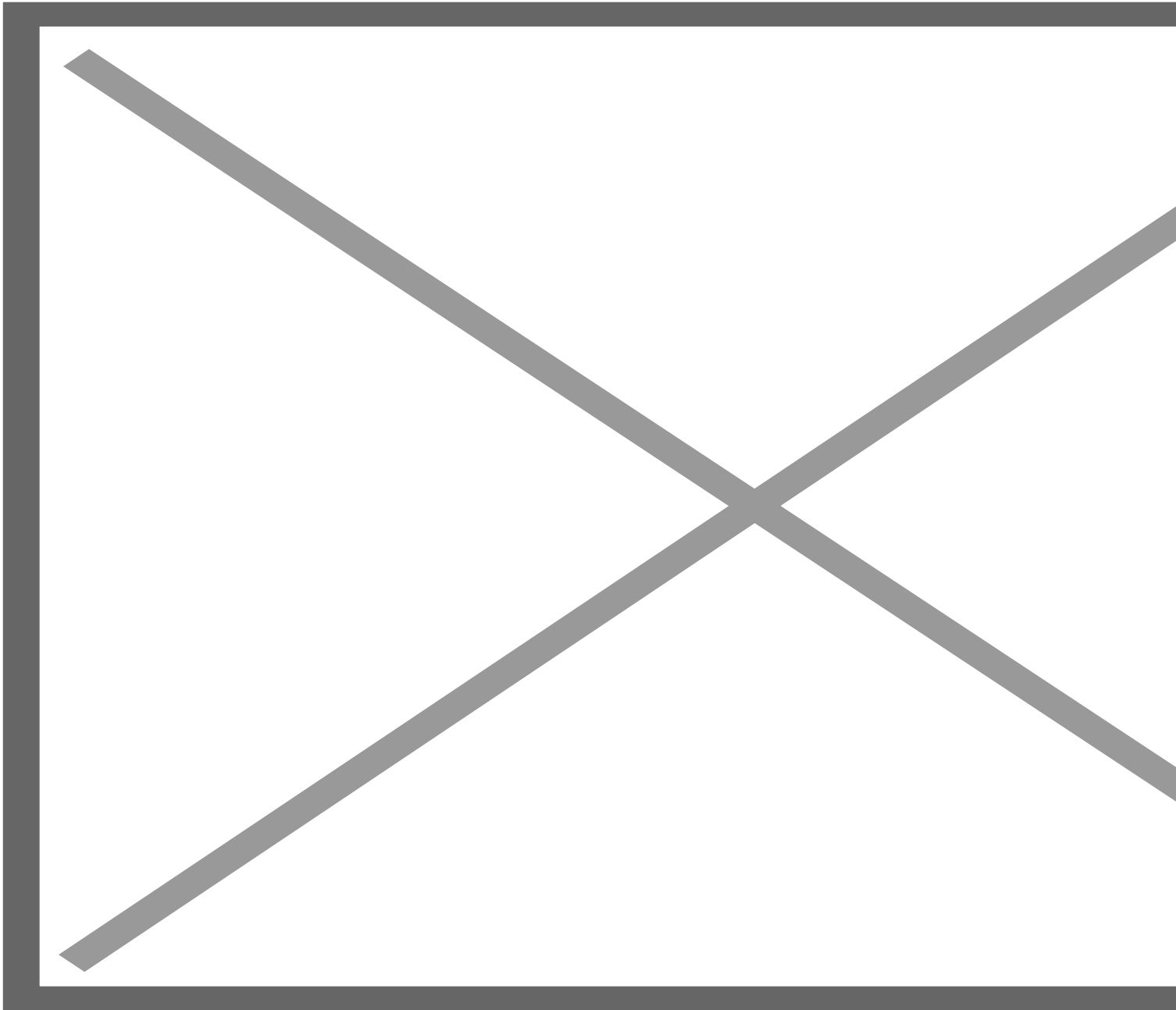


Episcopal bishop asks Texas churches to refrain from "expansive language" in liturgies

by [David Paulsen](#)

June 10, 2026



Robert Price, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas (Photo: Episcopal Diocese of Dallas)

All dioceses in the Episcopal Church regularly rely on the 1979 Book of Common Prayer to structure their worship services. The bishop of the Diocese of Dallas wants his diocese's congregations to refrain from using

any other liturgical text, at least on Sundays.

Last month, Bishop Robert Price [issued new guidance](#) for Sunday liturgies in Texas's third largest city, effective May 31. Price's guidance specifically advised congregations not to incorporate several other commonly used supplemental liturgical resources, including the church's "expansive language" versions of the liturgy and the collection of liturgies known as Enriching Our Worship.

Out of "pastoral concern," Price said he is asking clergy to refrain from using expansive language, "as an act of gracious restraint, sacrificial love, and fellowship with their sisters and brothers in Christ."

Those supplemental liturgies have been authorized for use throughout the Episcopal Church without the need to get permission from a bishop, a fact that Price acknowledged when he released revised guidance on June 2.

"I am unable to prohibit the use of these prayers on Sunday mornings," Price wrote [in his latest letter to the diocese](#). "Nevertheless, the underlying reason for the original prohibition remains unchanged: the desire that our diocese pray together as one body using the memorialized 1979 Book of Common Prayer, thereby deepening our union in Christ."

It isn't clear how many of the more than 60 congregations in the Diocese of Dallas have regularly used expansive-language liturgies, though the bishop's changing guidance has required at least one congregation to adjust. [Church of the Transfiguration](#) has used those supplemental liturgies for the past eight years.

The supplemental liturgies "were intended to lessen the dependence on masculine pronouns for God, which can diminish our spiritual imaginations, and also introduce some changes to the Nicene Creed to foster ecumenical relationships," said Casey Shobe, Transfiguration's rector, [in a May 28 message](#) to the congregation about Price's initial prohibition. "As we begin this next chapter, we will abide by the bishop's direction."

In an interview on June 3, Shobe said he and other church leaders were still digesting the latest guidance from Price.

"We will take seriously his request . . . while also thinking very carefully about how much the expansive-language rites have meant for the parish in these last eight years."

Price has not said whether he specifically objects to the church's yearslong development and authorization of expansive-language liturgies. In a written response, he did not comment on those liturgies. Rather, he indicated that asking all congregations to use the 1979 Book of Common Prayer on Sundays is a way to promote unity in a diverse diocese.

"While a symbolic gesture, I believe that symbols matter," Price said. "We have a theological diversity in the Diocese of Dallas that no longer exists in many dioceses, and I am asking everyone to sacrifice their preferences in order to build mutual charity. To be honest, I am somewhat bemused that asking Episcopalians to use the 1979 BCP on Sunday mornings is perceived as being in any way radical or oppressive."

If not radical or oppressive, Price's guidance appears to be unusual.

Ruth Meyers, a prominent scholar of the church's liturgical history, said in an interview that some bishops had forbidden the use of such supplemental liturgies while those liturgies were still being developed, but since they were fully authorized by the general convention in 2018 she was unaware of a bishop openly discouraging their use.

Meyers, a longtime general convention deputy and a retired [Church Divinity School of the Pacific](#) liturgics professor, also questioned whether a call for “unity” justified exclusive use of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

“The unity would be at the churchwide level, not at the diocese level,” Meyers said, since it is up to general convention to determine what liturgies are authorized for use in the church’s dioceses and congregations.

Price, in his statement, said the inspiration for the new guidance dates to the time before he was elected bishop when he was meeting with local leaders. “Building greater trust and collegiality amongst the clergy and parishes of the diocese was identified as a key priority of the new bishop, and I have sought to facilitate that healing and deeper unity in ways great and small since my consecration,” he said. “As a part of that effort, I have put forward pastoral guidance that seeks to bring all of us together.”

The bishop’s new guidance follows decades of debate within the Episcopal Church and across the Anglican Communion about the role that “common prayer” plays in Anglican unity. Meyers underscored that the consensus over time has shifted away from a unified text in favor of a set of shared principles, approaches, and structures.

The Book of Common Prayer was [first published in 1549 for use in the Church of England](#), and in subsequent centuries, it became the primary liturgical text for Anglicans worldwide in the provinces of what is now known as the Anglican Communion. In 1958, the [Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops acknowledged](#) that independent liturgical revisions in those autonomous provinces, including the Episcopal Church, had made it harder to agree on one single text.

In response, the Lambeth Conference called attention “to those features in the Books of Common Prayer which are essential to the safeguarding of our unity: i.e., the use of the Canonical Scriptures and the Creeds, Holy Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, and the Ordinal.”

In the 1970s, The Episcopal Church undertook its last major revision of its Book of Common Prayer, resulting in the [current prayer book’s adoption in 1979](#). That process emphasized the structure of the church’s liturgies while allowing for several variations. Today, even in churches that exclusively worship using the Book of Common Prayer on Sundays, congregations can choose from the prayer book’s more traditional Rite I or the more contemporary Rite II, and within Rite II, the options include four different eucharistic prayers.

As the 1979 Book of Common Prayer became the cornerstone of worship across the Episcopal Church, church leaders continued to develop supplemental liturgies with a special emphasis on more expansive and inclusive language, including for God and the divine.

A [general convention resolution in 1985](#) directed the preparation of “inclusive language texts” for trial use, and those texts [were authorized in 1988](#), with permission of a bishop. Over the next decade, the process of liturgical experimentation and revision led to authorization in 1997 of a set of supplemental liturgies published as [Enriching Our Worship](#), still under the direction of the bishop.

“Enriching Our Worship is not intended to supplant the Book of Common Prayer, but rather to provide additional resources to assist worshiping communities wishing to expand the language, images and metaphors used in worship,” then-Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold said in the [preface to the first edition](#).

The general convention continued to support further revisions of Enriching Our Worship until voting in 2018 to authorize those texts for use across the church, no longer requiring permission of the bishop. Also in that year, the general convention [authorized trial use](#) of three new versions of the eucharistic prayers in the Book of

Common Prayer's Rite II. Again, the resolution did not require congregations to first consult their bishop.

The general convention also called for the development of a set of principles to guide future use of expansive and inclusive language in the church's liturgical texts. Those guidelines were proposed and [approved by the 80th general convention in 2022](#).

The Task Force on Liturgical and Prayer Book Revision, which [drafted the guidelines](#), said it wanted to "maximize" the church's liturgical language, not erase it.

"Expansive language seeks to tell as much truth about God as we can, utilizing the full range of language available to us," the task force [said in its report](#). "It does not displace traditional language for God but uses additional metaphors."

The task force also recommended expansive use of pronouns in reference to God, part of a separate but related goal of more inclusive language. "Our language often has built-in biases that exclude and harm some persons. When exclusive language is used, we fall short of our calling to respect all who are created in the image of God," the task force said.

Such considerations influenced the Church of the Transfiguration's decision to embrace the newly authorized expansive-language liturgies in 2018. Since then, the congregation has generally worshipped using Enriching Our Worship on Sundays during the seasons of Advent and Lent and has used the supplemental Rite II eucharistic prayers during the rest of the year.

"There was great appreciation for the way that the rites lessened the dependency on he/him pronouns" for God, Shobe said, and "carefully excising" those references was possible "without doing any change to the overall theology of the prayers." —Episcopal News Service