

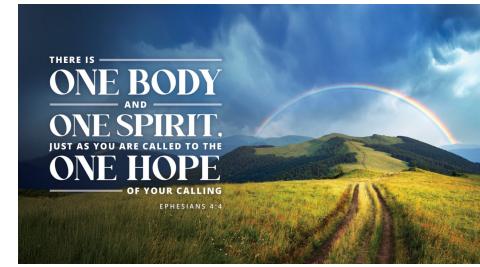
Dorset South & West Circuit. Written Service.

Sunday January 18th 2026.

One World Week.

Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.

Call to Worship. “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling” (Ephesians 4:4)



Introduction:

For this year, the prayers and reflections for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity have been prepared by the faithful of the Armenian Apostolic Church, along with their brothers and sisters of the Armenian Catholic, and Evangelical Churches. Throughout Armenia's turbulent history, the Armenian Apostolic Church has been vital to the survival and resilience of its people. It has provided continuity and stability amid persecution, forced migrations, and genocide. During the Armenian Genocide of 1915, the Church became a sanctuary for those suffering, offering solace and preserving hope for a brighter future. The Church commemorates this tragic event annually, honouring the martyrs' memory and advocating for recognition and justice. In modern Armenia, the Church continues to wield significant influence over national life. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Armenia experienced a religious revival, and the Armenian Apostolic Church reclaimed its central role in society. Today, the Church engages actively in social, educational, and charitable initiatives, addressing poverty, healthcare, and education. It also supports Armenian communities in the diaspora, fostering unity and ensuring that Armenian traditions and faith remain vibrant among Armenians worldwide. We shall be using some of the resources, which draw upon centuries-old traditions of prayer and petitions used by the Armenian people. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2026 extends an invitation to draw upon this shared Christian heritage and to delve more deeply into our fellowship in Christ, which unites Christians worldwide.

If you would like to download the week of prayer daily readings this is the website for the resources.

<https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/WPCU-2026-English-Pamphlet.pdf>

STF 690

The Church's one foundation
is Jesus Christ her Lord;
she is his new creation
by water and the word;
from heaven he came and sought her
to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought her,
and for her life he died.

Called out from every nation,
yet one through all the earth,
her charter of salvation
one Lord, one faith, one birth;
one holy name she blesses,
and shares one holy food,
as to one hope she presses
with every grace endued.

In toil and tribulation,
and tumult of her war,
she waits the consummation
of peace for evermore;
till with the vision glorious
her longing eyes are blest,
at last the Church victorious
shall be the Church at rest.

Yet she on earth has union
with God the Three in One,
and mystic, sweet communion
with those whose rest is won.
O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we,
with them, the meek and lowly,
in heaven your face shall see.

Prayers of adoration and confession: (based on the week of prayer for Christian unity resources)

From Sunrise in the East to Sunset in the West, blessed are you, O Lord, because you are King, and your name is revered throughout the universe. Let our psalmody resound sweetly in your hearing.

Let justice dawn from your righteousness and rise over our frailty, and may your most holy name be glorified. And let us become worthy to abide by your commandments and to sing praise and glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages of ages. **Amen.**

Heavenly Father, you have called us in the Body of your Son Jesus Christ to continue his work of reconciliation and reveal you to the world: forgive us the sins which tear us apart; give us the courage to overcome our fears and to seek that unity which is your gift and your will; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Bible reading: Ephesians 4:1-13

I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high, he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." (When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) He himself granted that some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

Reflection

The beginning of our passage of scripture today is a challenge to us. Walk, live a life worthy of being a follower of Christ. But too easily we pass over how the writer describes himself. Not one who has managed and still reflects his life as following perfectly in the way of Christ. He described himself as, 'the prisoner in the Lord.'

How do you describe yourself? "I try to be a Christian". "I do my best to be kind, good, thoughtful etc" Do you see yourself as a prisoner in the lord? I guess a question that might help us to understand this phrase is to ask what it means to be a 'prisoner'? The simple answer is to lose our freedom. To be bound to be a captive. When we look at what identities we have they are multiple. We have family ties, we belong to our families and our family heritage. We have our social status and affiliation's. We have our hobbies and interests. We might not see ourselves tied or in prison to these aspects. However they have claims on our time and our way of interacting in life. They don't necessarily rob us of our freedom, unless we allow them to. People become addicted to certain ways of being and sometimes that becomes unhealthy. One of the important aspects of belonging to an addiction group and trying to get free of the addiction that is robbing you of life. Is to be able to say and own that something has you bound in an unhealthy way. "My name is....and I am an ..." However we can never be totally free. That's an impossible concept. We have our thoughts and our connections. St Paul is saying that he is choosing who he wants to be totally absorbed with. To be in captivity with. "My name is Paul and I am a prisoner in the Lord".

We are just a few weeks into the new year and no doubt many New Year's resolution's have been made and broken. People wanting to break free of what they see as not good ways of living. Perhaps you have made resolutions yourself, either this year or in the past? "I will quit....". Whatever your quitting has been allowed to make you a kind of prisoner. For example, some people can't be around chocolate, or without it. They have to eat it all. Ok that's pretty trivial compared to some things that really are life limiting and destructive.

This Sunday begins the week of prayer for Christian unity. I can recall a historic moment in time when the Roman Catholic Church and the Methodist Church where I was working at that point, actually crossed the road to share together in this very special Sunday. For too many years we hadn't even noticed or acknowledged each other. We hadn't accepted that our different ways that we worshipped were valid. We were held captive by our misconceptions and assumptions. At the end of our bible passage St. Paul writes about the unity of the faith. From earliest times to today we are prisoners of our thoughts and assumptions that divide rather than unify. Our ignorance separates us and I wonder if like me you had very little understanding about the Armenian church until this week of prayer for Christian Unity? The language of the prayers and the hymns are not perhaps our usual way of thinking.

When we think about our unity. I imagine that this Bible reading may feel familiar if you've ever been a part of a group of people that has struggled to have one single identity when members of the group feel like they are really different from each other. I have met it in sports clubs, social groups, charitable organisations.

Everywhere, where people come together initially with a common purpose but from different backgrounds. It's so easy to lose sight of the common goal amongst individual aspirations. Being a church, a group of loving but fallible humans, has never been easy. It wasn't during the earliest days of the church and it's not now. But, it is possible to have rich, gracious Christian community shared among all kinds of people. We just keep needing to be reminded of that fact. This portion of Ephesians shows how one particular group of Christians kept learning how to be church together.

Scholars tell us that Ephesus was an important and diverse city in ancient Rome. It is not surprising that the church reflected the community in which it developed. Some of these Christians were Jewish. Some were Gentile. The early Christian movement became well known for including people of lots of different ethnicities, as well as different social classes. Slaves, wealthy widow women, everyday tradespeople, fishermen, and farmers all came together in the early churches. While it was great to live in such a diverse community, it could also be difficult to build relationships across the class and ethnic boundaries. This is certainly true of the diverse church of Ephesus.

They were complaining about each other, specifically about who got to have the most authority and privilege in their community. According to one commentator, it appears that these Christians wanted to draw lines of privilege based on both ethnic background and type of service to which one was called, types of service that I imagine may be connected to levels of education and training that people had attained. Thankfully, the

author of this letter knew that Christ calls us to a community that is guided not by old social divisions, but new love in Christ. Some people thought that the Jewish followers of Jesus, who had been Jewish himself, should have greater authority than people who came to Christ from other religious and ethnic groups. This author had to explain to them that Christ had broken down the divisions between Jew and Gentile, and that they were to no longer be bound by these particular cultural divisions.

These divisions that hold us captive from being in full harmony with each other are so diverse. We can trace it back through our own recent church history. When churches combine for instance. How many generations does it take for people to forget the past and come together as one? In so many different ways. Whether it be identifying yourself as a 'prim', or 'Wesleyan', in Methodism. Or a 'congregational or Presbyterian'. And so it could go on through all the different denominations that have 'united' over the years. What of local churches that have amalgamated? Do we still identify ourselves as from the old St, or xxxx street?

When we seriously consider what Christian unity means, there are so many shackles of the past that need to be removed so that we can be truly free, to be a prisoner of the Lord.

The writer gives us an unusual statement in this passage of scripture. 'he made captivity itself a captive;'. I think we have fully explored the idea that we are all captive to so many things and ways of being that could get in the way of us fully following the way of Christ. We hear people say, "what is holding you back?". If it's truly our desire to be totally absorbed in Christ. "what is holding you back?". If it's truly our desire to be in unity of the faith, "what is holding you back?".

Christ has taken everything that holds us captive into captivity. However are we willing to let go and take hold of His challenge to walk worthy of our Christian heritage? He doesn't ask us to do that without giving us any help. He provides the gifts or tools. Those gifts are all different and unique to each person. A bit like an enormous jigsaw puzzle. Each piece different from the other but essential to make the picture whole. It's like we are all puzzle pieces, holding a small spark of God, that can only be clearly seen when we join together. Without each of our gifts, we miss something of the Divine. If you think of the church as the body of Christ if we all aren't present, we don't have all the ligaments that help us move. I think it's good to be reminded just how necessary we each are to the whole Christian faith. It is our calling to equip the saints in our lives and to recognise the gifts they bring to the church. The gifts don't have to all be the same. The people don't have to be all the same either. We just have to be ready to use what we have to serve God and our neighbours. God has never needed us to be all the same. God has just needed us to be ready. Are you ready to be a prisoner of the Lord and to walk worthy of that calling, so that we might be united in Christ and serve His ways?

STF 696

For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord;
for a just and equal sharing
of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action
help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead us forward into freedom;
from despair your world release,
that, redeemed from war and hatred,
all may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
fear will die and hope increase.

All that kills abundant living,
let it from the earth be banned;
pride of status, race, or schooling,
dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
may we hallow life's brief span.

You, Creator-God, have written
your great name on humankind;
for our growing in your likeness
bring the life of Christ to mind;
that by our response and service
earth its destiny may find.

Prayers of Intercession

As we join in these prayers that have been prepared by the Armenian church let us also Pray for churches in our local communities. For the work of all denominations. Especially let us pray for the work of the churches and for those in any need or trouble.

Gracious and almighty Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, you are the true Light, who cast out the darkness of sin, and shined into our hearts the joy and hope of your eternal Kingdom. **Lord, have mercy.**

Loving Lord, accept the prayers of all your faithful children throughout the world, who call out to you with one mind, one voice, and one heart. Through your beloved disciple John, you promised that if we walk in your light, then we will have communion with one another, and your precious blood will cleanse us of all sin. Bring us that blessed communion, O Saviour! **Lord, have mercy.**

Grant us peace, O Loving Lord, and remove the scourge of civil unrest and violence from the face of the earth. Change the hearts of all who make war and touch the wounds of all who are afflicted by war. Comfort all prisoners of war and speedily bring them home. Let the light of your love shine in all the dark places of our world and hasten the day when all peoples may dwell in peace with justice. **Lord, have mercy.**

O Refuge and Shelter, Lord Jesus Christ, look with compassion on refugees throughout the world, who suffer the agony of displacement and the loss of their homes. Move us to manifest our communion with you, with them and with each other through gestures of hospitality and loving help. **Lord, have mercy.**

O Christ, our Saviour, we pray for the people of Armenia and Artsakh, and their kindred throughout the world, who long ago turned to your light through the preaching of the Apostle Thaddeus and the miraculous witness of St Gregory the Illuminator. **Lord, have mercy.**

Shine the light of your righteousness and wisdom on all your creatures. Make us children of light and children of the day, so that we may always live our lives reverently, and become for all the world, worthy lampstands for your life-giving light. **Lord, have mercy.**

For you are our Saviour, and to you be glory, dominion and honour, now and always and unto the ages of ages. **Amen.**

We say the prayer that unites all Christians...**the Lord's Prayer.**

STF 409

Let us build a house where love can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

*All are welcome,
All are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where prophets speak,
and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

Let us build a house where love is found
in water, wine and wheat:
a banquet hall on holy ground
where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
is revealed in time and space;
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us:

Let us build a house where hands will reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger:

Let us build a house where all are named,
their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed
as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

The Blessing

Gracious Lord, God of all, Guide for the lost, Light for those in darkness. May the sun of your glory shine forth, giving life and light to all, from the East to the West, and from the North to the South. Let the morning rays of your eternal spring awaken us who await your coming.

O Jesus Christ, Light from the Light, dwell within us, who share together to worship your holy and precious name. Let your life-giving radiance kindle within us a deeper love for one another. May your brilliant light stir us to ever more flourishing unity. Like diverse flowers in the garden of your Kingdom, may your divine brilliance cause us to bloom in harmony. And so, all as one, may we always joyfully praise and glorify you, and the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages of ages. **Amen.**

Adapted from St Gregory of Narek

