Pray what? The experience of extemporaneous public prayer in the United Church of Canada

Hogansan, Anne Margaret

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Abstract:
This qualitative research study seeks to understand the reason for an observed reluctance to pray extemporaneously in public among members of The United Church of Canada. A theological rationale for the project was developed, and relevant literature was reviewed. Using a phenomenological methodology, interviews were held with six members, including lay and clergy, of The United Church of Canada. The experiences were analyzed, and implications were considered for the spiritual life of individuals and faith communities.

Description:
1 online resource (46 p.)
Includes abstract and appendix.
Includes bibliographical references (p. 35-37).

"Graduate Project"

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Others rely on extemporaneous prayers. Both have their place. But I believe what our congregations need most are studied prayers, well prepared, well expressed. These prayers may or may not be read, but will be thought through ahead of time. Publicly leading a church in prayer deserves thoughtful preparation. 1. Use forms with freedom. Learn from The Valley of Vision or Hughes Oliphant Old or the Book of Common Prayer. But suit their prayers to your own purposes. The Didache, after laying down set prayers for Communion, also allows “the prophets to give thanks however they wish.” 2. Our public prayers in our corporate worship services have a massive impact on the prayer lives of God’s people, in that such prayers teach the church how to approach our transcendent but immanent God. They also bring power to our churches. The immense importance of the corporate prayers of the body of Christ rests on Scripture’s direct accounts of the power wrought by such prayers and the apostolic dependence on the prayers of the church. The Power of Public Prayer. As pastors, we may be called on to offer extemporaneous prayer several times a day. In this sense, extemporaneous prayer is a barometer of spiritual health. It can even be said that at times an extemporaneous prayer is the height of spiritual expression and heartfelt devotion. Public prayer, which used to be so much taken for granted, has now become an oddity in our shared life. But it was not so long ago that everyone’s school day began with prayer. Prayers were offered at the beginning of public meetings, sports events, and civic celebrations. Let us say that prayer does not actually accomplish anything in the spiritual realm. Then what is the good of it? Is it worth anything at all? There is actually much practical power in public prayer. What if they prayed for each other? Think of the benefits to the whole of society: We cannot stay angry long at a colleague with whom we have prayed. We cannot cheat for long a boss with whom we have prayed. We cannot provide poor customer service for a person for whom we have prayed.