

Reflection of the Month: The Psalms mirroring our lives

Sarah Larkin writes:

In Hebrew the word 'psalm' means 'praises'. The Greek Psalmoi can mean 'songs sung to a harp'. It is striking to me that every human experience seems to be conveyed in these 150 songs – especially sorrow and pain, as well as thanksgiving and praise.



The Christian monk John Cassian (360-435) taught that the Psalms were a gateway to a form of prayer where the soul pours itself out to God. He said of the Psalms:

The Psalms are our own. If we penetrate deeply into the thinking of the Psalms, we will then sing them as if we ourselves had written them - our own private prayer uttered from the depths of our heart.

Psalms evoke memories. The sacred words stir memories within us, remembrances of the daily trials, the costs of our negligence or the profits of our zeal, the good things of providence and the deceits of the enemy.

The Psalms mirror our lives. The Psalms are not like things we have to remember but, rather, things brought to birth in the depths of our hearts. We enter into their meaning because of what we ourselves have experienced. We see our own lives mirrored in them.

As a poet and facilitator of the creative process in others, I have developed a way to help people internalise the Psalms. Psalm Readings simply turn Psalms into questions – by answering the questions, you can write your own psalm. For example this is what Psalm 131 looks when turned into questions (the psalmists 'answers' are in brackets):

What is my heart not? (My heart is not proud)
What are my eyes not? (My eyes are not haughty)
What do I not do? (Involve myself in great matters or in things too difficult for me)
What do I do with my soul? (I have composed and quieted my soul)
What is my soul like? (Like a weaned child rests against his mother, my soul is like a weaned child within me)
What does that cause me to do? (Hope in the Lord from this time forth and forever more)

What an interesting way to identify where you are on your spiritual journey. Here is an example of a contemporary response to Psalm 131:

My heart is not divided
My eyes are not veiled
I do not spend myself on the what does not satisfy
Held in the arms of night I have listened to my soul whispering to me
Taken aside, my soul is like a wise friend within me
I stand up straight, raise my hands and worship God

I will never forget the answer of one troubled young man to the question what is my soul like? He said, "My soul is like a blackened fig swinging on the branches of a tree". I always say to people that the main thing when writing anything is not - is it any good? But rather is it truthful?

It is also the case that every Psalm turns into different questions, and you answer the questions on different days and get different answers. So, by reading the Psalms today, we connect with God's people throughout the ages, and see our own lives mirrored in the lament, thanksgiving and praise of life. Why not have a go at writing your own version of Psalm 131? Don't think too much about your answers – go with what comes to you first and see what flows. You may be surprised by what emerges into the light of day.

Sarah Larkin (née Fordham) is a poet with three books published – Psalm Readings (2005), The Cool of the Day (2009) and Love's First Look (2010). In 2015 she was the poet in residence for the CTE Forum. Poetry blog: <http://scfordham.blogspot.com>
Sample sound file: <https://audioboom.com/posts/5564172-nicodemus-goes-public>

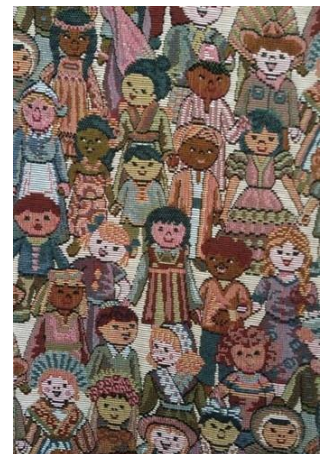
Catholic school admissions advice recognises Churches Together Groups

The Catholic Education Service has published a definition of 'children of other Christian denominations' which recognises churches in membership of local Churches Together groups.

Admissions policies are set by School Governing Bodies. They have to be fair, transparent, and administered equitably and efficiently. In an effort to allow the admission of faithful Christians who do not belong to the Church sponsoring the school, many church schools cite membership of Churches Together in England as a criterion. This excludes children whose families attend local independent churches and some smaller denominations. Each year such policies cause great distress.

It is in response to this problem that the Catholic Education Service offers Catholic schools a definition of 'children of other Christian denominations' which uses the [basis](#) of Churches Together in England and includes 'churches and ecclesial communities that are in membership of any local Churches Together Group (by whatever title)'.

[Download the statement and read more about CTE and school admissions.](#)



Women's World Day of Prayer 3rd March 2017



Elizabeth Burroughs, Chairperson National Committee for England, Wales & Northern Ireland writes:

'WWDP is very close to my heart, it is unique in its breadth and the unity and friendship it creates. Amazing. It achieves so much.' These are the words of one of our Preparation Day organisers, but I wish I had thought of them first. WWDP is indeed unique: the largest ecumenical movement in the world, the only one in which Orthodox and Protestant, Catholic and Evangelical come together to worship; covering 170 countries and territories, many more than the World Council of Churches.

And it is a wonderful way of making friends. Our Facebook page is read by people from many countries, some of whom we are getting to know, and every year we receive e-mails and letters from all over the world. Our prayer partners are the WDP Committee of Albania. This Committee is relatively new and struggles financially. So, our National Committee has supported them for a number of years. For three out of the past four years, a couple of Committee members have attended their annual conference in January and two people will be going again later this month.

WWDP also achieves much, not only through the grants we are able to provide to charities and the publicity we give to some of the smaller ones in Together in Prayer, but also by raising awareness about some of the troubled areas of the world and about some of the problems experienced by women and children in our own country. As we prepare for the service written by the Christians women of the Philippines, we pray for justice for all women and children everywhere and pledge ourselves to fight against discrimination and oppression wherever we find it.

Remember the power of prayer

All information on the website: <http://www.wwdp.org.uk/>



Lent course 2017

Returning Home

Christian faith
in encounter with other faiths

Download resources from:
www.ctbi.org.uk/lent



Catholic-Lutheran Common Prayer

Canon John O'Toole, Very Revd Thomas Bruch and Revd Susanne Freddin Skovhus on behalf of Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales & the Council of Lutheran Churches in GB, write:

From Conflict to Communion

Catholic-Lutheran Common Prayer
Sunday 26 March 2017 at 3 Pm

This year, in 2017, Catholics and Lutherans are commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, by reflecting on 50 years of official worldwide ecumenical dialogue and building on the communion that they share. This encourages Lutherans and Catholics to celebrate together their common witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet, amidst this celebration, they also acknowledge the suffering caused by the division of the Church, and look critically at themselves, not only throughout history, but also in a contemporary context. After the service, which is based on the Common Prayer liturgy prepared by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, there will be a social event in the Cathedral's Amigo Hall.

Preachers are the Most Revd Bernard Longley, Archbishop of Birmingham (above), and the Rt Revd Martin Lind, Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Great Britain (below).



SUNDAY 26 MARCH 2017 AT 3 PM AT ST GEORGE'S CATHEDRAL

Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HR [opposite the Imperial War Museum]

[Download PDF A4 poster for Catholic-Lutheran Common Prayer](#)



The appointment of a new Orthodox President for CTE

Churches Together in England
Press release
30th January 2017

Rev Dr David Cornick, General Secretary of Churches Together in England writes:



'We are delighted to announce that HG Bishop Angaelos, General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom has succeeded HE Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain as the Orthodox President of Churches Together in England. He will serve alongside The Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, HE Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, the Revd Dr Hugh Osgood, the Moderator of the Free Churches Group, Bishop Eric Brown who represents the Pentecostal Churches and the Revd Canon Billy Kennedy who represented the Lutheran community, the Society of Friends and the New Churches.

Churches Together in England also express their warm thanks to his predecessor, H.E. Archbishop Gregorios whose four-year period of office has drawn to a close. The Archbishop was the first President to represent the Orthodox churches within CTE, a ground-breaking piece of ecumenical service. It is a joy to us that the ancient traditions of the Orthodox are such a significant and valued part of the life and experience of the English church family, and we look forward to consolidating that during Bishop Angaelos's Presidency'.

His Grace Bishop Angaelos, General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom, says: "Having a President specifically representing the Orthodox traditions was a dream that started almost 15 years ago, and it was with great joy that the first President agreed upon to represent the Orthodox Churches in that specific category was His Eminence Metropolitan Gregorios, a brother and dear friend to us all. We are all thankful for all he has done in the past four years and for his wider ministry across Britain. I look forward to working with all the CTE Presidents, who I am glad to say are valued friends and inspirational Church leaders. Churches and Church leaders witnessing together is the greatest way to ensure that the light of Christ reaches our whole nation, and CTE is a wonderful lampstand from which that light emanates."

Photo credit: Coptic Media Centre UK

Homeless Sunday call for a 'comprehensive long-term strategy' re homelessness

Adam May writes:

Thousands of Christian communities across the UK today (Sunday 22nd January 2017) will be marking Homeless Sunday. As part of this year's campaign, Action and Advocacy: a Christian response to homelessness is being published this morning.



The statement, coordinated by Housing Justice and is signed by the Bishop of Rochester and National charities, comes as an attempt to unite the Christian homeless sector voice to both the church and to Government. The aim of Action and Advocacy: a Christian response to homelessness is commit the church to better working with Government at national and local level to see a joined up response to homelessness.

The statement, whilst expressing it's 'absolute dismay' about homelessness at the local level, contains an acknowledgement that no one sector alone will be able to see homeless figures fall and offers a pledge from the churches to serve the needs of those sleeping rough or in temporary accommodation. The statement also calls upon the churches to remain an independent voice holding local Government authorities to account in the treatment of those who are facing housing injustice. Recognising the unique position of the churches, mainly through its high level of volunteers, the statement calls upon the Government to engage in regular meetings with Housing Justice and other partners to see how a more proactive relationship can begin to emerge.

It calls upon the Government to develop and implement a comprehensive, long-term national strategy to end homelessness in England, starting by ensuring that every local authority has a strategy to address homelessness in their own locality. Housing Justice, in partnership with the other signatories is calling upon local churches to adopt this statement as a sign of grass-roots support. Churches wishing to sign up can do so on the Housing Justice website; www.housingjustice.org.uk

Welcoming the publication of the statement, Housing Justice Chief Executive, Alison Gelder said: *"Born out of a symposium style event in Parliament in the Autumn, Action and Advocacy: a Christian response to homelessness is a call for the churches and the Government to seek strong relationships in the days, weeks and months ahead. As the statement acknowledges the state of homelessness in England and Wales is an absolute tragedy and it is now time for a more cooperative strategy to developed, with input from and in active partnership with, the churches. Publishing this statement this morning as churches mark Homeless Sunday and also in the same week in which, we hope, the Homelessness Reduction Bill will be debated for the third time, shows a strong commitment from leading Christian homelessness organisations intentionally to unite to take part in addressing the challenges before us. This is timely statement and I hope Government will sit up and take notice of the pledge of the churches. But also that the churches will recognise their calling to be part of the national conversation which now needs to take place."*

Link to full Statement and further information:

http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/489027/Home/News/Latest_news_articles/Homeless_Sunday_call.aspx

CTE Staff member co-President of Housing Justice

The Chair of Housing Justice and Bishop of Rochester, the Rt Revd James Langstaff is delighted to announce that Bishop Dr Joe Aldred, Pentecostal and Multicultural Relations Officer for Churches Together in England and BBC broadcaster has agreed to serve as a Co-President of the organisation.



Bishop Joe will join the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Vincent Nicholas and Ms Rachel Lampard (reported in January CTe-News) in a three way joint Presidency of the charity. Each of the Presidents has extensive knowledge and wisdom in both the church, housing and homelessness sector.

Dr Aldred takes up this honorary position in addition to his work full time on the staff team for Churches Together in England with responsibility for Pentecostal and Multicultural Relations.

As part of his new role as a Co-President of Housing Justice, Bishop Joe visited one of the Birmingham Winter Shelter venues accompanied by Emma Neil, Housing Justice Birmingham Development Coordinator. The Birmingham Churches Winter Night Shelter is a community of individuals, churches and organisations that work together to provide emergency accommodation, food and support to homeless people in Birmingham during the coldest winter months through welcoming them into our churches and providing hospitality.



Speaking of his new role, Bishop Dr Joe Aldred said: *"Being approached to take on this new role at Housing Justice is an honour, because I would dearly love to live in a society where everyone has a home. I believe the church has a huge contribution, which will grow in the coming years and this must be a response of the whole church, in unity. I look forward to working with my fellow presidents and all those connected to Housing Justice as together we contribute to making this ideal as close to reality as possible."*

Senior Church Leaders gather in South London

Claire Crowley from Churches Together in South London, writes:

On Thursday 19 January 2017, senior church leaders gathered to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at Methodist Central Hall Westminster.



Back row left-right: Greek Orthodox, Very Rev Archimandrite Christodoulos Persopoulos of St. Mary's Cathedral, Camberwell, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Southwark, Most Rev Peter Smith, Salvation Army Divisional Mission Commander South London Division, Captain Kevin Stanbury, Newer Free Churches, Roger Forster of Ichthus Christian Fellowship

Front row left-right: London Quakers, Eleri Pengelly, United Reformed Church Moderator, Southern Synod, Rev Nicola Furley-Smith, Newer Free Churches, Faith Forster of Ichthus Christian Fellowship, Methodist London District Chair, Rev Michaela Youngson, Churches Together in South London, Claire Crowley

Meeting together at the invitation of Churches Together in South London (CTSL), these leaders demonstrate the strong relationships and shared purposes of South London's churches. Reverend Nicola Furley-Smith offered a reflection at the invitation of Reverend Michaela Youngson, Chair of CTSL, and spoke about reconciliation. Drawing on the theme of Crossing Barriers for this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Nicola recounted that on an international conference last summer, many were

grappling with issues affecting community. There was Brexit, a growing antagonism to refugees in Germany, and towards the Romany community in Ostrava, the possibility of a President Trump – surely not! In each place there was a common theme of the Gospel call to live not for ourselves but for Christ, to reach out to others and to break down the barriers of isolation.

CTSL's Chair invited the leaders to share key initiatives for 2017 and many shared priorities emerged, including London Churches Social Action's #LondonUnited campaign and Christian Aid's #ChangetheStory campaign. It is a strong witness to fellowship between denominations to see this group of Christian leaders meeting with one another to pray, reflect, discuss and eat together at a time when unity, friendship and multilateral partnership, is crucial for our city and world.

Churches Together in South London (CTSL) represents over 50 local ecumenical networks across 10 London boroughs south of the River Thames, and is one of 49 intermediary bodies around the country for Churches Together in England.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CTSouthLondon>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/CTSouthLondon>

Website: www.ctslondon.org.uk.

Ecumenical Officer for Mission and Evangelism

Sought by the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity

Role: Developing the Church of England's relationships with other churches as part of the Council for Christian Unity staff team, you will have a particular focus on mission and evangelism.



You will need wide-ranging knowledge of the Church of England and its ecumenical relationships, as well as communication skills that match the demands of this role. Commitment to the Christian dimension of the work is important. The post holder should be a communicant member of the Church of England (*in accordance with the Equality Act 2010*).

Salary: Salary: £50,604 per annum rising to £53,662 per annum upon successful completion of probationary period

A very competitive benefits package is also offered with this appointment including 30 days paid annual leave per annum plus Bank holidays, three additional NCI holidays, an excellent pensions package and an interest free season ticket loan.

Location: Church House, Westminster

Contract Type: Permanent, 35 hours per week

Closing Date: Friday 3rd March 2017

Interviews: Friday 24th March 2017

[Click here for details of how to apply](#)

What is unity? What isn't unity?

Fr John O'Toole, National Ecumenical Officer, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, considered this question during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The text is available on the CTE website under 'Theology' and 'Reflections on Unity'. Here are some extracts.



Unity is both a gift from God and a task. The task is to welcome that gift and to make it visible to others.

..... This year marks the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation and this is the first time in history that a centenary anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation is being commemorated in an ecumenical age. It is easier to be an historian than a prophet, but what might glimpses of the ecumenical future look like?

I was very struck by some words of Pope Francis recently. [1] He referred to the important ecumenical meetings he had attended in 2016, including both the Anglican-Catholic Dialogue meeting in Rome and the October Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue at Lund in Sweden. He stressed that it is by growing closer to the person of Christ and conforming ourselves to him – personally and as a community – that we grow closer to others. This is the soul and the heart of ecumenical talking and walking.

Pope Francis went on importantly to list three 'false models' of communion, three things that full communion is not:

- Unity is not the fruit of our human effort but is instead 'a gift that comes from on high' – a gift of the Spirit. It is something for us to receive rather than to achieve.
- Unity is not uniformity. Our different traditions are a wealth for and not a threat to the unity of the Church. Seeking to suppress this diversity is to counter the Holy Spirit who acts by enriching the community of believers with a variety of gifts.
- Unity is not absorption. No one would have to deny their own history of faith. Unity is not 'being swallowed up into one big blob', as someone said to me recently. Before seeing what separates us, it is necessary to perceive the wealth of what we have in common, especially the Scriptures and the Creeds. In this way we Christians are able to acknowledge that we are brothers and sisters who are called not to compete with one another but to collaborate in joint witness and mission to the part of the world in which we live.

I am interested that Pope Francis doesn't offer a 'true' model of communion. He is happy to leave the destination in God's hands and in God's time. Our gift and our task is to walk the journey together. 'Remember', Pope Francis has said, 'when we work, pray and serve the needy together, we are already united.'

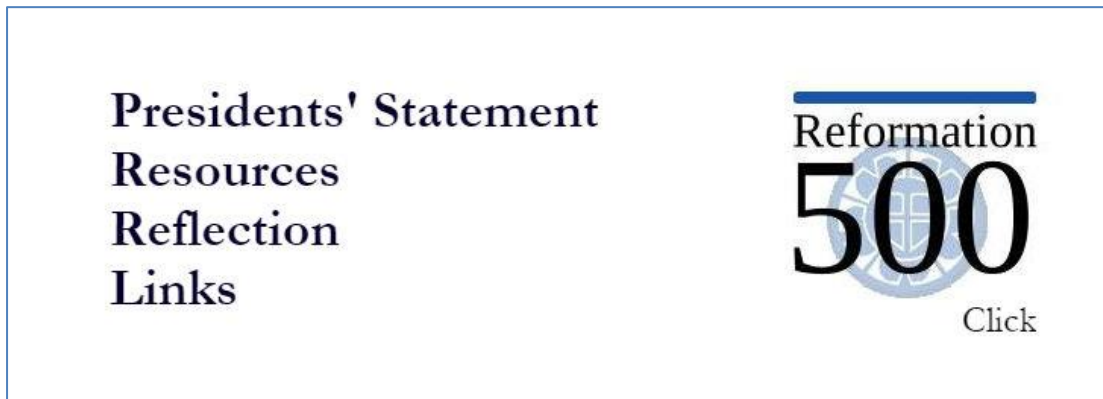
*Homily for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
St Mary's Anglican Church, Barnes, 22 January 2017 (edited)*

[1] November 2016 audience to participants in a plenary session of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity on the theme: Christian Unity: what model for full communion?

Full text:

http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/286331/Home/Resources/Theology/Reflections_on_unity/What_is_unity/What_is_unity.aspx

'Reformation 500' on CTE website



This banner on the CTE website links to a hub which will be expanded. The purpose of the hub is to signpost where further information is found:

http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/276196/Home/Resources/500th_anniversary_of/500th_anniversary_of.aspx

Changes in West Yorkshire

West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council (WYEC) closed at the end of 2016 and on 1 January 2017 West Yorkshire Churches Together (WYCT) was born. Church Leaders of the eleven Member Churches will continue to meet, as will Denominational Ecumenical Officers. The change 'reflects the desire of the leaders of Member Churches to respond to contemporary ecumenical needs in West Yorkshire'.



WYEC was publicly launched in 1987, building on the ecumenical co-operation that had been established between the Churches for many years. It has been at the forefront of national and regional thinking and practice on Christian unity, providing support for Churches Together groups, Local Ecumenical Partnerships and many initiatives in local ecumenism. It has provided opportunities for senior Church Leaders and Denominational Ecumenical Officers to meet together, to further relationships, and to plan strategically together. It has enabled the Church Leaders to be visibly united, speaking with one voice on issues of common concern.

West Yorkshire Churches Together will build on these solid foundations and the excellent work done by the Rev Dr Clive Barrett, Executive Secretary for the past ten years. WYCT will be served by an Administrator, Deacon Nick Shields. Visit [their new website](#) for contact details.

27 Church leaders launch Prison Hope

'Prison Hope' got off to a great start in 2017 when 26 Rugby church leaders were invited to breakfast by David Spademan, Managing Chaplain at HMP Onley. He said: 'As a chaplain I am passionate to get church leaders into prison to show them how they can help support men and women in prison and on release.'



The leaders enjoyed a cooked breakfast in the Lock Inn, the prison's training catering facility. They also spent time in the Prison Chapel for worship and to ask questions about work in the prison. Then 14 of the leaders toured some of the training workshops and heard about how the men are helped to find employment and accommodation after leaving prison. For many of the leaders it was their first time in prison. The aim was to break down preconceptions and to explore ways for them and their congregations to partner with the prison Chaplaincy Team. It is hoped that many prison chaplains will link with local churches in this way through Prison Hope.

'Prison Hope' is a new initiative of Hope

Together: <http://www.hopetogether.org.uk/Group/Group.aspx?ID=272850>

Visit www.prisonhope.org.uk to find out how your church can get involved in your area.

Justice
for all

Racial Justice Sunday
12 February 2017

Download resources from:
www.ctbi.org.uk/rjsunday

churches together
IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Image: Wendy Cope (Flickr)

And finally ...

1. **You and your Bible survey results.** The Bible Society is a Body in Association of CTE and recently invited Christians to say how they read the Bible. 3,700 replies came in and the results can be viewed online in a summary presentation in a full text PDF. We hope to have further information in a future edition of CTe-News, but for the PDF [click this link](#).

2. **Hereford Ecumenical Companions:** The Bishop of Hereford (Chair of Churches Together in Hereford, together with the Chapter of Hereford Cathedral, has appointed two new Ecumenical Companions: Father Cadfan Williams of Belmont Abbey, and Steve Sully of Challenge Community Church, Hereford.
3. **Norwich Ecumenical Canons:** During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the Bishop of Norwich welcomed three new Ecumenical Canons: Very Rev David Paul, Dean of St John's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Rev Julian Pursehouse, Chair of the East Anglia Methodist District, and Pastor Jon Norman of Soul Church.

(Do please notify website@cte.org.uk of other appointments of Ecumenical Companions/Canons)

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