

## Written prayers

### Prayers for unity in the church

*These prayers were inspired by Christian Aid Week 2011, and then updated with new additions for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2012 and again in 2015, in celebration of the unity that the church in the UK can and does achieve when it is working together. And to intercede with a heartfelt desire that God would use this glimpse of what is possible in him to grow a passion for unity in his church which goes far beyond coming together for occasional initiatives, and unites the church to proclaim Christ in love as Jesus desires (John 13:35).*

*The song 'We are in Christ' and other further unity resources can be found grouped together on our topical index at [www.thesanctuarycentre.org/whereworldandworshipmeet-search](http://www.thesanctuarycentre.org/whereworldandworshipmeet-search)*

#### Prayers of thanksgiving

**For the presence of unity where we see it** (inspired by Psalm 133)

Father God, how good it is when our lives point to you.  
When brothers and sisters live together in unity  
It's like an oil of blessing pouring down;  
Spilling out and running over;  
Touching hearts and overcoming hurts.

Father God, how good it is when our love for you cannot be contained.  
When brothers and sisters love together in unity  
It's like fresh water springs bubbling up;  
Spilling out and running over;  
Inspiring shared vision and overcoming crossed-purposes.

Father God, how good it is when our love reaches out.  
When brothers and sisters go out together in unity  
It's like a river refreshing parched land at last;  
Spilling out and running over;  
Breaking down barriers and inviting the thirsty in.

Father God, we thank you for this sign that you are among us by your Spirit.  
As brothers and sisters join together in unity  
It's like a beautiful perfume poured out  
Spilling out and running over;  
Washing your feet and carrying fragrant worship to your throne.

**For organisations and demonstrations of unity:**

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for the heritage of your church in this land,

For every movement, building, and revival that has testified to your name  
And blessed your wider body with established wisdom, new vision and fresh expressions of your  
grace.

**All: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you. Bless your church.**

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for the unity we already see in your church,  
For Churches Together, HOPE that unites, and joined weeks of action for those in need.

**All: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you. Bless your church.**

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for every place where church leaders meet to pray  
And Christians unite to demonstrate your love in their communities, and on their streets.

**All: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you. Bless your church.**

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for every stirring of common purpose,  
Reconciliation, trust and shared ownership of your name, and your mission.

**All: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you. Bless your church.**

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, increase the unity of your church –  
Break dividing walls, and encourage us all to be a people who take the first step towards each other.  
For the sake of your people, for those who do not yet know you,  
And above all, for the glory of your name, Lord Jesus Christ.

**All: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you. Bless your church. Amen.**

## Prayer of confession

**All: Triune God – Father, Son and Spirit – forgive us where we have not followed your example of  
preferring and honouring.  
Forgive us for the times we have sought to be right more than we have striven to love;  
Forgive us for our tendency to unite around our own labels rather than the precious name of  
Christ.**

**Have mercy where we have withheld forgiveness,  
Stood in judgement,  
Harboured pride,  
Or pursued our own agendas at the expense of our brothers and sisters.**

**We confess our hearts have sometimes been hardened to your precious body; we are sorry Lord.  
We confess that at times we have acted as if our relationships with each other don't matter that  
much to you; we are sorry Lord.**

**We come now in repentance, and with humility, and recognise each other as holy ground – for your presence dwells in our brothers and sisters.  
Hear us and help us Triune God – soften our hearts and return them to you, and to your people.  
Amen.**

## Prayer of absolution

**Leader:** Triune God we thank you that we can come to you  
Through the love of the Father, the grace of Jesus,  
And the presence of the Holy Spirit in us, and with us.  
Thank you for your conviction, your redemption, and your restoration –  
We receive your forgiveness now, and resolve to live differently.  
We choose today to serve you; to pursue unity, and to treasure the glorious diversity of your church.  
Father God, teach us to protect and nurture each other.  
Precious Lord, help us to stand for truth through sacrifice not superiority.  
Holy Spirit, comfort those who have been hurt; counsel those who need guidance; and  
draw us together through your love.

**All:** Amen.

## Alternative prayer of confession and absolution

*In 2015, the theme of the CTBI's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was 'The Well is Deep' inspired by the inclusion the Samaritan woman experienced in John 4. And the Sanctuary wrote and helped to lead a special united service for all the churches in Ilkley around this theme. We constructed a well and after the confessional liturgy had been said, everyone came up to receive some water from it. It was a powerful time. You could construct a well, or simply use a bucket if you wanted to use this symbolic act alongside the liturgy, or simply make use of the liturgy on its own. (The explanation is therefore provided with the liturgy for you to adapt if desired.)*

***After the confession liturgy has been said together, we invite everyone to come forward in turn, as a symbolic act of responding to Jesus' invitation to drink his living water.***

***Please bring your cup with you and as you reach the well, scoop out some water to drink, as a symbolic act of receiving his living water. Drink the water when you are ready, thanking Jesus as you do so that by the power of his sacrifice on the cross, you are washed clean – and that by the power of his Spirit, you are refreshed and strengthened to continue following him.***

***When you are done, please place your cup in the bin at the front of the pews, to symbolise "it is finished!" – just like the woman at the well, Jesus tells us that our sin is dealt with and we will never be thirsty again (John 4:13).***

**Leader:** Lord Jesus, we thank you for the gift of your living water.  
But we confess that sometimes we forget to come to your well, striving forward in our own strength and hiding from the truth that nothing is fruitful without your sustaining love.

**All:** **Please forgive us and invite us to return to your well, to drink your living water once again.**

**Leader:** Lord Jesus, we confess that even when we do come to your well, we are so often burdened and distracted by sin, guilt, worries and fear.

**All:** **Please wash us clean and purify our hearts and minds with your living water.**

**Leader:** Lord Jesus, we confess that we are often weary and tired when we arrive at your well.

**All:** **Please refresh us and help us serve you through the strength and power of your living water.**

- Leader: Lord Jesus, we confess that sometimes our actions or words have prevented our brothers and sisters from coming to your well.
- All: Please forgive us and guide us to love one another better, so that we do not cause a blockage to anyone else from receiving the fullness of your living water.**
- Leader: And finally, Lord Jesus, we confess that we have often lacked the courage to bring the thirsty to your well.
- All: Please forgive us and fill us with boldness to speak of your living water to all those we meet. In your powerful, life-giving name, Lord Jesus, we pray, Amen.**

## Prayer of repentance

On behalf of the churches in the UK (to be said whilst kneeling):

**All: Lord Jesus Christ forgive your church  
For the times she has tarnished your image,  
Confused your message,  
And distracted from your love  
Through her disunity.**

**Lord Jesus Christ restore your church  
For we would be known again by the way we love each other,  
And the way we love you,  
Rather than perceived as a house divided against itself  
Crumbling where it stands.**

**Lord Jesus Christ break our hearts for your church  
For we would build your house again here in our land.  
It is our desire that you would restore your body here  
So we kneel in repentance before you, and submit to you.  
Humble us to serve each other so that your name may again be raised high in our nation.**

**Lord Jesus Christ, forgive us, restore us, reunite us and revive your church today  
So all may see that you are Love.**

## Prayers of intercession

For those who have left the church as a result of past hurt:

Hold close today my Father  
The hearts of all those who have been broken  
By the heavy hands,  
Careless words  
Or honest mistakes  
Of church leaders.

Help them, heal them and hold them  
And in your perfect time, restore them to community again.  
Lead them into forgiveness, relationship, and the joy of true community.

Hold close today Jesus my Friend  
The hearts of all those whose reputations have been shattered  
By the trampling feet,  
Unjust accusations  
Or well-meant corrections  
Of Christian friends.  
Help them, heal them and hold them.  
And in your perfect time, restore their confidence in who you have created them to be.  
Lead them into forgiveness, and prosper all they do for you.

Hold close today Holy Spirit my comforter  
The hearts of all who felt isolated within their community  
By the turned backs,  
Absent conversations  
Or well-meant busyness of service  
Of established church members.  
Help them, heal them and hold them.  
And in your perfect time, bring them back, and into the inner circle – of your church, and of your love.  
Lead them into forgiveness, and surround them with loving brothers and sisters.

Pursue today oh one true God – Father, Spirit and Son  
The hearts of all who have rejected you because of a failed witness  
Through division,  
Insularity,  
Or lack of love poured out for others  
In your church.  
Help them, heal them and hold them.  
And in your perfect time, help show them another broken body – one whose wounds bring healing  
And whose mercy is new every morning, and sufficient for them, and for your church.  
Amen.

**For unity to be restored to the church** (based on 'We are one in the Spirit' © 1966 Peter Scholte)

Leader:        Make us one in your Spirit,  
                  Make us one in you Lord.  
                  Make us one in your Spirit,  
                  Make us one in you Lord.  
                  And we pray that all unity may one day be restored  
                  Father grant that our unity will soon be restored.

**All:            Let our nation know we are yours by our love Lord,  
                  Let our communities know us by our love.**

**Let us love provocatively because you loved us first Lord,  
Let everyone we meet know us by our love.**

Leader: Help us work with each other,  
Help us work side by side.  
Help us work with each other,  
Help us work side by side.  
We would guard each man's dignity

And save each man's pride.  
Father help us to value each woman and man.

**All: Let our nation know we are yours by our love Lord,  
Let our communities know us by our love.  
Let us love provocatively because you loved us first Lord,  
Let everyone we meet know us by our love.**

Leader: Help us walk with each other,  
Help us walk hand in hand.  
Help us walk with each other,  
Help us walk hand in hand.  
That together we'd spread the news  
that God is in our land.  
Father come again to our land.

**All: Let our nation know we are yours by our love Lord,  
Let our communities know us by our love.  
Let us love provocatively because you loved us first Lord,  
Let everyone we meet know us by our love.**

## **Prayer of blessing for the churches in any specific locality**

Father, Spirit, Son  
Three – in One.  
Pour out a blessing on your church in *[insert your location]* today.  
Draw us together, under the banner of Christ;  
Unite us in purpose, and fill us with love.

Father, Jesus, Spirit most holy  
One – in Three.  
We choose to bless all who stand here in your name today – *[insert names of churches in your location]*.  
Give them vision, and prosper their plans to make you known;  
Fill them with purpose, and unite them with love.

We bless all our churches in your name Lord –  
To walk in humility;  
To seek unity and love;

To speak out encouragement;  
And to earnestly desire each other's present and future to thrive.  
For the sake of you – to whom all churches belong.  
Three in One and One in Three.  
Amen.

## Prayers for meditation and reflection

**On turning away from our labels** (inspired by Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11, 1 Corinthians 1:11-13 and Mark 3:25)

May we wear no label save Christ alone  
For if there was neither Jew nor Greek;  
Neither male nor female;  
Neither circumcised nor uncircumcised  
Then,  
What is there now  
which should divide?

And if believers were bid to follow neither Paul nor Apollos  
Then,  
Who is there now, besides Christ,  
behind whom we should unite?

May we cease to judge who is inside, and who is outside,  
Who is sorted, and who is still figuring it out,  
For it is Christ alone who knows who his true body is  
And Christ alone who can lead her.

For there is one church;  
One body;  
One gospel;  
One Father;  
One Spirit;  
One Way; one Truth; one Life; One Love;  
And one Christ –  
To him be the glory forever and ever  
In, and through, every expression of his church.  
Amen.

**On examining our hearts** (inspired by Psalm 139:22-24)

Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my hidden thoughts,  
my conversations, and my motives.  
See if there be anything critical or judgemental in me

and lead me to love, and seek unity with my brothers and sisters.  
I know it is only through your Spirit, and by your grace and power  
that I can do these things.  
So I ask for your help and strength, as well as your forgiveness  
In the precious name of Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

## **Dramatic monologue/meditation inspired by the story of the Samaritan woman at the well's inclusion by Jesus in John 4**

*First written by the Sanctuary as part of a special service – 'The Well is Deep' – for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2015 (see the alternative confession above for a full explanation), we've found this poignant, challenging and inspiring at all times.*

### **Here at the well – a call to united mission**

I wanted to bring you all here. So you'd understand. Because everything changed here.

Here – at the well.

That day began the same as any other. I walked the dusty road towards the water source weighed down by the heavy emptiness inside me. For I carried a load of shame back then.

I was an outsider – used to being on the wrong side of withering stares, rolled eyes, cold shoulders and whispers. Often excluded, marginalised and judged. And that was by *my own* people.

And so when *he* showed up at the well – one of *them* – those superior Jews who think they're so perfect and chosen because they worship at the temple and are sure the Messiah will come from them – I knew I was in for another round of the same scathing power-trip they always seem to put my people through.

But then he spoke to me. And he looked at me. And we talked. I mean, we really talked. As if it was the most natural thing for a Samaritan woman and a Jewish rabbi to talk; as if...

Well, as if we were both insiders on something bigger than any of those barriers.

And then he seemed to be inviting me into this something huge. He said he could give me living water – water that would mean I would never be thirsty again. I didn't understand what he meant, but I wanted it. I was thirsty to drink my fill of something different – something more than disappointments and broken relationships. Something different to being written off by other people again and again...

It wasn't comfortable though. Oh, anything but. This man knew everything there was to know about me without being told... and the things he knew, they were the stuff of scandal and rumour; justifiable reasons for people to exclude me.

But he was inviting me in anyway! He said a time was coming when it wouldn't be important any more if you went to the mountain or the temple – that you'd be able to worship the *Father* in spirit and in truth *anywhere*. That the same Lord could unite everyone.

And then he said that Lord was *him*. He said he was *Messiah*. And I knew he was right. I knew it was true! Because I could feel the lightness inside.

I was an outsider no longer. Now I was gathered up and welcomed in and filled up to overflowing. And I couldn't help but brim over and pour out until I became worshipper and messenger too. For I had to tell everyone.

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I brought them all here. To the well. And to *him*. The living water that never runs out. The one we had *all* been waiting for.

I looked people in the eye who had shunned me; I invited those who had intimidated, judged and excluded me. I spoke up without fear to those who had lied and whispered behind my back. How? The divisions and barriers seemed only like faint scars now – the people I brought were the ones that had hurt me but the old heavy pain was feather light next to the hugeness of his promised life to all of us. What was more appealing? Holding on to my heavy buckets of emptiness? Or dropping them and running, shouting – dancing even – till everyone came back with me and experienced their fill from *this well; this water; this Lord?*

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I wanted to bring you all here too. So you'd understand. Because it's here that everything changes.

Here – at the well – we can remember the hugeness of who unites us. Jesus Christ – our same life-giving Lord.

Here – at the well – we can leave behind our outsider selves and our excluder selves and simply come. We can *all* come to our same life-giving Lord.

Here – at the well – we can admit we are tired and thirsty and drink deeply from the same forgiveness and freedom he offers to us all.

Here – at the well – we can all know again that in Christ – we are all 'insiders', 'worshippers' and 'messengers'.

Here – at the well – we can resolve to leave behind our hurt, emptiness and judgement and go out together – full of him.

Here – at the well – we can tell our stories and listen and find new ways to run, shout and dance through our actual and virtual streets together until everyone in our community finds him and drinks their fill from *this well; this water; this Lord*.

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So will you come join me here? Will you come to the well?