

Introduction to the Ecumenical Worship Service

“You are witnesses of these things.” (Luke 24:48)

The theme for the 2010 week of prayer for Christian Unity is *“You are witnesses of these things.”* It comes from chapter 24 of Luke’s gospel which is the central focus of this service. This is also the theme which Scottish Christians have chosen to celebrate the centenary of the Edinburgh Mission Conference.

In 1910 members of the meeting in Edinburgh heard prophetic witness as to how divisions between Christians not only weaken missionary effectiveness, but also the Church and body of Christ and its mission.

In 2010 the Christians of Scotland invite ecumenical gatherings to read aloud the whole of this chapter of Luke. Thus preaching, thanksgiving, intercession and the celebration of being sent out in the name of the gospel can all be fully developed. This will lead to an appreciation of the resurrection of Christ as the source of ecclesial communion, of being sent out in mission, of the intrinsic link between mission and unity and, therefore, of the continual need to renew our commitment to Christian unity.

It was precisely this reciprocal demand for evangelism and for ecumenism that the pioneers of the ecumenical movement of the 20th century emphasized with such faith, strength and clarity.

Order of service

The order of service is deliberately very simple. This choice was made in order to help with adapting it to local situations and to allow Christians from all traditions to come together without difficulty to pray while respecting their diversity. It is quite possible to expand a part of the service. The simplicity of the structure – (I) gathering, (II) celebration of the Word of God, (III) intercessions, (IV) sending – means that congregations which prefer freer forms of worship and spontaneous prayer should also be able to use the material.

The following notes have been adapted from the international resources for use in Australia.

I) Gathering

The congregation would gather as usual. A carafe of wine and a loaf of bread would have already been placed on the altar or table. These symbols will remain untouched throughout the service, with no direct reference being made to them.

The words of welcome would include an acknowledgement of country.

This would also be the time and place to welcome the Word of God.

The welcome to the Word of God would be best done in gesture without words, for example by a procession with the Bible. It would be particularly fitting if it were “danced in” by one of the cultural groups in the community who would regularly “dance” the Word in procession, e.g. the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, or a Pacific islander community. This could also highlight the contribution of women as witnesses.

The assembly is then invited to give thanks to God for the resurrection of his son Jesus Christ and to ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit to renew Christian mission and unity in the spirit of the Edinburgh call of 1910 (see also the general introduction and the passage above).

The *opening prayer* can also be chosen from the anthology in the appendix.

II) Proclamation of Luke 24

The *Gospel hymn of praise*. There are a variety to choose from: hymns to the risen Christ, a gloria, an alleluia in a more developed form, a chant or responsive paschal Psalm or one which evokes the sending out of the witnesses of the resurrection.

This is a long reading and would be best done in parts as follows:

Verses 1-12 are read by a single reader.

At the end of the reading the congregation sing the Easter Alleluia.

Verses 13-35 are a dramatic reading with three or four voices: the narrator, Jesus, and Disciples on the Road.

At the end of the reading after a brief moment of silence a lone (unseen) voice would address the congregation: "He has vanished from our sight; he is absent. Where is he present today?" This should be followed by an extended period of silence.

Verses 36-49 are read by a single reader.

At the end of the reading the congregation sing the Easter Alleluia.

Verses 50-53 are read by a single reader.

The sermon would follow.

At that place in the Service where the Hymn and Offering occur, it would be helpful to speak words to invite people to make an offering, in the spirit of the mission that we have received from the risen Lord. The congregation could also be told of the way the offering will be used in the service of mission.

III) Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession

These are inspired by the material prepared for the each day of the week of prayer. They invoke the name of the Lord and celebrate God in his generosity and hospitality towards us manifested in Jesus Christ. They are at once prayers of supplication and a request for God's consecration of witnesses to the Gospel, united by one faith and one baptism, and by the common witness of the church which is undivided in its hope.

An appropriate place to make a modification to the Intercessions would be after the third Kyrie. Here we could recognise the original inhabitants of the land, and those who have come at a later time. We could also begin to name the cloud of witnesses to the faith from among our own land, and our own local communities. We could also give thanks and pray for the witness of women in our communities.

IV) Sending

A prayer by a Scottish Christian is proposed as a prayer of commitment. It expresses our desire to ask for God's blessing for the present and future, both of the ecumenical movement and of evangelism. In the year 2010 as we approach a new "Edinburgh commitment", may our gatherings for prayer hear the more than ever contemporary call to evangelize in unity: "May we be one, that the world may believe", and may our response to Christ's call to bear united witness to his resurrection be strengthened.

Ecumenical Worship Service

I) Gathering

Opening hymn

Opening responses

L. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling..."

A. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."

L. "It is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem..."

A. "We are the witnesses of these things."

Words of welcome

Opening prayer

O risen Christ,
On the road to Emmaus you were the disciples' companion.
Be at our side on the journey of faith
on life's pathways and at every encounter,
engender our compassion so that we may welcome others
and listen to their stories.
Kindle anew the desire to proclaim your Word.
May it illumine us and may our hearts burn to bear witness to it.
May your Holy Spirit teach us the art of explaining scripture
and open our eyes to recognize you.
Grant us the courage to become vulnerable
so that our sisters and brothers may know you through us
and that we may know you through them.
Amen

II) Celebration of the Word of God

Sung acclamation of the gospel

Reading of the whole of chapter 24 of the Gospel of Luke

Sermon

Hymn

The peace

L. Jesus said to his disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." Do not look upon our sin but on the faith of your church. To fulfil your will, grant this peace to your church and lead it to perfect unity, you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever.

A. Amen

L. The peace of the Lord be always with you.

A. And also with you.

Or

L. The peace of the Lord be always with you

A. The risen Christ is indeed among us

Or

L. Christ is risen.

A. Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia.

The Nicene-Constantinople creed (without the filioque)

Offering and hymn

III) Intercessions

Creator and saviour God, we praise you for all our different communities who together want to confess, through word and deed, their faith in the risen Christ, who brings us life.

May we so progress in our ecumenical commitment that we become more united both in our thanksgiving for creation and in our concerted action to uphold life.

Kyrie eleison (or an alternative sung response)

God, you have made yourself known to us in our story, we give you thanks for being with us and for having given us your Son to reveal your love and share your glory.

Guide the steps of all who bear witness to the gospel towards perfect unity, in careful and patient listening to cultures and people's history.

Kyrie eleison

God, you who never abandon us, we give you thanks for the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus with the risen Christ.

Grant that we may feel Christ's presence with us on our journey. Warm our hearts and open our understanding, that we may bear witness to your active presence in the power of his resurrection.

Kyrie eleison

God, from whom every perfect gift comes, we give you thanks that from the dawn of time from generation to generation you have never ceased to awaken that cloud of witnesses which transmitted the faith of the apostles. (Saint Ninian, Saint Columbus ... - *at this point each congregation can mention local evangelists and martyrs*).

We pray that we may be faithful to this faith we have been entrusted with, and creative, so as together to open up new paths of the gospel.

Kyrie eleison

God, of compassion, we give you thanks because you have reconciled the world through the cross of your Son.

Increase our faith, that it may give our churches and each of us, with Christ and following his example, the strength always to stand more effectively alongside people in their lives, suffering and death.

Kyrie eleison

God, we put our hope in you and praise you for Jesus' promise, "See, I am with you always even unto the end of time."

You see the doubts which beset our hearts on the path to Christian unity. Following the example of the ecumenical pioneers of the Edinburgh conference of 1910, give us courage to denounce together our current fears and clarity to regain trust in 2010 on the path to the fulfilment of your will.

The Lord's prayer

IV) Sending

Prayer of commitment

L. Let us pray.

A. Take us from where we are, to where you want us to be;
make us not merely guardians of a heritage,
but living signs of your coming Kingdom;
fire us with passion for justice and peace between all people;
fill us with that faith, hope and love which embody the Gospel;

and through the power of the Holy Spirit make us one.
That the world may believe, that your name may be enthroned in our nation,
that your church may more effectively be your body,
we commit ourselves to love you, serve you,
and follow you as pilgrims not strangers.

(ACTS commitment. Taken from the Inaugural Service
of Action of Churches Together in Scotland)

Blessing

L. The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you always.
A. And also with you.

or

L. The Lord who conquered darkness with light,
give peace to you.
The Lord who conquered death with life,
give peace to you.
The Lord who conquered loneliness with love,
give peace to you.

Or another blessing.

Sending forth

L. Today the risen Christ says to us, "As the Father sent me, so I send you".
A. Amen.

L. We have been told the Good News of the resurrection of Jesus, "We are the witnesses of these things". Go then in the peace of Christ. Alleluia!
A. Thanks be to God. Amen, Alleluia!

Final hymn