

PRAYING TOGETHER IN A COMMON LIFE



"They were constantly at prayer together". This was the reaction of the disciples of Jesus in the days between His ascension and Pentecost, according to the Acts of the Apostles. In their mixed emotions of exhilaration, uncertainty and apprehension, it was natural that the disciples would be a fellowship of prayers. Jesus had taught them the importance of prayer and how to pray: prayer was their foundation stone.

On the Day of Pentecost, they were *"all together in one place"*, and the disciples post-Pentecost pattern of life was that *"they met constantly to hear the apostles teach, and to share the common life, to break bread, and to pray. All whose faith had drawn them together held everything in common."*

Prayer was not only time spent with God but it was also time in one another's company: the expressions of praying together in the Acts of the Apostles were collective occasions.

In the Epistles, readers are encouraged to pray corporately and for one another:

"Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me. Pray that I may declare the mystery of the gospel boldly." Ephesians 6.

"Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective." James 5.

We can best pray for one another when we have a personal relationship, know one another's experience, problems and desires. Relationships and understandings do move on. This idea was summed up by the late Cardinal Basil Hume who commented on the ecumenical pilgrimage: 'there was a time when we went to watch one another praying, now we pray together;. there was a time when we were very polite to one another, now we are friends.'

How do we **pray with** Christians from another denomination? By sharing together we are able to learn how diverse are the ways we pray and also what resources are used to make us aware of the presence of God. We may need to remember that all do not pray in the same fashion as we do.

How do we **pray for** one another? What about taking the initiative and asking someone, or another group, to pray for you and your church?

Praying with, praying for - are ways of being together in a Common Life in our richness and diversity

Circle me Lord

Keep hope within,
Keep doubt without.
Circle me Lord,
Keep peace within,
Keep evil out.

PRAYING TOGETHER ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Here are a few ideas that are tried and tested.

Churches Together in Lincolnshire have used the idea of a Prayer Diary that starts from Ash Wednesday in one year and runs to Shrove Tuesday the following year. It is offered as one method for Christians to be, and to be seen to be, at one in prayer. It is suggested that each subject can be offered in any one or more of the five principles of prayer - thanksgiving, confession, adoration, intercession and petition. A variety of subjects can be covered both within and beyond the local area, and can include named individuals. The Prayer Diary manages to convey feelings of living on the world stage as it offers challenges, concerns and commitment to being Churches Together. (website //www.ctal.org.uk/prayer)

The **Milton Keynes Prayer Circle** is a well-established tool that assists churches to pray. Issued four times a year it provides resource material designed to be of service to churches, prayer groups and individuals. It combines a local, personalised prayer list with a wider world-view. Each week there is a summary of concerns, information of different countries and the particular needs identified by Christians there. Also included are several short poems or prayers as a focus for personal meditation.

In **Cumbria** a weekly local prayer group meets on a week day morning. Largely led by lay people, in an informal rota, it specifically picks up general prayer requests left by visitors to the churches, or particular concerns of the community. The group meets for just 20 minutes and has developed a style that includes brief meditations and silent prayer. (further information from Miss Margaret Pilkington or Miss Marjorie Mellor, Tel; 015242 71619).

In many places **Prayer Circles** have been set up. Many of us are used to the idea of individual congregations remembering in prayer those who are incapacitated or struggling with the difficulties of life. This simple idea takes that model, and information of need is shared between churches in a locality and mutual support is recognised and valued.

PRAYING TOGETHER LOCALLY

Who are praying? We all are. Younger people need encouragement to pray for their friends and classmates at school or college, and their colleagues at work. Older people who feel that they can do little in active ecumenical work can be at the heart of the churches' prayer life. Some simply need encouragement - not just those who are learning the discipline of praying but also those who may become disheartened.

God our Father,
you sent your Son to us:
Grant that, filled with your Spirit, we
may be renewed in faith
And inspired in hope and love
To spread the gospel of your kingdom
to all humankind
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

From the Anglican Province of Central Africa

These ideas are not new but they may help you to get started -

Discussion/house groups can build regular prayer for local churches into the programme. Some churches or individual Christians from various traditions arrange a Retreat or Quiet Day to provide opportunity for a shared prayer experience. Others have a 'Week of Guided Prayer'. Use could be made of the 'Quiet Day Pack' prepared by the Retreat Association (Tel 020 7357 7736, donation cost £1.50 per pack).

Individual congregations in an area promising to pray for each other on a weekly basis. Through information-sharing, pray for a neighbouring congregation when they have a special celebration.

Supporting a neighbouring congregation when they experience times of adversity.

Some local churches in addition to praying for their own denominational leaders have responded to the challenge of the Churches Together in England Forum to pray also for other church leaders, national and local.

In some local situations the rich variety of approaches to prayer has been shared in vigils as well as study groups.

As an alternative to praying for different congregations each week you can keep the same congregation in mind for that month.

IDEAS OLD AND NEW

- ✓ **United Services of Worship.** Try and build on what you already do together. Pentecost/Whit Sunday gives the perfect opportunity to be 'together in one place'.
- ✓ **Existing Sunday Services.** Where Sunday services continue in the regular pattern, refresh them by using the approach to prayer from a different tradition.
- ✓ **Eight Days of Prayer and Reflection.** Prepare local resource material based around a theme that would help with the discipline of personal devotion.
- ✓ **A Celebration Meal.** Christians are rediscovering the value of sharing fellowship at the meal table. Can a simple shared inter-church meal be arranged?
- ✓ **An Open Forum with a panel.** An ecumenical panel could answer questions and share in discussion on how they sustain a meaningful prayer time.
- ✓ **A Local Pilgrimage.** A simple pilgrimage could visit local churches (and other places of religious significance) where a time of prayer is shared. This could end in the open air, with a short act of prayer for the whole community.
- ✓ **A 'Songs of Praise'.** Using the popular BBC TV format, representatives of local congregations could bring contributions of both hymn and prayer request.
- ✓ **Facing the tough issues.** Where trust has grown strong over the years, churches can be open in discussing their differences and end with specific prayers for each other.
- ✓ **Getting the Movement moving again.** In some places ecumenism has slipped into a rut. Could an 'away day' asking 'how can we better pray together' be the answer?
- ✓ **Into the community.** Can teams be organised on an ecumenical basis to 'prayer walk' districts around each other's churches?
- ✓ **Prayer Rounds.** Two people from another congregation visit your church and lead the period of prayer. The following week two people from your congregation visit the next church on the rota and lead their prayers and so on until the list of churches in the area is complete - then you start again.
- ✓ **Sharing your Spiritual Treasures.** Make use of the leaflet available from Churches Together in England (see website details), learning from and praying for one another.

Let imagination and creativity run riot!

Grant, O Lord, that your love may so
fill our lives
That we may count nothing too small to
do for you
Nothing too much to give
And nothing too hard to bear
For Jesus Christ's sake, Amen

A Prayer by St Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556):

PRAYING TOGETHER IN THE FUTURE

Marking the Millennium has opened up unique opportunities and challenges. This leaflet raises some questions for local churches and ecumenical groups, to encourage you to discover and learn more about one another through prayer.

Before the round of usual activities overtakes you, you are invited to set aside some time to discuss what you can do together that will help to develop a Common Life. Take an honest look at where you are in your shared pilgrimage, and be encouraged to use imaginatively the material in this leaflet. Plan ways that will meet the needs of your local situation so that you experience at first hand the thrill of 'Praying Together in a Common Life'

- Not every idea will be appropriate to your local setting
- Your situation can produce further ways of uniting in prayer
- It's probably better to talk in depth about some of the possibilities rather than to skim through them all
- Perhaps ask each local church council or committee to look at this leaflet, before pooling ideas
- Perhaps then ask a small group to take the ideas forward
- Jot down some conclusions and resolutions, and check them in a year or two. (Put someone in charge of reminding everyone else)

Your response:

- This leaflet is primarily intended to stimulate local action.
- A national process of reflection is also taking place as part of the Together in a Common Life process, and the aim is to share the results widely. So, you are invited to send your comments to Common Life 2000 at Churches Together in England, 27 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HH, or email to commonlife2001@churches-together.net. Your response can then be incorporated into the website, www.churches-together.net. Responses grouped under the headings set out inside this paper would be particularly helpful. Copies of the leaflet may be obtained from Churches Together in England, 10 for £2 incl. p&p.
- You may photocopy this leaflet, down-load it from the website, or obtain it as a rtf file by email from commonlife2001@churches-together.net. Feel free to adapt the text for particular local situations. Please acknowledge Text © Churches Together in England 2001.



*O God, Holy and Eternal Trinity,
We pray for your Church in all the world.
Sanctify its life; renew its worship;
Empower its witness; heal its divisions;
Make visible its unity.*

*Lead us, with all our brothers and sisters,
Towards communion in faith, life and witness
So that, united in one body by the one Spirit,
We may together witness to the perfect unity of your love*

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