
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2026

The Call to Unity

All-age resources

Material for all ages together to supplement the ecumenical worship service

Links to video or song resources are for the benefit of those preparing to use the resources and are not to be publicly played unless the user has the appropriate license and copyright permissions.

Gather

Use the activity and prayer to gather and introduce the theme.

We are one

- Divide the congregation into four groups. Invite the first group to join hands and sing 'Circle Song' by Bernadette Farrell (<https://www.ocp.org/en-us/songs/31482/circle-song>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFeccE4gv8s>) to the others.
- Ask the second group to join hands with the first group and sing the song again, then repeat this until the whole congregation is singing together as one.
- Observe that the singing became stronger as more people joined together. Ask people to imagine what the world could be like if we worked together in unity.

Alternatively...

United in diversity

- Ask people to share with a neighbour or with the congregation something which makes them unique, e.g. "I play the ukelele" or "I did a sponsored walk this week".
- Reflect on the diversity of the people gathered together and their life experiences. Yet all are part of one church.
- Ask people to consider how unity amidst diversity might help bring peace to today's world.

Call to worship

As Abram called to Lot,
'Let there be no strife between you and me';
as the Psalms cry out,
'How good it is when God's people live together in unity';
And as Jesus prayed,
'May they all be one'.
We gather together today
as one body, in one Spirit, sharing one hope.

A gathering prayer

Gather us in Lord, make us one body.
Different ages, different backgrounds,
different experiences of life.
Gather us in Lord, make us one body,
as you gave your life for us to be one with you.
Amen.

Share the Word

Isaiah 58:6-11

You will need: paper chain, bread, candle or torch, watering can.

Read Isaiah 58:6-11, using the props to act out each verse. You might want to ask some volunteers to hold the props and perform the actions at each verse.

- v. 6 – tear the paper chain
- v. 7 – break open the bread
- v. 8 – light the candle or torch
- v. 9b – hold up the torn paper chain
- v. 10 – hold up the broken bread, then hold up the candle or torch
- v. 11 – pour water from the watering can.

Ephesians 4:1-13

One voice

Print or write a large number 1 onto a sheet of card. Read Ephesians 4:1-13 aloud, holding up the card wherever the word 'one' appears. Invite the congregation to shout out 'One!' together whenever it is held up.

Alternatively...

Up and down

Invite those who are able to stand or raise a hand whenever they hear the word 'up' and to sit or lower a hand whenever they hear the word 'down'. Read the following paraphrase of Ephesians 4:1-13:

As someone locked up because I serve the Lord, I am writing this **down** to urge you to measure **up** to the standard set **down** in God's calling to you. Be humble and gentle, be patient, lift one another **up** in love. Double **down** on the unity which the Spirit gives through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling. Listen **up!** There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Note it **down**: there is one God and Father of all, who is **up** and **down** and everywhere in between.

Each of us has been given a gift by Christ. As the Scripture says,

'When he went **up** to the heights,
he took many captives with him
and sent **down** gifts on all his people.'

(What does it mean, 'he went **up**'? It means that he first came **down** to the earth itself! So the one who went **up** is the same one who came **down**. He has now gone **up** above the heavens, to fill the whole universe.) Christ himself set down the gift we have: he raised **up** some to be apostles, others prophets, others evangelists, others pastors or teachers. He did this to equip us to get **down** and serve others, so that the body of Christ may be built **up** until we can all get **down** to being united in our faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God become mature, reaching **up** and **down** the measure of the fulness of Christ.

Bible notes

Isaiah 58:1-12

This passage declares that the people's perception of their relationship with God was based on all the wrong things. They were keen on drawing near to God, but framed this in terms of their religious practices, such as fasting and praying.

The prophet pointed out that their day-to-day behaviour gave the lie to their faith – they wanted 'righteous judgements' from God, but were unwilling to act righteously themselves. They oppressed their workers and ignored the poor and the hungry. They pointed the finger and spoke evil of others. Their extravagant, outward, one-off gestures did nothing to repair the injustice of their everyday lives. The light that shall break forth like the dawn would only arise when they got rid of their acts of oppression and fed the hungry. In the same way, this is a challenge to our perceptions of what pleases God. It may not be fashionable any more to 'bow down the head like a bulrush' or to 'lie in sackcloth and ashes', but are there religious actions that we take to be the sure marks of a Christian, while ignoring this call to justice, liberation and peace-making?

Psalms 97

The glory of God is revealed as a sovereign power that acts justly to put things right. While heaven and earth can rejoice at this revelation, humanity is divided between the wicked, who serve what is ultimately worthless, and the faithful, who are rescued from their hands. The proclamation, 'The Lord is king', brings hope to the righteous who oppose evil. The very trembling of the earth (v.4) can unfasten the chains of oppression, as in our first reading from Acts.

Ephesians 4:1-16

Today's epistle focuses on practical suggestions for the kind of life Christians should live, and the desire for unity within the body of Christ, his church.

Ephesians 4:1 begins with an appeal to the Ephesians to live lives worthy of their calling. Paul looks for personal qualities of humility, gentleness and patience; for compassion towards fellow Christians, for commitment to living in and making the effort needed to maintain community life. He repeats one of his major themes — the unity of the church. Note the list of 'ones' (vv.4-6): body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and God and Father of all.

Behind such an impassioned appeal lies the awareness that in the church there is always the tendency to divide on many issues and for numerous reasons. Paul appeals to the Ephesians to avoid division, and to recognise that diversity is a gift from the one God through Christ (v.7). Verse 11 lists the diversity of gifts given to the Church to enable it to function properly, though it seems much of the trouble then (and now?) is about power in the Church. Who has it? How is it used? And who wants it? These gifts are there, Paul insists, to equip the people, 'the saints', for their service of Christ in the Church and the world. They are for building the body of Christ not for personal glory. Verse 13 is an amazing statement of the transformation or growth which Paul expects to see in individual Christians and in the Church.

Sermon ideas

Highlight how the Bible readings explore the importance of unity through humility and the sharing of gifts for one another.

Sermon starter 1: United despite differences

Picture a crowd at a sporting event, such as a football match. People might be wearing different team shirts, and even those who support the same team might have different versions of their team's strip. They will have varied ways of engaging in the game — some might sing, some might clap, some might watch quietly. There will be a range of views in the stands over which players should be played and what tactics should be deployed. Fans may belong to different supporters' clubs. Whatever differences exist, these pale into insignificance next to their unified desire to see their team win. They have a shared purpose and hope; at the end of the day, they all win, lose or draw together. Churches may appear different, worship differently, share different views or theologies, belong to different denominations (or none), yet these all pale into insignificance next to the unity that comes from being part of one body, in one Spirit, with one hope to which God has called us.

Sermon starter 2: In the place of another

The 20th-century German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer described Christian relationships as being characterised by *stellvertretung* — standing in the place of another. Sharing someone's place means being affected by whatever affects them. The call to unity means recognising that whatever affects one part of the body of Christ affects us all; therefore, the call to unity is also a call to work for peace for people everywhere. Where people suffer because of violence, displacement or persecution, such as the Armenian Church, secret Christians in North Korea or pastors in Colombia, the whole people of God suffer. What can we do to advocate for peace and call for an end to violence?

Explore & respond

A sequence of active worship ideas; individual items can stand alone.

How many colours in the rainbow?

S

Explore the infinite diversity that can exist in unity

You will need: a glass prism or a patterned crystal glass, a source of light (such as a bright torch or a projector).

- Ask everyone how many colours are in the rainbow. They will likely answer seven: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet.
- Create a rainbow by shining a bright source of white light (such as a data projector showing a white slide) through a glass prism or patterned crystal glass. Observe that there are more than seven colours: there are colours between red and orange, between green and blue and so on. In fact, there is an infinite number of colours in the rainbow, including infrared and ultraviolet colours that we cannot see, yet all are united in white light.
- Ask people to reflect on the infinite diversity that can exist in God's church, yet we are united as light for all the world.

We are one

W E

Discuss the strengths of being one body

- Play the song 'Let the Church Sing, by Tauren Wells, <https://genius.com/Tauren-wells-let-the-church-sing-lyrics> (or a similar song about Christian unity that suits your tradition).
- Talk together about the ways in which people think the church can be strengthened by standing alongside other Christians in unity.
- You could invite members of other local churches to share in your conversation, or invite the congregation to use their phones to look up other local churches and what they distinctively bring to the body of Christ

Doves of peace

W S A

A craft activity to pray for peace around the world

You will need: printouts of the dove template (see p.6 of this resource), sheets of A5 white paper, pencils, string.

- Explain that the dove has often been used to symbolise the Holy Spirit and as a symbol of peace. These are also the themes of today's reading (you may wish to read Ephesians 4:3 again).
- Give each person a dove template and ask them to write or draw a situation in the world where peace is needed. (This could be a global situation, such as a war or conflict, or a personal situation, such as a relationship or worry.) The 'slit' marked on the template will need to be cut out.
- Give each person a sheet of A5 white paper and ask them to fold it into a concertina/fan by folding it over a strip about 2cm wide, turning it over and folding it again, then repeating this until all the paper is folded. Ask them to push this through the slit in the dove until the fan is halfway, then release to reveal two wings.
- You could provide string and invite people to hang their doves in a central location as an act of prayer, or say a simple prayer such as: 'God of unity, we pray for peace in these situations.'

A simple worship activity

E A

Make a commitment to work for peace and unity

- Play some reflective music and invite everyone to make a pledge before God to work for peace and unity by sharing a sign of peace with others around them, for example, by nodding/smiling, by shaking hands, or with a hug (being aware of what will feel comfortable to all involved). You could learn 'Peace be with you' in BSL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CoIRm5HQGFg>.

Connected together

S A

Pledging to work together for peace and unity

You will need: a piece of string for each person with enough length to connect to one another.

- Give each person a length of string.
- Play some reflective music and invite everyone to tie their pieces of string to someone else's as a symbol of a pledge to work for peace and unity.
- Could you work together to join all pieces of string into one circle?

A prayer for all ages together

Just as you called us,
help us to live as one.
So that we show your love,
help us to live as one.
Just as you, God, are one,
help us to live as one.
To bring peace to your world,
help us to live as one.
Amen.

Music

Suggested songs for your worship.

Bind us together (JP, HON, MP, ICF)

Oh, how good it is (Keith Getty, Praise Hymnal, God Welcomes All)

May you find peace (Fischy Music, God Welcomes All) <https://www.fischy.com/fischy-music-online/songs/may-you-find-peace-with-health-wellbeing-resources/>

We are one in the Spirit (GtG, Gather Comprehensive, Songs of God's People) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bL5bT_Ezeq8

One is the body (WGRG, A&M, HON, CH4, StF)

Go with God

Invite people to turn to someone around them and share one thing they value about being part of the worldwide church. What helps to unite us?

A sending out prayer

You are one, God:

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Help us to live as one

so that we may bring your love and peace to the world.

Amen.

Go with God



Putting your faith into action in the days ahead

This week, take some time to learn about another church community in your local area or a different part of the world. What do you have in common? What differences could you learn from? How might you pray for their situation?

