

**SPOLEK PŘÁTEL ETF
ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDS OF THE PTF**

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My name is **Michael Hoffmann**. I am a priest in the Church of Norway, Norway's Lutheran state church. My parish consists of 2 communities with people living on 4 islands off the coast of Central Norway north of Ålesund.

I do not have a programmatic lecture for you, but rather a description of how a church service takes shape with me. You could call it: Confessions of a priest and father of two and a half small children.

The planning of a church service:

The plan for the church services for the whole year is normally made in the summer of the previous year, so that we can plan at least one school year in advance, and it's possible to include schools, kindergartens, clubs and different organisations. At the same time we are forced to plan one calendar year in advance because the diocese requests that we have a fixed number of services in at least 4 churches or prayer houses in my parish or 8 in the whole district of Haram.

Therefore, we must also always plan one whole calendar year in advance every spring or summer. At the moment, I have the responsibility for the planning of the church services of 3.25 priests at 8 fixed preaching stations with more than 4 services per year in a district with approximately 8000 parishioners. In this plan it is decided where the church service on each occasion will be held and by whom, which liturgy is used and whether there are any special features for this church service.

The liturgy:

Our church is in a phase of liturgical renewal and in the last 5 years we have already received a new Agenda for marriages and a new burial liturgy. There is a large number of liturgies and liturgical elements that are released for testing at this time. And I think nobody knows all of them.

The ones most frequently used are the "Holy mass" and the family service. The family mass, a family service with communion, is becoming increasingly popular. Besides this, I myself also like to use a simple communion service especially for outdoor church services and church services in homes for the elderly. Besides this we offer confessional services, special services on Holy Thursday and a meditative crossroad on Good Friday.

Even if the liturgies have become ever more elaborate over the years, many priests still regard them as drafts, which could and sometimes should be changed.

The texts:

It is similar with the texts for the service. In the classical "Holy mass" we always read 3 texts: one from the Old Testament, one from the letter literature, and the text to be preached about is normally the Gospel of the day. There are two main series of texts with three texts for every service of the church year. There is also a third series with additional texts.

So that no boredom arises among the priests and the 2 percent of church members who attend a service on a normal Sunday, the church parliament mixes the texts a little bit. So we also preach on epistle texts and texts from the additional series. If there is a special reason, we can also choose the texts freely. Such a reason for me is for example at confirmation sermons. Outdoor church services are another



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example. Services that I hold many times on my 4 sermon places (with at least 6 church services per year), are also such a case: When the children in the fifth class get their own New Testament, I prepare the church service only once and hold it 4 times, with slight changes, normally on 3 Sundays altogether. But even if I use the same sermon manuscript four times, it is nevertheless 4 different sermons that I preach.

The songs:

For the selection of the songs, the priest is responsible. Unfortunately! Here, I wish to increase the involvement of the organist, who frequently knows the local song-traditions better on the spot. But my organist, who is 60 years old, educated as a teacher, and has learned to play the organ on his own, doesn't like to take part actively in the selection of the songs. However, I can choose from the hymnal from 1985 and its appendix from 1997. What he expects is to get to know about the songs for the next Sunday at least on Thursday. Incidentally both priests and organists have a right to at least one free weekend per month in our church.

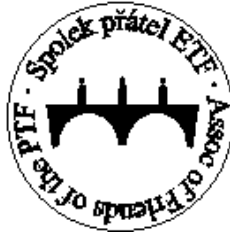
The preparation of a concrete church service:

For some services, the work with them often begins with a visit in a school, a kindergarten, a club or organisation. I often read the text for the sermon for the first time as early as the Friday 9 days before the service.

When I'm sitting down at my desk on Tuesday morning the first thing I do is to read through the texts and the collect prayer for the next Sunday. Afterwards, I choose from the different liturgical alternatives for the greeting, for the intercession prayer or at the communion, for example. Or I insert a baptism into the service. Afterwards, I decide which songs to use. The Lutheran school in Oslo publishes a suggestion; but in my view it is made with congregations in mind that are very good musically. Furthermore I would wish that they offered more songs in the Nynorsk language, because this is the language form used in our parish. Therefore this suggestion is only of restricted benefit for me. I select the songs based on the topic, the texts of the day, the repertoire of the worshippers and my own taste. I select the songs and the liturgical alternatives in a computer program, which allows me to print out my personal liturgy for the respective service in the end. Afterwards, I send the songs to the organist and the sacristan by SMS.

Tuesday and Friday are my funeral days and I choose the texts for these sermons myself. Here I try to find texts which are connected in some way to the deceased person, so that at least somebody listens to me. The deceased are remembered in the church service following on the funeral and on the first Sunday in November. The Wednesday is dedicated to sermon work: I read the text. And, to be quite honest, I don't translate it. Maybe I look at the original text to check two or three words, but I don't translate it. It's simply due to a lack of time and will, since there are often various meetings on the agenda on Wednesday and Thursday and I've always been excruciatingly bad in Hebrew. But I can only warmly recommend a cursory reading of the New Testament to each student. This is a chance that will never come again. I still live from it.

I get inspiration for the sermon from the sermon helps of the Luthersk Kirketidene (which is accessible in the library here in the house), books, and not least from the



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Internet. However, there is no substitute for the working of the Holy Spirit and turning off the telephone. After approximately 2 to 3 hours of concentrated work, the Amen stands at the end of the sermon. During the writing of the sermon, I must take into account that I preach at different places and that the congregation normally consists of three parts.

1. The more or less regular churchgoers, who simply come because of the church.
2. The family of a child who is baptised or of someone who has died.
3. The participants in the church service, such as the choir, readers, children's group, corps etc. which in one way or other are involved in the service. They come to the church service, but they need a special reason to bring them out of the house on a Sunday morning at 11 o'clock.

We also have different people employed in the church to work for the service.

The service:

The service normally lasts between 50 and 75 minutes but with my colleagues it's not unusual to have a service lasting 90 minutes.

I try to be on the spot one hour or at least 45 minutes before the service starts.

Once there, I am frequently busy with installing a screen for projecting or other technical appliances, such as a data projector and so on. I also speak with co-workers and welcome the first people who arrive at the service. Approximately 15 minutes before the start, I change and pray for the service together with the bell-ringer and sometimes the organist or other co-workers. If it is appropriate, the service is opened with a procession. Baptisms take place after the Gloria.

Frequently one of the texts is read by a candidate for confirmation.

I myself lay down the formulated text when I begin to preach. But I try to follow it through the sermon at least by maintaining the thread. But I have a formulated sermon lying in front of me.

At the end of the service, we try to offer coffee. And there I like to talk to the people.

Especially important texts for me are: Luk 10:27; John 3:16 and Matt 28:20.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

AMEN