

Christian Unity

Yesterday marked the beginning of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The many divisions within the Christian Church are a cause of great sadness and regret. They very much diminish the effectiveness of the proclamation of the Good News to which we are all called. How can we further the work of peace and reconciliation in the world when we are so divided ourselves?

Of course division exists not only between different denominations but within them. Indeed those within denominations can sometimes be more marked. There are many different views on important issues within our own Anglican Communion. Fortunately we are still largely able to remain one Church, though there are real tensions.

Open and honest dialogue is required, which is a prerequisite of the process of reconciliation. It has to be said that over the last fifty years relations between the different denominations have greatly improved at both official and ground root levels. That is to be applauded yet also built upon further.

What we are seeking to achieve is not uniformity. That would be neither realistic nor desirable. For it is through the richness of diversity that our faith can be deepened. We can learn so much from one another, from different ways of understanding Scripture and its message, from different traditions of spirituality and worship, from different forms of serving others. We should celebrate diversity, not seek to suppress it.

It is the recognition and awareness of the underlying unity between Christians that we need to rediscover. For our unity is in Christ. We heard as our Bible reading just now (John 17.20-26) part of our Lord's final discourse to his disciples before his arrest, trial and crucifixion. Jesus prays that his disciples will be one, just as he is one with the Father. That oneness, that unity is based on love, on the very example of God's love for us shown in the saving acts of his Son Jesus Christ.

In view of the competing pressures of our world, in the face of conflict, violence and oppression in many parts of it, that underlying unity is all the more essential. To adapt the well-known saying, divided we are likely to fail, but together we can more easily conquer people's hearts and minds to see and embrace God's love.

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