**Non-Eucharistic liturgy in a rural setting**

The current shortage of clergy has precipitated the merger of former village parishes into grouped benefices. Even then it is often difficult to recruit priests.  This means that eucharistic services are hard to maintain in every village every Sunday. To keep up the frequency and regularity of Sunday services and to nurture Christian communities  there needs to be an increase in non-Eucharistic liturgies that can be led  by the laity.

Common Worship. Services and prayers for the Church of England  and the revised daily Lectionary https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/app/lectionary are two strands that radically help with this. Firstly the Lectionary is much more comprehensive as it is designed over a three year cycle not the rather restricted if familiar one-year cycle of the Book of Common Prayer.  The latter served well when people were less literate and learned their Bible through familiarity and repetition.   Common Worship allows a more in-depth understanding of Biblical themes joined across the Old Testament and the New.  Daily Prayer is structured with greater adherence to the monastic and early traditions, combined with contemporary language and more updated translations from the original writings.  It also permits  more variety within a particular service order.

The book Common Worship Daily Prayer (Church House Publishing, 5th Edition, 2015) )costs £22-24 in hard back.  It is fairly hard to follow but only because there are so many choices on offer.  There are special collects and responses for different occasions,  the Psalms change daily, along with a wide range of different patterns of prayer. After all that you still need the Lectionary and a Bible!

Much easier is the App which you can get on a smart phone for £2. 99p https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/apps/daily-prayer.  This is very user friendly.  It opens at the right service, Morning, Evening or Night Prayer depending on what date and time you open it.  All the responses, collects, Psalms and readings are there in the correct order. You need no other information.  While at first it looks odd being in a service with everybody looking at their phones, once you remember that it is simply a service book the strangeness is quickly forgotten.  Common Worship Daily Prayer has the flexibility to substitute for traditional Matins or Evensong, or to be used in small groups in someone's house, or used as private devotion.  Given the prospect that medieval churches will prove too expensive for small worshiping communities to maintain, the church militant here on Earth may go back to its house group origins. If so rural congregations will be in the vanguard.

Matins and Evensong  from the Book of Common Prayer are popular with those who were brought up with it.  For this generation, 17th century English retains its power, and the flow of Cranmer's prose is evocative and meaningful.  However for those not immersed in it when young, the drift in language over the last 3-400 years can be a barrier.  Music comes to the rescue here, and in Cathedrals the attendance at traditional Sung Matins and Evensong  is growing.  The problem for a rural community is that it is just as hard to find musicians and choirs as it is priests.  There comes a point where a small congregation finds singing less and less an expression of praise, perhaps even a bit of an embarrassment.  Although Matins and Evening prayer can be said rather than sung,  Common Worship services are probably better able to serve both with and without choral accompaniment.

Calehill with Westwell PCC has agreed to print an order of service for Morning Prayer on Sundays within the Common Worship format.  It contains a small selection of the more popular Psalms.  This is for anybody to use, but is made available so that it is easy for a Warden or a ministry leader to take a non-Eucharistic Sunday service with minimal preparation.   It may also be a starting point for anyone setting up a prayer group or a house group where the liturgy has yet to find its voice.

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