Together We Walk

Paul’s 1st Letter to the Thessalonians

Writing a Modern Day Letter to our Partner Churches

This resource will help you follow Paul’s example of writing letters of encouragement and camaraderie to one of our partner churches through Bible study, prayer, and information on the Greek Evangelical Church. In this year of Europe we would encourage you to write to Greece, but if you have a connection to any of our other partner churches across the world you can apply the same method and write to them instead!
Introduction

Throughout the New Testament we are taught to do certain things with or for our fellow Christians. For example, in Romans 13: 8 Paul tells us that we are to love one another and in 1 Peter 4: 9 we are told to offer hospitality to one another. In his first letter to the Thessalonians 5: 11 Paul teaches us that we are to encourage one another: ‘Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.’ (1 Thess 5: 11)

As Christians we are part of a wider church family, which extends far beyond Scotland. The Church of Scotland has many partner churches across the world that all need our love and encouragement. One simple and practical way in which you can offer support to your fellow Christians is by imitating Paul and writing them a letter.

Prayer

O Lord our God,

Listening to us here,

You accept the prayers of our brothers and sisters

In Africa, Asia, the Pacific, the Americas and Europe,

We are all one in prayer.

So may we, as one, rightly carry out your commission

To witness and to love

In the Church and throughout the world.

And as we turn to your Holy Scriptures

Open our hearts to your Word,

And inspire us to send a message of your love and encouragement

To our Christian brothers and sisters across the world. Amen

Paul’s Letters in the New Testament

The Apostle Paul wrote many letters to various young churches in the New Testament. Think about what types of letters he wrote and who he wrote them to.

Think about letter writing and ask the following questions:

- Who do you send letters?
- When do you send a letter?
Do you think there a difference between a letter and an email?

Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians was written to a community who had not been Christians for a very long time. In Acts we read about Paul’s visit to Thessalonica where he preached in a synagogue and continued his work among the Gentiles converting many people to Christianity.

Paul was forced to leave due to opposition and had hoped to return; however, due to illness he had to send Timothy who reported back to Paul (1 Thess 3: 6). The first letter to the Thessalonians was written in response to the good news that the church in Thessalonica was flourishing and standing firm in its new faith.

What is so exciting is that this church is still very much alive and the Greek Evangelical Church in modern day Thessaloniki is a vibrant mission focused church, which comes out of this rich biblical heritage! There is more information about this church following the bible study.

Paul’s First Letter to the Thessalonians

Part 1: The Greeting

Bible Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

• What is the very first thing that Paul does? (v2) Why is this important?
• What strikes you about this introduction?
• Think about how you would open a letter to a partner church. Do you think it would be important to introduce yourselves?

Part 2: Encouragement and Support

Bible Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4: 1-12

• What things does Paul praise the church in Thessalonica for doing well? (v 3-5; 9-10)
• What do you admire about your chosen partner church? What should they be congratulated for?

Bible Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5: 12-22

• The Christians in Thessalonica were expecting the second coming of Christ to come quickly and some had stopped making plans for the future: What advice does Paul give the Thessalonians?
• In what ways do you think this advice is relevant for Christians today?
• What advice would you give our partner church from your own experiences as Christians living in the 21st century?

Part 3: Closing Statement

Bible Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5: 23-28

• In what way does Paul bid farewell to the Thessalonians?
• Do you think it is important that he asks the church in Thessalonica to pray for himself and Timothy? (v25) Is it important that he describes them as 'brethren'?
• What would you like for our partner church to pray for on your behalf?

Writing your own letter to the Thessalonians

Now that you have discussed Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians hopefully you’ll feel inspired and confident to write one of your own! Below you’ll find information about our partner church, The Greek Evangelical Church, and an example to help get you started. Once you’ve written you letter as a group or as individuals send it to:

Greek Evangelical Church of Thessaloniki
35 P.P.Germanou str., GR 546 22, THESSALONIKI, Greece

The Greek Evangelical Church

Our partner church, The Greek Evangelical Church is a small church with 35 congregations including one in modern day Thessaloniki. World Mission Council Secretary Ian Alexander wrote this short piece about the Greek Evangelical Church so that you can get to know them a little.

The Greek Evangelical Church (GEC) has around 5000 members, 18 ministers and 35 congregations, all across Greece. It is explicitly evangelical, seeking to challenge what was termed the "Greek mentality" and understand the call of Jesus for a change of life for people. The GEC congregations today have more people attending worship than they have members. Many who have come from outside Greece are getting involved.

Realistic in their assessments of the situation of the economy (60% of 18-25 year olds are unemployed), the GEC leadership believe there is still much that Christian people and churches can do to show Christ in the difficult situation. At the 2nd Greek Evangelical Church in Athens, there is a soup kitchen and a food bank. Where in the past the soup kitchens had helped immigrant communities, today there are many Greek people also making use of them. In a country where protestants have been viewed with suspicion, or as being not truly Greek (Greece is over 90% Orthodox), many neighbours had previously ignored the protestant church, but now they have started dropping in bags of food or regular donations to help provide for those in need.

Members of one Athenian congregation go out at night to befriend sex workers and offer a listening ear and a friendly word, or a bite to eat. In the GEC detox centre, men seek to get free of drugs in an explicitly Christian environment; they attend prayers every morning and worship on Sunday. The faith side is complemented with a professional approach and a strong commitment from the Christian staff who choose to work in the precarious financial situation of a church-supported institute rather than a state one.

Greece is the point of arrival for many immigrants from Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The GEC works with other protestants to offer food, friendship, laundry and washing facilities, Greek
language classes and some trade skills, to those who find themselves with nothing in Greece. Members of the churches spend time in the facilities drinking tea and having conversations, playing games, and sharing human kindness with the men, women and children who need this companionship and solidarity.

The Greek Evangelical Church is a church which welcomes the stranger, feeds the hungry, cares for the poor, visits prostitutes, helps drug addicts face up to and recover from their addictions. It is a church doing what Christ commands.

Example Letter

This letter is just an example – your letter can be as long or as short as you like and personal to your congregation. Remember if you are twinned with or have a connection with another church please feel free to write to them: World Mission can give you contact details for any of our partner churches.

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Church of Scotland Offices
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EH2 4YN
Scotland

To our brothers and sisters in Christ at the Greek Evangelical Church of Thessaloniki, Scotland

Greetings from the Church Offices of the Church of Scotland!

We give thanks to God for the presence of the Greek Evangelical Church in Greece and particularly for your congregation in Thessaloniki who stand on the very ground that the Apostle Paul did so many hundreds of years ago.

The work of the Greek Evangelical Church is so inspirational to us in its Christ-like mission to the poor and lonely in Greece. So often the hungry and destitute are left unnoticed and unloved, but like Paul and the apostles your ministry to them reveals the love and hope of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We know that your country has suffered dramatically during the economic downturn and that you have a large number of immigrants and homeless people in your cities. We pray for your soup kitchens and outreach work with these communities and ask that you pray for the work that the Church of Scotland congregations are doing with homeless people in Scotland. Food insecurity is also affecting people all across Scotland and we ask that you pray for churches and people who are running soup kitchens and supporting food banks in our country.

We encourage you to continue supporting women in Greece, whether through befriending sex workers or running your shelter for victims of domestic abuse, and we will support you by collecting stamps for the Church of Scotland Stamp Project 2014, which is raising funds for your safe house.
You truly are doing what Christian commands: feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger and befriending the destitute.

May God continue to bless you and may all see His work through your actions.

Deep peace of the running wave to you.
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the infinite peace to you.