

## Resources

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# TOGETHER IN CHRIST

## 3 Prayer and Worship Together



All the faithful should remember that the more effort they make to live holier lives according to the Gospel, the better will they further Christian unity and put it into practice... This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and merits the name 'spiritual ecumenism'.

*Vatican II, Unitatis Redintegratio (Decree on Ecumenism), nn. 7-8*

To achieve Christian unity is beyond human power, and is a free gift of God: 'Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain' (*Ps. 127:1*). It is therefore something we must ask God for, in persevering prayer.

'It is significant that Jesus did not primarily express his desire for unity in a teaching or a commandment to his disciples, but in a prayer to his Father.' (Cardinal Kasper, *A Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism*, p.10).

It has been well said that it is almost impossible to quarrel with someone we have just been sincerely praying with. Praying together changes our relationship, because all sincere prayer is God's gift, and brings God with it. Prayer together is a time when, conscious of our common poverty, we ask God to fill our emptiness with his abundance. Such prayer together is also 'a humble but faithful sharing in the prayer of Jesus, who promised that any prayer in his name would be heard by the Father.' (*A Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism*, p.10).

## Ask yourselves

### ***What do we do already?***

It can be helpful to conduct a survey or 'audit' of the local area (see leaflet 2), to find out what people are already doing in the way of common prayer or formal worship. We may be pleasantly surprised to find out how the Holy Spirit has moved Christians to come together in the Lord. A Churches Together group, for example, can then simply give thanks that this is happening, be ready to offer support if requested, and pray that these initiatives will flourish and bear fruit as the Lord wills.

### ***What more can we do?***

As well as encouraging what is already happening, what else might be considered? Many, of course, will be much occupied with work and family, but perhaps there are retired people who would find quiet prayer together a ministry they could fulfil on behalf of all. Spiritual ecumenism is indeed 'the soul of the ecumenical movement', so it would be appropriate for a Churches Together group to spend a quiet day in prayer together, to ask for guidance and then to share ideas on what more could be done.

### ***What is our ecumenical worship like, and how welcoming is our 'normal' worship?***

If ecumenical services have been going on for some years, have they started to look a little tired? Is a fresh approach needed, with younger people involved? Ensure you involve everybody in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

What about our 'normal' services? Do other Christians feel at ease in them (e.g. baptisms, weddings, funerals)? Are invitations given for inductions of new clergy? Are the partners in interchurch marriages made to feel welcome at Sunday Mass?

## How about

**1.** The *Our Father*: This is of its nature the prayer of Christians together. It is the prayer of the baptized brothers and sisters of Christ, speaking together to the one we are privileged to call *Abba, Father*. This prayer is a powerful reminder of what we already are, a stimulus to strive towards what we are called to be, and a humble prayer for help towards that goal. Whenever Christians seeking unity come together, they should always say this prayer from the heart. It is a prayer for unity, *Thy kingdom come*; a prayer for forgiveness, *Forgive us our trespasses*; and a prayer that in the fullness of unity we may come to share the *daily Bread* of the Eucharist, and even now be one in our concern for the poor and hungry of the world, who lack their earthly bread.

**2.** In the Bidding Prayers at Mass pray frequently for the needs of the other local churches, and have an agreement to exchange prayer-requests among the churches, to be included frequently in the Sunday Intercessions.

**3.** In addition to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, hold ecumenical prayer and worship during the greater seasons of the year, especially Lent, Holy Week and Easter: e.g. prayer-groups; Stations of the Cross with a different church composing them each week; joint Palm Sunday procession; Good Friday walk of witness; and united services at Pentecost.

**4.** Arrange opportunities to take part in one another's worship, with suitable explanations – e.g. Catholic Prayer of the Church, or services of Anointing of the Sick outside Mass; Methodist non-Eucharistic services; Anglican Morning and Evening Prayer, and Harvest Festival.

**5.** It is important to be realistic. It is better to have modest aims and achieve something rather than be unrealistic and ultimately disappointed. The power of prayer cannot be measured by numbers: a few people, meeting regularly across the denominations to be with the Lord together, to pray for unity and for the needs of all, has a value which we cannot estimate, because it is the Lord who is at work.

'I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. Therefore neither the one who plants is anything, nor the one who waters; but God, who gives the increase.' (1 Cor 3: 6-7).