

**Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2011**

# All things in common

  
churches  
together  
IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Popeth yn gyffredin / Gach ni i gcomhpháirt

**18–25 January**

[www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer)

© 2010 Alvarez Rodriguez. Image from Eyegstock.com

## An introduction to the days

The following pages provide some material for reflection, prayer and study for the eight days of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This is based on the suggestion of the Jerusalem Churches' plan that we consider the great vision lived out by the Apostolic Church in Jerusalem of Acts 2:42-47. Our churches today are some distance from that vision and in this week we pray for deeper unity and healing. Through creative engagement with the Acts passage, and drawing on the history of God's saving acts before and since, we look for wisdom in the search for a Godly path ahead.

Two scripture passages are lined out below for use every day where appropriate. It is our suggestion that the Acts passage be used every day of the week in this or another form. Some additional commentary is also offered for reflection during the week. This is particularly inspired by the challenges posed on Day 3 but can equally apply to the other days too.

### A Song of Nehemiah: Nehemiah 9: 6-7, 9-11, 16-20

1. 'You are the Lord, you alone; you have made heaven,  
the heaven of heavens, with all their host,
2. The earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them.  
To all of them you give life, and the host of heaven worships you.
3. You are the Lord, the God who chose Abram and gave him the name Abraham;  
'You saw the distress of our ancestors in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea.
4. You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and the people of his land,  
for you knew that they acted insolently against our ancestors.
5. You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day.  
You divided the sea before them, so that they passed through on to dry land,
6. You threw their pursuers into the depths,  
like a stone into mighty waters.
7. 'But they and our ancestors acted presumptuously  
and stiffened their necks and did not obey your commandments;
8. They refused to obey, and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed  
among them;  
but they stiffened their necks and determined to return to their slavery in Egypt.
9. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and you did not forsake them.
10. Even when they had cast an image of a calf for themselves  
and said, "This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt",
11. You in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness;  
the pillar of cloud that led them in the way did not leave them by day,
12. Nor the pillar of fire by night  
that gave them light on the way by which they should go.
13. You gave your good spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold your manna from  
their mouths,  
and gave them water for their thirst.

## Worship and work in the early church: Acts 2:42-47 in canticle form

1. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.
2. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.
3. All who believed were together and had all things in common;
4. They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.
5. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,
6. Praising God and having the goodwill of all the people; day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

## Commentary

As we pray for unity in Christ's Church, the memory of the apostolic Jerusalem Church at one as they 'broke bread' may evoke a sense of hurt and failure that the Church can no longer unite in Eucharist with bread and wine. Acts 2:42 in particular caused the group that prepared these notes some difficulty. For some this passage contained clear references to the ongoing practice of Holy Communion, for others this was a simple picture of the early church sharing a common life and fulfilling each other's daily needs. But it is as important that we explore the common ground as it is to contemplate the difference. The leaders of today's church in Jerusalem have been honest about the fractures that they live with in the work they have offered to us. They have also been positive in their hope and challenge for greater unity.

In exploring the common ground from the diverse traditions within CTBI we acknowledge that Jesus did himself break bread in a ritualised Passover meal, that table fellowship was an important aspect of his ministry, and that the ideas of the new wine of the kingdom and his presence as the bread of life run through the Gospels and epistles of the early church. We must also recognise in the Last Supper some disunity from the very beginning. Judas Iscariot and St Peter took betrayal and denial from the table. St Paul writes to the church in Corinth with a challenge to address disunity in the Lord's Supper.

The Old Testament records how notions of bread and wine have represented God's love and mercy offered to God's people throughout salvation history. From the manna showered on the desert comes the idea of God sustaining the people. The vineyard is an image of God's nurturing and faithfulness. These themes are collected together in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, his teachings and his actions.

The churches' remembering of Christ's body and blood inspire his followers today to commit themselves to living like him in a sacrificial way. We feed on him in order to become more like him, in spirit and in our material lives. Whilst we may need to lament the ways our fellowship is broken, we look forward to incorporation together as children of God's kingdom in the heavenly banquet.

# Day 1

## Theme: Devoted to teaching

### YOU

1. What is the first bible story you can remember learning?
2. What has the church taught you about how to live?
3. What does the church need to learn from the world?

### THE WORD

<b>READ:</b>	Acts 2:42-47	Worship and work in the early church
	Isaiah 51:4-8	Listen to me, my people
	Psalms 119:105-112	Your word is a lamp to my feet
	Romans 1:15-17	Eagerness to proclaim the gospel
	John 17:6-19	I have made your name known

**FOCUS:** A teaching will go out from me... (Isaiah 51:4)

### REFLECTION

We live in reason's light,  
yet stumble in the shade  
of ignorance and willful folly  
turning from truth:  
fearful of its charge to us:  
to change hearts and heads.

And another light, still brighter, shines  
and even reason fears,  
as faith presents persuasive views  
of how we yet can be.

And hearts and heads accord,  
and spirits soar,  
devoted to the source:  
this lamp of wisdom  
lights our lives;  
this light, the Word of God.

### THE WORLD

God of light, shine on us now with nurturing light; teach us the ways to be, to be the way you will! Nourish our spirits in the glow of your grace! Sear away our sin by the brilliance of your mercy and blaze in us a burning desire for justice.

We pray for all in the shadow of doubt and the gloom of despair and the darkness of disaster: that a new light of hope bursts over them like a healing dawn.

## Day 2

### Theme: Devoted to fellowship

#### YOU

1. How is the stranger welcomed in your church?
2. What difference to friendship does shared faith bring?
3. What can create closer fellowship amongst your local churches?

#### THE WORD

<b>READ:</b>	Acts 2:42-47	Worship and work in the early church
	Isaiah 40:3-5	God's glory seen together
	Psalms 51:10-12, 15-17	The acceptable sacrifice
	1 Corinthians:1.4-9	Called into fellowship with Christ
	John 14:15-23	God makes a home with us

**FOCUS:** ...put a new and right spirit within me. (Psalm 51:10)

#### REFLECTION

To contradict loneliness costs.  
Relationships come at a price.  
Solo living is free but raw:  
investing in togetherness  
a charge worth paying.  
All are changed in the process:  
the lonely – to find life less so;  
the already-connected –  
to feel the fragility  
we all face at some time :  
when the future is feared  
and the present too painful.  
That broken-openness  
is a welcome wound:  
letting others come close,  
letting God be there.

#### THE WORLD

When we find ourselves blessed with friends,  
remind us of the sorrow of loneliness:  
that we may pray for hearts breaking in solitude.  
And when we find ourselves in that solitude,  
bless us with the knowledge others offer that prayer for us,  
and gather us in your grace to know the company of faith  
across time and place.

## Day 3

### Theme: Devoted to the breaking of bread

#### YOU

1. In what ways is the Eucharist an act of remembrance? Is it more than an act of remembrance?
2. Does it have a universal significance for all Christians?
3. In what ways are you aware of being a eucharistic community?

#### THE WORD

##### READ:

Acts 2:42-47

Exodus 16:13b-21a

Psalms 116:12-18

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Worship and work in the early church

It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat

I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice

When you come together

**FOCUS:** When you come together wait for one another...(1 Corinthians 11:33)

#### REFLECTION

Taken, Blessed, Broken, Given

Betrayal and denial at the door.  
Taking the bread,  
Saying thank you despite  
Touching the edges of such a dark night;  
Breaking the loaf,  
And giving the pieces away.  
Morsels pressed into hungry palms,  
Your words resounding still:  
Take it, this is my bread ...

The sins of the world at the door.  
You took the cup that would not pass,  
Saying thank you despite  
The deepening darkness all around;  
You gave it to those that you called  
friends.  
The circle breaking  
As trembling fingers clasped the chalice,  
Your words resounding still:  
This is my blood of the covenant,  
Which is poured out for many ...

For the ways that we betray you,

For the times that we deny you,

Help us to receive all that is still  
Given from your nail pierced hands.  
Bread of heaven came down,  
Fruit of the vine poured out,  
Feed us and fill us, O Lord  
In both the blessing of life and its cost;  
Thanking you in every season,  
Our hands open  
Ready to clasp the cup as it passes by us.

#### THE WORLD

Dear Lord

For the ways that I betray you  
For the times that I deny you  
Help me to receive all that is still  
Given from your nail pierced hands  
Feed me and fill me, O Lord  
In both the blessing of life and its cost  
Help me always to thank you in every  
season  
In Jesus' name I pray  
Amen

## Day 4

Theme: Devoted to prayer

### YOU

1. Bring to mind your earliest experiences of prayer.
2. In what way has your prayer life developed since?
3. Bring to mind an instance where you feel that you have received an answer to prayer.

### THE WORD

<b>READ:</b>	Acts 2:42-47	Worship and work in the early church
	Jonah 2:1-9	Deliverance belongs to the Lord!
	Psalms 67:1-7	Let the peoples praise you, O God!
	Matthew 6:5-15	Your kingdom come, your will be done...

**FOCUS:** I called to the Lord... and he answered me. (Jonah 2:2)

### REFLECTION

#### Prayer...

Is it sitting in silence, looking for answers,  
alone in the stillness, reading God's word,  
hoping for grace, seeking a message,  
longing for unity founded in love?

Is it joining with others in praise and in worship,  
learning from them new ways we could go,  
sharing traditions and holding in common  
the teachings of Jesus, the hope for our world?

Pardon our failures, Lord, strengthen our efforts,  
transform our lives with the power of your love;  
fill us with eagerness, Lord, for your service  
together to bring in your Kingdom on earth.

### THE WORLD

Loving Lord, we present ourselves to you in so many different ways,  
with so many different identities and in so many different places.  
We know that this diversity too often separates us and we ask you to show us  
how we can share our prayer, our thanksgiving and our understanding of your love for us.

Guide and encourage us in both joy and sorrow  
and open our hearts and minds to experience your healing power.  
We make this prayer in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray.  
Amen

## Day 5

### Theme: All together

#### YOU

1. How often do you 'do your own thing', and why?
2. What was the task when you last chose to work with someone else?
3. What more could your church be doing with the 'church down the road'?

#### THE WORD

<b>READ:</b>	Acts 2:42-47	Worship and work in the early church
	Isaiah 55:1-4	Come to the waters
	Psalms 133	How good it is to dwell together
	Matthew 23:37, 24:4	Take care no-one leads you astray

**FOCUS:** Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered you as a hen gathers her chickens...? (Matthew 23:37)

#### REFLECTION

Indeed, how good it is to gather in unity  
Indeed, how often would you gather us  
Indeed, you call us, 'Come unto the waters'  
Yet we create our own and separate springs  
Ignoring your signs and wonders  
Beguiled by ideas, keeping us apart.

Jerusalem, city of peace!  
We cry peace, but there is no peace  
As a hen gathers her chickens, you call us  
But we make tests, of orthodoxy or reform  
As the Mother Hen, Christ calls us  
Let us strive to go together, in belief.

#### THE WORLD

O God, as you have called us to your service, make us worthy of our calling.  
Establish us in the faith of your Church.  
Lead us together on the Way,  
that our hearts and minds may be filled with signs and wonders  
that can only come from unity.  
Grant to your Church that peace and unity  
which is in accordance with your will;  
to lead us together to heavenly places.

## Day 6

Theme: All things in common

### YOU

1. What does God require of you?
2. How could you respond?
3. How do you respond?

### THE WORD

<b>READ:</b>	Acts 2:42-47	Worship and work in the early church
	Micah 6:8	The requirement of God
	Psalms 37:1-11	Trust in the Lord and do good
	Matthew 6:25-34	Strive first for the Kingdom of God

**FOCUS:** Everything they owned was held in common. (Acts 4:32)

### REFLECTION

In many and various ways  
have our ancestors interpreted  
the Word that God spoke  
through his only Son.

And they have all caught something of his light,  
but not the whole light;  
for the whole light is not within human grasp.

So we bring together what light we have,  
all the flickering candles of our understanding,  
that in their one bright flame we may see  
what God requires of us.

### THE WORLD

Lord of Justice...  
forgive our narrow horizons of self...  
Let your Word take root in us...  
enabling the greater vision of your kingdom...

## Day 7

Theme: All in their need

### YOU

1. What has been your experience of need?
2. Does your experience help you to understand the needs of others?

### THE WORD

**READ:**

Acts 2:42-47

Isaiah 58:6-10

Psalms 113

Matthew 14:13-21

Worship and work in the early church

Share your bread with the hungry

Equality and Justice for all

The feeding of the five thousand

**FOCUS:** He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap.  
(Psalm 113:7)

### REFLECTION

This is a world of plenty,  
but it is plenty for the few,  
and many more are buried  
in the dark tomb of need.

But the tomb has no dominion.  
We are raised with the Lord  
to life where need is quenched  
and there is grace upon all.

### THE WORLD

Father Creator, we thank you for the gifts you bestow upon us.  
Forgive our complacency in the sight of injustices.  
Strengthen our resolve to overcome our differences,  
so that, together we may joyfully minister to those in need.

## Day 8

### Theme: The goodwill of all

#### YOU

1. How did you first experience God's goodwill towards you?
2. What are the things for which you need to forgive yourself?
3. What are the things for which you need to forgive others?

#### THE WORD

<b>READ:</b> Acts 2:42-47	Worship and work in the early church
Genesis 33:1-4	“Esau ran to meet Jacob, and embraced him...”
Psalms 96 :1-4	“Sing to the Lord a new song ...”
2 Corinthians 5:17-19	“Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creature ...”
Revelation 21:1-7	“Then I saw a new heaven and new earth ...”

**FOCUS:** I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of water of life without cost. (Revelation 21:6b)

#### REFLECTION

We love to hear stories of goodwill, yet so often righteous indignation rises up in us and almost without thinking about it, we live by ancient bitterness and unquestioned anger. We set our own standard rather than cherishing forgiveness above all else. In a world that assumes retribution, the Scriptures unveil to us a new order whereby all things are made new. We are clearly confronted with the need to change.”The old law of an eye for an eye leaves everyone blind.” (Martin Luther King Jr in the context of the fierce racial violence of his day, quoting Ghandi). So, where to start? “You start with the one next to you.” (Mother Teresa of Calcutta).

#### THE WORLD

Pray, then, in this way:

Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come,

Your will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not bring us to the time of trial,

but rescue us from the evil one.

For the kingdom and the power and the glory  
are yours for ever.

Amen

# Welcome to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2011

2011 is year of journeying. We are invited to travel to Jerusalem, as well as back in time to the early church to be reminded of the earliest Christians' commitment to each other – to be one in life, faith, worship and action. But we also visit the churches of Jerusalem today; an ecumenical group in Jerusalem prepared the original material that CTBI has adapted. You will also find additional material written by the Britain and Ireland writers group.

Jerusalem today has become synonymous with the turbulence of the region – the disturbing news of violence and injustice – and of the conflicting narratives that demand us to listen. Yet the one narrative that can easily be lost is the faith of the diminishing numbers of Christians in the Middle East.

This year we are privileged to be offered a glimpse of that living faith that strives to be faithful in frightening and disturbing times. And they too have a challenge to us – to join with them to pray for the unity of the Church, in faithfulness to Christ who prayed that we might be one.

From another, very different context, Archbishop Desmond Tutu commented that “apartheid is too strong for a divided church” – a reminder that our praying for the unity of the church and our praying for a more just world, free from violence and fear, are not options, but integral to our continuing faithfulness to Christ.

Rev'd Bob Fyffe, General Secretary, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

---

## Programme of themes day by day Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011

- Day 1 Devoted to teaching
  - Day 2 Devoted to fellowship
  - Day 3 Devoted to the breaking of bread
  - Day 4 Devoted to prayer
  - Day 5 All together
  - Day 6 All things in common
  - Day 7 All in their need
  - Day 8 The goodwill of all
- 

Published by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland  
39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX  
info@ctbi.org.uk www.ctbi.org.uk  
Phone: 020 7901 4890  
Registered charity no 1113299.  
Company limited by guarantee, registered no 5661787



churches  
together  
IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND<sup>©</sup>  
www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer