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## *Beautiful Prayers Work, Over and Over Again*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,  
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There is a reason that we Episcopalians use the same prayers over and over again.

They work.

Now, I realize that extemporaneous prayers also work. I love composing prayers on the spot, at blessings over family and food, at special events, and certainly in times of crisis and need. Sometimes, the emotional energy of an extemporaneous prayer compensates for its clumsy structure and flimsy substance. But often, of course, the energy does not so compensate.

Episcopalians use prayers that have worked over time. The prayers began with basic verses of scripture and sound theological principles. They were shaped as exceptional pieces of poetry and syntax. Then, they were usually refined several times, edited in newer prayer books. The good ones survive in prayer book after prayer book, and parish after parish. The good ones speak to our heart, mind, and soul.

Consider how you might want to compose a prayer using great scripture verses like Ephesians 2:17, Acts 2:17, Isaiah 57:19, and Joel 2:28. If you were George Edward Lynch Cotton, missionary bishop to Calcutta, India, from 1858 to 1866, you would have composed something that now looks like this:

*O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.*

It is one of my favorite prayers from the prayer book. Our present version is not exactly how Cotton wrote it, but it's basically the same. Recognize the bible verses now? "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh." (Joel 2:28), and Christ Jesus "came to preach peace to those who were far off and to those who were near." (Ephesians 2:17).

This prayer is now one of the three possible prayers for mission with which our office of Morning Prayer closes every day. Some of us pray this prayer three days a week. We pray it over and over again. It works.

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