Thinking about intercessory prayer
Jesus invites us, as his disciples, to pray for others and ourselves. And he promises that God answers our prayers. We need only believe, and as we speak, God responds. God may surprise us with the response, of course. We may not always receive exactly what we pray for. Sometimes we do, and sometimes we don’t. We may need to puzzle about the response, or to continue to pray until the response becomes clear. That’s true in personal prayer, and it’s equally true in the intercessory prayer we offer for others. The Bible encourages us not to worry but to trust that God will provide what is needed and good.

Many of us feel uncomfortable when we pray with another person, especially for the first time. Intercessory prayer can feel like a shopping list offered to God, rather than a conversation. We need to listen carefully for the ways in which God may respond. When we pray with someone else, we will usually pray aloud for at least part of the time. And when we do, we allow the other person to overhear our conversation with God. When someone else prays aloud for us, we feel held in God’s love and care through that prayer, and we participate in that prayer in our silent responses. When we pray with someone else for their specific needs, we allow them to join in and pray for themselves.

When praying in our role as pastoral visitor, we invite God into the relationship we are developing with the person being visited, and we bring God’s care and love to those for whom we intercede. The love of God and love of neighbour which is the key to discipleship is brought clearly into our caring, and as the other person is held in God’s love, so we share in that experience of equality before God in our response to God’s call to relationship.
Practical skills

Often in pastoral visiting, most of the time is taken up with conversation about the person being visited. They will often talk about themselves, describing difficulties, hinting at painful emotions:

Listening Well
The first skill is listening well, which requires empathy (the ability to put oneself in the other person’s place). It also requires the ability to be silent, to allow the other person the space to talk about himself or herself. These skills can be developed with awareness and practice.

Remember details
The second skill is the ability to listen to the story being told, remembering details and helping the person telling the story to make sense of it. Sometimes we will hear stories that seem confused or illogical, and the visitor can help to clarify the experience for the person being listened to. Sometimes this involves trying to get the facts straight (the who, what, where, when, how sorts of questions). Sometimes it means helping the other person to express feelings about the situation. A visitor might ask them directly ‘How does that feel?’ or reflect back what has been heard, ‘I heard you say…’ It is good to help a person understand their own experience. Be gentle, don’t interrogate them!

Themes
Listen to the themes in the story; needs, concerns, issues and emotional responses. These are the things that will help shape prayer. At the end of a visit or of their story, the visitor may want to offer to share in prayer with the other person. It is important to ask if this is wanted. There are many ways of asking, giving the other person the opportunity to decline. ‘Would you like me to pray with you?’ or ‘Would you like a word of prayer?’ Some people say, ‘Shall we offer this time to God in prayer?’ If the person being visited declines it may be appropriate to assure them that others at the church are praying for them but care must be taken that confidentiality is not breached.
Prayer Cards
Visitors may have prayer cards that they can leave with someone – often with a familiar prayer or one written by the visitor. If you feel uncomfortable finding words in prayer, read a pre-printed prayer or offer silent prayer. As a visitor it is helpful to pray before a visit and to continue to pray for the people being cared for.

Notes to the Distribution of Holy Communion to the Sick and Housebound at Home or in Hospital (from Common Worship)

Ministers may be either ordained or lay persons authorized by the bishop to assist in the distribution of Holy Communion.

When the consecrated bread and wine are to be conveyed directly from a celebration to those not present, they are given to the ministers at the distribution or at the end of the service. The ministers may receive communion either at the celebration or with those to whom they take the elements, or on both occasions.

When Holy Communion is distributed at other times to those absent from a celebration, the minister may receive with them but need not do so.

Words of introduction linking the consecrated elements with the celebration at which they were consecrated must be used.

Prayers of Penitence

These may be omitted when the service has been preceded by a penitential rite.

Seasonal Material

Seasonal or Sunday provision may be used in place of that provided here. At Christmas, Easter and Pentecost some at least of the seasonal provision for the Festival should be used.
Reception of the Consecrated Bread and Wine

Communion should normally be received in both kinds separately, but where necessary may be received in one kind, whether of bread or, where the communicant cannot receive solid food, wine.

Spiritual Communion

Believers who cannot physically receive the sacrament are to be assured that they are partakers by faith of the body and blood of Christ and of the benefits he conveys to us by them.

Residential Homes

These forms (provided in Common Worship) may be used in residential homes where pastorally appropriate.

Incumbents would normally give training and guidance as to the liturgy used (which can be downloaded from the Common Worship website) and offer appropriate training to those, having been licensed, exercising this ministry.
Some practical guidelines for the leading of services of Extended Communion

- It would be helpful for the PCC to provide a suitable bag/case to carry the vessels, elements, orders of service, Bible, etc. Some communion sets come in carrying cases. This will include, where appropriate, the provision of suitable ‘cloths’ for the Sacrament to be placed upon.

- In consultation with the Incumbent and/or Ministry Team, establish to whom are you going to extend communion and how frequently you are going to do so.

- Ensure that you have sufficient and suitable copies of the order of service for those who are going to be present.

- If the person(s) sharing in the service of Extended Communion need gluten-free bread/wafers, ensure the presiding minister is provided with it/them before the Sacrament is consecrated.

- Consider asking the presiding minister to pray at the end of the distribution for those who will receive communion at the service of Extended Communion.
• If people are visually impaired, be sure to provide large print service sheets. If their health makes it difficult for them to respond and speak the words in bold type, do the service in a way that enables them to participate as fully as possible. Most will know some of the service by heart, especially the Lord’s Prayer in traditional language.

• Will everyone receive both the bread and the wine? If so, how? If one, which one? Will anyone not receive? (This needs awareness and sensitivity and the confidence to say that to receive either the bread or the wine is to receive Christ. You may find it easiest to dip the bread into the wine and place it directly in the mouth of the sick person, but it is best to ask them, or their carers, if you have any concerns)

• There may be a relative/friend/carer present for whom it would be inappropriate (e.g. someone who belongs to another church whose discipline would not permit them or someone of another faith) to receive. Be sure to ask before you begin the service.

• What remains of the elements should be reverently consumed and the vessels will need to be washed and dried. You will want to consume at the end of the service, but it may not be convenient to wash and dry the vessels there and then. In some cases, it may have to be done at the leader’s home, with due care being taken to wipe the vessels before transporting them.
A note on Confession and Reconciliation:

Although formal Confession normally finds its expression within the more Sacramental tradition of the Church, lay ministers will find, from time to time, that ‘confessional’ information of a confidential and sensitive nature may be shared with them. In these situations you may discern that the person you are ministering to might need to speak to a priest, or you may feel that the appropriate response is to pray with them and assure them of God’s forgiveness (using one of the prayers of Absolution in common worship with the appropriate wording for a lay person to use) assuring them that what they have shared is in confidence (see the section on Confidentiality).

A detailed understanding of the Church of England’s liturgical understanding and use of formal Confession and Reconciliation can be found in the provisions for Christian Initiation on the Common Worship website or in the Christian Initiation volume.