

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2024

Go and do likewise

All-age resources

Material for all ages together to supplement the ecumenical worship service

Gather

Biscuit welcome

You will need: plain biscuits (e.g. digestives), prepared glacé icing (or tubes of writing icing), chocolate drops or small sweets; knives for spreading; paper plates.

As the service starts with refreshments, invite people to decorate a biscuit as they arrive, and then to offer their decorated biscuit to someone they don't know well – an opportunity to get to know them little better! Encourage those who prefer not to decorate a biscuit, to speak to someone they don't know well.

Call to worship

Gather everyone together with these words

Come, all who love the Lord and all who would like to.
Come, those who don't yet know who God is.
Come, young and old and those in between.
Come, if you've been here many times
Come, if you've never been here before.
Come, as friends, as neighbours, as equals in God's eyes.
Come and be welcome, whoever you are.

Share the Word

Genesis 18:1-8

Before the reading, ask for examples of welcome that we have received or given – e.g. 'Granny always puts chocolate on my pillow' or 'I put fresh flowers in their room'.

Does anyone have an interesting story to tell of welcoming unexpected visitors?

Psalm 138

During the response section of the psalm, invite people to do the following actions:

On the day: *make a circle with hand (as if 12 hours are passing).*

I called: *cup hands round mouth.*

You answered me: *put hand to ear, then make a heart shape with the fingers.*

Luke 10:25-37

This well-known parable lends itself to being dramatized. Invite two confident readers to be Jesus and the lawyer (and a narrator as well, if you need one). You could ask for volunteers to act out the parable as it is told by Jesus; to do this you will need: a traveller, some robbers (who are good at pretending to fight!), a priest, a Levite, a Samaritan and an innkeeper. If you have an aisle down the centre of your worship space, much of the action could take place there.

Explore

Storyboard

You will need: storyboard templates, pens.

Divide those present into groups and give each a few storyboard templates and some pens. Assign a modern-day situation to each group – e.g. school, shopping centre, sports club, office, local park. Ask the groups to think about how they could retell the story of the Good Samaritan in this context. Who would the priest, Levite and Samaritan be? Invite each group to draw their version of the story on the storyboard – using more than one sheet if necessary – and display it for all to see.

Ask: How does doing this exercise help us see more clearly who our neighbours are? What do we learn about the part we play in the story?

Meditation word cloud

You will need: Five large pieces of paper, each with one of these words written near its centre: heart, soul, mind, strength, neighbour; pens; copies of Luke 10:27 in many different Bible versions (you could use biblegateway.com).

Read Luke 10:27 aloud. Then invite people to look at different versions, using what you have prepared or looking it up themselves (e.g. on their phones), to find how the five words are portrayed. Write these new or additional words on the respective paper to build up a word cloud around the central word.

Place these word clouds around your worship space and, while some quiet music plays, encourage people to spend time focussing on one or two of the word clouds. Invite people to consider if any of these synonyms resonates in a new way for them.

'Who is my neighbour?' collage

Provide newspapers and magazines, scissors, glue and paper and invite people to look for images that illustrate 'who is my neighbour?'. Cut out and stick the images to a large sheet of paper or card. Then think creatively of ways in which you can serve these neighbours within your community.

Sermon / talk ideas

'Wonder'

The children's book *Wonder* (by RJ Palacio) explores the theme of acceptance from the perspective of a child (Auggie Pullman) with a severe 'cranio-facial difference' starting school for the first time at age 10. Many children will be familiar with the book as it is often used in schools to encourage the theme of kindness. It is also a film. The book was inspired by a real-life encounter when Palacio and her children were at an ice cream store and sat next to a little girl with a severe facial deformity. Palacio's three-year-old son started to cry, so the author grabbed her children and left hastily. She was trying to protect the girl but also avoid her own discomfort.

Afterwards, when she had reflected on the incident, she said: 'I was really angry at myself for the way I had responded. What I should have done is simply turned to the little girl and started up a conversation and shown my kids that there was nothing to be afraid of'.

Palacio also wrote a follow-up exploring the motives behind the actions of Julian, who is very unkind to Auggie and starts up a bullying campaign against him. It is a revealing read, particularly as it highlights his own nightmares triggered by watching zombie movies as a young child. These nightmares re-occur after Auggie joins his class which upsets the now 10-year-old Julian who is trying to be the tough child in the class. You could use this illustration to explore the motives of the priest and Levite in the parable and to challenge people to explore the motives behind our actions and how we struggle to see some people as our neighbour.

The main theme of *Wonder* is to 'choose kind'. One of the teachers gives the children monthly precepts to discuss, the first of which is: 'When given the choice between being right or being kind, choose kind.' Maybe the priest and Levite thought they were doing the right thing as far as the Law goes, but it was surely the Samaritan who 'chose kind'. How do we 'choose kind' over the urge to be right?

Neighbours

We don't know the reason why the expert in the law came to speak to Jesus. Was he seeking reassurance or was it another test? As was often the case, he got more than he bargained for when talking to Jesus. When the expert asked, 'Who is my neighbour?' notice how Jesus doesn't answer that question. Instead, he flips it around, challenging us to think not about **who** but **how** we are good neighbours. If you haven't done the 'neighbour' collage activity, you could perhaps display some pictures of people in the news here and discuss how the local church could serve anyone who needs help. At the end of the story, the expert still can't manage to say the word 'Samaritan'. Are there people we really hope God doesn't ask us to interact with? Why are we threatened or afraid? Where does that come from? Are there occasions when we serve others but without truly being able to accept them? What might be holding us back? How can we overcome any reticence as a church or as an individual? What can we do with our fear? Is conflict a part of our feelings? In this week of prayer for Christian unity, we are challenged to ask ourselves how we can be conflict resolvers in our homes, churches and communities. What do you think Christian unity means and how does this story relate to it?

Takeaway activity

You will need: paper, pens, scissors (or paint, bowls of water and towels).

Invite everyone to either make a handprint with paint or to draw round their hand and cut it out. Encourage everyone to hold this hand every morning and pray: Who is my neighbour today? At the end of the day, use it to reflect: Who was I a neighbour to today? Who was a neighbour to me?

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