

The General Thanksgiving

Traditional version

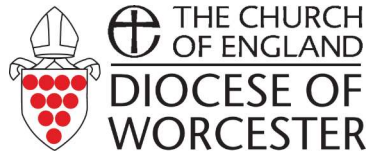
Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all men. We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

Contemporary language version

Almighty God, Father of all mercies,
we your unworthy servants give you most humble and hearty thanks
for all your goodness and loving kindness
to us and to all people.

We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for your immeasurable love
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.

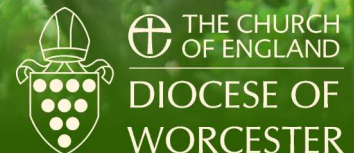
And give us, we pray, such a sense of all your mercies
that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful,
and that we show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives,
by giving up ourselves to your service,
and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,
be all honour and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.



Additional copies of this booklet, and the gifts questionnaire are available from:
<https://www.cofe-worcester.org.uk/your-faith/kingdom-pathways/>

Thanks to the Diocese of Oxford for the use of their Gifts Questionnaire

Pathways for Kingdom Living



Introducing Pathways for Kingdom Living



Pathways for Kingdom Living is a simple framework for anyone who wants to reflect on how they are trying to be a more faithful Christian. There are three broad routes through this framework, and which pathway you take depends on you and what's available in your parish.

A very short history

Christians have always been challenged and encouraged to grow in faith, hope and love as they live out life's journey as followers of Jesus. Today we often use the language of discipleship to describe this. The nearest modern equivalent of what the word "disciple" meant in the ancient world is "apprentice": Jesus's earliest disciples went around with him learning to do what he did, and teach what he taught.

Later Christian writers tended to use the word "disciple" mainly for the historic characters of Jesus's day, and used other language to talk about growing in faith. John Bunyan famously characterised it as *A Pilgrim's Progress*. The language of pilgrimage, or journey, is an image a lot of us find helpful, and in the Middle Ages life in the here and now was often referred to "our earthly pilgrimage", reminding ourselves that we have a heavenly (we hope) destination.

Another great spiritual writer, St Thomas à Kempis, writing in the fifteenth century, talked about spiritual life as *The Imitation of Christ*, going back to an idea we find in the gospels: "For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" says Jesus in St John's story of the foot-washing (John 13:15).

In another famous book, Brother Lawrence talked about Christian living as *The Practice of the Presence of God*. There are many more ways people have spoken about what many churches today are now using the language of discipleship to explore. Use whatever language helps you think about how you can grow in love for God, and for your neighbour.

While the questions below speak of God's presence, sometimes it may be that we are more acutely aware of a sense of God's absence. It is important to acknowledge and name that "dark night" as awareness of God. It has been the experience of many saints, and perhaps also it was that of Jesus on the cross: his awareness of God at that point included an awareness of God's absence.

Where have I been able to use my gifts?

What has given me the most energy?

What has been particularly challenging?

Where have I most needed support?

Where have I been most aware of God's presence?

After each person has spoken, the whole group holds them in silent prayer before God, before the next person takes their turn.

In the closing prayers it is important that the words you use are not accidentally judgemental or giving advice. Focus on thanking God for each other, and each other's gifts, and commending each other to God's love. You may find it helpful to use a classic prayer of thanksgiving such as the prayer book's "General Thanksgiving." It may also help to conclude with the Lord's Prayer.



Route 3: A Pilgrimage Group

Route three can also be used as a supplement to route one, as well as on its own. Route three depends on there being a group setting out on the journey together. This might be an existing home group, a group who have completed the Bishop's Certificate (or any other course) together and want to continue to support each other, or a group that is set up fresh for this purpose.

Setting up the Group

As a group you all need to be committed to each other, wanting to affirm, support and listen to each other, and willing to keep what is said in the group confidential. It's important that everyone is willing to contribute equally, even if you have a convener to help keep things to time. You may take it in turns to be the convener. A good size for the group is probably around a half-dozen people.

You will probably find it helpful to meet once every four to six weeks, but the timing and frequency is entirely your collective decision. However, try to plan far enough ahead that everyone can make every meeting date. Set a limit on how long you will meet for before you review whether you want to continue: perhaps for six meetings, or for a year.

It would be quite possible for a group like this to meet sometimes online and sometimes in person, but unless you know each other well from other contexts, you will probably want to meet in person at least for a meeting which sets up the group.

Structuring the Group

It can help to begin with 15 minutes or so of reflective prayer – perhaps using *Lectio Divina* (meditative reading) on the gospel of the day. And it is important to take time for prayer, particularly prayers of thanks, at the end of the group.

Each person has time to talk (and you will need to think roughly how much time depending on your group size). Each person is asked to come prepared to say something about the same five questions, thinking about the period since the group last met. A suggested set of questions is outlined here, but a group may settle on a different set. It is important, however, that one question focuses on the use of our gifts, and one on where we are aware of God in our lives.

Beginning with Grace

All the routes begin with an appreciation of God's goodness to us. What gifts has God given you? What do you enjoy doing? What leaves you feeling fulfilled in life? *Pathways for Kingdom Living* starts with a simple 21 item questionnaire (on pages 6-7) that you fill in, thoughtfully and prayerfully, on your own, exploring your gifts.

When you have completed the questionnaire, you can choose how you want to build on what you have discovered about yourself and your gifts.

That's far enough for now

You can, of course, just stop at this point. Take a moment to be thankful for your gifts, and pray that you will use them well. Perhaps later you might come back to one of the routes outlined below.

Setting out on the next stage

At the end of the questionnaire, you are invited to note one or two ways in which you will commit yourself to trying to make more use of your gifts in the months ahead. Choosing one of the following routes is about deciding how you will set about putting this commitment into practice, and particularly on routes two and three, find support and encouragement in doing so.



Route 1: A Personal Pilgrimage

If you like walking on your own, this pathway invites you to pay attention to the journey and not simply get lost in your own thoughts. It uses a form of prayer drawn from Ignatian spirituality called the **Examen**. You can choose whether this is something you adopt as a daily or weekly practice to help you explore how you are using your gifts.

When you completed the gifts questionnaire, you noted one or two ways in which you wanted to make (better) use of your gifts. On this pathway they form part of a regular prayerful review of how you are managing to do this. You can adapt the following outline in ways that suit you, especially as you get used to it, or in the light of other ways you've heard about doing it. The outline is written for a daily exercise, but if you wish or need to change that to a weekly one, please do.



They help you think about a timescale. Is this a plan for the next six months or for a year? They arrange to meet with you in around three months' time for another hour's reflection, so that you can explore with them how you feel things are going. They will encourage you and help you reflect on whether you need to make some adjustments: perhaps things need tweaking in terms of activities and timing. Perhaps a bit more of a rethink is needed. (If you are doing this as a "pilgrimage pair" with a friend, you might want to do this every four to six weeks rather than quarterly.)

Aim for six months' or a year's commitment to this journey. Then, at the end of that time, explore with them what the best next step might be.

It's important that each meeting begins and ends with prayer. Your Kingdom Companion will both pray for you and with you. They will also encourage you to pray in your own words. Remember when you pray that this is first and foremost about God's gifts. Root your prayers in gratitude to God for what you have been able to do, and where you have experienced God in your daily life.



Route 2: Walking Side by Side

Route two can also be used as a supplement to route one, as well as on its own. Route two depends on there being another person to walk with you on this journey. We are calling these companions "Kingdom Companions."

Two sorts of Kingdom Companion

There are two sorts of Kingdom Companion. One is a friend who agrees to do this with you – you might even agree together that you will be each other's Kingdom Companions and support each other in your journeys. The other is where a parish or deanery has identified a number of people who are willing to act as Kingdom Companions for others, and will help you find someone to support you on your journey. You will need to talk to one of your ordained or lay ministers to see if they can help you find someone to do this.

(Note that where a church is providing Kingdom Companions, they should be those who have already had the required safeguarding checks and training for their existing church roles or ministries.)

What does a Kingdom Companion do?

They arrange to meet you for an hour after you have completed your gifts questionnaire. In that conversation, they listen as you tell them what they have discovered about yourself, and what ideas you have about your priorities.

They do not tell you what you should do, but help you explore which of your ideas are the ones you really want to have a go at, how you think you can best use your gifts, what ways forward are realistic and achievable, and how you might work towards them.



The Examen

Being still

Spend a few moments stilling yourself in God's presence. Many people find it helpful to concentrate on their breathing as they do this. For some it helps to think about breathing in God's peace, love, calm, and breathing out frustrations, hurts, anger.

Look back on the day.

Encouragement

Where have you seen signs of God's presence?

In your life?

In the lives of others?

In the wider world?

Where have you been able to use your gifts?

What has helped you do so?

Give thanks for all these.

Discouragement

Where have you struggled today?

With your own feelings and desires?

With other people?

With what's going on in the wider world?

What's stopped you using your gifts as well as you would like?

What do you need to say sorry for?

Review

What has been good for me today?

What has been bad for me today?

What has been challenging for me today?

What has been life-giving for me today?

Prayer

Lord, help me use my gifts tomorrow in ways that give life to me and to others.

Help make me more like you.



The Gifts Questionnaire

Give yourself a rating for each statement on a scale 0-5:

0 is not me at all; 1 seldom applies to me; 2 sometimes applies to me;
3 fairly often applies to me; 4 usually applies to me; 5 is absolutely who I am.

		Score
1	I enjoy being with other people	
2	I dislike anyone being treated unfairly	
3	I enjoy explaining things to others	
4	I am a practical person	
5	I like to express myself artistically	
6	I am a good listener	
7	I enjoy being quiet	
8	I enjoy working for the good of the community	
9	I try to be just and to see that others are treated justly	
10	I am able to get people to see things in a new light	
11	I am detail conscious	
12	I enjoy discovering how things work	
13	I am sensitive to other people's pain	
14	I like to spend time regularly just thinking about things	
15	In groups, I am happy to take the lead	
16	I have to speak about injustice when I see it	
17	I can communicate effectively in public	
18	I am good at administration	
19	I like devising new and exciting ways of doing things	
20	I try to help people in need	
21	Contemplation is important for me	

Now use the next page to add up your scores.

Copy your scores below against each statement.

So, in Column A, write your scores for questions 1, 8 and 15, and so on.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1=	2=	3=	4=	5=	6=	7=
8=	9=	10=	11=	12=	13=	14=
15=	16=	17=	18=	19=	20=	21=
Add up each column and write the total for each in the cell below.						

Then transfer them to this table

	Area of Gift or Strength	Score
A	Building community	
B	Seeking justice	
C	Teaching	
D	Making things work	
E	Creating	
F	Caring	
G	Reflection	

The highest score indicates a strong gift. However, this questionnaire is only a starting point to help your thinking, it is not a full picture of who you are.

Are there some gifts and enthusiasms you feel you have which are not picked up here? Include those in your thinking about which gifts you want to use, and how you might use them.

Use this space to make notes on which gifts you want to use, and how.

An electronic version of this questionnaire is available on our website, which can add up your columns for you, along with additional copies of this booklet.