

Written prayers

for the church and its witness...

These prayers were written with the desire of expressing some reflection of the Sanctuary's heart – and the hearts of many across the global church – for Christians to grow and flourish in authentic and wholehearted love of God, each other and the world... and to demonstrate this in their witness to him individually and collectively.

They are written in love with a desire to serve and bless, but are charged with longing as they address a number of key areas of our mutual discipleship and mission which we all hunger to see pursued and representing Jesus more fully.

But they are also written as much for ourselves as for the rest of the church... because we need the transformation they seek too.

(You'll find another collection of written prayers specifically about church unity at <http://thesanctuarycentre.org/resources/written-prayers-for-unity-in-the-UK-church+updated+jan+15.pdf>)

1. A prayer for more listening lives

Forgive us Lord
for the times when
we've done all the talking
and all the planning
and then asked you to bless
our work as if it was yours.

Come again and rule in our hearts,
help us to truly recognise and follow you
as the only head of your body
and the only King of your kingdom.

We surrender our plans, our programmes,
our ideas, our traditions and our dreams.
We lay down our judgements, our analyses,
our strategies, our concerns and our attempts to control.

Give to us Lord,
daily prayerful and listening hearts
that long to hear you speak
and watch you shape all your plans for us
so we can bless you and your world
by joining in with your work.

2. A prayer for wild obedience

Speak Lord, please share your heart with us,
and may you find your church is listening.

Here your church is, Lord – send us –
and may you find us ready to go.

Show us Father what you're doing
and enable us to do it with you.
Say to us Father what you're saying
and echo your voice through ours.

Help us see where we have lost our love
for the beautiful adventures
of wild obedience
that leaves all its boats behind
and lays down all its fortune at your feet
to follow you anywhere and everywhere
you would lead us.

Fill us with a new hunger
to run this race
with a deeper love for you
that propels us – each and together –
forward in delighted pursuit of
your best will for your church and your world.

3. A prayer for greater authenticity

Holy Spirit of complete and perfect truth,
come and fill your church still more,
for we know we have not given you
full access and rule in our lives
and daily fall so very far short
of your perfect standard of integrity.

Help our actions match our words
– yes – please help us.

But more than this even, please,
help our hearts to reflect all we speak and do
and to prize character over status or influence.

And please Spirit, please
give us more humility
so we can own and proclaim to the world
our shared limitations and sinfulness.
And always point others to our Saviour, Jesus Christ,
as the only full embodiment of Truth on earth.

Holy Spirit of complete and perfect truth,
come and fill your church still more,
for we long to give you
fuller access and rule in our lives
and daily see them grow
in deeper reflection of your authenticity.

4. A prayer for greater generosity

Lord we love to tell and re-tell the stories
of the widow who gave with all her mite,
an early church that had everything in common...
and modern heroes of the faith
who seem to still stake their all on your words
by living as if they too were in the pages of your book.

Lord help us to love still more re-living and re-writing these stories
in our own lives; till we truly give with all our might,
look again more like those who have all things in common through you...
and become more like heroes of the faith ourselves –
ancient and modern – staking our all on your words
and living our best reflection of your ongoing story.

So challenge our cultural assumptions and expectations
of how we should live, or how much we should hold on to for ourselves.
And challenge us too where we have grown so familiar with your words
that it is all too easy to qualify them, or disqualify ourselves from such radical living.
Fill us with fresh awareness and deep gratitude that all we have is at your gift,
and catch us up in your irrepressible heart to give and give and give to excess.

5. A prayer for a bigger worldview

Father of creation,
we know we all only still see you
through a dark glass dimly,
and our perspectives on the world
are similarly discoloured
by all that gets in the way of your truth.

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Father of creation,
shine your light through
every ideology, cultural norm
or worldview held by your people
and help us all to see
anything that seeks to constrict your love.

Father of creation,
reveal to us all
anywhere where we are
viewing people
as less than your image-bearers
or ourselves as being more important.

And Father of creation,
show us too
everywhere we are
dismissing creation itself
as a sub-plot to the human story
rather than integral and precious to you.

Father of creation,
expand our worldviews
till they look more like yours –
characterised by a love
so wide and so deep
that nothing and no one is forgotten.

6. A prayer for a posture of learning

Source of all wisdom, perfect teacher and Lord,
could we your church ever learn to live
more on our knees than on our soap boxes?
We long to. Please help us.

We confess we don't have all the answers.
We admit none of us has the perfect revelation
on how every part of your word should be
interpreted and applied.
We own up we have blind spots.
We recognise others know, and move in, things we do not.

Could we just sit at your feet and listen?
Could we sit at each others' feet and listen?

Could we respect your image in each person enough
to sit and listen at the feet of those outside your church too?

Keep us asking this Lord, keep us longing and learning;
keep us open to receive your counsel through whoever,
and from wherever, it may come next.

7. A prayer for unity and reconciliation (inspired by Romans 12:18)

Father of compassion,
who forgives recklessly
with scandalous mercy and grace,
help us as your people
– who long to mirror you –
to love and forgive always;
and to proactively reconcile
and be at peace with everyone
wherever it is possible,
as far as it lies with us.

8. A prayer for growing in love and honour for the global church

Father of every nation, tribe and tongue
open our eyes to the scale and diversity
of our global brothers and sisters...
to remember even now
how every day
we share your presence
with a whole host of prayers and praises
as your name is lifted high
on every continent;
voiced in a litany of languages,
musical modes and instruments
and celebrated with colours,
scents, symbols, rituals and dances
both shared and distinct.

Father of every nation, tribe and tongue
fill our hearts with love for the scale and diversity
of your global church...
and to look forward
to the day
when we will be in your presence
alongside this whole host of prayers and praises
lifting your name together

as the languages, musical modes
and visual offerings of worship
from every generation
are all brought together
to celebrate your glory
in perfect harmony.

Father of every nation, tribe and tongue
help us – having seen and loved –
to honour what we have seen
and serve those we love
with a new level of appreciation
for all each part of your wider church has to teach us;
and how much we all need
each others' prayers, generosity and example.
Help us to be ready to mourn with those that mourn;
rejoice with those who rejoice;
mutually support those facing poverty or persecution;
and be eager to learn from those
who worship, witness and work differently to us,
for the sake of you, the first love of us all.

9. A prayer for balancing freshness and heritage

Lord Jesus Christ,
our only Way and the only walker
to perfectly tread the narrow path,
thank you that in this, as in all things
you are our perfect model,
inspiration and strength.
You came to fulfil the law
but had no time for legalism;
You quoted the ancient scriptures
but also spoke entirely new revelation.
You went into sacred places
but prayed and preached on hillsides.

Lord Jesus Christ,
teach us the practices and programmes to prize,
and the ones that have served their time;
the new winds to catch,
and whether they are for this season or for life.
Help us to look back
with reverence for the historic church,
ready to learn from its collected wisdom.

And help us to look around
with openness to every part of the church today,
eager to receive their unique insights
to fortify our own areas of deficiency.

But above all, Lord Jesus Christ
help us to look to you
for your best plan to embody you
among the people, places and contexts
you have placed each one of us in,
for your glory and for the sake
of all who are yet to come to know you.

10. A prayer for more care-full words

Living Word, we confess we sometimes feel
we should have all learned by now
just how powerful our words are
to build up... or to tear down.
Your word makes it so clear;
our scars make it so obvious; and yet...
still, we so often speak, write –
and even preach! –
without really thinking...
or with much too much feeling...
careless to the effect we are having
and leaving behind a trail of destruction.

Living Word, help everyone in your church
to grow in discernment,
empathy, wisdom and, simply, *love*,
till we recognise much more quickly
when we do not have the heart required
to speak the phrase on our lips,
or when our silence is wounding
and others need to hear our voice.
Help us choose our content, language and tone,
care-full to build up all who are listening
and to remember there are people behind
every online identity we engage with too.

11. A prayer for greater valuing of character

Lord we know we your people
are sometimes better at building

sub-culture than counter-culture;
we say we are citizens of a different kingdom –
your kingdom! –
but sometimes make ourselves more at home in the world.

Lord we confess that we your people
are often just as swept away by
power and personality,
status and achievement,
fame, wealth and buildings,
as anyone else is – and we've celebrated them all too much in our churches.

Lord, forgive us and change us please;
set in us a holy passion
that prizes lives lived for you;
full of the Spirit's fruit
and characterised by
a pure and distinctive devotion to you and the way of your cross.

12. A prayer for a greater love of holiness

Father God, we thank you for revealing
to many parts of your church in recent decades
just how great your love is for each and every
person you have made.

Help us now to hold on to this revelation
and keep sharing it with the wider church
and those who don't know you yet
in delighted celebration, open-hearted compassion
and a fuller mercy that reflects who you are.

But please help us too, to recapture
what we fear many of us may have lost.

For it is true that you are not distant,
and as the very essence and origin of love
you can never be reduced to definitions
that are characterised by anger or judgementalism.

But oh God, forgive us, for you absolutely are
breath-takingly pure, and all consumingly holy
and you do not make light of sin or injustice or oppression
for these must and do offend perfect love.

May we please – who proclaim to know you as Love –
flee from cheapening your grace,
compromising your perfection,
or in any sense being found as those inadvertently worshipping
something made more in our own image,
or the image of our culture's time and trends,
rather than you – our real, true, radiant God.

Help us see that holiness is beauty and wholeness,
the technicolour shalom of life flourishing as designed,
and help us to fall in love with the pursuit of it again
for the sake of you – the Holy one we say we love
and a world so confused and lost as to how to live.

13. A prayer for more faithful following

Faithful friend and saviour,
we know we can never be as constant as you,
but help your church please
to pursue you and your presence every day.
Not just on some days, Sundays and Holy-days;
not just at festivals and conferences and special days;
but every day; each and every normal day.

You are the same yesterday, today and forever,
so help us to all seek you consistently and directly.
Help us to each see where we might be inadvertently
trying to outsource our relationships with you
to those we consider to be closer, more experienced,
more gifted, more anointed or more mature.
And wake us up from any passivity that may have crept in
and set us instead to active, adventurous, faithful following.

14. A prayer for braver witness

Greater are you Lord Jesus –
you who are in us –
than he who is in the world.
We speak this statement
over the whole church today
because we know we all need
to truly hear it
and more fully welcome your love

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into our hearts and lives
to cast out all our remaining fear.

Send us each and all
out into the world today
in every place you have put us
ready to obey all you have called us to
in making you known
and extending your kingdom
of justice and peace;
confident that you are with us
wherever we go
and whatever may come.

15. A prayer for free-er witness

Where the Spirit of the Lord is,
there is freedom,
so please come and set us free
from all the things that hold us back
from being ourselves made new in you
in every relationship and sphere of influence
you have opened up for each one of us.

We confess we've sometimes tied ourselves in knots
with programmes and processes and systems
that have stilled the beating heart of love
that fuels all true evangelism.
Our approaches have often led to awkwardness and fear
as many of us have tried to be or do something
that is not authentic to who we are.

Come, Holy Spirit of the Lord,
and give us a new freedom,
and a new hunger
to share our faith much more openly;
but teach us to do this out of the overflow
of who you have made us to be – in your strength
and with the gifts you have freely given to each one of us.

16. A prayer for rest

Creator God who never grows tired
but still chose to take time to rest and call creation good,

you urged us to do the same to help us remember
the responsibility is not all on our shoulders.
But we – who are so often deeply weary –
seem to constantly forget our limitations.
Help us to remember to stop and rest,
and lay down our endless striving for control.

Into the midst of our hectic 24-7 culture,
with its incessant barrage of content and noise,
whisper your redeeming rhythms of grace
to restore your best balance of work and rest, play and prayer.
And into the midst of all our busy church activities,
with so many demands on our hearts and time,
breathe your restoring, beautiful order
of responding simply to what you say is for today.