

# Reconcile your people

## A unity service for all ages during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (18-25 January 2009)

### Planning

#### **A brief explanation and history of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**

You will find a history and explanation of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity on the website of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland ([www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer)). It is observed each year between 18 and 25 January. In many places, churches of different denominations share a particular service during this week, for which CTBI provides a Liturgy. This ROOTS service is drawn from that service but is a supplement to it, for use in places where no such service is held or it is not possible for everyone to attend. It is designed for people of all ages who may know little about any church other than their own. In 2009 the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity draws upon the experience of the churches in Korea where the context of national division has led the churches to turn for inspiration to the prophet Ezekiel, who also lived in a tragically divided nation and longed for the unity of his people. The full liturgy for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is on the CTBI website [www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer), together with many support materials.

#### **The Prophet Ezekiel and his book**

Ezekiel writes from captivity in Babylonia after the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of many of its people. His dated oracles begin with a reference to the first deportation in 597 B.C. and the last (Ezekiel 29.17) corresponds to the year 571 B.C. He speaks to a defeated people at the time of their greatest tragedy and division: the northern kingdom of Israel had been conquered in 721 B.C. and after that religious syncretism with pagan cults had been established there. Now all the able bodied people of Jerusalem have been taken, leaving only a small remnant in the ruin of their land, their city and their temple. In order to survive and fulfil the mission to which God has appointed them, the Jews will need to be reunited, and Ezekiel explains this with the aid of his image of joining the two sticks, representing the two kingdoms, together. They had been divided from about 931 B.C., ever since the time of Solomon's successors, as described in 1 Kings 12. Doubtless the long division of the Jews into two kingdoms had made them an easier prey for other nations to attack, and had made them more vulnerable to the influences of other religions once they were conquered. Unity will be needed if they are to maintain their faith and live out their historic destiny.

Ezekiel's words can apply to the scandal of present day disunity amongst Christians, in which energy that should be devoted to mission is expended on internal conflicts and rivalries between sects and factions. We need to remind ourselves that 'we have one shepherd', Jesus Christ. We need to make a covenant of peace with all our fellow Christians, in order that we might be a blessing to the nations.

#### **The Church in Korea**

You can find information about the Church in Korea on this website: [www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/5567](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/5567).

#### **You will need:**

- Many small pictures of a different church buildings and people worshipping to demonstrate the diversity of the Church. You can find these quite easily on the Internet (type 'church pictures' into a pictures search engine). Try to mix pictures of buildings with images of people at worship.

- A large picture of Jesus on a board with plenty of space around it. Provide pins or glue sticks beside it.
- Crosses of different shapes and sizes with emblems of different Churches (e.g. the Methodist Church cross) on them – you can download these emblems from the websites of different Churches.
- A map of Korea cut in two along the border between north and south.
- A map of your community/area (whatever is appropriate – in an urban area it might be the immediate neighbourhood, in a rural area you might need to show several villages) with churches marked on it (you might also mark church buildings that are no longer used), cut into church building-centric pieces. Simply chop up the map into pieces each of which has a church on it. It might be helpful to ring each church with a red circle. You can download maps from the Internet – you don't need to chop up one you have paid for!
- Two pieces of thick A4 sized card, each with the words 'God's People' clearly written on it in large letters, together with some pre-cut pieces of strong tape to stick them together at the appropriate moment during the reading from Ezekiel.

### Hymns and songs

- *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation* or another suitable song based on Psalm 146 would make a good opening hymn.
- A chant or song to express worship and reverence after the opening prayers might be something like: *The Iona Gloria*, or the song *Majesty*.
- *Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life* by Marty Haugen might follow the Ezekiel reading.
- *Come now, O God of Peace* might be good after the Gospel reading.
- *I'll go in the strength of the Lord* would be a suitable song to end with.
- *I am the Church* would be a good song to include where there are children present.

## Prayers

### A prayer of approach

Come forward to God!

**Lord, you are the source of our hope.**

We live in a broken world,

**Lord, you are the source of our hope.**

Where countries are divided,

**Lord, you are the source of our hope.**

Where tribe is at war with tribe,

**Lord, you are the source of our hope.**

Where the rich oppress the poor,

**Lord, you are the source of our hope.**

Where the poor fight each other for crumbs,

**Lord, you are the source of our hope.**

Even the Body of Christ is broken –

Christian against Christian.

Lord, we are frustrated with our brokenness.

**You are the source of our hope.**

**A voice** Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord,  
Lord, hear my voice!

**O let your ears be attentive  
To the voice of my pleading.**

**A voice** If you, O Lord, should mark our guilt,  
Lord, who would survive?

**But with you is found forgiveness;  
for this we revere you.**

**For prayers of intercession, use this response:**

God who calls us to be one,  
**Hear our cry, we pray.**

**A prayer of response following the reading from Ezekiel**

God spoke to the Prophet Ezekiel and said,  
'They shall be one in my hand. They will be my people and I shall be their God.'

And so we pray:

**We pray to you for the unity of all Christians  
according to your will,  
according to your means.**

**May your Spirit enable us to experience the suffering caused by division,  
to see our sin and to hope beyond all hope.**

God, you alone are our hope.  
**You alone are our hope.**

**A prayer of acclamation and commitment**

Invite young children (or people who find reading difficult) to lead this acclamation, saying each time 'Blessed are you O Christ', with the rest of the congregation reading the responses. As each bidding is made, someone takes one of the crosses from the front of the church and carries it to the outside of the congregation, holding it high so that the people are eventually surrounded by the crosses.

Blessed are you O Christ:

**When we are without hope  
your cross is our hope.**

Blessed are you O Christ:

**When we are lost  
your cross is our guide.**

Blessed are you O Christ:

**When we are blind**

**your cross is our light**

Blessed are you O Christ:  
**When we are weak  
your cross is our power**

Blessed are you O Christ:  
**When we are oppressed  
your cross sets us free.**

Blessed are you O Christ:  
**When we are in peril  
your cross is our peace.**

Blessed are you O Christ:  
**When we are apart  
your cross unites.**

*Leader*

God of all the world:  
we are united in your cross.  
In you, O Christ, is love and your love has set us free.  
In Gethsemane, at the foot of the cross,  
at the empty tomb and on the road,  
help us to recognize you.  
So may we find  
*Voice 1* water for the thirsty,  
*Voice 2* food for the hungry,  
*Voice 3* shelter for the stranger,  
*Voice 4* home for the exile,  
*Voice 5* healing for the sick,  
*Voice 6* freedom for the slave,  
*Voice 7* love for the unloved.

## **Gather**

### **Prepare the space**

As they arrive, give everyone a small picture of a different church. Display a large picture of Jesus on a board with plenty of space around it. Display the seven crosses with emblems of different churches. Add a map of Korea cut in two and a map of your community/area with churches marked.

### **Call to worship**

A bell or gong is sounded.

The Christians of Korea greet each other and offer the peace in the words we now use:

God's peace be with you!

**And also with you!**

Peace has been offered to you. God has planted his peace in you.

Turn up the light of peace and let everyone enjoy peace.  
**Amen! Let us stay in peace!**

### **Gathering words**

The leader may explain the purpose and something of the history of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and of the experience of the churches in Korea.

## **Open and respond to the Word**

**Gospel reading:** John 10.14-16

### **Respond**

#### **1 The Good Shepherd**

After the Gospel has been read, invite people to stick or pin around the figure of Jesus the picture of the church they have been given so that Jesus is surrounded by many and varied churches.

#### **2 Celebrating and valuing our differences**

Invite people to talk about their different experiences of church in small groups. Some people may be willing to do this to the whole congregation also.

Invite people to talk about their experiences of different churches .

You might invite people who once went to a different church to say what had attracted them to it and how it was different from your church. You might invite neighbours to join you and talk about their own church. If there are people who once lived in another country, they might speak of the church there. You can even ask people to describe a church they visited while on holiday or of what they have seen on Songs of Praise or another television programme. There are many possibilities.

**Old Testament reading:** Ezekiel 37.15-24a

Explain the context of the Prophet Ezekiel (see above).

As this is read, act out the reading, bringing together the two pieces of card and creating a book.

## **Sending out**

### **A young person says:**

For there is nothing in death or life, in the realms of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths – nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8.38

**Amen.**

Peace has been offered to you. God has planted his peace in you.

Turn up the light of peace and let everyone enjoy peace.

**Amen! Let us stay go peace!**

The gong or bell is sounded.