



Midsomer Norton Churches Together

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2021

Abiding in Christ

18–25 January

Welcome

Our spiritual well-being is as important as our physical well-being. In the past year both of these have been seriously challenged: the COVID-19 pandemic has caused us to be careful about our own health, taking precautions such as washing hands and wearing facemasks and maintaining social distance. Some of us have been ill or have lost someone close to us. Meanwhile the working lives of many have been disrupted and families kept apart, often at huge personal cost. Perhaps it has made us all more anxious about our health and more aware of our vulnerability. At the same time church buildings have been closed and worship has been taking place online. Opportunities to worship and pray together have been seriously curtailed. We may well be feeling a sense of isolation from God as well as our neighbour.

The period of lockdown that we have lived through has caused us to take a step back to think again about our priorities and the things and people that we value, that make our lives whole. The long periods of absence from extended family and friends, and the inability to share a meal together or celebrate a birthday or a wedding, are examples of this.

When it comes to our spiritual life, what is it that is most important for our well-being? As Church life was to a large extent paused for the first time for most people, what does it mean to be part of the one Church, the Body of Christ when all we see of our sisters and brothers are on the screen of a laptop?

When the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity invited the sisters of the Community of Grandchamp in Switzerland to produce the material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity for 2021 they could not have foreseen the pandemic and its impact. Yet the Sisters of Grandchamp have offered us something uniquely precious: an opportunity to engage with a form of prayer that is both very ancient and yet at the same time so apposite for our times. The ancient rhythm of prayer found in many religious orders and their traditions teach us that when we pray, we pray not just on our own or with those who share the same physical space, but with the whole Church, the Body of Christ, of Christians in other places and in different times.

This rhythm of prayer, with its traditional forms of structure, hymns and psalms and perhaps most importantly, silence, might well be an important gift from the ancient Church to the Church of today struggling with pandemics and lockdowns and more widely with some of the serious challenges that our world faces, most particularly climate change, racism and poverty. This tradition of prayer and spirituality, despite the things that hurt and separate us, invites us into shared prayer and silence together. Surely a most precious gift in troubled times. Come with us this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and enter into a place of community and blessing. Simply “be” in this place and be carried by the prayer and the reality that it is God, in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, who carries us and accompanies us. Always.

Bob Fyffe, General Secretary, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Introduction to this year's theme

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2021 has been prepared by the Monastic Community of Grandchamp in Switzerland. The theme that was chosen, "Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit", is based on John 15:1-17 and expresses Grandchamp Community's vocation to prayer, reconciliation and unity in the Church and the human family. www.grandchamp.org/prier-avec-nous.

The Grandchamp Community has its origins in Europe in the 1930s, when a group of women of the Reformed tradition sought to rediscover the importance of silence and listening to the Word of God. Today the community has fifty sisters, all women from different generations, Church traditions, countries and continents. In their diversity the sisters are a living parable of communion. They remain faithful to a life of prayer, life in community and the welcoming of guests. The sisters share the grace of their monastic life with visitors and volunteers who go to Grandchamp for a time of retreat, silence, healing or in search of meaning.

In producing the material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity for 2021, the sisters are inviting churches across the world to enter into their tradition of prayer and silence that is rooted in the ancient traditions of the Church catholic.

Jesus said to the disciples, "abide in my love" (Jn 15:9). He abides in the love of the Father (Jn 15:10) and desires nothing other than to share this love with us: "I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father" (Jn 15:15b). Grafted into the vine, which is Jesus himself, the Father becomes our vinedresser who prunes us to make us grow. This describes what happens in prayer. The Father is the centre of our lives, who centres our lives. He prunes us and makes us whole, and whole human beings give glory to the Father.

Abiding in Christ is an inner attitude that takes root in us over time. It demands space to grow. It can be overtaken by the struggle for the necessities of life and it is threatened by the distractions, noise, activity and the challenges of life.

We live in a time that is both troubling and magnificent, an often dangerous time where we are challenged by pandemics, wars, violence, poverty, racism and climate change. Yet as Christians seeking reconciliation, justice and peace, we also know the full value of a spiritual life, have an immense responsibility and must realize it, unite and help each other create forces of calmness, refuges of peace, vital centres where the silence of people calls on the creative word of God. It is a question of life and death.

Though we, as Christians, abide in the love of Christ, we also live in a creation that groans as it waits to be set free (cf. Romans 8). In the world we witness the evils of suffering and conflict. Through solidarity with those who suffer we allow the love of Christ to flow through us. The paschal mystery bears fruit in us when we offer love to our brothers and sisters and nurture hope in the world.

Spirituality and solidarity are inseparably linked. Abiding in Christ, we receive the strength and wisdom to act against structures of injustice and oppression, to fully recognize ourselves as brothers and sisters in humanity, and to be creators of a new way of living, with respect for and communion with all of creation.

The summary of the rule of life that the sisters of Grandchamp recite together each morning begins with the words "pray and work that God may reign". Prayer and everyday life are not two separate realities but are meant to be united. All that we experience is meant to become an encounter with God.

Day 1 Called by God

(18th January)

“You did not choose me but I chose you” (John 15:16a)

- **Genesis 12:1-4** **The call of Abraham**
- **John 1:35-51** **The call of the first disciples**

Meditation

The start of the journey is an encounter between a human being and God, between the created and the Creator, between time and eternity.

Abraham heard the call: “Go to the land I will show you”. Like Abraham we are called to leave that which is familiar and go to the place that God has prepared in the depths of our hearts. Along the way, we become more and more ourselves, the people God has wanted us to be from the beginning. And by following the call that is addressed to us, we become a blessing for our loved ones, our neighbours, and the world.

The love of God seeks us. God became human in Jesus, in whom we encounter the gaze of God. In our lives, as in the Gospel of John, God’s call is heard in different ways. Touched by his love, we set out. In this encounter, we walk a path of transformation - the bright beginning of a relationship of love that is always started anew.

“One day you understood that, without your being aware of it, a yes had already been inscribed in your innermost depths. And so you chose to go forward in the footsteps of Christ....

In silence in the presence of Christ, you heard him say, ‘Come, follow me; I will give you a place to rest your heart.’”

[The Sources of Taizé (2000) p. 52]

Prayer

Jesus Christ,

you seek us, you wish to offer us your friendship and lead us to a life that is ever more complete.

Grant us the confidence to answer your call

so that we may be transformed and become witnesses of your tenderness for the world.

Questions

- Have you ever been aware that God was asking you or someone you know to begin a new journey in life – whether literally moving to somewhere else, or ‘changing direction’ in some other way? How did you respond?
- What changes could your church or group of churches make to empower God’s people to walk more faithfully the path God has set for you, or to discern God’s guidance more clearly?
- What are some of the stories of the ‘new’ members of your community, whether they have crossed a county boundary or journeyed across continents to get there?

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Global: Get informed about and take action on global refugee and asylum issues and campaigns.

Local: Participate in any hospitality being offered locally to those who have had no choice but to go on a long journey to find safety in an unfamiliar place across the world.

Personal: Spend time exploring what is unfamiliar to you in another Christian tradition and which might help lead you to greater understanding and unity.



Day 2 Maturing internally

(19th January)

“Abide in me as I abide in you” (John 15:4a)

- **Ephesians 3:14-21** **May Christ dwell in our hearts**
- **Luke 2:41-52** **Mary treasured all these things**

Meditation

The encounter with Jesus gives rise to the desire to stay with him and to abide in him: a time in which fruit matures.

Being fully human, like us Jesus grew and matured. He lived a simple life, rooted in the practices of his Jewish faith. In this hidden life in Nazareth, where apparently nothing extraordinary happened, the presence of the Father nourished him.

Mary contemplated the actions of God in her life and in that of her son. She treasured all these things in her heart. Thus, little by little, she embraced the mystery of Jesus.

We too need a long period of maturation, an entire lifetime, in order to plumb the depths of Christ's love, to let him abide in us and for us to abide in him.

Without our knowing how, the Spirit makes Christ dwell in our hearts. And it is through prayer, by listening to the word, in sharing with others, by putting into practice what we have understood, that the inner being is strengthened.

“Letting Christ descend into the depths of our being ... He will penetrate the regions of the mind and the heart, he will reach our flesh unto our innermost being, so that we too will one day experience the depths of mercy.”

[The Sources of Taizé (2000) p. 134]

Prayer

Holy Spirit,

May we receive in our hearts the presence of Christ, and cherish it as a secret of love.

Nourish our prayer, enlighten our reading of Scripture,
act through us, so that the fruits of your gifts can patiently grow in us.

Questions

- The Bible tells us very little about Jesus' youth and early adulthood, when he seems to have lived an ordinary life in Nazareth. How are you conscious of God's presence with you in the everyday things of life?
- In your church or group of churches how do you nurture your children and young people to walk with God in their everyday lives, and how could you do this better?
- What does the churches having a 'presence' together in the community look like in your area?

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Global: As people of faith think about how you can work together for the day when all can know a full and abundant human life.

Local: Consider how the churches in your area can be more child friendly spaces.

Personal: Give thanks and pray for the children you know.



Day 3 Forming one body

(20th January)

"Love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12b)

- **Colossians 3:12-17** **Clothe yourself with compassion**
- **John 13:1-15; 34-35** **Love one another**

Meditation

On the eve of his death, Jesus knelt to wash the feet of his disciples. He knew the difficulty of living together and the importance of forgiveness and mutual service. "Unless I wash you," he said to Peter, "you have no share with me."

Peter received Jesus at his feet; he was washed and was touched by the humility and gentleness of Christ. Later he would follow Jesus' example and serve the fellowship of the faithful in the early church.

Jesus wishes that life and love circulate through us as the sap through the vine, so that Christian communities be one body. But today as in the past, it is not easy to live together. We are often faced

with our own limitations. At times we fail to love those who are close to us in a community, parish or family. There are times when our relationships break down completely.

In Christ we are invited to be clothed in compassion, through countless new beginnings. The recognition that we are loved by God moves us to welcome each other with our strengths and weaknesses. It is then that Christ is in our midst.

“With almost nothing, are you a creator of reconciliation in that communion of love, which is the Body of Christ, his Church? Sustained by a shared momentum, rejoice! You are no longer alone, in all things you are advancing together with your brothers and sisters. With them, you are called to live the parable of community.” [The Sources of Taizé (2000) pp. 48-49]

Prayer

God our Father,

you reveal to us your love through Christ and through our brothers and sisters.

Open our hearts so that we can welcome each other with our differences and live in forgiveness.

Grant us to live united in one body, so that the gift that is each person comes to light.

May all of us together be a reflection of the living Christ.

Questions

- Can you think of a person in your life who you would identify as being “clothed in compassion”? Can you recall a time when you have been the recipient of compassion?
- How does your church community need to be more compassionate with members and visitors?
- What would it look like for the churches in your area to be more compassionate within your community? Where is compassion most needed in the world today?

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Global: What action can we take in response to the compassion needed in the world?

Local: Consider making a banner or quilt together as churches and the wider community to demonstrate the things that thread and weave you together.

Personal: Consider the clothing in your wardrobe and the lives and hands that have touched them. Have these clothes been made with fair pay and good working conditions?



Day 4 Praying together

(21st January)

"I do not call you servants any longer... but I have called you friends" (John 15:15)

- **Romans 8:26-27** **The Spirit helps us in our weakness**
- **Luke 11:1-4** **Lord, teach us to pray**

Meditation

God thirsts for relationship with us. He searches for us as he searched for Adam, calling to him in the garden: "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9)

In Christ, God came to meet us. Jesus lived in prayer, intimately united to his Father, while creating friendships with his disciples and all those he met. He introduced them to that which was most precious to him: the relationship of love with his Father, who is our Father. Jesus and the disciples sang psalms together, rooted in the richness of their Jewish tradition. At other times, Jesus retired to pray alone.

Prayer can be solitary or shared with others. It can express wonder, complaint, intercession, thanksgiving or simple silence. Sometimes the desire to pray is there, but one has the feeling of not being able to do so. Turning to Jesus and saying to him, "teach me", can pave the way. Our desire itself is already prayer.

Getting together in a group offers us support. Through hymns, words and silence, communion is created. If we pray with Christians of other traditions, we may be surprised to feel united by a bond of friendship that comes from the One who is beyond all division. The forms may vary, but it is the same Spirit that brings us together.

"In the regularity of our common prayer, the love of Jesus springs up within us, we know not how. Common prayer does not exempt us from personal prayer. One sustains the other. Let us take a time each day to renew our personal intimacy with Jesus Christ."

[The Rule of Taizé in French and English, SPCK, Great Britain pp. 19 & 21]

Prayer

Lord Jesus, your entire life was prayer, perfect harmony with the Father.

Through your Spirit, teach us to pray according to your will of love.

May the faithful of the whole world unite in intercession and praise,
and may your kingdom of love come.

Questions

- Jesus lived as an example of what it means to "live in prayer". If prayer is the foundation of our relationship with God how much time and attention could you give to your personal prayer life?
- What have you learned from praying with other Christians? What might God want you to learn from the practices and traditions of others?
- What specific need in your community can you commit to pray for over the coming year?

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Global: Commit to praying through the WCC Ecumenical Prayer Cycle this year.

Local: Unite with others in your community to pray together this week, in person, online via Zoom or similar platform, or at a set time when you know others will be joining in prayer.

Personal: Consider how your prayer practices inform and influence your action in the world.



Day 5 Letting oneself be transformed by the word (22nd January)

“You have already been pruned by the word...” (John 15:3)

- **Deuteronomy 30:11-20** The word of God is very close to you
- **Matthew 5:1-12** Blessed are you

Meditation

The Word of God is very close to us. It is a blessing and a promise of happiness. If we open our hearts, God speaks to us and patiently transforms that which is dying in us. He removes that which prevents the growth of real life, just as the vine grower prunes the vine.

Regularly meditating on a biblical text, alone or in a group, changes our outlook. Many Christians pray the Beatitudes every day. The Beatitudes reveal to us a happiness that is hidden in that which is unfulfilled, a happiness that lies beyond suffering: blessed are those who, touched by the Spirit, no longer hold back their tears but let them flow and thus receive consolation. As they discover the wellspring hidden within their inner landscape, the hunger for justice, and the thirst to engage with others for a world of peace, grows in them.

We are constantly called to renew our commitment to life, through our thoughts and actions. There are times when we already taste, here and now, the blessing that will be fulfilled at the end of time.

“Pray and work that God may reign.

Throughout your day

Let the Word of God breathe life into work and rest.

Maintain inner silence in all things so as to dwell in Christ.

Be filled with the spirit of the Beatitudes,
joy, simplicity, mercy.”

[These words are recited daily by the Sisters of the Grandchamp Community]

Prayer

Blessed are you, God our Father,

for the gift of your word in Holy Scripture.

Blessed are you for its transforming power.

Help us choose life and guide us by your Spirit,

so that we can experience the happiness which you want so much to share with us.

Questions

- What does it mean to you that “God may reign” in your life? Is there anything you could change or adjust?
- If your church(es) were to live the “Beatitudes” each day what difference would this make to the communities they serve?
- What does it mean in our world today to be blessed by God?

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Global: Find out more about the Just Scripture initiative and help organise a session connecting the churches in your area with a community across the world.

Local: What one act of kindness could the churches in your area take together to be a unified blessing in your wider community?

Personal: Read the Beatitudes through slowly (Matthew 5: 3-11). Which of the actions described in the passage are you encouraged to take today?



Day 6 Welcoming others

(23rd January)

“Go and bear fruit, fruit that will last”

(John 15:16b)

- **Genesis 18:1-5** **Abraham hosts the angels at the Oak of Mamre**
- **Mark 6:30-44** **Jesus’ compassion for the crowds**

Meditation

When we let ourselves be transformed by Christ, his love in us grows and bears fruit. Welcoming the other is a concrete way of sharing the love that is within us.

Throughout his life, Jesus welcomed those he met. He listened to them and let himself be touched by them without being afraid of their suffering.

In the gospel account of the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus is moved with compassion after seeing the hungry crowd. He knows that the entire human person must be nourished, and that he alone can

truly satisfy the hunger for bread and the thirst for life. But he does not wish to do this without his disciples, without that little something they can give him: five loaves and two fish.

Even today he draws us to be co-workers in his unconditional care. Sometimes something as small as a kind look, an open ear, or our presence is enough to make a person feel welcome. When we offer our poor abilities to Jesus, he uses them in a surprising way.

We then experience what Abraham did, for it is by giving that we receive, and when we welcome others, we are blessed in abundance.

“It is Christ himself whom we receive in a guest.”

[The rule of Taizé in French and English (2012) p. 103]

“Will the people we welcome day after day find in us men and women radiant with Christ, our peace?”

[The Sources of Taizé (2000) p. 60]

Prayer

Jesus Christ,

we desire to welcome fully the brothers and sisters who are with us.

You know how often we feel helpless in the face of their suffering,

yet you are always there ahead of us

and you have already received them in your compassion.

Speak to them through our words, support them through our actions,

and let your blessing rest on us all.

Questions

- When you meet new people do they find you “radiant with Christ”?
- As we pray together for greater unity how are we showing Christ’s welcome to other Christians?
- What are people hungry for in your community?

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Global: Take time to engage with global news stories today. Take action in response to the story that most moves you with compassion.

Local: Contribute in any way that you can to a foodbank, food growing scheme or community meal initiative in your area.

Personal: Reflect on and identify who ‘the other’ is for you. How might you connect with and offer a welcome to them in your next encounter?



Day 7 Growing in unity

(24th January)

"I am the vine, you are the branches" (John 15:5a)

- **1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:21-23** **Is Christ divided?**
- **John 17:20-23** **As you and I are one**

Meditation

On the eve of his death, Jesus prayed for the unity of those the Father gave him: "that they may all be one ... so that the world may believe". Joined to him, as a branch is to the vine, we share the same sap that circulates among us and vitalizes us.

Each tradition seeks to lead us to the heart of our faith: communion with God, through Christ, in the Spirit. The more we live this communion, the more we are connected to other Christians and to all of humanity. Paul warns us against an attitude that had already threatened the unity of the first Christians: absolutizing one's own tradition to the detriment of the unity of the body of Christ. Differences then become divisive instead of mutually enriching. Paul had a very broad vision: "All are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God" (1 Cor 3:22-23).

Christ's will commits us to a path of unity and reconciliation. It also commits us to unite our prayer to his: "that they may all be one. . .so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21).

"Never resign yourself to the scandal of the separation of Christians who so readily profess love for their neighbour, and yet remain divided. Make the unity of the body of Christ your passionate concern."

[The Rule of Taizé in French and English (2012) p. 13]

Prayer

Holy Spirit,
vivifying fire and gentle breath, come and abide in us.
Renew in us the passion for unity
so that we may live in awareness of the bond that unites us in you.
May all who have put on Christ at their Baptism
unite and bear witness together to the hope that sustains them.

Questions

- Are you resigned to the scandal of separation of Christians?
- What part of your tradition is vital and life giving and what can you learn from what is vital and life giving within other Christian traditions?
- What could be the impact on the world of greater unity between the churches?

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Global: Find out more about the ACT Alliance and Caritas International and celebrate the coming together of Christian organisations to bring transformation across the world.

Local: Organise an online or in person conversation with the assistance of a facilitator on the theme of unity for the churches in your area.

Personal: Consider and commit to one act of unity.



Day 8 Reconciling with all of creation

(25th January)

“So that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11)

- **Colossians 1:15-20** **In him all things hold together**
- **Mark 4:30-32** **As small as a mustard seed**

Meditation

The hymn to Christ in the epistle to the Colossians invites us to sing the praise of God’s salvation, which encompasses the entire universe. Through the crucified and risen Christ, a path of reconciliation has been opened up; creation too is destined for a future of life and peace.

With the eyes of faith, we see that the kingdom of God is a reality that is very close but still very small, hardly visible – like a mustard seed. However, it is growing. Even in the distress of our world the Spirit of the Risen One is at work. He encourages us to become involved – with all people of good will – in tirelessly seeking justice and peace, and ensuring the earth is once again a home for all creatures.

We participate in the work of the Spirit so that creation in all its fullness may continue to praise God. When nature suffers, when human beings are crushed, the Spirit of the risen Christ – far from allowing us to lose heart – invites us to become part of his work of healing.

The newness of life that Christ brings, however hidden, is a light of hope for many. It is a wellspring of reconciliation for the whole of creation and contains a joy that comes from beyond ourselves: “so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (Jn 15:11).

“Do you wish to celebrate the newness of life that Christ gives through the Holy Spirit, and let it live in you, among us, in the church, in the world and in all of creation?”

[Second promise made during profession at the Community of Grandchamp]

Prayer

Thrice-holy God, we thank you for having created and loved us.

We thank you for your presence in us and in creation.

May we learn to look upon the world as you look upon it, with love.

In the hope of this vision, may we be able to work for a world

where justice and peace flourish,

for the glory of your name.

Questions

- How much does your life declare God's salvation? What view of God would others have from how you live?
- What could your church(es) and community do together to make justice and peace flourish in your locality?
- How does your church or group of churches care for God's creation? What changes, large or small, could you make which would make that care more effective?

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Global: Find out about and join the prayer chain for climate justice.

Local: Campaign together for climate justice in the lead up to the United Nations climate change talks in Glasgow 2021.

Personal: Take action for climate justice in your own life.