

**Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit  
Service at Home, 22nd January 2023**

Hello! Sometimes, we can be encouraged by remembering the bigger context. Perhaps that is why in my earlier years, when doodling my address I would end with 'Europe, The World, The Universe'! Perhaps that was because Guernsey, my home island, is rather small!

Our local churches also can feel very small, even constricting, so it can be helpful to remember our bigger context as Christians and as human beings. I am helped by the Bible verse in our Methodist 'Prayer in the Evening' on a Sunday which paints such a picture. *'There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope in God's call to you.'* (Ephesians 4:4)

In our first hymn, Charles Wesley reminds us of our place within the whole Church on earth and in heaven.

**Hymn:** Read, pray, sing StF 378

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APlaUuS5voQ>

- 1 Father of everlasting grace,  
your goodness and your truth we praise,  
your goodness and your truth we prove;  
you have, in honour of your Son,  
the gift unspeakable sent down,  
the Spirit of life, and power, and love.
- 2 Send us the Spirit of your Son,  
to make the depths of Godhead known,  
to make us share the life divine;  
send him the sprinkled blood to apply,  
send him our souls to sanctify,  
to bless and seal us with this sign.
- 3 So shall we pray, and never cease,  
so shall we thankfully confess  
your wisdom, truth, and power, and love,  
with joy unspeakable adore,  
and bless and praise you evermore,  
and serve you as your hosts above:

4 Till, added to that heavenly choir,  
we raise our songs of triumph higher,  
and praise you with a bolder voice,  
out-soar the first-born seraph's flight,  
and sing, with all our friends in light,  
with everlasting love rejoice.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

The annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity has helped many of us over the years to recognise and to experience some of our wider context. In many communities, for eight days (the Octave) we have joined with fellow-Christians to read the Bible, to pray and to think on one aspect or another about the meaning of our calling. This year's theme is *'Be-Longing – praying for unity amidst injustice,'* with material provided by the churches in Minneapolis, USA.

I am including parts of the prayer booklet in our service and these are printed in italics, as are the Bible quotations. The complete prayer booklet is on the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland website.

<https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/WPCU-2023-English-pamphlet-web.pdf.pagespeed.ce.l3CErTj5pk.pdf>

***Reflection:*** *We give them names: refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, economic migrants, some more welcome than others. But you know their human names because they are your kin, stamped with your image, divinely human.*

***Prayer:*** *You made us, God, in your own image, and then became one of us, proud of those you have made. Make us proud of being part of that worldwide family, and eager to discover and celebrate your image in every person, every culture, every nation that we are privileged to encounter. Amen*

*For the churches of the US State of Minnesota, the murder of George Floyd and the institutional racism it embodied provide the focus for their*

*prayer for unity and justice. – They place before us the prophet Isaiah’s challenge to do good and seek justice (Isaiah 1:17). The prophet is writing to the people of Judah at a time when formal religion is thriving, in a culture which understands wealth as blessing from God and poverty as punishment. Seeking justice and doing good is not on the agenda of either the priests in the Temple or the ruling authorities in the neighbouring palace. Isaiah seeks to awaken the conscience of the people to the reality of their situation. ... Isaiah denounces the political, social and religious structures which encourage the hypocrisy of offering sacrifices whilst oppressing the poor. He speaks out vigorously against corrupt leaders and in favour of the disadvantaged.*

Isaiah 1: 17-18

*‘Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the oppressed,. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widows.’ (NIV)*

The challenge by the prophet Micah is similar, in answer to the question as to what we should be and do in response to God.

*‘He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.’ (Micah 6:8)*

It seems to me that the Churches of Minnesota, reflecting on such Bible calls for right living and compassion are inviting us to explore further some of the depth of what it means to worship God. Many of our hymns do that.

**Hymn:** Read, pray, sing StF 701

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHMt3YJHbZE>

- 1 Heaven shall not wait  
for the poor to lose their patience,  
the scorned to smile, the despised to find a  
friend: Jesus is Lord;  
he has championed the unwanted;  
in him injustice confronts its timely end.
- 2 Heaven shall not wait  
for the rich to share their fortunes,  
the proud to fall, the elite to tend the least:  
Jesus is Lord;  
he has shown the master's privilege --  
to kneel and wash servants' feet before they  
feast.
- 3 Heaven shall not wait  
for the dawn of great ideas,  
thoughts of compassion divorced from cries of  
pain: Jesus is Lord;  
he has married word and action;  
his cross and company make his purpose plain.
- 4 Heaven shall not wait  
for triumphant Hallelujahs,  
when earth has passed and we reach another  
shore: Jesus is Lord  
in our present imperfection;  
his power and love are for now, and then for  
evermore.

John L. Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Maule (b. 1958)

Words and Music: From Heaven Shall Not Wait (c) 1987,  
WGRG, Iona Community, Glasgow G2 3DH Scotland.  
<[www.wgrg.co.uk](http://www.wgrg.co.uk)>

Particular phrases and sentences in that hymn may have struck you and you may find it helpful to read that hymn again. In one way or another it may remind you of what we hear or read in news bulletins, or what is happening much closer to home. Sometimes, thinking about the hurt and pain of the life of others can be too much for us. How much worse it is for those who are enduring it.

The Churches of Minnesota focused their reflection and prayers on the appalling way in which George Floyd was killed in 2020. We may remember that reaction to his death was world-wide, the UK included, and was expressed notably in the 'Black Lives Matter' movement. This has led to an increase in debate and action about the involvement of this country in the historic enslaving of millions of people from the continent of Africa and the subsequent enrichment of white families and institutions through the slave plantations they owned in the West Indies.

The group who edited the prayer booklet for use by the Churches of Britain and Ireland referred also to the death of the teenager Stephen Lawrence, murdered in 1993 on a street in London while waiting for a bus. As they say, *Stephen Lawrence was a promising young man looking forward to fulfilling his dream of becoming an architect. He was murdered simply because he was black.*

Racism persists, as many black people born in this country know all too well, now and not just in the past, in the life of churches as well as more widely in our communities.

It is in the context of life as it is that we are called to be and to live as friends of Jesus. He was well aware of the pain of others, pain of body, mind and spirit. He gave himself that we all, each one, may know the healing that God offers us, both as individuals and in our life together. John, in his gospel, says that on the night before his arrest, Jesus prayed that his friends would know the unity that Jesus experienced with God.

*'My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. My prayer is not for*

*them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.'* (John 17: 15-21)

This challenging and encouraging prayer of Jesus is referred to in the prayer booklet and the next paragraph is part of the reflection offered.

*Jesus prays that we will be "completely one", praying for an authentic and selfless unity, one with no half measures, reflected in the person of God, in the unity of the Trinity. Such unity is challenging, it requires self-reflection, humility, a release of power and control, and an openness to change. .... Many have experienced pain, rejection, abuse, and exclusion within the Church. A Christian expression of unity must include everyone and offer healing and justice. It is rarely done in isolation, but more often together.*

When I first saw the title of the theme for this year's Week of Prayer I was intrigued. What does it mean? 'Be-Longing – praying for unity amidst injustice.' Does the 'Be-Longing' mean 'To be longing for ...'? Or, to belong? You may well have your own interpretation of that title. It seems to me that truly belonging to the company of the friends of Jesus can help us to long for God's will for justice and mercy to be worked out more completely in our be-longing together in the world, whoever we may be. Thank God!

### **Prayers for others and ourselves**

(leaving space for your own prayers ....)

Dear God, we praise you, source and centre of all life and we bring to you our concern about anything that degrades and divides your creation. We thank you for all who seek to work with your creative purposes to restore nature to a better state and wholeness, and for the well-being of all in their need . . . . .

Forgive us for any way in which we deny other people their basic human rights because of our careless or deliberate attitudes and actions, due to our prejudice, bitterness, or ill-will. Let your open welcome to us be the well-spring of growing and overflowing respect, care and love for each person . . . . .

So, we ask your special blessing for those who stand up for those who suffer discrimination, risking the hatred of others, even at cost to themselves. May their example stir us to stand up for others who feel isolated, in their own hard experience of life, so far as we can . . . . .

Thank you, dear God, for all who have gone before us - who have stirred us to say 'yes' to be longing for all that you offer us as members of your family, and in belonging to the fellowship of others who follow your ways and who help others to do so . . . . .

We ask it all in the name of Jesus. Amen.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen

### **Prayer of Dedication**

We offer to you, dear God, all that we have and are to work with you in your life-giving and renewing work in us and through us in your world. Amen

**Hymn:** Read, pray or sing **StF 520**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HSCDvagm0s>

- 1 Give to me, Lord, a thankful heart and a discerning mind; give, as I play the Christian's part, the strength to finish what I start and act on what I find.
- 2 When, in the rush of days, my will is habit-bound and slow, help me to keep in vision still what love and power and peace can fill a life that trusts in you.
- 3 By your divine and urgent claim, and by your human face, kindle our sinking hearts to flame, and as you teach the world your name let it become your place.
- 4 Jesus, with all your Church I long to see your kingdom come: show me your way of righting wrong and turning sorrow into song until you bring me home.

Thomas Caryl Micklem (1925-2003)

In company with the friends of Jesus in every place, we say –

***The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen***

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Service prepared by the Revd Eric Renouf

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