

Second Sunday after Epiphany – Year C

Sunday 19 January 2025 – Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

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 the community of Bose, an ecumenical monastery of brothers and sisters in northern Italy 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.

Visit the CTBI website to download or order printed versions of the order of worship, daily reflections and other resources: <https://ctbi.org.uk/resources-for-week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity-2025/>

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.

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 – “Do you believe this?”

Welcome

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

At the heart of our reflections for this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is the question posed by Jesus to Martha: “Do you believe this?” (John 11:26). This same question resonated throughout the deliberations of the first Ecumenical Council, meeting in Nicaea in 325, which gathered Christian communities from around the world to strengthen their relationships as the Church of Jesus Christ. Read in isolation the question might appear as a stark challenge, but from the Gospel story it is clear that the words of Jesus are spoken in love and experienced as invitation as well as challenge. Similarly, while the Council of Nicaea was not without its challenges as a wounded and scattered Church sought to discern the truth of the Gospel message, there was an obvious desire to deepen connection and belonging and to live faithfully as disciples of Christ.

Reflecting on these moments we are reminded that the gift of our faith brings both support and challenge. The 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea this year has been embraced with a hopeful enthusiasm in the global Church and in ecumenical bodies, inspiring a wide range of events and dialogues. It is valued as a significant moment of shared history across the different Christian traditions, despite the many ways in which our paths may have diverged in the years since. Some have remained closer to the Church envisaged at Nicaea with the Nicene Creed continuing to be of central importance as a statement of faith, while others have adopted non-credal models of Church placing greater emphasis on other forms of expression of shared Christian faith. Looking back together from our different perspectives presents an opportunity to deepen understanding and relationships, strengthening our unity in diversity.

While recognising the value of this looking back, we have also been conscious of the need to reflect on how we are responding to Christ’s question in the circumstances of today, considering as we do so what we might learn from the example and experience of Nicaea. An important question in that regard, and one to which this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity resource seeks to respond is: what is the relevance to the life and mission of the local church?

There is an opportunity to celebrate and draw strength and encouragement from the gift of our shared faith. In these troubled and turbulent times, we can take heart from the endurance of that faith. The Church that gathered in Nicaea was one that had been shaken and wounded by violence and persecution and was therefore close to the suffering of

humanity. It was presented with an opportunity for dialogue with the political power which posed difficult choices about how best to share the Good News of the Gospel as faithful disciples of Christ, whose Kingdom is not of this world. In today's polarised world, when trust in the willingness of political powers and authorities, including the Church, to protect the most vulnerable has been undermined, how might a renewal of our commitment to Christian unity contribute to positive change?

Our polarised and fracturing world is in need of a new vision for peace, centred on the recognition of our inter-connectedness and shared humanity. As we gather to mark this anniversary, we have an opportunity to ask the hard questions about what may be getting in the way of our shared identity as Christians and our collective witness to the world. We are reminded of the transformative power of our faith which gives hope in suffering through the promise that all will be renewed in Christ.

Introduction to the theme

This year the ecumenical celebration has been prepared by the community of Bose, an ecumenical monastery of brothers and sisters in northern Italy. In Bose, community life is shaped by the rhythm of regular prayer. As the bells call the sisters, brothers and guests to prayer, they all assemble at the church.

As we celebrate 1,700 years since the Council of Nicaea, this worship service has at its heart, the Nicene Creed. Reflecting this, the scripture readings for this year focus on belief. At this service the gathered community is invited to reflect on the story of Martha's confession of faith in Jesus, as narrated in John 11:17-27. Each is called to sit with Jesus' provocative question to Martha: "Do you believe this?"

As a response to the proclamation of the Word, we affirm our faith together in a solemn recitation of the Nicene Creed. This moment is marked by the sharing of the light of Christ, symbolised by lighted candles. Candles are distributed and the light spreads through the gathering. We stand together as light of the world, united in love, affirming: "We believe...". At the end of the creed, the lighted candles are placed together in a suitable and safe receptacle, to burn together as a reminder of our continued calling to Christian unity.

Another distinctive feature of this year's worship is the inclusion of early Christian writers, most notably in the prayers of intercession. For the sisters and brothers of Bose, these writers are a living source for their shared life.

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Prayer

Adapted from the Bose Community

Almighty God,
accept our praise and thanksgiving
for what already unites us.
Hasten the hour when we will recognise each other
in the one communion You willed
and for which Your Son prayed.
Blessed be God, now and forever. Amen

Musical suggestions

God Welcomes All (GWA) is the new supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition. This exciting new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world.

The full music version is now available; and the words-only book, digital resources including the expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website, will be published in due course, with streaming functions and further information on each song; backing tracks; and lyric videos. *God Welcomes All* is available to order from <https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786225573/god-welcomes-all>

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.

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

- GWA 123 – “Listen to the words of the risen Christ” – relates to the John 20
- GWA 151 – “See how deep he loves” – relates to John 11

Unity and ecumenism

- GWA 20 – “We will extol you, O God”
- GWA 44 – “Come, people of the risen King”
- GWA 46 – “Let us come and worship our creator”
- GWA 82 – “Here and now we’re bound together”
- GWA 86 – “May you find peace, may you find hope”
- GWA 127 – “Holy Spirit, living breath of God”
- GWA 148 – “I will sing a song of love”
- GWA 199 – “Oh how good it is when the family of God”
- GWA 200 – “Great is our God (One Church, one voice)”
- GWA 205 – “Sing to God from every city”
- GWA 215 – “O God of creation, we see all around us”
- GWA 218 – “When hands reach out beyond divides”

- A suggested playlist of [songs from CH4 throughout Epiphany](#) can be found on the Church of Scotland website.
- GWA 105 – “Christe, lux mundi”
- GWA 106 – “God Incarnate, living presence”
- GWA 107 – “A voice was heard in Ramah”

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](#)