

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2017

REFLECTIONS FOR THE 8 DAYS

Crossing Barriers

DAY 1

One has died for all

Readings

- **Isaiah 53: 4-12**
He gave his life as an atoning sacrifice.
- **Psalms 118: 14-29**
God did not abandon me to death.
- **1 John 2: 1-2**
Christ died for all.
- **John 15: 13-17**
Giving his life for his friends.

Starting point

When Paul was converted to Christ he came to a radical new understanding: one person has died for all. Jesus said, 'No greater love has anyone than to lay down their life for their friends.' The Franciscan Maximilian Kolbe was imprisoned in the concentration camp at Auschwitz and in 1941 willingly gave up his life so that another prisoner could live. Through Paul's preaching we see the death of Christ on the cross as the means of our reconciliation with God. Christian churches share in this same commission of proclaiming the Gospel message of reconciliation.

Reflection

1. Friendship

If this is friendship...
...to discover light through anguish
...to overcome punishment with wholeness;
...to embrace healing through
being bruised and crushed
tortured and killed;
if he died in this way,
for us
his friends,
for once, for all;
then can I believe?

Questions

- What qualities do you value in your friends?
- What do Jesus and Kolbe teach us about friendships and how can that transform our own friendships?
- Can we apply this to the way our churches relate to one another?

Prayer

God of inextinguishable life,
you never 'unfriend' us!
Yet our relationships are often fragile and fickle -
for we would hold on to life for fear of losing it.
By your Spirit, give us the courage
to lean on our ever faithful friend, Jesus
so that we might understand more deeply
how we gain life by laying it down.
In the name of Jesus we pray.
Amen.

Go and Do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

- Plan to mark Holocaust Memorial Day on the 27th January.
Share a joint action or prayer in your churches. The Council for Christians and Jews (CCJ) produces worship material on behalf of CTBI.
- The number of users of Facebook passed 1 billion in 2015. What has friendship become in the age of Facebook? Consider the ideas shared in Rory Varrato's TEDx talk. Contact a friend today who you haven't been in touch with for a while.
- Find out how churches in your area are befriending those who are new to your community including those seeking refuge. Visit our Go and Do links for inspiration and guidance.

DAY 2

Live no longer for themselves

Readings

- **Micah 6: 6-8**
God has told you what is good.
- **Psalms 25: 1-5**
God of my salvation, show me your ways.
- **1 John 4: 19-21**
We love because God first loved us.
- **Matthew 16: 24-26**
Those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Starting point

In recent years, social isolation and increasing loneliness have become important issues in Germany as in many contemporary societies. Recognising that "we love because God first loved us", Christians are called to develop new forms of community life. In these we share our means of livelihood with others and nurture support between generations. The Gospel call to live not for ourselves but for Christ, is also a call to reach out to others and to break down the barriers of isolation.

Reflection

2. Re-source

Like entering a new galaxy,

in order to find my source
must I first lose all sense of self?

Is not the paradox of self-loss that
in order fully to find the other
first I must know, love and embrace self.

Only then may I fold my self
into the great galaxy of the 'I am'.

Questions

- In what ways can we live for others in our daily life?
- How does our culture tempt us to live only for ourselves?
- What are the ecumenical implications of the call to live no longer for ourselves?

Prayer

Loving God,
in Christ you freed us for a life
that goes beyond ourselves.
Shaped and moulded by your Spirit,
enable us truly to become
sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ our Lord,
now and forever. Amen.

Go and Do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

- Take time to care for yourself today.
- Send an appropriate care package to the refugee camps at a European crossing point such as Calais.
- Organise to watch the Age of Loneliness documentary with a small group and discuss how to address the problem of loneliness in your church and wider community.

DAY 3

We regard no one from a human point of view

Readings

- **1 Samuel 16: 6-7**
The Lord looks not at outward appearances but at the heart.
- **Psalm 19:7-13**
The commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes.
- **Acts 9:1-19**
Saul becomes Paul.
- **Matthew 5:1-12**
The Beatitudes.

Starting point

Meeting Christ turns everything upside down. Paul had that experience on the road to Damascus. Transformed by their encounter with Christ, in 1741 the Christians of the Moravian Church answered the call to regard no-one from a human point of view. They chose to 'submit to Christ's Rule'. In

submitting ourselves to the rule of Christ today, we are called to see others as God sees them, without mistrust or prejudice.

Reflection

3. Re-human

Is it possible, that
we have de-humanised
terrified children and
fleeing mothers
for the sake of tranquillity?

Is it possible that
we have be-littled
ourselves so much
that reality means more
through a screen
than a touch?

Is it possible that
we have been seen
so completely
that through a slight-seismic shift
divinity becomes more visible
through our humanity?

Questions

- Where can I identify Damascus experiences in my life?
- How are marginalised groups such as refugees regarded in your locality?
- What changes when we view other Christians or people of other faiths from the Godly perspective?

Prayer

God, three in one,
Alpha and Omega,
Source and destination,
Forgive our self-obsession
And smug satisfaction.
Turn us from Saul to Paul,
Living your gracious love
And growing into the unity you offer.
Amen.

Go and Do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

- Watch the clip on YouTube to view how Damascus has been devastated by conflict.
- Pray for the Damascus road conversion required for peace to be realised. Prayers are available from Christian Aid.
- Take action on behalf of those escaping conflict and seeking a safe place to call home.

DAY 4

Everything old has passed away

Readings

- **Genesis 19:15-26**
Don't look back.
- **Psalms 77: 5-15**
God is always faithful.
- **Philippians 3: 7-14**
Forgetting what lies behind.
- **Luke 9:57-62**
Keep your hand on the plough.

Starting point

During this year, the work of Martin Luther and other reformers is being commemorated by many Christians. The Reformation changed much in the life of the Western Church. Christians of all traditions showed heroic witness and were renewed in their Christian lives. Scripture tells us we can be frozen to the spot when we look back. It is important not to be limited by what happened in the past. The Holy Spirit can open us to a new future in which division is overcome and God's people made whole.

Reflection

4. Remember

To linger over-long
in the haze of time,
so stifling the past
 in nostalgia
 or blame-fumed fury
en-shrouds, tomb-like,
as with salt,
moments otherwise free to soar.

But to re-imagine the past,
leaning deep into memory,
so freeing the now
 to birth the not yet
 to draw out
flavours of the future
as with salt,
to taste and see goodness...

this is how it is
to remember.

Questions

- What do you value in your own past and what holds you back from becoming the person God would have you be?
- What could we learn by reading together the history of our divisions and mutual mistrust?
- What must change in my church so that divisions can be overcome and that which unites can be strengthened?

Prayer

Liberating God,

we look back in nostalgia,
but often frozen to the spot
unable to move.

Free us to travel with you into the future
that, learning from and treasuring the past,
we may journey with you, hand to the plough,
into the transformation of life in you.

Amen.

Go and Do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

- Look through an old photo album and reflect on those places and people who have shaped and taught you.
- Plan with your local congregations to go on a pilgrimage walk around your churches or visit a local heritage site or place of historical interest. Notice the stories of your shared history.
- Remember Rwanda and respond to the current events in Burundi.

DAY 5

Everything has become new

Readings

- **Ezekiel 36:25-27**
Receiving a new heart from God.
- **Psalms 126**
Being filled with joy.
- **Colossians 3:9-17**
Being renewed in Christ.
- **John 3:1-8**
Being born in the Spirit.

Starting point

In this 500th anniversary of the Reformation in Germany we are reminded of both the achievements and tragedies of our history. The love of Christ compels us to live in a new way, actively seeking unity and reconciliation. God lives in us by the power of the Holy Spirit and lets us share in the life of the Trinity. This new life becomes visible when we allow it to take shape and live it out in 'compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.'

Reflection

5. Re-new

Created, each one of us, beautiful and blessed,
in the image and likeness of the One who created us.
God is our refuge, and still takes sanctuary in us.

Graced by humility to retrieve the lost kindness in our own eyes
can we see ourselves and others as God sees us.

In solidarity we walk with those on the road, whose burden is heavy
and whose loss is great.

Can we bless the imagining of ourselves
which is so often smaller than God's
so that each of us might see that future
and that stature that we are called to become.

Make us attentive still to good news
and small occasions.
To the grace of what is possible.
That we may neither miss our neighbour's gift
nor our enemy's need.

Questions

- 'I am a new creation' writes Paul. So what has changed in your life?
- In the ongoing reformation of your life, what else needs to change?
- What do you notice God is doing in the ongoing reformation of the Church?

Prayer

Holy God, maker of heaven and earth,
in you we are a new creation.
Give us new hearts to overcome
all that endangers our unity.
Through Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Now and forever. Amen.

Go and Do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

- Spend time connecting with creation today, for example, by watching a nature documentary, visiting a local park or going for a walk in a woodland.
- Give thanks for the progress made towards a Global Climate Change deal and continue to campaign for climate justice. Is your church an eco-church or eco-congregation?
- Connect with those new to your community by inviting their involvement in any local environmental projects, for example community gardens, allotments, recycling, tree planting.

DAY 6

'God reconciled us to himself'

Readings

- **Genesis 17:1-8**
God makes a covenant with Abraham.
- **Psalms 98**
The world has seen the victory of God.
- **Romans 5:6-11**
God reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ.
- **Luke 2:8-14**
Proclamation of the good news.

Starting point

After the Holocaust the distinctive task of the German churches is to combat anti-Semitism. Similarly all churches are called to reconciliation in their communities. This means resisting all forms of human

discrimination, for we are all held in God's covenant. Reconciliation has two sides being both fascinating and terrifying at the same time. It draws us in so that we desire it: within ourselves; with one another; and between our different confessional traditions. We see the price and it scares us. For reconciliation means renouncing our desire for power and recognition.

Reflection

6. Covenant

This I do not know:
Whether I must change, repent – reform
before reaching for reconciliation;
Or if, rather,
being reconciled with my
brothers and sisters
is a necessary condition
for reformation.

This I know:
That human time,
rarely straight-lining,
rather, spirals;
that the troublesome
grit-of-separation
seeps into the cavities
of the walls of division,
growing layers of wisdom:
pearls of reconciliation.

And this more I know:
That the covenant
binding us with God
is a gift of God's time.

Questions

- Where have you encountered the hurt of discrimination or prejudice? Reflect on this experience.
- Where have you witnessed, colluded in, or experienced discrimination within the church?
- How can God use you as a reconciler in such a situation?

Prayer

God of promise,
you call us into a covenant
that binds us into your inclusive love;
yet we build walls that disturb and disrupt this.
Lead us to a renewed understanding of your promise to us,
that is never cancelled,
but which reconciles us to you, through Christ.
Amen.

Go and Do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

- Read about the work of reconciliation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
- Explore the different ways people can be discriminated against.
- Take action to challenge any myths that have grown up concerning those who seek asylum.

DAY 7

The ministries of reconciliation

Readings

- **Genesis 50:15-21**
Joseph is reconciled with his brothers.
- **Psalm 72**
God's kingdom brings righteousness and peace.
- **1 John 3:16b-21**
God's love compels us to love one another.
- **John 17:20-26**
Jesus prays for the unity of his church.

Starting point

The reformers such as Martin Luther and others who remained in communion with Rome, such as Ignatius of Loyola, sought to bring about renewal in the Western church. However, what should have been a story of God's grace was also marred by human sinfulness. Reconciliation between God and humanity is key to our Christian faith. Paul was convinced that the love of Christ compels us to bring God's reconciliation to bear in all aspects of our life. Today this leads us to examine our consciences in relation to our divisions. As the story of Joseph demonstrates, God always gives the grace needed for the healing of broken relationships.

Reflection

7. Reformed

You shape us –
each and every one;
some are more malleable than others,
and yet more
near broken,
fragile,
cracked.

But a fault line runs through us all;
Perhaps that's how we see the light,
the spark of the divine in each of us?

As we each embrace
that which is broken in us,
we find that in our wounds –
that is where we discover each other.
Not that my pain is yours,
or yours mine;
but that none of us,
not a single one,
go through life without being scarred.

If we were each to bring our broken pieces
and bit by bit,
lay them down
side by side;
we would see Your craftsmanship,

reforming that which is broken,
into that which is
healed

loved

and one day

whole.

Questions

- Where have you experienced the fracture of a community you have belonged to?
- What were the barriers that hindered reconciliation?
- How can those barriers be broken down?

Prayer

God of reconciliation,
Through Christ you call us to a unity that is not an option.
Yet we fall back tenaciously on our old ways:
 conflict, division and fractured relationships.

Confront and convict us of this failure;
Break through the walls of our excuses,
And set us free to participate in your ministry of reconciliation.
This we pray in Jesus' name.
Amen.

Go and Do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

- Ask someone for something you need today.
- View the Rusty Radiator Awards and seek to challenge stereotypes about who the needy are.
- Give those who are new to your community an opportunity to contribute - for example ask them to share in the cooking of a community meal.

DAY 8

'Reconciled to God'

Readings

- **Micah 4:1-5**
In the last days justice will reign.
- **Psalms 87**
Glorious things are spoken of God.
- **Revelation 21:1-5a**
God will make a new heaven and a new earth.
- **John 20:11-18**
Meeting the risen Christ leads to personal mission.

Starting point

What if? What if the prophecies in the Bible actually came true? What if God's justice and peace reigned, a peace which was more than simply the absence of war? What if there really was no more

mourning, no more tears, and no more death? It would be the culmination of the reconciliation that God brought about in Jesus Christ. It would be the Kingdom of God.

Reflection

8. Be-holding

If seeing is believing
can we look
not turning our face away
from the mourning
the crying
the pain
staring into the grave
meeting the gaze of what we fear

If seeing is believing
can we look
turning our face towards
resurrection
reconciliation
and reformation
to the day when
every tear will be wiped away

Every tear

the tears of those living in terror
the tears of those fighting in anger
the tears of those grieving from loss
the tears of those aching with compassion
the tears of God for the pain of the world

If seeing is believing
can we look
if through blurred eyes
beholding
all things
are being
made new.

Questions

- How do you envision the Kingdom of God?
- Which songs, stories, poems, liturgies and pictures from your traditions give you the feeling of participating in the reality of God's eternity?

Prayer

Jesus Christ,
your torn and abused body,
found its peace in death.
Yet you are risen on Easter day.
Give us the courage to comprehend
your saving and transforming love
in the wounds as well as the healing.
So that we can find new and deeper joy
in the good news of your risen life!
Amen.

Go and Do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

- Watch the short film *Tree of Life* - an example of what was meant for destruction bringing restoration.
- Seek out stories, songs, poems or pictures from those seeking refuge in your community or country that describe their hopes for the future.
- Give thanks for the work of the ACT Alliance, 140 churches and faith-based organisations working together in over 100 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalised people.

Closing prayer

Prayer

Triune God,

We thank you for this week of Prayer
that has brought us together as Christians
and that has enabled us to experience
your presence in different ways.

Grant us ways to praise your holy name together

So that we continue to seek reconciliation and grow towards unity.

Dates

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is traditionally observed from 18th to 25th January (the octave of St Peter and St Paul). However, some groups choose other times of the year, particularly around Pentecost which is a symbolic date for the unity of the church.

Dedication

Stephen Brown and Gwynn ap Gwilym

This year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity material is dedicated to the memories of the Revd Stephen Brown who passed away in February 2016 and the Revd Canon Gwynn ap Gwilym in July 2016.

Both Stephen and Gwynn had served as dedicated members of the CTBI Writers Group for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity for many years, making enormous contributions through their creativity and collegiality which will be greatly missed but never forgotten.

Acknowledgements

CTBI WPCU 2017 Writers

Each year Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) works in collaboration with various writers from within the four nations to produce these materials for your use. In acknowledgment of this collaboration we have listed below the colleagues who have helped us accomplish this task for 2017:

- The Venerable Dr Tim Stratford, Moderator of the CTBI WPCU writers group and Archdeacon of Leicester.
- Bob Fyffe, General Secretary, CTBI.

- Revd Peter Colwell, Deputy General Secretary, CTBI.
- The Revd Dr Adrian Burdon, Superintendent Minister, The South Fylde Circuit of the Methodist Church.
- Revd Dr David Cornick, General Secretary of Churches Together in England (CTE).
- Ruth Harvey, Consultant and Facilitator of Shoreline Conversations and member of the Iona Community.
- Philip Mellstrom, Worship Development Worker, Church of Scotland.
- The Revd Dr Adrian Morgan, Assistant Curate of Gorseinon in the Diocese of Swansea and Brecon and Chaplain to Gower College Swansea.
- Fr Damian McNeice, Master of Ceremonies for Dublin Archdiocese.
- The Revd Canon Dr Daniel Nuzum, Hospital Chaplain, Church of Ireland.
- Jenny Sheehan, Lay Preaching Commissioner, URC Southern Synod.
- Wendy Young, Church Resources Officer, Christian Aid.

Christian Unity Wall

Please add details and photos of your events, prayers and messages of unity to the Christian unity 'wall' at www.weekofprayer.org by posting to Twitter using the #wpcuwall hashtag. Posts appear automatically (after a slight delay).

On the Internet

- www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer, Twitter: #wpcu2017
- www.weekofprayer.org, Twitter: #wpcuwall

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info@ctbi.org.uk,
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