

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2024



**Daily Prayers
Churches Together in Ramsbottom**

The material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2024 has been prepared by the churches of Burkina Faso.

The theme this year is “Go and Do Likewise.”

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the best known passages of scripture, yet one that never seems to lose its power to challenge indifference to suffering and to inspire solidarity. It is a story about crossing boundaries and calls our attention to the bonds that unite all of humanity.

Our neighbours in Burkina Faso call us to reconnect to God’s dream for us – a dream of a unity formed of ties of love and compassion. This challenges us not only to reflect on the learning from our ecumenical journey so far, but to widen our vision. What can we learn from people of other faiths, from those whose backgrounds are most different from our own, and what do we need from each other?

The reflections encourage us to consider the perspective not only of the one who showed mercy, but also of those who passed by. Burkina Faso is in the Sahel region of West Africa, which extends into the neighbouring countries of Mali and Niger.

Approximately 26% of the population is Christian.

Burkina Faso is currently experiencing a serious security crisis. The country has endured a proliferation of terrorist attacks, lawlessness and human trafficking.

Christian churches have been specifically targeted by terrorist attacks. Many of the Christian population cannot practice their faith. The majority of Christian churches in the north, east and north west of the country have been closed. However, individual churches continue to organise daily prayers and fasting.

The invitation to work together on the texts for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2024 challenged the different churches in Burkina Faso to walk, pray and work together in mutual love, during this difficult period for their country.

The love of Christ that unites all Christians is stronger than their divisions and the Christians of Burkina Faso commit themselves to walking the path of love of God and love of neighbour.

They are confident that God's love will overcome the violence that currently afflicts their country.

Included in this leaflet are the reflections and prayers written by the churches of Burkina Faso, with suggested prayer topics for our churches in Ramsbottom.

Please join in because it is through prayer that we connect with the living God.



Day 1— Thursday 18th January 2024

A lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25)

Help us, Lord, to have a life turned towards you.

Additional scripture passages

Romans 14: 8-9

Psalm 103: 13-18

Reflection

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” This crucial question asked of Jesus by a lawyer challenges every believer in God. It affects the meaning of our life on earth and for eternity. Elsewhere in the Bible, Jesus gives us the ultimate definition of eternal life “... that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17: 3).

Knowing God means discovering and doing the will of God in our lives.

Violence, greed and exploitation distance us from one another and from Jesus as “the Way” that leads us to the Father, our ultimate destiny. Speaking from a society that has been torn apart and traumatised by violence and identity based conflict for the last eight years, the churches of Burkina Faso offer us a message of hope in the promise of Christ’s all-embracing love.

We pray for

Ramsbottom Community Church.

Emmanuel Church, Holcombe.

Our local vision for working together in Ramsbottom.

Our brothers and sisters in Christ who are unable to worship freely.

We pray together

God of life,

You have created us to have life,

and life in all its fullness.

Help your wounded church to be a source of hope and healing.

As we follow the way of Jesus with determination,

may we lead others to you.

Amen

Question

How do you see God's dream for you unfolding in your life?

Go and do

Christians gathering to worship and witness in parts of Burkina Faso have been attacked and murdered, and the threat of violence continues to oppress and scatter that community. As we gather this week, pray for all those facing persecution in Burkina Faso and other parts of the world.

Day 2—Friday 19th January 2024

Jesus answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.” (Luke 10: 27)

Help me, Lord, to receive your love, that I may make you manifest in loving well, both myself and my neighbour.

Additional scripture passages

Deuteronomy 10: 12-13

Psalm 133

Reflection

The answer Jesus draws out of the lawyer, from the well-known commandments of God, appears simple. However, the command to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind will be a constant challenge, requiring a lifelong determination to learn, reflect and seek change in ourselves through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The instruction to love our neighbours “as ourselves” demands equal consideration. To love and value ourselves as God would wish demands intimate relationship. Is God saying that we cannot love our neighbour fully unless we love ourselves?

We do not get to choose our neighbours. Sometimes we must cross difficult barriers to serve them, rather than walking by. Loving means being attentive to their needs, accepting who they are, with humility, encouraging their hopes and aspirations.

Let’s learn to celebrate difference in Christ’s unifying life, death and resurrection.

We pray for

St Philip's Church, Stubbins.

Our neighbours.

The lonely and isolated.

We pray together

Lord, give us the grace to know you deeply,
in order to love you entirely.

May the gift of the Holy Spirit enable our eyes, ears and
minds to receive the unconditional love with which you love
us.

Purify our hearts that we may always be able to love our
neighbour,
however different, as ourselves.

Amen

Question

How do you see yourself? How do you think God sees you?

Go and do

Resolve to get to know a new person in your road and find a
loving way to engage with them.

Day 3—Saturday 20th January 2024

“Who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10: 29)

Lord, open our hearts to those we do not see.

Additional scripture passages

Romans 13: 8-10

Psalm 119: 57-63

Reflection

The teacher of the law wanted to justify himself, hoping that the neighbour he is called to love is one of his own faith and people. This is a natural human instinct. We prefer places of familiarity. This can also be true of our church communities.

But Jesus takes the lawyer, and his wider audience, deeper into their own tradition by reminding them of the obligation to welcome and love all, regardless of religion, culture or social status.

The Gospel teaches that loving those who are like ourselves is nothing special. Jesus steers us towards a much more radical version of what it means to be human. The parable illustrates in a very visible way what Christ expects from us – to open wide our hearts and walk in his way, loving others as he loves us.

In fact, Jesus answers the lawyer with another question: it is not “who is my neighbour?”, but “who was a neighbour to the man in need?”

We pray for

Greenmount URC.

St Paul's Church, Ramsbottom.

Our outreach to the elderly and our local care homes.

Those who find it difficult to integrate into society.

We pray together

God of love,

who writes love in our hearts,

Instil in us the courage to look beyond ourselves

and to be the unexpected neighbour.

Amen

Question

Who are the people who are excluded within your community and why?

Go and do

Think of a person you have never really thought of as your neighbour?

How can you be a neighbour to them in a practical way?

Day 4—Sunday 21st January 2024

When he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

(Luke 10: 31)

May we never turn away from those in need.

Additional scripture passages

Isaiah 58: 4-8a

Psalms 34: 15-22

Reflection

The priest and the Levite who walked by on the other side may have had religious reasons for not helping. They would have felt justified in what they had done. Yet, on many occasions, Jesus is critical of religious leaders for placing rules ahead of the obligation to do good.

The prophet Isaiah gives us the same encouragement, we should do good rather than look good.

As Christians, how far are we prepared to go beyond convention?

This parable not only challenges us to do good, but also to widen our vision. The Good Samaritan is often the one we do not expect. Light and love are embodied in our enemy too.

We pray for

St Mary's Church, Hawkshaw.

Holcombe Brook Methodists.

Our clergy, ministers and church leaders.

World leaders that they show faith and integrity.

We pray together

Lord Jesus Christ,

may our eyes not look away,

but be wide open to the world around us.

As we travel through life,

may we stop and reach out,

bind up the wounded

and in so doing experience your presence in them.

Amen

Question

Who are the Good Samaritans in your community?

Go and do

Reflect on your own circle of relationships and their geography. Choose today to walk through another part of town. What do you see and who do you notice?

Day 5—Monday 22nd January 2024

He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. (Luke 10: 34)

Lord, help us see the wounds and find hope.

Additional scripture passages

Joel 2: 23-27

Psalm 104: 14-15, 27-30

Reflection

The Good Samaritan did what he could out of his own resources: he poured oil and wine and bandaged the man's wounds and put him on his own animal. He went further still by promising to pay for the man's care.

When we see the world through the eyes of the Samaritan, every situation can be an opportunity to help those in need. His example motivates us to ask ourselves how to respond to our neighbour. What can we give, so that we can be part of God's work of healing a broken world?

This brokenness shows itself in our world through insecurity, fear, distrust and division. Shamefully, these divisions also exist between Christians. Though we celebrate sacraments of healing, reconciliation and consolation, we persist in behaviours that cause division. The healing of our own divisions would perhaps promote the healing of the nations.

We pray for

Dundee Lane URC.

St Andrew's Church, Ramsbottom.

Our pastoral care groups.

Those who are ill or grieving.

We pray together

Gracious God,

You who are the source of all love and goodness;
enable us to recognise the needs of our neighbour.

Help us to be honest about our need for healing.

Change us, so that we can love all,
that we might build a world of peace.

Thank you for leading us to a future which is full of hope.

Amen

Question

What can we give, so that we can be part of God's work of healing a broken world?

Go and do

What groups already exist in your area that are actively involved in healing in some way? Explore meaningful ways of engaging with them.

Day 6—Tuesday 23rd January 2024

Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. (Luke 10: 34)

Lord, turn our churches into inns, welcoming those in need.

Additional scripture passages

Genesis 18: 4-5

Psalms 5: 11-12

Reflection

In any society, hospitality and solidarity are essential. They require the welcoming of strangers, migrants and all people without a home. Such hospitality can require sacrifice, but it is an important witness to the Gospel. When faced with insecurity, suspicion and sometimes violence, we tend to mistrust our neighbours so that extending and accepting hospitality becomes more difficult.

Welcoming “the other” and being welcoming in turn, is at the heart of ecumenical dialogue and practice. Christians are challenged to turn our churches into inns, open and inviting spaces where our neighbours can find Christ.

When we, as followers of Christ, move beyond our traditions and choose to practise ecumenical hospitality, we stop being strangers and start being good neighbours.

We pray for

Edenfield Parish Church.

Trinity Grace Church.

Our churches to be places of welcome to all.

Those working with the isolated and vulnerable.

We pray together

God of unity,

Help us to become a community that generously welcomes those

who feel abandoned and lost,
together building an inn where all
are welcomed and loved.

Amen

Question

When have you seen Christ in someone who was not like you?

Go and do

What ecumenical projects can be found in your area? Find out what Christians are doing together and get involved.

Day 7—Wednesday 24th January 2024

Jesus said: “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour?” (Luke 10: 36)

Lord, show us how to respond to our neighbour.

Additional scripture passages

Philippians 2: 1-5

Psalm 10: 17-18

Reflection

At the end of the parable, Jesus asked the lawyer who was the neighbour to the man who was robbed. The lawyer replied that it was the one who showed mercy. He does not say “the Samaritan” and we might imagine that the hostility between Samaritans and Jews made that hard to admit.

We often discover our neighbours in the most unexpected people. In today’s world, where polarised politics often set those of different religious identities against one another, Jesus challenges us to see the importance of our vocation to transgress borders and walls of separation.

Like the lawyer, we are challenged to reflect upon how we live our lives, not merely in terms of whether we do good or not, but whether, like the priest and the Levite, we are neglecting to “do mercy.”

We pray for

St Joseph's R C Church.

Our local interfaith groups.

Those working for peace and reconciliation.

We pray together

Holy God,

your Son Jesus Christ came among us

to show the way of compassion.

Help us by your Spirit to follow his example,

to serve the needs of all your children,

and so witness together as Christians

to your ways of love and mercy.

Amen

Question

How can you "do mercy" today?

Go and do

Think about the ways that Christians, churches and people of other faiths have been merciful to those who have least expected it.

Day 8—Thursday 25th January 2024

Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise”. (Luke 10: 37)

Lord, may our mercy be a sign of your Kingdom.

Additional scripture passages

Romans 12: 9-13

Psalm 41: 1-2

Reflection

Jesus sends each of us, and our churches to live out his commandment to love. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, we are sent out to reach to a suffering humanity with compassion and mercy. Like the Good Samaritan, we can choose not to reject those who are different, rather actively seeking out opportunities to be hospitable, to welcome and to share.

To truly be neighbours, we must go beyond that which does not cost us anything, as we learn how Christ’s love visits us through the welcoming of others.

Striving together for merciful unity helps rebuild relationships, so that violence can give way to solidarity and peace.

As mutual trust and confidence increase, our hope is that Christ’s love heals us through each other’s mercy and care.

We pray for

Christ Church.

Emmanuel Church Centre.

Our local volunteer groups.

Cooperation and love between our churches.

We pray together ...

Father God, who holds the world in loving embrace,
may we care for each other as you do.

Holy Spirit, giver of life, open us to each other
and strengthen our bonds of communion and mutual affection.

Prince of Peace, give us the resolve to live out the Gospel
faithfully,

that we may be radical welcomers and reconcilers.

Amen

Question

What does this call of Christ imply for your relationship with
members of other churches?

Go and do

Where do you notice God's dream working in your community?
Explore how you might join in.

**All are welcome at:
Prayer Breakfast at Holcombe Brook Methodist
Church
Saturday 13th January at 08.30**

**Quiet Morning at Emmanuel Church Centre
Tuesday 16th January at 10.00**

**Christ Church Prayer Meeting on zoom
Tuesday 23th January at 19.00
Contact johnleyland@hotmail.co.uk for details**

**United Service at St Andrew's Ramsbottom
Sunday 28th January at 18.30**