THE LTURGICAL LIFE OF SAINT MAGNUS CATHEDRAL

The Revd. Fraser Macnaughton

'Whether you come from north or south, east or west, whether you live here or are visitor, are here for the first time or are here regularly, you are welcome to our worship. Your presence enriches us in this time of celebration together.'

So begins the call to worship at each Sunday morning service in Saint Magnus Cathedral. The intention is to be as inclusive as possible - as the team is very aware of the dynamic and changing nature of the worshipping community each week.

It would be reasonable to say that the Church of Scotland has never been quite comfortable with its mediaeval legacy or inheritance of its ancient cathedrals. Not least because in many ways they do not fit into the homogeneous parish church model that is the heartbeat of the Church of Scotland polity.

In the 22 years that I was privileged to be the minister at Saint Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall, Orkney I have attempted to evolve a liturgy that I would describe as 'contemporary liturgical'. That evolution has taken many years and built on previous experience, both from within the Cathedral through the ministry of my predecessor Ron Ferguson and my own experience as university chaplain at the University of Dundee in the 1990s.

Ron, a former leader of the Iona Community, was acutely aware of the importance of inclusion and also being able to meet the needs of a wide variety of worshippers from various different traditions and cultures. For such is the makeup of the worshipping community both in Iona Abbey and in our mediaeval cathedrals. In many ways Ron facilitated that liturgical evolution to the form of service we offer today.

In my own time as university chaplain at Dundee, I was tasked with broadening the worship offerings in the beautiful chaplaincy centre. The resulting publication of 'UniWorship' a University Service book, drew on examples from Iona and other contemporary liturgical sources.

What then, are the basics of a liturgical evolution. Coming from an 'Auld Kirk' background and being a disciple of our former esteemed President, John Bell, I have always subscribed to the belief that structure to a service is the backbone of all worship. Much hair has been pulled out over the years, attending worship offerings made up on the hoof, dotting hither and thither like a demented midgie, (with much use of the word 'just'!)

The challenge in the 21st century is how that structure continues to be meaningful and relevant in a post Christendom culture. I recall an article in 'Life and Work' a few years ago, which stated that there are only two places on a town High Street that a person cannot see into - the bookies and the church. If one has never been into a bookies to lay a bet it is undoubtedly a very daunting experience. Just imagine going in the door. There are television screens, there's a man behind the grill and a queue of people writing little notes. What's the drill? What do we do? In the same way if one has never been into a church and one ventures across the door….. there's invariably a nice person greeting you, handing you a little purple book and perhaps a piece of paper with lots of big words on it like prayers of adoration, confession, petition and supplication…. One can imagine where this is leading! What do we do? What's the drill?

Liturgical evolution has to take place hand in hand with education. In St Magnus Cathedral, during the summer tourist season from Easter till October, perhaps as much as 70% of the worshippers are visitors. But the core local worshippers are the ones who keep the whole show on the road during the long winter months. Again many of these are not on the 'Communion Roll', nor even Church of Scotland members, but attend and participate faithfully. Yes, like everywhere we have had our fights and disagreements about changing things, but it is this body of worshippers who enhance the experience for summer visitors, and who have been part of the liturgical evolution as it has developed, and who have come along on the journey, developing an understanding of what is what and why.

To give some concrete examples for helping to develop folks' liturgical literacy - a series of Children's Addresses on the liturgical colours and their significance, prior to the introduction of pulpit falls and Bible markers or a series of sermons on the Lord's, or Jesus', Prayer prior to the introduction, firstly of a contemporary version and then latterly a rolling 'rota' of several versions. One choir member once said that he had always parroted the traditional version with 'lead us not into temptation' without giving it much thought until we used the version with 'save us from the time of trial' and how that prompted him to 'pray it better' as he put it.

Again, the use of a 'pilot' usually meets with less resistance than landing something out of the blue onto people. Fed up with the constant bad news in the media we began a slot in the service entitled 'Gospel Glimpses' essentially good news stories from around the world, linked to the theme of the day. This pilot ran for a year before being incorporated into what now has evolved and expanded into the 'Contemporary Reading', which informs the sermon from many sources and which sits alongside the Bible Reading (singular) each week.

Which neatly leads us to the subject of much debate in the church…. Lectionary… no lectionary…. which lectionary? I have been greatly impressed by the imagination and enormous hard work of our own 'Spill the Beans' team over the years and how they have not been afraid to move away from the RCL and experiment with the Narrative Lectionary, the Women's Lectionary, and others, making use of the wonderful freedom we have in our polity's worship not afforded many other denominations.

In St Magnus we have evolved from a slightly slavish following of all three readings from the RCL each week to a much looser pattern of Bible reading, moving to one reading which informs the sermon and latterly having the Psalm of the Day, sung, read, recited in unison, on a rotating basis. Here again, because the regular worshipping community are themselves part of the evolution of the liturgy, these varieties become the norm with which people are comfortable.

One of the greatest joys for me is to be asked by a visitor at the end of the service 'What denomination is this?' to which I invariably reply, 'We like to think of ourselves as post-denominational.' This mindset drives a continuing liturgical evolution of our Sunday service, which truly has become 'leitourgia'. When one thinks of it, and adds up the number of people involved in putting together and 'doing' the worship, it is the 'work of the people'.

Our dedicated group of very able worship leaders, choir members, bell ringers, welcome team, make the service what it is. And that liturgical evolution has over the years, to put it bluntly, taken the best bits from all the denominations' worship and woven them together to make our contemporary liturgy. So the visitor, from whatever tradition, finds something familiar in the service, be it the Silence at the beginning from the Quakers, the Sharing of Peace and invocation of the saints from the Roman Catholic tradition, some good 'ole Victorian hymn singing' from the Baptist tradition, together with responses, sung and said at the prayers, the lighting of candles, and, thrown in for good measure, a traditional Church of Scotland sermon! In finding something familiar the visitor feels involved, feels included and so hopefully engages in other parts of the liturgy which may be new to them.

Another important part of the liturgical evolution has been already alluded to, namely language and technical jargon. As clergy we suffer the same professional jargon disease as other professions. I am never done banging on to medics about not saying 'you have a haematoma on your humerus' yet still sometimes lapse into ecclesiastical jargon. Liturgy, sadly, in many cases, is still littered with such language. What are we doing? Showing off? Being lazy? The success with which we engage with a post church culture when that interface happens, whether weddings, funerals, a Sunday visit from the curious, is surely down in some part to the care we use with our language.

As you can see from normal order of service below at St Magnus Cathedral we go to some length to have the printed order accessible and intelligible. Gone are the days of words like 'introit' or, as aforementioned, Adoration, Confession, Petition, Supplication etc., even though that is what it

is. The Intercessions become the 'Prayers of Concern' but remain the same in essence. What we call the 'set piece' parts of the liturgy, i.e. responses, candle lighting, sharing the peace, Bible reading etc., are always led by lay people from the worship team, adding to the sense of inclusion.

Like other cathedrals and churches we have our fair share of 'civic religion'. Here again, the worshipping community interfaces with large numbers of people who are irregular attenders. As St Magnus Cathedral belongs (since 1486) to the people of Orkney rather than any church and is managed on their behalf by the local authority, the Orcadian community at large has a real sense of propriety to the building. The ultimate 'belonging but not believing' I suppose!
So it is incumbent upon the regular worshipping community again to welcome people to 'their' Cathedral on these civic occasions and to make the experience as relevant and meaningful as possible. Similarly there has been a long tradition of other denominations holding services and celebrations in the Cathedral, where again the emphasis is on inclusion and unity. Hence for example, on the 900th anniversary of the martyrdom of St Magnus, High Mass was concelebrated by every Scottish Catholic Bishop accompanied by the Bishops of Copenhagen and Bergen! Again, many of the ancient Scottish University chamber choirs have sung Choral Evensong in the Cathedral while on tour.

As can be seen from the accompanying typical order of service below, music is a very important component in the liturgy. As well as the traditional introit and anthem, choral input via responses etc are a regular feature. We are very fortunate to have an extremely professional and dedicated choir group of some 24 members, which is not afforded everywhere, and who input into planning as well as participating in the worship.

One could go on ad infinitum on the subject of the Cathedral's liturgical life. As Scott Rennie pointed out in a recent 'Life and Work' article, 'Cathedral life is an untapped reservoir for potential engagement'. Certainly in 'Cathedral worship is one of the growth areas.'

I hope I have been able to show with our example that it is possible to be liturgical and contemporary, both parts being fundamental to good practice in preparing and leading worship. Some may say St Magnus has been a bit of a liturgy lab over the years, and there is truth in that, but hopefully what continues to develop will be relevant, meaningful, spiritual and helpful to people on their faith journeys.

Appendix

USUAL ORDER OF SERVICE FOR ST. MAGNUS CATHEDRAL

Welcome and Call to Worship

Good morning…
Whether you come from north or south, east or west,
whether you live here or are a visitor,
are here for the first time, or are here regularly,
you are welcome to our worship.
Your presence enriches us in this time of celebration together.

Gathering Music *[unannounced]*

Lighting of the Christ candle

The candle is lit.

All say a short response:
We light this Christ candle, a living symbol of the one Life in which we all live and move and have our being.

Gathering meditation and a time of Silence

All sing one short verse or chant from CH4 unannounced.

This is very much a meditative prayer just allowing folk to settle in to the worship finishing with an intro to the silence such as:

Let us again listen to the silence of this sacred space. A space made ready for us by willing hands.

Silence for about 90 seconds concluding with something like:

May we recognise in our life the presence, power and light of our soul. May we realize that we are never alone,

Meanwhile printed on OOS a variety of worship aids for silence such as:

You may wish to use these words to help focus:

I pause for a moment and reflect on God's life-giving presence in every part of my body, in everything around me, in the whole of my life.

Praise

Bible Reading

Topped and tailed with a response such as:

L May we open ourselves to the seeds of wisdom that lie dormant in this reading.

ALL And may our minds be fertile soil in which they may grow strong and true.

TEXT

L For the word of God in scripture, for the word of God among us, for the word of God within us.

ALL We give thanks.

Praise
Psalm of the Day sung, read, recited responsively

Contemporary Reading
may be a reading or poem or even 2 or 3 minutes by way of illuminating the context of the passage.

Anthem

Sermon

Time for Reflection
[musical]

Praise

Sharing the Peace

Such as:

L This is a house of God, a place of peace, a place where we befriend one another.

ALL Let us greet one another as a sign of God's peace and of our shared friendship.

Candle of Remembrance and Hope *[unannounced]*

Choir and congregation sing:

Bless the Lord my soul, and bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord my soul, he rescues me from death.

The Choir sing this once whilst the candle-lighter lights the left candle on the Table while saying the following as the choir hum the tune again:

We light this candle in Remembrance and Hope to call to mind
Magnus and Rognvald and all the saints
and all those dear to us who have gone before
and especially those who have died in recent times
and as a sign of hope to future generations as yet unborn;..
Jesus said,'I am the light of the world;
whoever follows me shall not walk in darkness
but shall have the light of life'.

a final sung reprise as the candle-lighter goes back to their seat.

Prayers of Concern and the Jesus' Prayer *[all said together]*

God our Maker
Who is everywhere, Your name is holy. May your new world come
and your will be done, in this place as in all times and places.
Meet our needs everyday
and forgive our failure to love, as we forgive others who fail us.
Save us from loads too hard to bear and lead us into your light.
For everything on earth and the universe beyond is yours,
now, and for all time.
Amen

Praise

Sending Out

L Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and tomorrow.

ALL With that confidence and in that hope, let us go in peace

L to love and to serve the Lord

ALL all the days of our lives.

Blessing

Choral Amen

Fraser Macnaughton

was ordained in 1982 following which he worked as Youth Minister at Newlands South Church in Glasgow. He became Minister at Fenwick Parish church in Ayrshire, Chaplain to the University of Dundee and Minister in Bearsden Killermont before being called to St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall from 2002 until retirement in 2024. He served as Chaplain to Lord Wallace when he became Moderator as worked on a series of Church committees from Chairing the Youthshare Committee to membership of the Faith Nurture Forum.