



Faith – Hope – Love – Since 1972



*Reflecting on our Jubilee*  
A Small Group Study Series

The URC celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in October 2022. To mark this various writers have contributed to a series of readings, reflections, and prayers which will be distributed through the Daily Devotions email list every morning over the first two weeks of October. Some of these reflections have been used to provide these small group study sessions which will encourage us to reflect, give thanks, and rise to the challenge of being part of the URC in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Each session involves hymns from a variety of URC writers to help us reflect.

## *Session 2 The Quest for Unity*

**Hymn**            Your Love Alone Turns Action into Service  
© The Rev'd Sue McCoan Tune Finlandia

Your love alone turns action into service,  
Your grace alone turns speaking into prayer.  
All that we are is held within your mercy,  
all that we do, made holy in your care.  
Spirit of God, breathe through us in our worship,  
take and transform the gifts and griefs we bear.

2: Bind with your truth this act of dedication;  
confirm with hope each step of faith we take;  
disturb with joy our cautious hesitation  
renew with strength the promises we make.  
Spirit of God, pour out your affirmation,  
bless us for life, made sacred for your sake.

### **Introduction**

#### **Ephesians 4: 1-6**

I entreat you, then I, a prisoner for the Lord's sake: as God has called you, live up to your calling. Be humble always and gentle, and patient too. Be forbearing with one another and charitable. Spare no effort to make fast with bonds of peace the unity which the Spirit gives. There is one body and one Spirit, as there is also one hope held in God's call to you; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But each of us has been given his gift, his due portion of Christ's bounty.

*(New English Bible)*

### **Reflection**

### **Questions**

- Is the search for Christian unity still something which energises us?
- What does your congregation do to reflect our desire for unity with other Christians?
- What gifts and skills do you have which might help in that ministry?

### **Prayer**

We use now a prayer of confession and repentance from the Westminster Abbey service marking our formation.

O God eternal,  
with whom alone there is healing for our divisions;  
we confess and repent of all in our past disunity  
which sprang from pride and not from love of truth;  
all uncharitable thoughts, words and deeds  
which have hindered thy healing work;  
all individual failings and sins which have added to confusion  
and broken the peace of thy Church.  
Have mercy upon us, we pray thee;  
cover all our sins by thy forgiveness,  
and renew our life in thy love;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Hymn God of the Pilgrim Way**

© The Rev'd Colin Thompson. Tune: Colin suggests the German Chorale *Darmstadt* by Ahasuerus Fritsch (1629-1701) which can be heard on the URC website here <https://urc.org.uk/who-we-are/our-50th-anniversary/urc-at-50-worship-resources-competition/> but it also works well to Nun Danket "Now Thank We All Our God" which is better known.

1 God of the pilgrim way,  
guide of each generation,  
through ever-changing years  
our sure and firm foundation:  
we turn to you, the source  
of all that's good and true,  
the never-failing store  
of treasures old and new.

2 We praise you for the lives  
of those who went before us,  
saints honoured, saints unsung,  
the witness which they bore us;  
for those who took to heart  
the prayer of Christ the Son,  
that all who bear his name  
should be in Christ as one:

3 One Church, a house of peace,  
where people long surrounded  
by walls built to divide  
meet, held in Love unbounded.  
The suffering of our world,  
the sorrows of our earth  
cry for your healing touch,  
long for a second birth.

4 And when the way grows hard,  
and will and purpose fail us,  
when dreams and visions die,  
and doubts and fears assail us,  
let wisdom from on high  
our troubled spirits raise,  
walk with us on the road  
and set our hearts ablaze.

5 United for your sake, by grace a new creation,  
grant us the strength to serve the work of your salvation:  
hope for a world unsoiled by terror, lies and greed,  
faith in a future blest where Love's commandments lead.

### **Isaiah 11.6**

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.

'Unity in Christ is not achieved by keeping quiet but by engaging in a difficult and complex costly argument; it is not achieved by pouring oil on troubled waters but by dealing with the trouble; it is not achieved by leaving Jerusalem for the quiet hills of Galilee but by riding into the city and cleansing the temple. Confrontation must be the hallmark of your life: not peace but a sword... My second suggestion is about inclusion. As a church in your life together and as you send each other back and forth to serve the everyday world you will do your level best never to reject and exclude those you confront.'

*The Rev'd Dr Michael Taylor,  
Charge to the United Reformed Church, 1 April 2000*

## Reflection

### Questions

- How does your congregation bear witness to and work for justice?
- Where has the URC, and your local congregations, been part of calling out injustice?
- How might your church better reflect Lindsey Sanderson's idea that all are to be truly included in God's household?

### Prayer

Confronting and yet including God,  
through the leading of the Spirit  
prompt us to engage in the costly complex arguments of our day.  
Expand the boundaries of our comfort zones,  
remove the scales of prejudice and injustice from our eyes,  
give us courage to take action in the face of much greater opposition  
so that all may be welcomed into the community of your Church  
and share fully in the feast of abundant life. Amen

### Hymn

The Earth Is Yours, O Lord Our God

© The Rev'd Dominic Grant, Tune: How Can I Keep From Singing?

The earth is yours, O Lord our God,  
and everything that's in it;  
mere aliens and tenants we,  
yet still we strive to win it.  
So easily seduced and swayed  
by Empire's brash occlusion,  
we overlook your leasehold-terms:  
"enjoyment, not exclusion".

2: And on this cusp of Jubilee  
we've recognised temptation  
to seek to 'wow' a fickle crowd,  
sidestepping true vocation.  
But we believe you've brought us here  
to strengthen and re-wild us,  
to hear afresh and trust anew  
the call that once beguiled us.

3: Therefore with thanks for all that's past,  
we hold firm in the present,  
anticipating future hope  
unceasing, incandescent –  
a hope that shapes and changes us,  
a free space that we enter,  
a rule of hospitality  
with Jesus at the centre.

4: And till that final Jubilee  
of reset and redemption,  
we'll pledge to live in faithfulness  
to your declared intention.  
Refreshed and reconditioned here,  
you send us now in mission:  
to give the Church a mighty shake,  
or such is our tradition!

### Ezra 3:10-13

When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments were stationed to praise the Lord with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, according to the directions of King David of Israel; and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, 'For he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever towards Israel.' And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations, wept with a loud voice when they saw this house, though many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted so loudly that the sound was heard far away.

## Reflection

## Questions

- Our forebears were very interested in how the Church was to be governed – bishops or councils, priest/minister or Elders/Church Meeting etc. How important is the way we are governed to you? Is this a vital aspect of our life together?
- What might you change in the way your local church or the wider URC is governed?
- If, as James Breslin suggests, the formation of the URC was the happy culmination in a 300 year process, what should our task be now? To seek further unions or to see our purpose as something different (if so, what?)
- Each union has, paradoxically, caused pain and separation with a minority of congregations remaining out of the unions. Has this further division, in the face of union, impaired our life and ministry?

## Prayer

O God, we give thanks for those who down the ages have been moved to build and sustain our Church. We remember with gratitude the worship, prayer, and witness of those whose efforts created the United Reformed Church. We give thanks for those with gifts in hymnody and prayer who during these 50 years have enriched and encouraged the whole of Christ's church. Amen.

## Hymn Writers

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## Contributors

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