hope  
and a living mystery

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# I

## On the Edge of Faith: Outreach Services

### Introduction

We can talk about three broad kinds of conventional evangelism: (1) where the church wants to share something that the culture more generally doesn't think it wants or needs, but the church seeks to offer it in an attractive manner anyway; (2) where the church has something that a particular group knows it wants or needs but is not used to finding in the conventional patterns, practices and programmes of the church; (3) where the church observes something people clearly want or need and identifies ways to make that thing available but gently and respectfully seeks to offer a great deal more besides. The examples in this chapter fall into the second and third categories.

In the second category we find Start:Stop, which perceives that many people living pressured lives and working in intense environments long for a moment of peace, beauty and reflection. Such people invariably only have a few minutes to set aside, so Start:Stop seeks to offer them something deep and helpful – something that some find in a podcast listened to on bus or tube, but is so much more significant when experienced live and tangibly. In similar vein we find Sacred Space, which serves those who have a longer period of reflective time once or twice a month, but who want to be given the opportunity to rest in their own contemplation rather than have their prayer structured by conventional liturgical expectations. Likewise here we explore the ministry of healing, conceived as an outreach event appealing to people who really want help and prayer and identify with



the words of Romans 8.26: ‘Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.’ Such people often don’t want the baggage of church that comes with such prayer, so here we suggest a service that gives them what they know they need.

In the third category we present Great Sacred Music, a hugely successful programme running since 2013, which starts with people’s enjoyment of popular classical music but gives them reasons for the joy they find there – thus achieving as much music as a concert but as much theological reflection as a crafted sermon, yet all in a playful and unthreatening spirit. And there is an account of our midweek informal evening Eucharist, which attracts those who are drawn to a sacramental life but want to participate directly in liturgy and feel less like spectators.

## Great Sacred Music

### *Samuel Wells*

I lived for seven years in North Carolina, a part of the USA comparatively well served for public broadcasting. North Carolina has a classical station, not so different from the UK’s Classic FM, and on a Sunday, this being the American South, a good deal of airtime reflects the listeners’ devotional, largely Christian, interests. As I would step out of the shower on a Sunday morning I would hear a trailer for the 8–10 a.m. programme. It would begin, ingenuously, ‘Did you know that a great deal of the classical music that we enjoy has *religious* origins ...?’ – as if it had happened upon a remarkable, profound and little-known truth. I never took the trailer seriously. But I never forgot it.

I became vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields in 2012. Besides engaging with homelessness and destitution, what St Martin’s is most famous for is classical music. St Martin’s, besides being the busiest choral and orchestral concert venue in the country, is the only major classical music home that makes a commercial

profit, rather than relying on grant support. It successfully offers popular revenue-generating concerts alongside more specialist aspirational events. When I joined St Martin's, two things about this drew my attention. One was that all the best-attended concerts were franchised to external promoters: this meant the principal creative live interface between the public and St Martin's was one in which St Martin's congregation, clergy and staff were communicating little or nothing about their own convictions and vision of the world. The concert programme was seen largely, though not wholly, as a form of income generation; no time was being spent nurturing and highlighting our own professional performers – leaving aside the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, an entirely separate but cordially related organization. The other concern was that there was no cross-fertilization between the public-facing concert programme and the congregation-facing liturgical programme. They were run by different people and happened at different times.

Thus in 2013 we combined the concert and liturgical music departments and sought to strengthen both the liturgical and the performance programmes by integrating them. What St Martin's was trying to do was to identify its classical music more closely with its core identity as an agent of renewal in church, world and Kingdom. Given it was famous for classical music, it wanted to offer clearer messages through that fame that spoke of the mission of the whole organization.

The intention has been to retain the balance between worship and performance, professional and voluntary, aspirational and popular, Christian and people of all traditions, entertainment and challenge, pastoral and prophetic. The first result of this was the idea of creating a hybrid event that took the intensity and spoken content of a worship service and blended it with the accessibility and popular appeal of a classical concert. And this was the moment when I recalled that unforgettable trailer from the North Carolina classical music radio station. And so Great Sacred Music was born.

What we have noticed is that many concert-goers see classical music as a significant aspect of their spiritual quest, and/or eagerly wish to discover more about the origin of much classical

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music in its theological themes and commitments. Thus we have begun to explore ways in which clergy and musicians can present events that provide both musical delight and enriching commentary on the intent and texture of anthems and hymns. These ‘crossover’ events, which are both concerts and worship services, and at the same time neither of the above, are developing a large and enthusiastic following. One visitor, on departing from Great Sacred Music, and seeing two or three hundred people gathered, said, referring to the internationally known and hugely influential introduction to the faith run by the charismatic West London Anglican church, Holy Trinity Brompton, ‘This is your Alpha course.’

Since 2013 Great Sacred Music has taken place at St Martin-in-the-Fields every Thursday between 1 and 1.35 p.m., usually led by me and performed by the St Martin’s Voices conducted by Andrew Earis. It follows a regular pattern: it begins with an anthem; then comes a two-minute introduction followed by a hymn; then a commentary followed by two anthems, and another commentary followed by one or two anthems; then a short introduction to the second hymn; finally, there are advertisements to other parts of the church’s programme and a short concluding word followed by a final anthem. In between I offer theological, historical and anecdotal commentary on the music, its origins, references and significance. We work hard to ensure it’s not an act of worship in any conventional sense: there are no prayers, the hymns are sung seated, God is spoken about but not spoken to, there are no vestments or processions, there is no especial air of reverence. But it still feels different to a concert – not just because there are four or five interruptions to the music, each with three or four minutes of spoken words, but because those words are designed to highlight the dimensions of the notes and lyrics that have existential significance; some people report having an experience of worship, others sense they are involved in an educational programme, others again regard it as just a more engaging form of concert. One regular attender, noting the humour, the critical engagement with faith, and the playful storytelling, said, ‘You have introduced me to a more generous form of Christianity.’ What’s happening is that churchgoers who

want to discover the real significance of the music they know mingle with music-lovers who are intrigued by the theological approach that takes their diverse standpoints of faith, other faith or no faith seriously.

The tendency in the classical music world is either to scorn Classic FM as 'Radio 3 lite' or slyly to admire it for making classical music mainstream and profitable. Our approach is not only to see the commercial potential of Classic FM and what it represents, but to see it as indicating a deeper search for meaning, understanding and depth, which St Martin's is well placed to feed and reward. The secret is not to look for a particular outcome, but to ensure every gathering is stylish, professional, light-hearted, probing, surprising, informative and fun. There are usually salacious details about the composers' real lives, a provocative observation about why a hymn, though popular, is problematic, and a pause to dwell on a sublime turn of word or tune and what makes it so special.

Why are people, who in many cases know very little about composition or theology, nonetheless so often moved by classical music that, in the words of that Carolinian trailer, 'has religious origins'? The answer, we have come to believe, is that they are deeply searching for meaning and truth, and, through disillusionment or habit, have in many cases lost the will or desire to seek a fulfilment of that quest in institutionally shaped conventional religion – yet may be drawn to such depths by music that opens doors, asks questions and addresses longings. All Great Sacred Music does is to take that quest seriously and point out the ways that composers of words and tunes were asking similar questions and addressing comparable yearnings.

As Great Sacred Music has become popular, we have sought to adapt it to different settings. One that has proved successful is an evening concert series we call 'Great Sacred Choral Classics'. This is an hour-long format without hymns that takes a theme or composer and offers around 38 minutes of music and 22 minutes of speech. That amount of speech gives ample opportunity to develop a theme in some depth. Thus, for Mozart's Requiem, familiar choral pieces were interspersed with five-minute addresses on Death, Heaven, Hell and Purgatory. For Haydn's

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*Creation* a similar format allowed for addresses on Haydn, creation, science and ecology. For ‘Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring’ there were addresses on Bach, Jesus, joy and desire.

Another successful spin-off we call ‘Making My Heart Sing’. This is a blend of the BBC Radio 4 classics *Desert Island Discs* and *With Great Pleasure*. A celebrity is invited to choose around eight favourite choral pieces and then is interviewed in a conversation that explores their life and convictions about faith while linking together the eight choral pieces, each of which is performed live. Again it lasts one hour.

### Example outline – International Women’s Day

Anthem 1: O virtus Sapientiae (Hildegard von Bingen)

Welcome and brief remarks about:

- Hildegard of Bingen
- International Women’s Day
- three kinds of feminism found within the Church and theological thinking
- Bernadette Farrell, author of the first hymn

*(choir standing, everyone else seated)*

Hymn 1: ‘O God you search me and you know me’

Brief remarks *(largely about the connection between Anglo-Catholicism and the women’s suffrage movement, as featured in anthem 3)*

Anthem 2: Jesus Christ the Apple Tree (Elisabeth Poston)

Anthem 3: Sanctus from Mass in D (Ethel Smyth)

Brief remarks *(about Edith Cavell’s faith and life)*

Anthem 4: Standing as I do before God (Cecilia McDowell)

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Brief remarks (*about Irish Anglo-Catholic hymn-writer and social activist Cecil Frances Alexander*)

Hymn 2: 'All things bright and beautiful'

Closing remarks and announcements (*concerning Amy Grant, known as the Queen of Christian Pop*)

Anthem 5: Thy Word (Amy Grant)

*(35 minutes in total)*

### Start:Stop

#### *Jonathan Evens*

St Stephen Walbrook, a partner church of St Martin-in-the-Fields, is located, midway between Bank and Cannon Street stations, on Walbrook, one of the busiest streets in the City of London. Between 7.30 and 9.30 a.m. a human river of souls flows up and down the street, all, until recently, passing St Stephen by, as the church was not open until later in the day.

The Parish of St Stephen Walbrook is populated by the insurance and financial industries, with other small businesses including restaurants, solicitors, banks and retail outlets. The parishioners are therefore the employees of these companies, rather than local residents. The key to mission in the parish is relationship with the major local employers, but, with changing work patterns and increased time pressures, the traditional midpoint in the working day when employees might frequent the City's many churches has been increasingly squeezed. The average lunchbreak in the City is 22 minutes.

As the mission challenges and opportunities at St Stephen were discussed, it became clear that this early morning flow of workers should become a key focus for the church. But what might engage busy people spilling out of crowded trains, grappling with the pressures of the upcoming day? And how could

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we encourage them to divert from their walk to work in order to come to church?

Our thought processes were as follows:

- Because of the pressures working people are under, whatever we offered had to be brief. That seemed to rule out all of the traditional Anglican services as, however much one pared them down, they were likely to be longer than the amount of time that busy people could spare. This gave us a clean slate from which to work in designing our liturgy. We decided that whatever we offered should last no longer than ten minutes.
- Although brief, what was offered had to give sufficient value to warrant people altering their usual schedule. We thought that content needed to be relevant, so had to be work-related.
- Because working life is pressured, we thought the time should be (and should be publicized as being) contemplative and reflective, as this could assist the well-being of workers in stressful circumstances.

Thus emerged the following initial parameters: ten minutes in length; work-related content; contemplative in nature; and non-traditional format. As a result, we decided to trial the use of a brief Bible reading, a short work-related meditation, space for silent reflection, and a responsive prayer, ending with a blessing. The prayers were to be based on the content of the meditation and the response would specifically use a phrase taken from the meditation, in order to unify the ten-minute session we were spending together. To assist in creating a contemplative atmosphere, we would play instrumental music quietly in the background and dim the lighting.

To enable people to drop in as and when they could and to guarantee that they would have to be there for no more than ten minutes, it was agreed that each ten-minute session would be repeated every 15 minutes from 7.30 to 9.30 a.m. on a Tuesday morning.

We decided to call the session ‘Start:Stop’, with the strapline ‘Start your day by stopping for 10 minutes of quiet reflection’,

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and created a flyer using traffic lights as a visual equivalent of the title, 'Start:Stop'.

To publicize Start:Stop we thought we would have to get our materials directly into the hands of those passing the doors of the church, so we leafletted on the street in the weeks running up to the launch.

We also thought that busy people would need a physical visual reminder of the sessions each day that they were occurring, so we created large signs which could be held up high on the street directing people to the church entrance for '10 minutes of quiet reflection'. For one of us physically to be on the street would, we thought, witness to a ministry of presence – and so it proved. The signs, as well as providing a visual prompt at the moment people are making a choice as to whether or not to come in, also led to other snatched conversations, and are a talking point to which people refer when we meet them in other contexts.

The result has been that between 30 and 60 people regularly attend Start:Stop. These are people who were not previously attending St Stephen Walbrook. They tell us that ten minutes is manageable for them at that time of day and that, because the content of the meditation is directly relevant to their work, the session sets them up for the rest of their day. Some will stop after the session to share a pastoral need or a request for prayer, while others have begun coming to services and activities at St Stephen Walbrook more generally.

Start:Stop is an example of contextualized ministry that works with (while sometimes also challenging) the actual and real experience of working people. As a result, connections are made between faith and work, and the church is seen to be supporting the well-being of working people through its pattern of worship and pastoral care.



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### Example outline – Show us how our humanity can be made ‘salty’

Welcome and brief outline of the session

Bible readings: Matthew 5.13 and Mark 9.49–50

Brief meditation based on the readings:

- About the use of salt in preservation and flavouring.
- ‘Every gift you have been given ... these have been given to you so that you can work with God to unlock the full potential of his world’ (G. Kelly, *Humanifesto*, Spring Harvest, 2001).
- Brief summary of the five different relationships that the Christian can have with culture as proposed by H. Richard Niebuhr in *Christ and Culture*: opposition, agreement, Christ above culture, tension and reformation.
- Let us ask God to show us how our humanity can be made ‘salty’, both in its role on the earth and in our workplaces.

Silent reflection

*Three responsive biddings using the response:*  
Show us how our humanity can be made ‘salty’  
**in our role on the earth and in our workplaces.**

*Blessing:* Being granted a vision of our world as God’s love would have it, unlocking the full potential of this world, using every gift we have been given, using our gifts for the common good. May all those blessings of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

*Closing announcements:* reflection concluded, so feel free to leave; invited to stay longer should you wish; time of next reflection; thank you for coming.

*(10 minutes in total)*



## Sacred Space

*Richard Carter*

Many of our acts of worship are very word-focused. So much so, that when we think of creating a new liturgy the usual place to start is with what words, readings, hymns or sermon will be included. It becomes an order of worship printed on a service sheet. Yet we have discovered at St Martin's that among many there is a growing thirst for greater contemplation and silence: a need to move beyond words and the printed page into a deeper space – the place of encounter. We are 'called home', as St Augustine put it, 'from the noise that is around us to the joys that are silent. Why do we rush about ... looking for God who is here at home with us, if all we want is to be with him?'<sup>1</sup> In the contemplative tradition there are techniques to help the individual find this inner space: the use of prayer words or phrases, or simple repeated prayers like the rosary or Jesus prayer.<sup>2</sup> And because deep contemplation includes our whole bodies and our senses there are physical ways of helping us to still the body which involve the way we sit, our posture, our breathing. There are also other aids to finding this still place, like candles, music or the use of a visual focus like a cross, icon or painting. What all these techniques help us to do is leave behind the distractions and anxieties of the day and find a place to be present with Christ.

Many people today are talking about the importance and benefit of 'mindfulness' and meditation – the way it can improve the individual's sense of well-being and quality of life. Of course techniques of mindfulness and meditation have a very rich spiritual tradition within the Christian faith. I would like to use the word 'presence'. How can we create a time and place where we are truly present to ourselves, to God, to one another and to the world in which we live? And how can God become more present to us? It can often seem that the church is a place that simply

<sup>1</sup> St Augustine, *On the Trinity* VIII, 7.11.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Laird, *Into the Silent Land: The Practice of Contemplation*, London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2006), pp. 34ff.

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makes us busier and bombards us with even more words and activities and interactions. Many of us may have resolved to keep a time of quiet prayer only to find a few weeks later that this time has been eaten away by other commitments. When we have tried to pray on our own we sometimes find these quiet times are anything but quiet. Instead of a still place, we enter into what can at times feel like a jumble or chaos of memories, thoughts, hopes, desires and fears. It is in this place of unknowing that what Martin Laird, in his very helpful book *Into the Silent Land*, calls ‘the commentary’ begins: we find our minds not only flooded with thoughts and feelings but also a commentary on them. Such a commentary, far from moving the prayer from head to heart, makes our minds even busier: ‘Who have I forgotten to contact? What shall I do? How can I cope with so and so? What’s the point of this?’ The silence we needed and sought is very different from this troubling introspection.

It is clear that our silent, contemplative time needs discipline and a structure that can help free us from such commentary. One of the communities that has done much to provide that access and structure into such a contemplative tradition is the Taizé Community in France. What Taizé has done so successfully is to open up the monastic tradition so that all can participate in that experience of the sacred – including beginners. Many young people, including myself many years ago, discovered a deeply resonant form of prayer at Taizé that made us thirsty for the beauty of God’s presence among us and awakened a longing in our hearts to recapture that experience in our own prayer life when we returned home. In many ways Taizé taught me and many others to pray in a deeper, more meditative way and to enter into silence as a way of discovering God’s presence. But how does this experience translate? With the Taizé brothers in our midst, the flickering candles and the ever-repeating beauty of the chants, it feels to many they have discovered the prayer of the heart. But it’s not so easy on their own or in their home churches when the liturgy seems more formulaic and so less spacious and there is so little silence. What are the elements that members of the Taizé Community use to help liturgy move from our heads to the soul of our being?

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- They create welcoming space – a place of silence and of sanctuary that is open day and night for people to enter into. It is no accident that it is the warmest place in the community. There is a very palpable sense that this place of prayer is the very centre of community life.
- They provide a sense of openness through the absence of fixed furniture. The carpeting and use of prayer stools creates a simplicity, an equality, but also helps us with posture, so essential to meditative prayer: by modelling our own posture on that of the monks – using a stool or prayer cushion to keep our backs straight – we learn to pray attentively with the crown of our heads in line with the base of our spines. This allows for a deep sense of reverence but also for a posture that can breathe in the prayer deep within us: a prayer not of the head only but that can come from the very centre of our diaphragm.
- The icons, with their simplicity and beauty, become visual points of focus, windows or doorways into the divine.
- The use of candlelight and natural light increases the ambience of the sacred.
- It is the music of course for which Taizé has become rightly famous – simple beautiful tunes that can be taken up by all; simple words from Scripture repeated again and again and again so they cease to be something we are reading but rather something we are listening to with the ear of our hearts.
- The liturgy moves into an extended period of silence. Silence is at the very centre of the liturgy. The central focus of the liturgy is therefore listening rather than telling. I remember so clearly the founder of Taizé, Brother Roger, teaching: ‘Let us listen to God: God’s wisdom is so much better than my words.’
- And there in the midst of us are the Brothers themselves, called to live this life of prayer and contemplation, whose reason for being there, and for holding the whole day in prayer – morning, afternoon and evening – is God.

So how can St Martin-in-the-Fields in its own way create a sacred space in the centre of London? We are not trying to re-create

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Taizé but to learn from the practice of the contemplative tradition. Around us in Trafalgar Square is all the noise, traffic, energy, creativity and intensity of this capital city. How can we enter into a prayer that soaks up the needs of the city but finds a way of transfiguring those hopes and fears through the stillness of God's presence? We have tried to find that sacred place through a tradition enriched by many different communities and individuals. This is what we have done at St Martin-in-the-Fields, which I offer as one adaptable pattern that could allow contemplative prayer to flourish in your own church.

- 1 We found a time when people were searching for a quiet and more contemplative space: a time on Sunday when for a moment the centre of London stills just a little. We chose 7.00 p.m., a time where 'the shadows lengthen and the busy world is hushed'.
- 2 Our Evensong finishes by 6 p.m., so there is time to create the sacred space into which people are drawn – without rush or anxiety. The Taizé cross or another icon is placed on the chancel steps. A number of candles are lit at the foot of the cross and on the ledges behind the altar. A Taizé CD is played quietly as people gather.
- 3 Cushions, prayer stools and, behind them, benches are placed around the cross or icon for those who will gather.
- 4 We have fixed pews in our church. We have learnt repeatedly that it's initially hard to get people to abandon the safety of the pews to come in and sit on the floor. Especially if they are newcomers, they invariably want to sit far from the front and scattered, rather than together with others who have come. And so our service provides a way for them initially to have this space and then for them to come forward and join others in a way that is non-threatening and inclusive. At the front of the pews we provide baskets of votive candles.
- 5 We use a small music team – a pianist, a guitar player and a soloist – and sometimes a further instrumentalist – a violin, a flute, an oboe. Sometimes there's just the piano.
- 6 The service begins simply with a song or chant and then a welcome to all who have chanced to come into this sacred space.

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- 7 One short passage of Scripture is read, followed by a short reflection. We have found it is important that the reflection is not a long sermon but simply a few words that open the passage up, allowing people to enter into the words read, to be fed by the word itself rather than a complex exposition or specific application. We are inviting people to be attentive to the presence of Christ in our midst, revealed in his word but also revealed in this group of people gathered in his name.
- 8 Then we come to the time of gathering, in which those scattered around the church are invited to light a candle and place it on the step, at the foot of the cross. The lighted candle is a sign of Christ present in each of the lives gathered. We often say to people as they receive the candle, 'You are the light of Christ.' As they place the candle they make their own silent prayer. Before they come forward we invite them, instead of returning to their places, to stay around the cross or icon, on the cushions, prayer stools, benches or front pews. It seems that the lighting of a candle is an action that allows everyone to respond naturally to this gathering. The one leading the service also sits or kneels among those gathered.
- 9 In this gathered space now the singing of chants begins, often sung in different languages. Often the words of the chant are read first, and those who are gathered are gently invited to put down any pieces of paper they are holding so that the simple repeated words can become their own prayer: the prayer of our hearts. The repetition deepens the prayer, allows it time to filter through the layers of our lives and consciousness. It allows the prayer to become as natural as the air we breathe.
- 10 These chants lead into an extended period of silence. One often fears the silence, fears that here in the very centre of London it cannot hold. The noise from outside, the sirens, the shouts from the street, the events in the square can intrude. But in the silence of the church we are invited to let go of all the noise and disturbance, both without and within. It is not an empty silence but one the prayer has led us into – a silence charged or infused with presence. Hold on to that. Hold it even when you feel it is ready to burst. Let go of the

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coughings and the restlessness and stay with the silence. It is in this silence that we enter together that place of unknowing where our lives are untangled and we glimpse the height, breadth and depth of God's presence. A presence of which we are part.

- 11 After the silence there are simple prayers – often no more than a single line or petition, the more spontaneous the better; nothing complex, just an expression of need and a longing for God's healing grace. Each petition is followed by a sung response.
- 12 This service ends with a final hymn or chant or song, followed by a blessing for all those who have come – a prayer that we may be the bearers of Christ's presence back into the world, holding this sense of God's indwelling within us, a presence beyond words. No one wants to rush away. Many remain kneeling in front of the cross before leaving quietly. Many whisper as they leave, 'That was so beautiful', or, 'That was just what I needed', or simply, 'Thank you'.

I cannot stress enough the importance of a shared space for meditative prayer and silence. We often wonder why we don't do this alone and indeed we can. But there is something very powerful and supportive in being with others as together we enter into a period of silent contemplation. It is the silent prayer of those around us that deepens, enriches and enfolds our own.

### **An example of a simple order of service – The sound of sheer silence**

Introit: 'Te lucis ante terminum' (To thee before the close of day)  
(soloist)

Welcome and introduction

Hymn: 'Be still for the presence of the Lord'

Reading: 1 Kings 19.4–12

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Reflection

Nunc Dimittis (Geoffrey Burgon) (soloist)

*As we gather lighting candles and placing them in front of the icon or cross we sing*

‘My peace I give you, my peace I leave you’ (Taizé)

*Having gathered sitting on the floor, benches and kneelers around the cross we then sing*

‘Wait for the Lord’ (Taizé)

‘The Lord is my light’ (Taizé)

“‘See I am near” says the Lord’ (Taizé)

‘Christe Domine Jesu’

*Long silence*

Short intercessions with sung response

Take, O take me as I am

You are my salvation I trust in you (Taizé)

Final blessing

‘This Day’ (Bob Chilcot) (*soloist*)

## Prayer for Healing and Laying-on of Hands

***William Morris***

The root of Christian healing lies in the incarnate ministry of Jesus. The Gospels contain numerous stories about illnesses being cured, disabilities being removed, and evil spirits being cast out to restore wholeness – often by Jesus laying his hands on

others. While these are miracles, they are not magic tricks done to startle, or even to edify. Jesus makes clear that healing and wholeness come because our sins have been forgiven – a burden has been lifted from us. And he also always makes clear that the healing comes about through the grace of God and is activated by our faith ('your faith has made you well').

Even in his Galilean ministry, Jesus sent the disciples out to heal the sick, to lay on hands and to anoint with oil. And after his death, the apostles continued this ministry of healing to those troubled in body, mind or spirit. Anointing with sacred oil is a tradition often mentioned in the Old Testament as setting people aside for God, as well as bringing succour and comfort through divine grace. The Letter of James specifically calls for the Church to anoint the sick and to pray for them (James 5.14–15). So, while not strictly instituted by Jesus, anointing with oil and the laying on of hands became one of the seven sacraments of the Church.

In the early Church this tradition continued with physical healing being associated with laying on of hands and anointing. But the increasing association of anointing with repentance and penance, as the Church moved into the Middle Ages, meant that anointing was only done when physical healing was highly unlikely and death was near ('extreme unction'). So, while the Church continued to care for the sick as a charitable endeavour, and figures such as St Francis of Assisi continued the tradition of healing, the link between anointing and healing lapsed.

The reinvigoration of healing as a Christian rite really started with the Pentecostal (charismatic) movement of the early twentieth century and the 'rediscovery' of the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12.8–11, which included healing. As a result, over the course of the last hundred years both the Roman Catholic Church and many Protestant denominations have returned healing to its place as an important sacrament in the life of both the community and the individual.

The new Anglican liturgy, *Common Worship*, provides services for both healing of the community as well as for individual healing through the laying on of hands and anointing. At St Martin's we offer both. And while we would not deny the miracles of

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Jesus, or the possibility of divine miracles today, we understand (and offer) healing more broadly. Healing is the restoration of wholeness: it may well not be full medical ‘cure’, or ‘going back to the way things were before’. But healing is our caring, loving God giving us the strength and comfort to carry on. And while our understanding of healing fully accepts – and encourages – the role of medical (physical and mental) treatment, we also understand that, as Jesus taught, wholeness may require spiritual healing. So, forgiveness and reconciliation are also an important part of the act of healing.

We have experimented with various types and formats of healing services at St Martin’s. Sometimes healing may be required for a community or for a country or for the world, but often the most acute need will arise for individuals in relation to illness, a broken relationship, a work crisis or a similar event. Thus, one of the features of this ministry is that the aim is not necessarily to build a worshipping community or long-term congregation, as such. To turn that around, because this ministry is often most needed at moments of crisis, while it may not be a regular service for any individual (although it *can* be), it should be a regular, sacramental offering of a church available to all individuals on the occasions upon which they need it.

We have incorporated elements of healing in special services (St Luke’s Day), separate services (an evening standalone service, or combined with compline) and as a sacramental supplement to other services (after Sunday Parish Communion). All of the varieties of the service we have tried share a common approach (and progression), which can be summed up in three words: silence, touch, words.

- First, silence. We listen to the person amid a deep listening and openness to God. We open ourselves to be a channel of God’s healing and peace for this person in whatever way God chooses to use us. We need silence to centre ourselves, to be sure as those administering healing that we are not bringing our own troubles into the encounter. Then, we should be silent so we can listen very carefully to what the person seeking healing is saying.

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- Second, touch. Touch creates a human connection, establishes a relationship between the two people. It is both a symbolic and a practical gesture, empowering the person seeking healing to share with and rely on the other.
- Finally, there are words. While this must be preceded by silence and touch, words are necessary to confirm release from what it is that troubles that person, and also to send them back out into the world from which they came. The final words of blessing are generally also accompanied by a final physical act – the anointing with oil.

Here are some reflections on what we have learnt. We must always be aware that for many who come to this service, they are in a very dark, very vulnerable place. Particularly for those who have been sexually or otherwise physically assaulted, ‘touch’ must be very carefully and sensitively done. Usually a light touch on the head or shoulder will be entirely appropriate, but we should watch and listen very carefully.

It should be made very clear in as many ways as possible (order of service, verbally and physically) that the healer is in a position of total equality with the person seeking healing. The ‘healer’ is not the bounteous giver, but a fellow traveller with the person seeking healing. (To emphasize this equality I often sit on a bench in the sanctuary with the person seeking healing.)

We are privileged (amazingly, immensely privileged) to stand alongside those seeking God’s help and wholeness, but we do it as brothers and sisters, ourselves in need of healing. To that point, before or after others come up for healing, the healing team should themselves seek and receive prayers for healing from other members of the team.

While this is a sacramental act, we do have a mixed team of ordained and lay healers, partly to emphasize that everyone can be this channel of God’s healing grace, but also, again, to emphasize equality with those seeking healing.

We need to be aware that there are some things we will not be able to deal with – severe mental illness, for example – and we should always be prepared to counsel seeking medical help while offering spiritual relief. Leading on from this, we should never

put ourselves or others at physical risk. It is prudent to work in pairs, rather than doing it singly, and also to have members of the healing team present in the congregation to help with troubled individuals, should that need arise.

### Example outline – A Sunday evening healing service

- Before the service there should be music. Taizé or something similar is often helpful to set a mood of calm. Many people come to the service troubled, scared or embarrassed to talk about a need for healing, and this lead-in helps with that. Members of the healing team pray together and hold silence to settle themselves before God.
- To start the service there is a welcome and introduction, which helps not only explain the structure of the service but also sets expectations about what constitutes ‘healing’. There are then short prayers, a communally sung Kyrie (Lord have mercy) and a communally said psalm. There is then a Bible reading. Normally we do not have a reflection on the reading, but there could be one at this point.
- A member of the choir then sings a solo. After experimenting, we decided this should not be done during the prayers for healing, as it might distract or overwhelm, but that it did mark a good break between ‘word’ and ‘sacrament’. People are then invited to come forward to the altar rail/into the sanctuary. It is made clear that God’s healing is available to people whether or not they come forward.
- Before anyone comes forward, the healing team themselves (in full view) seek prayers for healing from other members of the team. It is helpful to have a team member guide people forward. This enables a space (for privacy) to be kept between those receiving healing and those waiting to receive it.
- The person seeking healing is asked to say their name and what/who the healing is for.
  - The healer may gently touch the person on the head or shoulder/upper arm.

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- First, the person seeking healing should say for what they seek healing – but the team member should also sensitively ensure that this is not too extensive (sometimes by inviting them to stay afterwards to talk more).
- Then the person administering healing should pray quietly but audibly for the concerns mentioned. Again, this should not be too lengthy, and it is as well to have some appropriately pastoral phrases ready, as well as responding spontaneously to the concerns presented. Ideally touch may be maintained throughout this time, although circumstances differ.
- Finally, the anointing should take place, with comforting words of dismissal (such as: ‘Go in the healing love of God’).
- During the prayers for healing, music is quietly played. This offers dignity and privacy; the music should not be intrusive.
- After everyone has returned to their seats, there are prayers of thanksgiving, ending with the Lord’s Prayer. There is then a communal song or hymn. The service closes with a final blessing.
- Depending upon time and the size of the team, members of the healing team can make themselves available for more extensive conversations after the service.

## Informal Eucharist

### *Richard Carter*

A Eucharist can sometimes feel like a drama performed on our behalf by the designated ministers. A church can be like a theatre with a proscenium arch – most of the action taking place on a stage from which the audience is spatially separated. The members of the congregation become the witnesses, the listeners to prayers offered on their behalf. They are read to and preached to without interaction. In the sacrament they are recipients. The only things that are participatory are the responses to prayers which are prescribed and the hymns with words and a tune that

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they (mostly) adhere to. For much of the service the congregation are static – they do not move other than to stand up or sit down until they come up to receive Communion. Most of the physical action of the liturgy is done for them.

In the theatre, many directors have experimented with trying to remove the divide between the actor and the audience to create a greater sense of involvement. The aim is to create not so much a spectacle in front of us but an event actually happening to us, in our very midst, in which we all become the actors. As we developed our informal Eucharist at St Martin's we talked about how we could change the shape of our liturgy so that all could participate more fully in the action of this sacrament, while at the same time not losing its reverence. If all who gather are called to be part of the one body then they are the liturgy themselves.

We gathered a group together to experiment with different ways we might do this. We experimented with not using the altar at all but gathering around a small table sitting on the floor. We experimented with movement so that the offertory became a procession around the church in which everyone participated. We experimented with paperless liturgy where there was no prescribed response. At our Parish Away Day we held a silent Eucharist where no words were used at all but all of us were invited to participate in the actions which make up the Eucharist. It was beautiful. From these experiments and thoughts we have created an informal Eucharist which has been used every Wednesday. Our liturgy has been formed and shaped through repetition so that people can feel familiar and comfortable with that shape, and yet we have tried to allow for this liturgy to also maintain a sense of spontaneity and immediacy: the sense that this is not just a repetition of past actions but Christ made present and in our midst now. In all of this we have been careful not to lose the sacredness and beauty of the Eucharist, nor its simplicity or power. Not 'do it yourself' but a Eucharist in which each one of us is called to be intimately involved, just as those first disciples were involved as they shared the Last Supper or met the risen Christ when he broke bread at Emmaus. There is nothing very revolutionary in the form we have arrived at but it does have an immediacy and engagement that has built a small

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mid-week community who come regularly to this Eucharist each week and then for a simple supper afterwards followed by reflective listening groups sharing their responses to the theme or Gospel they have heard. We have discovered that the most important thing is to keep this Eucharist as simple and natural as possible. We are not aiming at a performance but at something transparent: God's life in our midst and flowing through each one of us. We call this informal Eucharist 'Bread for the World'.

This is the pattern we have developed.

- 1 All who come are warmly welcomed when they arrive by some of those who come regularly to this service and whom I will refer to as the community. They are not given a service booklet but a single sheet, which includes the hymns or chants and a couple of responses. They are invited, but not forced, to take seats as near the front as possible. In front of the pews are some benches and wooden kneelers, bringing a greater closeness. There is no procession but all those taking part take up their places as part of the congregation around the altar. This includes a group of our choral scholars without choir robes who sit together.
- 2 The choral scholars begin with an anthem or song that introduces or helps create the ambience or spirit of our theme. During this piece of music two members of the community come forward and simply prepare the altar for the Eucharist – 'preparing a place for Christ'. They light the candles, spread out the corporal (the white linen cloth) and place the pottery chalice, into which they pour wine, and the pottery paten, onto which they place fresh bread.
- 3 The celebrant welcomes those who have come, inviting them to participate in this Eucharist and later to join us for a simple supper. We want to establish a sense of the generosity and beauty of Christ's invitation which is extended to all.
- 4 There is a simple participatory confession.
- 5 One of the community reads the Gospel.
- 6 The reflection is usually shared and over the weeks has involved a large variety of people from all walks of life, including those from the community, choral scholars, guests

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and invited speakers. It has taken various forms, sometimes an interview, sometimes different speakers, sometimes something more participatory, like the use of drama or Godly play. It is important to hear the voices and reflections of some of the youngest or newest members of the community. Also the voices of those seldom asked to speak, like homeless people, or those who may sometimes feel on the edge of more formal gatherings. Obviously these need to be sensitively prepared and it helps to have someone interviewing who is known and can hold and weave this together.

- 7 After the reflection, members of the community lead the prayers, which they have prepared in advance after reflecting on the theme, and all of us join in a sung chant response to each of the prayers.
- 8 The celebrant now shares the peace and invites everyone to gather in a circle around the altar – a circle in which all are included. There is a hymn, song or chant as we gather.
- 9 The Eucharistic Prayer uses different voices. We have tried to make it direct and immediate, allowing for spontaneity so that it can draw on the theme we have shared. The words of consecration and the calling upon the Holy Spirit are said by the celebrant but we have tried to make these words present tense: something that is happening here and now and that unites all those who have gathered.
- 10 In one circle we say the Lord's Prayer together.
- 11 The sacrament is shared around the circle, with members of the community offering the bread and wine as the choral scholars sing. Those who do not wish to receive keep their heads bowed.
- 12 At the end of the service once again all those who have come are invited to continue the Eucharist with a simple shared supper and the chance to share thoughts and reflections with one another in groups.
- 13 The meal that follows the Eucharist is as simple as possible – usually bread and soup prepared by our cafe. The focus for this is not the food itself, the preparation of which could easily begin to dominate. The food after the Eucharist aims to continue the Eucharist as we talk and meet.

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- 14 After this we divide into ‘listening groups’, led by regular group leaders who encourage a sense of belonging for all, newcomers and regulars. We have found that between 8 and 12 people in each group works best. There are simple ground rules for these groups which we discuss together. The understanding that we are here to listen to one another, that each person is given space, that these are not competitive groups or groups trying to argue that one individual’s point of view is the correct or best informed one: rather we use Scripture as the means of encountering how God is at work in the lives of others. Each session begins by listening to the presence of God in Scripture through a short *lectio divina* on the passage we have used in the Eucharist. We have found it best to go round the group making sure that each person is given space to speak. This sharing ends with prayer.

### Example of the full liturgy

#### Gathering

*Music or song as two members of the congregation prepare the altar and light the candles*

We light these lights for the Trinity of love:  
God above us, God beside us, God beneath us:  
God at our centre  
God on the edge  
God with us.

#### Prayer of invocation

We prepare a place for you  
Come to us in the difference of every life gathered  
Come to us in song  
Come to us in word  
Come to us in stillness  
Come to us in bread and wine

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Come to us in flesh and blood  
Reach out across time  
Be present in all time.  
**Come Jesus, be our guest,  
Stay with us for day is ending.  
With friend, with stranger,  
With young and old,  
With the lost and found  
Be among us tonight,  
Our guest, our host,  
The one who says all – all are welcome here.**

Song or chant

Prayers for forgiveness

Because the world is beautiful  
but beauty is easily destroyed,  
we need you.  
**Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on us.**

Because we are weak and fail,  
because we cannot live without love  
but often walk in darkness,  
we need you.  
**Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on us.**

Because we often abandon you  
and turn away and walk past  
and are afraid  
and countless times fall short of your goodness,  
but you love us to the end  
and win a victory over all hatred,  
We need you.  
**Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on us.**

Because we have your message to proclaim,  
because we have your kingdom to build,  
because there are so many in need of your love,

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because we have your life to live,  
we need you.

**Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on us.**

And Jesus said, ‘Your sins are forgiven’.  
In the name of the Father who created you and waits to  
welcome you home,  
in the name of the Son who searches for you,  
in the name of the Spirit who brings the healing of  
forgiveness  
and calls you to do the same,  
you have been set free.

**Amen.**

*or*

Lord, you look upon us with love, knowing our weaknesses  
better than we know them ourselves and knowing how often  
we fall short of your glory. Let us confess our failures to keep  
your ways of life and truth.

*Silence*

Lord, we have put ourselves first and failed to love you and  
fallen short of the fullness of life that you long for for us.

Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

Lord, we have hungered and thirsted for our own comfort  
and safety,

and turned away from the injustice done to others.

Christ, have mercy.

**Christ, have mercy.**

Lord, we have been divided against one another in hatred  
and pride, and failed to live as peacemakers and bearers of  
your love to our sisters and brothers.

Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

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May the God of love and power  
forgive you and free you from your sins,  
heal and strengthen you by his Spirit,  
and raise you to new life in Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

Word on the Edge – a passage from the New Testament is read

Reflection

*Silence*

Prayers are offered

*Members of the congregation offer the following prayers*

A prayer of thanksgiving

**Sung response**

A prayer of concern

**Sung response**

A prayer of hope

**Sung response**

The sharing of the Peace

God of eternal peace,  
who offers the gift of peace  
and whose children are the peacemakers;  
pour your peace into our hearts,  
that conflict and anger may cease.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us offer each other a sign of that peace.

*Song or chant, during which all are invited to gather in a circle  
around the altar*

The table

Lord Jesus Christ,  
you have invited us to come to this table.  
We have come from many places and experiences;

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we have come with all our differences;  
we have come to the place where journeys meet.  
You have reached out to all on the edge  
and called us into the heart of God.

The Lord be with you.  
**And also with you.**

*Reader* On the night that Jesus was betrayed he told us to  
prepare a place for him. And then he offered us a sign.  
A sign of how he would give himself to us to give us  
new life. He had always loved us, and now he showed  
us how perfect his love was.

*Priest* While his disciples were eating, Jesus took a piece of  
bread in his hands, like this, and he blessed it:  
Blessed are you Lord God of all creation;  
through your goodness we have this bread to offer,  
which earth has given and human hands have made,  
it will become for us the bread of life.  
And then he said to them:  
This is my body broken for you, do this in  
remembrance of me.

*Silence*

*Reader* And then Jesus took a cup of wine, like this, and gave  
you thanks:  
Blessed are you Lord God of all creation, through your  
goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine  
and work of human hands,  
it will become for us the cup of salvation.  
And then he said to them:  
Drink this all of you,  
this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for  
you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.  
Do this in remembrance of me.

*Silence*

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*Reader* His disciples did not understand these words; how could they understand? But later they would see Christ's body broken, his love poured out – his death for us so that we might share his risen life. The life he gave then, he shares with us now.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
as we do in this place what you did once and for all,  
breathe your Holy Spirit upon us  
and upon this bread and wine  
that they may be heaven's food,  
renewing, transforming, sustaining and making us whole;  
so that we may be your body on earth,  
loving and caring for your creation,  
where all are welcome  
and the poorest are fed.  
**Bless the earth,**  
**heal the sick,**  
**let the oppressed go free,**  
**and fill each one of us with your love from on high.**  
**Gather your people from the ends of the earth**  
**to feast at your table with all your saints.**

The Lord's Prayer

Fraction and invitation

*Priest* Look, Jesus Christ, the Bread of Heaven, is broken for the life of the world.  
The gifts of God for the people of God.  
**Jesus, Bread of Life**  
**Bread on the Edge**  
**Bread for the world.**

*Song or chant as the bread and wine are shared around the gathered circle of people*

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Thanksgiving

God of hope, in bread and wine you have restored us to relationship with you. Show us how to be a people that live your reconciling love in the world, so that we may recognize your presence in those we meet, and our hearts like those first disciples may burn within us upon the road.

**Lord Jesus Christ,  
You are the Word for us to speak,  
You are the Truth for us to tell;  
You are the Light for us to light in the darkness,  
You are the Bread of Life for us to share.**

Now all of us must go out into the world  
And live God's love there.  
Look for Jesus in the oppressed and burdened,  
Look for Jesus in those who have lost hope,  
Look for him among the poor in heart,  
Among the merciful  
Among the peacemakers  
Among the persecuted for the sake of right.  
Look for Jesus on the edge.

Song, chant or hymn

The Blessing

Go simply, lightly, gently.  
Go with obedience.  
Go with love.  
And the blessing of Almighty God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you now and for ever.  
**Amen.**

Song of blessing