

Third Sunday after Epiphany – Year B

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Sunday 21 January 2024

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Churches Together in Britain and Ireland for their resources for the second Sunday after Epiphany.

These materials were prepared by an ecumenical team from Burkina Faso, facilitated by the local Chemin Neuf Community (CCN) and adapted by the Britain and Ireland writers group.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is traditionally observed from 18-25 January. Each year the international resources are adapted by the Britain and Ireland writers group. The resources consist of an order of service for Sunday worship and material that can be used daily by various groups to pray together through reflection and suggested action points. You are encouraged to use these resources with your worship group, Bible Study groups, or other small groups as appropriate: <https://ctbi.org.uk/go-and-do-week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity-2024/>

Visit the CTBI website to download or order printed versions of the order of worship, daily reflections and other resources: <https://ctbi.org.uk/category/mission-and-unity/christian-unity/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity/>

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

An archive of resources for daily worship can be found on the Sanctuary First website: <https://www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/daily-worship>

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

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Introduction

Go and Do Likewise – Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 18-25 January 2024

Welcome

Dr Nicola Brady, General Secretary, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the best known passages of Scripture, yet one that never seems to lose its power to challenge indifference to suffering and to inspire solidarity. It is a story about crossing boundaries that calls our attention to the bonds that unite the whole human family.

In choosing this passage of Scripture for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the churches of Burkina Faso have invited us to join with them in a process of self-reflection as they consider what it means to love our neighbour in the midst of a security crisis. Communities in the British-Irish context may be less vulnerable to acts of mass violence than in Burkina Faso, but there are still many living with the memory and/or the threat of serious violence, centred on issues of identity and belonging. There are also groups within communities, including people from ethnic minority backgrounds and people seeking asylum, who feel particularly vulnerable to violence or being displaced by the threat of violence.

Our neighbours in Burkina Faso call us to reconnect to God's dream for us – a dream of a unity formed of ties of love and compassion. This challenges us not only to reflect on the learning from our ecumenical journey so far, but to widen our vision. What can we learn from people of other faiths, from those whose backgrounds are most different from our own, and what do we need from each other?

The reflections encourage us to consider the perspective not only of the one who showed mercy, but also of those who passed by. Many of us will have been unaware of the threat faced by communities in Burkina Faso before reading this material. It is a powerful reminder of the many neglected conflicts that continue to destroy lives and devastate communities around the world, when only a limited number can capture, and fewer still can hold, the attention of the world's media. The Church is called to be an advocate for those caught in these forgotten conflicts, and to amplify the voices of those who feel forsaken.

In this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity the Church is being challenged to stop and tend to the wounded and, in so doing, to recognise our own wounds as churches and as

communities. Facing the reality of our own brokenness helps to connect us to the suffering of others from a place of humility and deep empathy, creating a sacred space of encounter inspired by Christ's healing love.

Introduction to the theme

The materials for the 2024 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity were prepared by an ecumenical team from Burkina Faso facilitated by the local Chemin Neuf Community (CCN). The chosen theme is "You shall love the Lord your God ... and your neighbour as yourself" (Lk 10:27). Brothers and sisters from the Catholic Archdiocese of Ouagadougou, Protestant Churches, ecumenical bodies and the CCN in Burkina Faso collaborated generously in drafting the prayers and reflections. They experienced their work together as a real path of ecumenical conversion.

Visit the CTBI website to download or order printed versions of the order of worship, daily reflections and other resources:

<https://ctbi.org.uk/category/mission-and-unity/christian-unity/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity/>

Prayer

From the Daily Prayer for Christian Unity of the Chemin Neuf Community.

Lord Jesus, who prayed that all might be one,
we pray to you for the unity of all Christians,
according to your will, according to your means.
May your Spirit enable us to experience the suffering caused by division,
to see our sin and to hope beyond all hope. Amen.

Musical suggestions

Our [online music resource](#) is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

A suggested playlist of [songs from CH4 throughout Epiphany](#) can be found on the Church of Scotland website.

You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.

Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord's Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of 'holy chaos'.
- If singing in our congregations is restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?
Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/
intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different "Spiritual Styles"?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?

- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?
What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?
Did it function well as a whole?
How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?
- How balanced was the worship?
What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?
Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/
community?
How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?
How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

Useful links

Up to date information for churches around Covid-19 can be found [here](#)

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship [here](#)

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online [here](#)