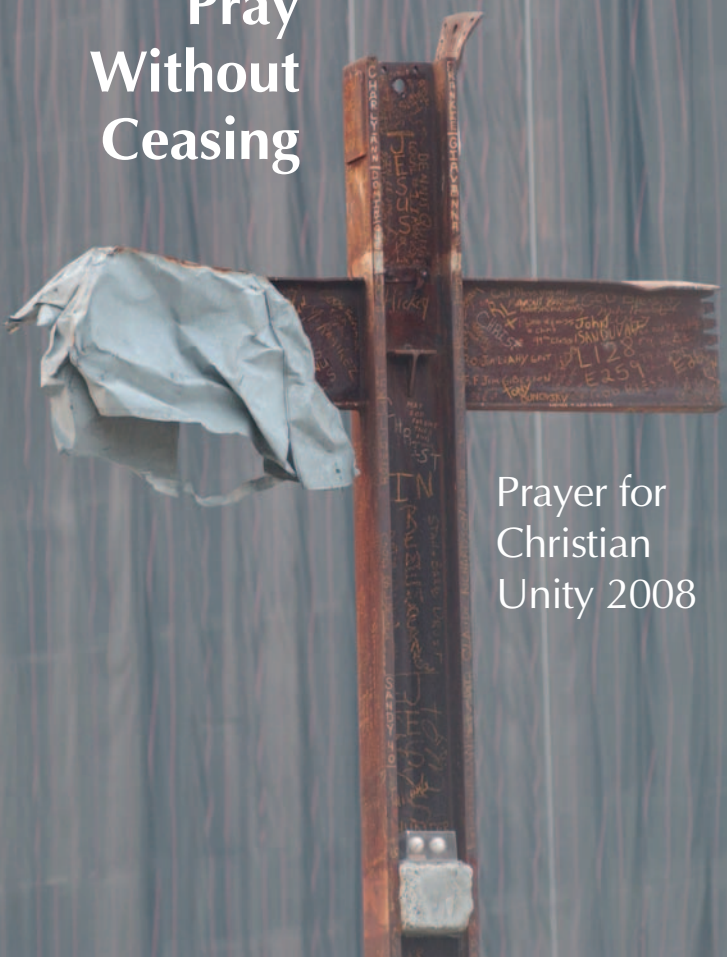


Pray Without Ceasing



Prayer for
Christian
Unity 2008

Bí gí ag guí gan staonadh
Gweddiwch yn ddi-baid



churches
together
IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND[©]

'Be at peace among yourselves.' That's Paul's appeal to his Christian friends in Thessalonica. And he doesn't only mean that they should avoid arguments. He wants them to build a bigger sort of peace – a community in which the gifts of all the members contribute to its thriving and its growth – a community which will be a bold sign of the day-to-day vibrancy of the united Body of Christ.

But Paul doesn't leave it at that. He doesn't simply offer an abstract theological outline of this state of peace. He called rather for specific actions, actual ways of behaving, through which his friends can show their commitment to one another. This peace will come about through his friends' efforts, and Paul offers advice on how to get there.

One crucial piece of advice which Paul gives is to '**pray without ceasing**', and this year's service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity takes up this imperative. The meditations and readings for the eight days of the Week of Prayer will explore also the other pieces of advice that Paul gives.

Praying without ceasing is a significant imperative for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2008 in particular. A hundred years ago an American minister, Paul Wattson, began the tradition of praying for Christian unity over the course of eight days, from 18 to 25 January. So as we pray this year, we can find strength not only in the prayers of brothers and sisters across the world who pray with us at this time, but also in the prayers of Christians of all denominations over the past century. With them, we root our yearning in the prayers of Jesus Christ, the source of our unity – Jesus Christ, who, as Paul had already told his friends in Thessalonica, lived, died and prayed among us 'so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him' (1 Thessalonians 5.10).

The Revd Bob Fyffe

General Secretary,
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Day 1

'Be at peace among yourselves.' *1 Thessalonians 5.13*

Reflection

Paul wanted the people at Thessalonica to 'be at peace'. The Bible offers many radical images of what 'being at peace' means. Peace is always more than the absence of aggression. It is the establishment of a community to which all can contribute, where all are valued, where all are accountable, where love is somehow put into practice and made visible.

It's easy to fall short of that ideal. It's easy to think that we've got all the answers, that our way is the best way, that our actions need no explanation.

Building community and building unity calls us to something better. Being a united community – 'being at peace' – makes us a sign of hope.

Prayer

Open our hearts, God, to your vision of peace, where our jealousies vanish because we are whole, and our pride falls away because we are healed.

Open our hearts, God, to your vision of peace, and inspire our work as we make it real. In Jesus' name.
Amen.

Action

What are the signs of hope in your local community?
Where are communities of peace and love being built?
Pray for them.

Readings

Isaiah 11.6–13

The wolf shall live with the lamb

Psalms 122

Peace be within your walls

1 Thessalonians 5.13b–18

Be at peace among yourselves

John 17.6–24

That they all may be one

Day 2

'And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted.' *1 Thessalonians 5.14*

Reflection

The readiness to turn around and go in a new direction is a main theme within the Bible as shown in the tale of repentant Nineveh after the preaching of Jonah.

Jesus also rebukes the disciples for their slowness in recognizing who he is and what he was called to undergo.

Paul, too, in this letter, is calling for specific actions through which people change and express their commitment to one another within the Body of Christ. The call to change is central. Christians of all traditions need to be brave enough to admonish the causes of division and encourage the means of reconciliation.

Prayer

Deep desiring God, in the secret of our hearts you teach us wisdom.

Teach us to encourage each other along the road to unity.

Show us the changes needed for reconciliation. Amen.

Action

One of the major challenges in the world today is the mass migration of peoples.

What can you do to be part of the Christian response to this?

Readings

Jonah 3.1–10

The repentance of Nineveh

Psalms 51.8–15

Create a clean heart

Romans 12.1–2

Be not conformed to the world

Mark 8.27–33

Jesus rebukes the disciples

Day 3

'Help the weak.' 1 Thessalonians 5.14

Reflection

Many Christians in Britain and Ireland are only too aware of their own weakness. Some remember a time when stronger congregations supported the weaker but now even some of them are weak. As Christians joining together in united witness and social action we find a new strength and common purpose.

When we are strong in this way we realize we cannot manage without the rest, and that our part of the Body of Christ is not the only part that matters. The standard by which we should treat one another is how God treats us. God helps the weak and so must we.

Prayer

Jesus Christ, Saviour of the world, who was crucified in weakness but lives by the power of God, help us to know our own weaknesses as well as those of others, that together with them we might experience your risen power. Amen.

Action

Find out about Fair Trade.

Find out how you can support it and how it strengthens some of the weakest people in the world.

Readings

Isaiah 35.1–10

Strengthen the weak knees

Psalms 86.5–10

Listen to my cry

Romans 14.1–4

Welcome those who are weak

Luke 5.1–8

Help from another boat

Day 4

'Be patient with all.' 1 Thessalonians 5.14

Reflection

What had Paul in mind with this challenge?

Was it a challenge not to be like the Pharisee who came arrogantly before God, saying 'I am not like other people'? Was it a challenge not to be like him, tempted to denounce the slowness, difference or rashness of other people?

Or was it a challenge about being impatient with God? Sometimes we are like the wanderers in the wilderness, questioning rather than trusting, especially, if at this time in our pilgrimage, we are going through a painful experience.

Or was it a challenge to remember to keep at it, for success will not come overnight?

Prayer

Still small voice, make me aware of your presence and attentive to you.

Give me an understanding of my needs, and a spirit to endure. Amen.

Action

Identify three five-minute slots in the day to be still.

Readings

Exodus 17.1–4

Why?

Psalms 100

Patience with God

Ephesians 4.1–3

Humility, gentleness and patience

Luke 18.9–14

Prayer of humility

Day 5

'See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all.'

1 Thessalonians 5.15

Reflection

As God's people, we are called to eavesdrop on the world with God's ears, and to listen with God's attentiveness. We're called to hear the cries of the oppressed and the needy. We're called to pay attention to the wrongs that surround us. And we're called to respond with God's sense of justice.

That justice was made flesh in Jesus. Jesus was always ready to ignore the prevailing priorities of his society when he saw the dignity of his neighbours destroyed. When he encountered hostility from the comfortable, the complacent and the powerful, he never repaid evil with evil, but responded with a costly love.

Prayer

I'm lazy sometimes, God. Sitting comfortably here, it's easy to ignore the suffering of others, easy to forget the challenge to see your image in friend and stranger, easy to expect others to work for justice.

I'm lazy sometimes, God, and that diminishes me. Make me uncomfortable, make me alert, make me responsive. Above all, make me love, in your name. Amen.

Action

What are the injustices around you that make you angry? How can you respond without vindictiveness to bring God's transforming love to those situations?

Readings

Exodus 3.1–12

God hears the cry of the Israelites

Psalms 146

Justice for the oppressed

James 2.1–8

Making distinctions

Matthew 5.38–42

Offer no resistance to one who is evil

Day 6

'Rejoice always!' 1 Thessalonians 5.16

Reflection

In prayer we rejoice to align our wills to God's will and so participate in the fulfilment of God's purpose. Isaiah calls on the people to find joy in the promise of new life.

In the sending of the 70 Jesus entrusted the good news of the kingdom and power over evil, given to him by the Father, to his disciples. Their return is joyful – even fearsome evil had been overcome. Jesus too rejoices in the Holy Spirit.

Paul calls on the Thessalonians to rejoice always that God's purpose of redemption will be fulfilled through their obedience as they pray without ceasing.

Prayer

God, perfect unity, keep our hearts so burning with the desire and hope for unity that we will never stop working for the sake of your gospel. We ask this through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Action

Identify forms of evil in the world today, possibly critical damage to the environment. How could you be involved in raising awareness?

Readings

Isaiah 55.10–13

You shall go out in joy

Psalms 105.1–7

Give thanks to the Lord

1 John 4.16b–19

Love casts out fear

Luke 10.17–24

The 70 return rejoicing

Day 7

'Pray without ceasing.' 1 Thessalonians 5.17

Reflection

Christ tells us that when we pray we ought not to be like those who think that, because of many words, they will be heard. Prayer ought to be like the ticking of a clock or the beat of a heart, only noticed if it stops or becomes erratic.

Prayer is the yearning of our innermost being in the direction of God.

As Christians in search of unity our lives should be so reborn in Christ that His prayer for our oneness becomes our unceasing prayer.

Unity is God's gift. We must pray without ceasing for the humility to receive it.

Prayer

Trinity in unity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, grant us the grace to pray without ceasing for the unity of your Church. May we reflect in your Church the unity in diversity that is yours. Amen.

Action

Seek to experiment with the balance of words and silence in your daily prayer so that you give God a chance to speak to you in the silences.

Readings

Isaiah 55.6–9

Turn to the Lord in prayer

Psalms 34.4–10

I prayed to the Lord and he answered me

Colossians 1.9–12

We have always prayed for you

Matthew 6.7–15

This, then, is how you should pray

Day 8

'Give thanks in all circumstances.'
1 Thessalonians 5.18

Reflection

A constant prayerful spirit of gratitude is not pained politeness but persistent hope. In thanking his captors, Nelson Mandela changed their lives.

Gratitude offered when hope seems a fiction is a conscious decision that despair will not win. Beginning with rejoicing, then moving to thanksgiving, fosters personal peace to face the darkest of valleys and a trust that all is never lost.

The tears of the Christ at the tomb of his friend are not weakness but strength: a ready demonstration that God feels our pain and shares our grief, while contradicting our chaos with compassion.

And so hope, in the end, not least for the unity of all God's people, rises, thankfully.

Prayer

God of trust and God of tears,
give strength to our prayers
and hear our thanks for all you are and all you do,
and all you give to help us through
the lives we lead! Amen.

Action

Count – literally – your blessings.
Enumerate your reasons to be cheerful.
Only then pray your complaints!

Readings

1 Kings 18.20–40
Confrontation on Carmel

Psalms 23
The Lord is my shepherd

1 Thessalonians 5.13b–18
Give thanks in all circumstances

John 11.17–44
Jesus weeps and Lazarus rises

Order of Service 2008

*Notes to assist those leading worship can be found on page 19. Where alternatives are available on the web site, this is denoted by *. Details are on page 19.*

Those assembled are welcomed by the Worship Leader.

Song one (For alternatives see page 37*)

Spirit of truth and grace,
come to us in this place
as now in Jesus' name God's people gather.
Open our eyes to see
truths that will ever be,
and in communion draw us close together.

Spirit of joy and peace
make all anxieties cease
with knowledge of the Father's perfect caring.
Then may God's children know
love that won't let us go
and joy that fills each day, beyond comparing.

Spirit of life and power,
revive us in this hour
and stir our hearts to praise with true devotion.
Fill us with heavenly fire,
and every heart inspire,
that we may serve the world with your compassion.

© *Iain D. Cunningham* (born 1954)
Tune: Down Ampney

Introduction

Welcome to this year's service of Prayer for Christian Unity, a year which marks a centenary since these gatherings were first introduced.

What prompted an Episcopalian Franciscan priest from America, called Father Paul Wattson, to start these gatherings in 1908?

Was it the terrible earthquake in San Francisco in 1906 which led some folk to come together to bring to God their shared anxiety? Was it a response towards a changing world and the fear of descent into chaos through war? Or was it the Holy Spirit blowing freely?

And now, after 100 years of The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, how much more united are we? Have recent developments in our churches made us more anxious about the prospects of Christian unity?

Unable to find solutions ourselves we recognize our dependence on God, a recognition of this year's theme, 'Pray without ceasing'. So let us express this in a prayer from St Francis, who inspired Paul Wattson:

All: **Most High and glorious God,
Enlighten the darkness of our hearts
And give us a true faith, a certain hope
And a perfect love.
Give us a sense of the divine and
 a knowledge of yourself,
So that we may do everything
In fulfilment of your holy will;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

© *Prayer of St Francis before San Damiano crucifix*

There are signs of hope. The fact that we are here together today is testament to this. The churches of these islands have in their different ways become engaged with the challenges of the future of the planet, justice and peace in our world, and in offering hospitality to the stranger. We recognize the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in bringing about such unity of purpose. These concerns for planet earth, for peace and justice and for hospitality to the stranger are reflected in the responsive reading of Psalm 34 which follows.

Responsive reading Psalm 34

Voice 1: I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise shall be continually in my mouth.
My soul makes its boast in the Lord;
let the humble hear and be glad.
O magnify the Lord with me,
and let us exalt his name together.

Voice 2: We are afraid for our planet,
its dwindling resources,
the consequences of our common greed.

All: **I sought the Lord, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.**



A Penitential Chant drawn from Psalm 34
© Philip Jakob

Voice 1: Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
Which of you desires life,
and covets many days to enjoy good?
Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from
speaking deceit.
Depart from evil, and do good;
seek peace, and pursue it.

Voice 2: We are afraid for our world,
riven by strife, disordered by war,
hurting and injured in body and mind.

**All: I sought the Lord, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.**

Voice 1: The face of the Lord is against evil doers,
to cut off the remembrance of them from
the earth.
When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears,
and rescues them from all their troubles.
The Lord is near to the broken-hearted,
and saves the crushed in spirit.

Voice 2: We are afraid as strangers come into
our midst,
we do not understand their cry for justice,
we cannot hear their fear and pain
and yet they are our brothers and sisters.

**All: I sought the Lord, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.**

Voice 1: Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the Lord rescues them from them all.
He keeps all their bones;
not one of them will be broken.
Evil brings death to the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will
be condemned.
The Lord redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him
will be condemned.

Voice 2: We come to you, O God,
in joyful service,
reaching for your promise of
a new heaven and a new earth,
and to the wholeness of justice.
Charge our lives and our churches with
the power of your peace.
Overcome our fears and self deceptions
with your presence.

Make us signs of your generosity and justice.
Light each day with hope so that we
may live your truth.

All: I sought the Lord, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.

A period of silence is kept after which the congregation
sings together.

Antiphon Sung Prayer

**Whisper words of truth in my heart
For you alone speak truth (repeat)**



Text: St Augustine of Hippo, Music © Philip Jakob

Reading 1 Thessalonians 5.12–18*

But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters . . . Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

A period of silence is kept after which the congregation
sings together.

**Whisper words of truth in my heart
For you alone speak truth (repeat)**

Song two (For alternatives see page 37*)

1. Lord, your word abiding,
and our footsteps guiding,
gives us joy for ever,
binds us all together.
2. Who can tell the pleasure,
who recount the treasure,
by your word imparted
to the simple-hearted?
3. Word of mercy, giving
succour to the living;
word of life, supplying
comfort to the dying:

4. O that we, discerning
its most holy learning,
Lord, may love and fear you,
evermore be near you.

Henry W. Baker (1821-1885), Tune: Ravenshaw

Sermon/Reflection

Song Three

1. God the Father of Creation,
source of life and energy,
your creative love so shapes us
that we share your liberty.
Teach us how to use this freedom
loving children all to be.
2. Jesus Christ our Lord and brother,
in your cross we see the way
to be servants for each other,
caring, suffering every day.
Teach us patience and obedience
never from your path to stray.
3. Holy Spirit, love that binds us
to the Father and the Son,
giver of the joy that fills us,
yours the peace that makes us one,
teach our hearts to be more open
so to pray, 'God's will be done'.
4. Members of our Saviour's body,
here on earth his life to be,
though we stand as different people,
may we share the unity
of the Father, Son and Spirit,
perfect love in Trinity.

© *Iain D. Cunningham (born 1954)*
Tune: Cwm Rhondda

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession

Leader: We give thanks for 100 years of united prayer
for Christian Unity,
for the journey we have travelled
and for the road that lies ahead,
for pioneers, for pilgrims and for
travelling companions
and hospitality along the way,
Thank you, God.

All: **Thank you, God.**

*You may use your own prayers here, possibly relating to local situations. **

Leader: Lord God,
whose Son was content to die
to bring new life,
have mercy on your Church which
will do anything you ask,
anything at all,
except die
and be reborn.

Lord Christ,
forbid us unity
which leaves us where we are:
welded into one company
but extracted from the battle;
engaged to be yours,
but not found at your side.

Holy Spirit of God,
reach deeper than our inertia and fears:
release us into the freedom of children of God.

© Ian M. Fraser

Action stations

Our three Action Stations around the church are different colours – green for Planet Earth, white for Justice and Peace and red for Hospitality. Here in your service booklet are lists of ideas for you to take action about the topics at those stations. I would like you now to choose ONE of the Action Stations. Go to collect a ribbon from your chosen Action Station and when you return to your seat ask your neighbour to tie it around your wrist to show your commitment to that topic. Then choose one of the actions on your particular Action Station list and promise to do it. If you already do some of them, take up a new challenge. The first three actions on each list are suitable for children, as well as adults, to do. Keep this order of service to remind you of your promise and for more ideas for action during the coming year.

Planet Earth – green

1. Put out food for the birds in winter and during the breeding season in spring.
2. Turn off electrical equipment instead of leaving it on stand-by.
3. Make up some games to play with your friends which don't need batteries or electricity.
4. Replace an ordinary light bulb with a low-energy bulb.

5. Buy recycled and second-hand products instead of new whenever you can.
6. Organize a 'green' service at your church.

Justice and Peace – white

1. Don't hurt people or animals.
2. Share your toys or belongings with others.
3. Don't be a bully and don't let others be bullied.
4. Read the Beatitudes (Matthew 5.1–10) every day for a month.
5. Start giving money or increase your contribution to a charity working against poverty.
6. Buy Fairtrade products when you can.

Hospitality – red

1. Talk with the grown-ups and children at your house about how your family could welcome new neighbours.
2. Make a welcoming poster for your church notice-board.
3. Play with someone at school who is on their own or be sensitive to the needs of new people at work.
4. Pray for people who have had to leave their country because they were not safe.
5. Find out what your local churches are doing to help asylum seekers and refugees and see what else needs to be done.
6. Organize an event at your church with food from different countries and invite everyone living locally.

Song four

Spirit of love, you move within creation
Drawing the threads to colour and design:
Life into life, you knit our true salvation,
Come, work with us,
And weave us into one.

Though we have frayed the fabric of your making,
Tearing away from all that you intend,
Yet, to be whole, humanity is aching,
Come, work with us,
And weave us into one.

Great loom of God, where history is woven,
You are the frame that holds us to the truth,
Christ is the theme, the pattern you have given,
Come, work with us,
And weave us into one.

*Shirley Erena Murray © 1992 Hope Publishing Company,
Tune: Lord of the Years © Michael Baughen Jubilate Hymns Ltd*

Ecumenical version of the Lord's Prayer

All: Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever.
Amen.

All: Let us leave this place,
glad to have prayed together,
challenged to seek unity,
committed to serve God's world.

Blessing

Leader: The Lord bless us and keep us,
the Lord make his face to shine upon us
and be gracious unto us,
the Lord lift up his countenance upon us and
give us peace.

Sending out

Voice 1: Go now in the name of Christ,
seek peace and pursue it,
hold fast to what is good.

Voice 2: Go now as sisters and brothers,
pray with each other,
work together,
let God deliver you from all your fears.

Voice 3: Go now, the world is waiting,
go, and walk with God.

A retiring collection may be taken

Notes for service leaders/organizers

For this service you will need:

1. Three 'Action Stations' one for Planet Earth (green), one for Justice and Peace (white), and one for Hospitality (red) placed around the meeting space before the service begins. Each should consist of a small table on which is placed a coloured cloth (one for each station – red, green and white) and a bowl/basket containing pieces of coloured ribbon or wool corresponding to the colour of the cloth.
2. The ribbons/pieces of wool need to be approximately 12 inches long to allow for them to be tied around the wrist.
3. Copies of the service sheet (either downloaded from the web site or purchased from CTBI).
4. Web site resources (see below).

Items available on www.ctbi.org.uk

1. Dramatized alternatives to 1 Thessalonians 5.12–18.
2. Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession.
3. Additional alternatives to Songs one and two.

Alternatives to Song one

Spirit of God, unseen as the wind
For the fruits of God's creation *set to All through the night*
All are welcome
God, you call us to this place
God is here! As we his people
Laudate omnes gentes

Alternatives to Song two

Lord, thy word abideth *tune: Ravenshaw*
Lord, your word shall guide us
Thanks to God, whose word was spoken
tune: St Helen 878787
O, the word of my Lord (Damian Lundy)
Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire
tune: St Columba (Erin)

Pray Without Ceasing

But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters . . .
Be at peace among yourselves. And we
urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers,
encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak,
be patient with all. See that none of you
repays evil for evil, but always seek to do
good to one another and to all. Rejoice
always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in
all circumstances; for this is the will of God in
Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5.12–18

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