

Church Unity

In this week of prayer for Christian unity it is right that we should focus today on the need for reconciliation between and within the different denominations. If we as a Church are to offer an effective ministry of peace and reconciliation then we clearly need to get our own house in order.

Although there are still many divisions within the Church we should not become too disheartened, though. Much has been achieved over the last sixty years or so. For there was a time when many Christians would not even step foot in the church of another denomination.

Happily we have moved beyond that, and there are now often good relations between congregations and individuals. The Archbishop of Canterbury's visit to Rome last year, whilst reminding us of the divisions between the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, did display much good will. The Pope also took part in a celebration in Sweden with Lutherans in preparation for their five hundred years celebration of the Reformation later this year.

Structural unity may be a long way off, and Christians will continue to have different views on a number of theological, ecclesiastical, social and moral issues. Indeed some issues are more divisive within individual denominations than between them.

Such differences were apparent from the very beginning of the Church. St Paul and others had deal with disagreements not dissimilar to those in our own time. We heard as our reading just now his great call for unity in his letter to the church in Ephesus (Ephesians 4.1-6). Indeed as Christians we should all follow his call to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". For despite our differences we all share in the fundament belief in "one Lord, one faith, one baptism one God and Father of all".

In our world in which there is conflict, violence, fear, uncertainty, pain and suffering, there is such a great need for the Good News of God's love to be heard loud and clear. That love needs to be shown in the lives of those who seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. If Christians do not love another and do not speak with one voice then the Gospel will be diminished and ignored.

That puts a great responsibility on those of us who profess and call themselves Christians. And we know we cannot do it with own resources alone. And so we pray for the grace and strength we receive from God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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