

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2006 Ecumenical Worship Service

"Where two or three are gathered in my name"

Introduction

There are two underlying themes in this worship service:

Theme A "Where two or three are gathered in my name". The thinking behind this is to encourage and strengthen the fellowship of God's people in small communities as well as in great gatherings, in daily life as well as in official, liturgical celebrations. Faithfulness to God's call is not limited to large assemblies but involves coming together in love, prayer and bible study by "two or three" in the name of Jesus. In fact, it is the lives of individuals united in mutual love which brings about the kingdom of God on earth.

Theme B "Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy times seven". We talk about forgiveness but we rarely seek forgiveness from one another. There is a strong undercurrent of repentance running through this service. It is indicated in the concluding prayer of penitence which specifically asks "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us".

Scripture readings

The readings have been chosen to reflect a consistent pattern of God's presence with his people to be found throughout the Bible.

In the Old Testament, God brought his people out of slavery in Egypt and led them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He never abandoned his people.

The psalm recalls the wonders which God has done. It invites his people to remember his deeds and to pass on this memory to their descendants.

In the Revelation text, the author offers a glimpse of the kingdom of God where God's people "will reign for ever".

The gospel is placed after the other readings because the everlasting reign of God announced by the Revelation text is based on God's presence with his people in the incarnation of Jesus his Son. Jesus announces the kingdom of God. In him is the realisation of this divine presence.

Thanksgiving and Intercession

These prayers seek to give thanks for what has already been accomplished by God's merciful power at work among his people, while recognizing that there is still much to be done if we really wish to do God's will in the world.

Symbolism

The use of various symbols and illustrations is a possibility: in particular, a Celtic cross carried into the assembly; the symbolism of the nails of the cross could perhaps be used during the act of repentance. Seven candles could symbolise the seven churches and the seven golden chandeliers of Revelation 1. However, since symbolism is so closely linked to culture, circumstance and to a community's sensibilities, we have preferred to omit any specific reference to the use of symbols in the course of the celebration. National groups are invited to find the symbols which best express the themes in their particular social and cultural context.

For the reading of the word of God, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is recommended. It is also preferable to use the ecumenical versions of the Nicene creed and the Lord's prayer, translated from the original texts.

L. Jesus, source of all forgiveness
All We gather in your name.

L. Jesus, Prince of peace
All We gather in your name.

All Lord Jesus Christ,
You call us together in faith and love.
Breathe again the new life of your Holy Spirit among us
That we may hear your holy word,
Pray in your name,
Seek unity among Christians
And live more fully the faith we profess.
All glory and honour be yours
With the Father, and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Praise / Hymn / Music

Proclamation of the Word

Exodus 40: 1-4 and 34-38

(reflection on the presence of God in the wilderness wanderings of his people)

Psalms 78 (77): 1-8

(remembering God's deeds and a call to fidelity)
(to be read antiphonally)

Revelation 22: 1-5

(reflection on the supreme glory of the presence of God in the midst of his people when his kingdom has come)

Matthew 18: 15-22

(reflection on the tensions which exist in reality and acknowledging the presence of God in the midst of his people, no matter how small the gathering)

Sermon / Meditation

Creed

Nicene Creed or Apostles Creed

(If using the Nicene Creed, an ecumenical translation should be followed)

Praise / Hymn / Music

Act of Repentance

(congregation facing frontwards)

L. There are many ways to be unfaithful to what we have become through baptism, to our commitment and our obedience to God. We offer him now our prayers of repentance.

All We confess to you, living God,
Our failure to live as brothers and sisters, and as your children.
We confess to you, loving God,
That we have not loved you as you have loved us.

Kyrie eleison

We confess to you, gracious God,
That we have doubted your word and failed to obey its teaching.
We confess to you, merciful God,
Our desire to own you and contain you within our doctrines and
theologies.

Kyrie eleison

We confess to you, almighty God
That we do not acknowledge you as Lord of all the earth.
Forgive us and redeem us
For we have not allowed your presence to shine among us.

Kyrie eleison

L. There are many ways in which we have failed in our commitment
and obedience to our fellow men and women. We turn towards our
neighbours and our friends and offer them our prayers of
repentance.

*In some assemblies – even the larger ones – responses could be made by
two groups facing each other, and alternately. Such an arrangement itself
acknowledges that we are sinners before God and our neighbour. Further
prayers of repentance may be formulated as appropriate to the local
situation.*

All Sisters and brothers in Christ, we confess to you
That we have not understood your way of life.
Sisters and brothers in Christ, we confess to you
Our shallow pride and self sufficiency.

Kyrie eleison

Sisters and brothers in Christ, we confess to you
That we have turned our backs on you in your need.
Sisters and brothers in Christ, we confess to you
That we have failed to see the risen Christ in the stranger in our
midst.

Kyrie eleison

Sisters and brothers in Christ, we confess to you
Our desire for an easy life, a comfortable life, a life which makes no
demands upon us.
Forgive us for failing to show forth the love of Christ

And for all that we have failed to do.

(Turn to the front)

L. May each of us hear the forgiving words of Jesus that we may turn from the *wrong* way and travel the path of friendship, love and unity shown by the Saviour. In harmony and peace we say the prayer he taught his followers:

All Our Father...

L. What we have confessed with our lips let us make real in our lives. By sharing in the sign of peace we renew our commitment to a new way of life which makes our confession to God and to one another a turning point in each of our lives.

The Sign of Peace

At this point in the celebration some assemblies could move to another part of the church either around the Bible, or the altar/communion table. This movement is an expression of the inner and community conversion in the name of Jesus and in his presence. A suggestion: a reproduction of a Celtic cross might be carried in from the entrance to the front of the assembly at this point. Other gestures could be proposed here – members of the assembly might exchange a verse of scripture, a word of peace or grace.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession *(two worship leaders/readers and the congregation)*

Remembering God's gifts we pray together:

L.1 Lord of heaven and earth, we have begun to listen to your Holy Spirit, calling us to unity in Christ:

All We thank you, O Lord

L. 2 May we be more attentive to your inspiration and more ready to listen to one another:

All We ask you, O Lord.

L. 1 We have begun to dialogue with one another, celebrating our common faith and seeking to understand our difference:

All We thank you, O Lord

L. 2 May the patient work of pastors, theologians and Christian people continue to progress and bear lasting fruit:

All We ask you, O Lord.

L. 1 For the agreements reached on matters of theology and pastoral life:

All We thank you, O Lord

L.2 That we may be able to face and resolve the difficult issues which still divide us:

All We ask you, O Lord.

- L.1 For our annual gatherings of prayer for unity among Christians:
All We thank you, O Lord.
- L.2 That prayer in common may become a normal feature of our local congregations:
All We ask you, O Lord.
- L. 1 For common witness in Christ which we have given in times of crisis, for justice, peace and humanitarian aid:
All We thank you, O Lord
- L.2 That our unity may one day become such that the whole world may believe in the Christ you have sent:
All We ask you, O Lord.
- L.1 For progress in inter-religious dialogue throughout the world:
All We thank you, O Lord
- L. 2 That engaged in this dialogue, we may henceforth sense the urgency of full communion among Christians as a witness to other believers:
All We ask you, O Lord.
- L. 1 For all inter-confessional families: living witnesses of personal communion in the love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit:
All We thank you, O Lord
- L. 2 May their family life contribute to the Christian joy of the members of their churches:
All We ask you, O Lord.
- L. 1 For the immense progress made by our churches in their common realisation of God's word as the source of revelation, and for the progress already achieved towards a common celebration of the eucharist:
All We thank you, O Lord
- L. 2 May this hope of one day sharing the same table and drinking from the same cup, increase our desire to do your will so as to receive from you this gift:
All We ask you, O Lord.

(Other prayers of intercession may be made as appropriate to the local context of the gathering.)

Praise / Hymn / Music

Sending Forth

- All Open our eyes to your presence.
Open our ears to your call.
Open our hearts to your love.
May we open our arms to others.
May we open our hearts to strangers.
May we open our doors to callers.
That we may be open to you, Lord

Open this day and for evermore.
(*Flame in my heart – St Aidan for Today*, David Adams, SPCK¹)

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
The love of God
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
Be with us all, now and forever. Amen.

¹ Copyright permission requested.