

## Second Sunday after Epiphany

### Second Sunday after Epiphany – 19 January 2020

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) for their thoughts on the second Sunday after Epiphany and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Our new online music resource is now live: [here](#) you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4). The search function allows you to bring up a list of songs by keyword, tune, theme, author, composer and metre, covering all of the indexes in the hymnbook. The site features Weekly Worship and thematic/seasonal playlists, alternative settings and background information on the hymns.

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## Introduction – Notes for the worship service

As an island nation, boats are an important part of Maltese life. The Scripture reading describes a perilous sea voyage by St Paul. A boat is also symbolic of the sometimes tempestuous journey Christians make together towards unity. For these reasons, the Christian churches of Malta suggest that, prior to the service, a boat or a large model of a boat is placed in the worship space.

The passage from Acts at the heart of our service provides wonderful opportunities for simple actions, sounds and multimedia that could accompany the text as it is proclaimed.

Children are seldom present at ecumenical gatherings. Here is a perfect opportunity for each community hosting this service to invite their local schools to participate by doing an art project that creates (even sides of) a boat into which some children can sit. Simple representations of the nautical items mentioned in the text could be crafted. This may also have the added benefit of welcoming their parents and guardians to our service.

At the moment mentioned in the Acts passage, sounds of the storm could accompany the proclamation (tennis balls in boxes shaken, sheets of tin foil rattled, rainsticks). In the course of the reading, several items are described as being used or thrown overboard and cut loose: ship's tackle, ropes, anchors, lifeboats, steering oars, a foresail. Cardboard cut-outs could suffice, decorated or otherwise. Pieces of wood and bed sheets could be used to good effect. The sound of grains of rice being poured into a box could conjure up the image of wheat being thrown into the sea. Without the dramatic accompaniment of the text becoming overly complex, let your imaginations and creative skills give glory to God. YouTube videos of storms at sea could be relayed on screens.

To this end, it may be best if the entire Acts passage is proclaimed by one person from one well-lit location, who introduces the text at the beginning. Given its length and technical nautical language, the text requires very careful proclamation and might best be proclaimed from a point near the boat. There is no need for further announcing of chapter and verse references until the very end when "This is the Word of the Lord" concludes the reading. This will provide the necessary continuity and rhythm to hold together the segments of the Scripture as they are being punctuated by responses, psalms and hymns etc.

Other Leader and Reader roles in the service can of course be led by a variety of Christian representatives.

## Ecumenical worship service – order of service

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### The Gathering

#### Introductory hymn

CH4 706 – “For the healing of the nations” (Cwm Rhondda) – *or a hymn that is sung to a well-known tune and reflects the themes of the Acts passage and the service as a whole* ([see CH4 World Church playlist](#))

*If you wish, during the singing of the introductory hymn, church leaders and representatives enter the venue for the ecumenical service of prayer for Christian unity. They are led by a participant carrying the Bible for all to see. The Bible is placed in a place of honour in the centre of the worshipping community.*

#### Words of welcome

Leader        The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
                  the love of God,  
                  and the communion of the Holy Spirit,  
                  be with you all.

#### All             **And also with you.**

Leader        Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, we gather to pray for unity among Christians and reconciliation in the world. When St Paul was shipwrecked in Malta, he was received with unusual kindness. Let us introduce ourselves to those around us and greet them with a sign of peace.

*Leave enough time for people to do this.*

Leader        The resources for this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity have been prepared by different Christian churches in Malta – a small country made up of two main inhabited islands, Malta and Gozo, as well as other islets. Malta is at the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, halfway between the southern tip of Sicily and Northern Africa. This biblical land lies at the crossroads of civilizations, cultures and religions. The history of Christianity in this small island nation dates back to the time of the apostles. According to tradition, St Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, reached the shores of Malta in the year 60CE. The narrative describing this eventful and providential episode is conveyed to us in

the final two chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, which are at the heart of our service today.

Leader (*same as above*) Let us listen attentively to the Word of God.

*All sit*

Reader Father in heaven, open our hearts and minds to Your Word.  
**All Your words are spirit and life!**

Reader Lead us to grow closer to each other in unity and charity.  
**All Your word is a lamp to our path!**

Reader A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

### **Acts 27:18-26**

We were being pounded by the storm so violently that on the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard, and on the third day with their own hands they threw the ship's tackle overboard. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest raged, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul then stood up among them and said, 'Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and thereby avoided this damage and loss. I urge you now to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For last night there stood by me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before the emperor; and indeed, God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you." So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we will have to run aground on some island.'

### **Invocation of the Holy Spirit**

*The response to each prayer may be sung by a cantor and repeated by the whole congregation. Or you could play the Taizé 'Veni Sancte Spiritus' softly or a suitable chorus or music as the words are being spoken.*

Leader Spirit, breath of God's loving, come upon this gathering and dwell among us.  
**All Come, Holy Spirit! (or Veni Sancte Spiritus!)**

Leader Spirit and Consoler, shine Your light in our darkness.  
**All Come, Holy Spirit! (or Veni Sancte Spiritus!)**

Leader Spirit and Advocate, be our hope when we feel abandoned  
**All Come, Holy Spirit! (or Veni Sancte Spiritus!)**

Leader Spirit, Helper and Guide, bring us to eternal safety.  
**All Come, Holy Spirit! (or Veni Sancte Spiritus!)**

Leader Spirit and Comforter, help us heal and restore what we have damaged and lost.  
**All Come, Holy Spirit! (or Veni Sancte Spiritus!)**

### **Acts 27:27-32**

Reader When the fourteenth night had come, as we were drifting across the sea of Adria, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. So they took soundings and found twenty fathoms; a little farther on they took soundings again and found fifteen fathoms. Fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. But when the sailors tried to escape from the ship and had lowered the boat into the sea, on the pretext of putting out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, 'Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.' Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the boat and set it adrift.

### **Prayers of pardon and reconciliation**

*The response to each prayer may be sung by a cantor and repeated by the whole congregation.*

Leader Forgive us, Lord, for remaining in darkness rather than seeking Your light.  
**All Lord, have mercy! (or Kyrie eleison!)**

Leader Forgive us, Lord, for our failure to sound the depths of Your presence in other Christian traditions.  
**All Lord, have mercy! (or Kyrie eleison!)**

Leader Forgive us, Lord, for past mistakes, mistrust and misdeeds between Christians from different churches and communities.  
**All Lord, have mercy! (or Kyrie eleison!)**

Leader Forgive us, Lord, for isolating ourselves and trying to escape God's desires for us.

**All Lord, have mercy! (or Kyrie eleison!)**

Leader Forgive us, Lord, for our lack of faith and for our failure to be people of hope and authentic love.

**All Lord, have mercy! (or Kyrie eleison!)**

Leader Forgive us, Lord, for remaining indifferent, instead of showing hospitality to all, especially strangers and refugees.

**All Lord, have mercy! (or Kyrie eleison!)**

Leader The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. As the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His steadfast love towards those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far He removes our transgressions from us (Psalm 103:8,11-12).

**All Amen**

*You may wish to sing again here. Choose a hymn which either picks up the theme of pardon and reconciliation and the unbounded love of God, or a hymn which looks toward the next instalment of the Acts passage.*

### **Acts 27:33-38**

Reader Just before daybreak, Paul urged all of them to take some food, saying, 'Today is the fourteenth day that you have been in suspense and remaining without food, having eaten nothing. Therefore I urge you to take some food, for it will help you survive; for none of you will lose a hair from your heads.' After He had said this, He took bread; and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, He broke it and began to eat. Then all of them were encouraged and took food for themselves. We were in all two hundred and seventy-six persons in the ship. After they had satisfied their hunger, they lightened the ship by throwing the wheat into the sea.

## The Apostles' Creed (or a suitable Creed)

*All stand*

Leader Dear brothers and sisters, St Paul gave encouragement to those on the ship by breaking bread. Let us take encouragement from our common faith, proclaiming words which have resounded in the Church throughout the centuries:

**All We believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth,  
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
he descended into hell;  
on the third day He rose again from the dead;  
he ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;  
from there He will come to judge the living and the dead.  
We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy Catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting. Amen.**

*All sit*

### **Acts 27:39-44**

Reader In the morning they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned to run the ship ashore, if they could. So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea. At the same time they loosened the ropes that tied the steering-oars; then hoisting the foresail to the wind, they made for the beach. But striking a reef, they ran the ship aground; the bow stuck and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the force of the waves. The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none

might swim away and escape; but the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, and the rest to follow, some on planks and others on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

**Psalm 107:8,19-22, 28-32**

*A cantor may sing this Psalm and the congregation is invited to sing the Response.*

Reader      The Lord has delivered us from the mighty waves.  
**All**         **The Lord has delivered us from the mighty waves.**

Reader      Let them thank the Lord for His steadfast love,  
                 for His wonderful works to humankind.  
                 For He satisfies the thirsty,  
                 and the hungry He fills with good things.  
**All**         **The Lord has delivered us from the mighty waves.**

Reader      Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,  
                 and He saved them from their distress;  
                 he sent out His word and healed them,  
                 and delivered them from destruction.  
**All**         **The Lord has delivered us from the mighty waves.**

Reader      Let them thank the Lord for His steadfast love,  
                 for His wonderful works to humankind.  
                 And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices,  
                 and tell of His deeds with songs of joy.  
**All**         **The Lord has delivered us from the mighty waves.**

Reader      Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,  
                 and He brought them out from their distress;  
                 he made the storm be still,  
                 and the waves of the sea were hushed.  
                 Then they were glad because they had quiet,  
                 and He brought them to their desired haven.  
**All**         **The Lord has delivered us from the mighty waves.**



Reader Let them thank the Lord for His steadfast love,  
for His wonderful works to humankind.  
Let them extol Him in the congregation of the people,  
and praise Him in the assembly of the elders.

**All The Lord has delivered us from the mighty waves.**

### **Acts 28:1-10**

Reader After we had reached safety, we then learned that the island was called Malta. The natives showed us unusual kindness. Since it had begun to rain and was cold, they kindled a fire and welcomed all of us round it. Paul had gathered a bundle of brushwood and was putting it on the fire, when a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, 'This man must be a murderer; though he has escaped from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.' He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. They were expecting him to swell up or drop dead, but after they had waited a long time and saw that nothing unusual had happened to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.

Now in the neighbourhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. It so happened that the father of Publius lay sick in bed with fever and dysentery. Paul visited him and cured him by praying and putting his hands on him. After this happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. They bestowed many honours on us, and when we were about to sail, they put on board all the provisions we needed.

Reader This is the Word of the Lord.

**All Thanks be to God who saves and who heals!**

## **A biblical reflection or short homily**

The story of St Paul's shipwreck on Malta in Acts 27 and 28 leads us, during this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, to reflect on many aspects of our own lives and the lives of our churches. As we approach one another, seeking unity, we recognise that we sometimes carry baggage from history, tradition and cultural expectation, which can weigh us down and threaten to overwhelm us. There is a danger that, in the face of that experience, we

might lose sight of the hope which first called us and we stop reaching for the light which Christ offers us.

St Paul challenged his fellow travellers, sailors, soldiers and prisoners to keep up their courage. In the face of apparent desperation and hopelessness, we are challenged to put our trust in God and allow ourselves to be held and carried through the waters. There will be times when we are broken, as individuals and as churches, and looking back we shall see not just the one set of footprints in the sand, but hundreds, as we are surrounded and supported by those who love us. There will be times when, standing in the storms of our own making, we are challenged to demonstrate unusual kindness in the face of worldly indifference.

To demonstrate unusual kindness is to see the sister and brother in the monster's shame and know that they too are children of God. To demonstrate unusual kindness is to give without counting the cost, and to allow ourselves to be given unto without questioning worth. As we reflect upon, and pray for Christian unity, we acknowledge the injury that we have caused, the pain that we carry, the baggage that we must jettison. We pray for Christian unity as the place from which we can move onward in faith and in hope for the redemption of the world and the restoration of creation.

## Prayers

### The prayers of the people

*During the prayers, eight oars (or oar-shaped models) are brought into the assembly by members of different communities. Seven oars bear words – Trust, Perseverance, Harmony, Courage, Unusual Kindness, Transformation and Generosity – and the final oar has the outline of a heart on it. The presentation of an oar introduces each of the petitions. After the oar has been held high, it is placed near or in the boat or given to a child to hold and a time of silent prayer follows. A reader then announces the corresponding petition and all respond.*

Leader        We cannot face the storms of life alone. A boat moves forward when all row together. In the face of difficulties we recognise the need to pull together and to unite our efforts.  
Let us pray.

*In silence, each oar is brought forward and held high before the Reader speaks. After the response it is put near or in the boat or given to a child to hold.*

Reader Gracious God, strengthen our confidence in Your providence when we feel overwhelmed by the storms of life.

**All Hear our prayer for Trust.**

Reader Gracious God, teach us to fix our course on Christ, the True Light who brings us to safe harbour.

**All Hear our prayer for Perseverance.**

Reader Gracious God, transform our many painful separations into harmony and our mistrust into mutual acceptance.

**All Hear our prayer for Harmony.**

Reader Gracious God, give us the courage to speak the truth with justice in love.

**All Hear our prayer for Courage.**

Reader Gracious God, help us to welcome with unusual kindness our sisters and brothers who are in peril or in need.

**All Hear our prayer for Unusual Kindness.**

Reader Gracious God, change our hearts and the hearts of our Christian communities, that we may be agents of Your healing.

**All Hear our prayer for Transformation.**

Reader Gracious God, open our eyes to see the whole of creation as Your gift, and our hands to share its fruits in generous solidarity..

**All Hear our prayer for Generosity.**

Reader Gracious God, listen now to the prayers of our hearts which we pray either in silence or softly aloud. (You may wish to amend this according to your tradition.)

*Leave enough time for people to think about what to pray for and to pray for it.*

Leader One in Jesus Christ, let us pray together to our true and tender Father in the words He taught us.

**All**            **Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be Your name,  
Your kingdom come,  
Your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours  
now and for ever. Amen.**

## **We are sent out together to proclaim the Good News**

**Leader**        We have come together as Christians,  
and therefore as fellow disciples.  
As we yearn for Christian unity,  
let us commit ourselves anew  
to work for this common goal.

### **Swanwick Declaration 1987**

**All**            **Lord God, we thank You  
for calling us into the company of those  
who trust in Christ and seek to obey His will.  
May Your Spirit guide and strengthen us  
in mission and service to Your world:  
For we are strangers no longer  
but pilgrims together on the way to Your Kingdom.  
Amen.**

**Prayer of blessing** (*Church leaders and representatives who are present may join in proclaiming the Prayer of Blessing.*)

**Reader**        May God the Father, who called us from darkness into light,  
make us true bearers of God's light.

**All**            **Amen**

Reader May God the Son, who redeemed us by His precious blood,  
empower us to follow His example in serving others.

**All Amen**

Reader May God the Holy Spirit, who is Lord and giver of life,  
strengthen us to endure the shipwrecks of life and reach the shores of  
salvation.

**All Amen**

Reader May the Almighty and Merciful God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless and  
protect us, now and forever.

**All Amen**

**All We set out together, to proclaim the wonders of God's love.  
Amen! Alleluia! Amen!**

### **Concluding hymn**

“Love is the boat for the journey” (words: Ian Callanan, tune: Loch Lomond)  
*or some suitable hymn sung to a well-known tune, picking up the themes of the service and  
sending people out to love and serve the Lord ([see CH4 World Church playlist](#)).*

### **Sermon ideas**

For the readings for the second Sunday after Epiphany, provided by the Weekly Worship  
editors.

### **[Acts 27:18-28:10](#)**

In the story from Acts (which is not part of the usual lectionary cycle), we are introduced to  
the curious little phrase, ‘The islanders showed us unusual kindness’.

What might unusual kindness mean? Is there something in particular that marks this  
hospitality, this way of treating newcomers as unusual? The idea of hospitality can be  
embodied in meaningful ways through coming together in unity with other churches in the  
area. It can be deepened by exploring our common calling to bring God’s love to the world.  
It can be seen in the Acts story, but also in the Revised Common Lectionary, where this  
week the readings point to themes of unity and shared purpose that fit well with the Week  
of Prayer for Christian Unity.

### [Isaiah 49:1-7](#)

In the Isaiah text we see a few themes that resonate with the story of Paul being shipwrecked on Malta. There is a cry to far flung places and people. Coastlands, just like those of Malta, are told to pay attention to the one sent by God. There is disillusionment in verse 4 that surely must resonate with someone like Paul, journeying through storms and conditions that make them feel like they 'have laboured in vain'. Just as Isaiah is speaking to an exiled people, those displaced in Babylon, we can take heart that no matter how far from home we are, how far towards the ends of the earth we go, or if we feel that we have been exiled or displaced – we are still children of God. There is a call to the community to be a 'light to the nations' to be a blessing, to work for liberation and healing for all. These themes are apt for a week of prayer for Christian unity.

### [Psalms 40:1-11](#)

Here the Psalmist is retelling a time of waiting – God drew me out of a miry pit, out of death, or in Paul's case – out of the sea. We do not know whether this was a time of hopeful or anxious waiting, but most of us can relate to both. God's faithfulness and steadfast love are for all to know and share, regardless of our experience.

### [1 Corinthians 1:1-9](#)

In this reading, Paul is helping the Corinthians to see that they have all been gifted God's grace and that this common bond is more important than anything else they might have. Paul reminds them that they lack nothing, and have been enriched in every way – through nothing they have done – but through the calling of God into unity in Christ.

### [John 1:29-42](#)

In the story from John's Gospel there is a powerful question from Jesus to the two disciples of John – "What are you looking for?" As we seek to follow Jesus, what is it that we are looking for? How might our answers bring churches closer together in unity? Jesus then responds to their next question to Him, "Where are you staying?" with a wonderful invitation to "Come and see".

## Alternative Material

The worship resources for the whole Church for this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity are provided by Roots, and can be found online at <https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/WPCU-2020-All-Age-A4.pdf>

## Musical suggestions

*You can hear samples of these suggestions in the 'Weekly Worship' section of <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/>. This new online music resource will allow you to listen to and search the breadth of music available in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4).*

*You will find hidden gems and alternative arrangements to familiar songs that will inspire creativity and spark fresh curiosity about how we best use music in worship.*

- CH4 706 – “For the healing of the nations” (Cwm Rhondda) – Introductory hymn that reflects the themes of the Acts passage and the service as a whole.
- “Love is the boat for the journey” (words: Ian Callanan, tune: Loch Lomond) – Concluding hymn that picks up the themes of the service, sending people out to love and serve the Lord.

A “World Church” playlist of suitable hymns can be found on the Church of Scotland website here: <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/inspire-me>

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