

“You shall love the Lord your  
God...

... and your neighbour  
as yourself.”

Luke 10:27

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN

*Hale*



18-25 JANUARY 2024

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY - 2024

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the best known passages of Scripture, yet one that never seems to lose its power to challenge indifference to suffering and to inspire solidarity. It is a story about crossing boundaries that calls our attention to the bonds that unite the whole human family.

In choosing this passage of Scripture for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the churches of Burkina Faso have invited us to join with them in a process of self-reflection as they consider what it means to love our neighbour in the midst of a security crisis. Communities in the British-Irish context may be less vulnerable to acts of mass violence than in Burkina Faso, but there are still many living with the memory and/or the threat of serious violence, centred on issues of identity and belonging. There are also groups within communities, including people from ethnic minority backgrounds and people seeking asylum, who feel particularly vulnerable to violence or being displaced by the threat of violence.

Our neighbours in Burkina Faso call us to reconnect to God's dream for us – a dream of a unity formed of ties of love and compassion. This challenges us not only to reflect on the learning from our ecumenical journey so far, but to widen our vision. What can we learn from people of other faiths, from those whose backgrounds are most different from our own, and what do we need from each other?

The reflections encourage us to consider the perspective not only of the one who showed mercy, but also of those who passed by. Many of us will have been unaware of the threat faced by communities in Burkina Faso before reading this material. It is a powerful reminder of the many neglected conflicts that continue to destroy lives and devastate communities around the world, when only a limited number can capture, and fewer still can hold, the attention of the world's media. The Church is called to be an advocate for those caught in these forgotten conflicts, and to amplify the voices of those who feel forsaken.

In this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity the Church is being challenged to stop and tend to the wounded and, in so doing, to recognise our own wounds as churches and as communities. Facing the reality of our own brokenness helps to connect us to the suffering of others from a place of humility and deep empathy, creating a sacred space of encounter inspired by Christ's healing love.

Dr Nicola Brady, General Secretary, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

## Introducing the Theme

The materials for the 2024 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity were prepared by an ecumenical team from Burkina Faso facilitated by the local Chemin Neuf Community (CCN)<sup>1</sup>. The chosen theme is “You shall love the Lord your God ... and your neighbour as yourself” (Lk 10:27). Brothers and sisters from the Catholic Archdiocese of Ouagadougou, Protestant Churches, ecumenical bodies and the CCN in Burkina Faso collaborated generously in drafting the prayers and reflections. They experienced their work together as a real path of ecumenical conversion.

### **Loving God and neighbour in the midst of a security crisis**

Burkina Faso is in the Sahel region of West Africa, which extends into the neighbouring countries of Mali and Niger. It covers 174,000 km<sup>2</sup> and has 21 million inhabitants, of about 60 ethnicities. Approximately 64% of the population is Muslim, 9% adheres to traditional African religions and 26% is Christian (20% Catholic, 6% Protestant). These three religious groups are represented in every region of the country, and in virtually every family.

Burkina Faso is currently experiencing a serious security crisis, which affects all faith communities. After a major jihadist attack was mounted from outside the country in 2016, the security situation in Burkina Faso, and consequently its social cohesion, deteriorated dramatically. The country has endured a proliferation of terrorist attacks, lawlessness and human trafficking. This has left over 3,000 people dead and almost two million internally displaced. Thousands of schools, health centres and town halls have been closed, and much of the socio-economic and transport infrastructure has been destroyed. Attacks targeting specific ethnic groups exacerbate the risk of inter-communal conflicts. In the context of this dire threat to security, social cohesion, peace and national unity are being undermined.

Christian churches have been specifically targeted by armed attacks. Priests, pastors and catechists have been killed during worship and the fate of others who were kidnapped remains unknown. At the time of writing, more than 22% of the national territory is outside the control of the state and Christians can no longer openly practise their faith in these areas. Because of terrorism, the majority of Christian churches in the north, east and north-west of the country have been closed. There is no longer any public Christian worship in many of these areas, but where worship is still possible, with police protection, usually in large cities, services have to be shortened owing to security concerns.

Despite the efforts of both the state and religious communities, the country is becoming increasingly unstable as extremist groups become more widespread. Nevertheless, a degree of solidarity is emerging between the Christian, Muslim and traditional religions. Their leaders are working to find lasting solutions for peace, social cohesion and reconciliation. To this end, for instance, the Christian-Muslim Dialogue Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Burkina-Niger is making a major effort to support inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogue and cooperation.

Following the Government's calls for prayers for peace, social cohesion and reconciliation, individual churches continue to organise daily prayers and fasting. Action by the various Catholic and Protestant churches has intensified to assist displaced persons. Reflection and awareness-raising meetings have been organized to promote better understanding of the situation and of the value of fraternity, and to develop strategies for a return to lasting peace.

This hope is also reflected in the traditional Mossi 2 proverb: "Regardless of the nature or duration of the fight, the moment of reconciliation will come."

The invitation to work together on the texts for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2024 challenged the different churches in Burkina Faso to walk, pray and work together in mutual love during this difficult period for their country. The love of Christ that unites all Christians is stronger than their divisions and the Christians of Burkina Faso commit themselves to walking the path of love of God and love of neighbour. They are confident that God's love will overcome the violence that currently afflicts their country.

Supplementing the national information each of the church communities in Hale had added their own reflection. Please join with us in prayer as we consider "our neighbours."

Day One - 18th Jan - St Peter's

Day Two - 19th Jan - Altrincham URC, Trinity, Hale

Day Three - 20th Jan - All Saints, Hale Barns with Ringway

Day Four - 21st Jan - St Elizabeth's, Ashley Church

Day Five - 22nd Jan - Altrincham Baptist Church

Day Six - 23rd Jan - The Vine, (Hale) Methodist Church

Day Seven - 24th Jan - Holy Angels

Day Eight - 25th Jan - Churches Together in Hale

# Day One - Thursday 18th January

St Peter's

A lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Lk 10:25)



**Help us, Lord, to have a life turned towards you**

## Commentary from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" This crucial question asked of Jesus by a lawyer challenges every believer in God. It affects the meaning of our life on earth and for eternity. Elsewhere in the Bible, Jesus gives us the ultimate definition of eternal life: "... that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3). Knowing God means discovering and doing the will of God in our lives. God's dream for us (cf. Jn 10:10) finds powerful expression in the words of Saint Irenaeus: "The glory of God is a human being fully alive".

Violence, greed and exploitation distance us from one another and from Jesus as "the Way" that leads us to the Father, our ultimate destiny. Speaking from a society that has been torn apart and traumatised by violence and identity-based conflict for the last eight years, the churches of Burkina Faso offer us a message of hope in the promise of Christ's all-embracing love.



**Perhaps you could sing "When I needed a neighbour"**



Romans 14:8-9

Psalm 103:13-18

## From St Peter's, Hale

'What must I do to inherit eternal life?'

*This week we are invited to focus on what Christians can and must achieve working together – if only we can lift our eyes beyond the familiar and the immediate. And look to the needs of others and not just 'what's in it for us?' In this only is eternal life.*

God of life,

You have created us to have life, and life in all its fullness.

Help your wounded Church to be a source of hope and healing.

As we follow Jesus' way with determination, may we lead others to you.

We pray in Jesus' name.  
Amen.

## From Burkina Faso

The reality of life in Burkina Faso may be very different from our own, but we can identify significant parallels in the challenges facing Christians in each context. Consider the following reflection offered by Church leaders in Ireland:

“In our approach to the past we have a moral responsibility to acknowledge the corrosive impact of violence and words that can lead to violence, and a duty of care to those still living with the trauma of its aftermath... Christ’s teaching, ministry and sacrifice were offered in the context of a society that was politically divided, wounded by conflict and injustice... In these encounters, as exemplified in the meeting with the Woman of Samaria (Jn 4:1-42), we see that Christ does not seek to minimise differences, but rather to establish connection through gracious listening, replacing exclusion and shame with the hope of new beginnings.” (Church Leaders’ Ireland Group, In Christ We Journey Together, 17 March 2021)



## St Peter's Hale

### Please pray for:

**Our work with young families**

**St Peter's, recognised as an Inclusive Church where all are welcome**

**Our bid for recognition as an EcoChurch**

**The Ploughman's Lunch on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> at the Assembly Rooms in Cecil Road – a Churches Together initiative raising funds for Christian Aid's Middle East Crisis Appeal**

**Go and Do—**(see [www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo))

**Personal:** Think of an example from the news that illustrates a society wounded by conflict. Research how Christian churches are responding. How can this be applied in your context?

**Local:** Consider sharing the theme from this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity with members of other faith communities in your local area, reflecting on the connections between the local and global contexts. What more can your communities do to bring issues of global justice into our local inter-faith dialogue?

**Global:** Christians gathering to worship and witness in parts of Burkina Faso have been attacked and murdered, and the threat of violence continues to oppress and scatter that community. As we gather in this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, pray for all those facing religious persecution in Burkina Faso and other parts of the world.

## Questions

### Personal:

How do you see God's dream for you unfolding in your life?

### Local:

What might be weakening our witness as churches to God's promise of abundant life?

### Global:

What more could faith communities be doing to build on their pastoral experience and global reach to further the work of peace and reconciliation?

# Day Two - Friday 19th January

Altrincham  
URC  
Trinity Hale

**Jesus answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.” (Lk 10:27)**



**Help me, Lord, to receive your love, that I may make you manifest in loving well, both myself and my neighbour.**

## **Commentary from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland**

The answer Jesus draws out of the lawyer, from the well-known commandments of God, appears simple. However, the command to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind will be a constant challenge, requiring a lifelong determination to learn, reflect and seek radical change in ourselves through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The instruction to love our neighbours “as ourselves” demands equal consideration. To love and value ourselves as God would wish demands intimate relationship. Is God saying that we cannot love our neighbour fully unless we love ourselves? It seems so, which is an immense challenge for so many of us. Do we recognise that we live in the glory of the love of God, whose compassionate gaze is always upon us. We are God’s beloved creation, made in God’s image, and adored.

God’s commandment to love, calls for deep commitment and means abandoning ourselves entirely, offering our hearts and minds to serve God’s will. God’s grace to us is never ending. Ask, says God, and we will receive such grace to follow Christ’s example, the one who offered himself up completely and said, “Not my will but yours be done” (Lk 22:42) demonstrating great love to all humanity, including his enemies.

We do not get to choose our neighbours. Sometimes we must cross difficult barriers to serve them, rather than walking by. Loving means being attentive to their needs, accepting who they are, with humility, encouraging their hopes and aspirations. Christian unity demands the same humility – in Christ, we are one. Let’s learn to celebrate difference and glory in Christ’s unifying life, death and resurrection – inaugurating a new way of living available to all.



**Deuteronomy 10:12-13  
Psalm 133**

## **From URC Trinity Hale**

A man asked Jesus ‘Who is my neighbour?’ This led to Jesus telling the story of the Good Samaritan with which we are all familiar and from which we understand that our love for others should not be marred by prejudice. Jesus wants us as a Christian community to be loving, welcoming and fully inclusive and we pray that this may be so. We can read the story in Luke 10:29-37.

Lord, give us the grace to know you deeply,  
in order to love you entirely.  
May the gift of your Holy Spirit enable our eyes, ears and minds to receive the unconditional love with which you love us.

Purify our hearts that we may always be ready to love our neighbour, however different, as ourselves. Through the self-giving life of Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

## Reflection

Beloved, my heart is for you.  
I created you, I know you.  
Your name fills me with delight.  
My every action, reaction, thought, emotion  
and prayer for you is founded  
on love at its highest.  
Receive my compassion,  
bask in my gentleness,  
delight in my joyful kindness.  
Let me cherish you –  
let me die for you –  
may my heart become your heart.  
A renewed heartbeat,  
flowering within you,  
unfolding its gentle,  
love-soaked vision;  
a courageous, unswerving hope  
bursting with grace.  
Dear one, allow heaven to manifest  
in every human encounter,  
tenderising it  
with love's dignity  
and promise.



**URC—Trinity, Hale**

**Please pray for:**

**In this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity we pray for the Christian community of churches in this area and give thanks that the URC can play its part in spreading the Good News brought to us by Jesus Christ.**

**May we share with all we meet the peace and unconditional love of Christ—family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and strangers through our actions and not just our words and may all those who enter our space at the URC feel welcomed, loved and safe.**

**Altrincham URC Trinity Hale prays especially that we will be successful in finding a Church and Outreach Worker to work alongside us in furthering our missional aspirations in this local area.**

**Gracious and Loving God, we pray that you will help us to be faithful to Christ's command that we love the Lord our God with all our heart and that we love and treat our neighbours as we ourselves would wish to be treated and loved. Amen**

**Go and Do—**(see [www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo))

**Personal:** Resolve to get to know a new person in your road and find a loving way to engage with them.

**Local:** Explore where you live and what opportunities there are to cross barriers to serve.

**Global:** Explore an issue regarding the displaced and dispossessed. How could you meaningfully contribute to the situation?

## Questions

### Personal:

How do you see yourself?

How do you think God sees you?

### Local:

Does God's view of you change your view of those around you?

### Global:

How does God's view of you change how you respond to the news?



# Day Three - Saturday 20th January

“Who is my neighbour?” (Lk 10:29)

All Saints,  
Hale Barns  
with Ringway



**Lord, open our hearts to those we do not see**

## Commentary from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

The teacher of the law wanted to justify himself, hoping that the neighbour he is called to love is one of his own faith and people. This is a natural human instinct. When we invite people to our homes, they are quite often people who share our social status, our outlook on life and our values. There is a human instinct to prefer places of familiarity. This is also true of our Church communities. But Jesus takes the lawyer, and his wider audience, deeper into their own tradition by reminding them of the obligation to welcome and to love all, regardless of religion, culture or social status.

The Gospel teaches that loving those who are like ourselves is nothing special. Jesus steers us towards a much more radical version of what it means to be human. The parable illustrates in a very visible way what Christ expects from us – to open wide our hearts and walk in his way, loving others as he loves us. In fact, Jesus answers the lawyer with another question: it is not “who is my neighbour?”, but “who was a neighbour to the man in need?”

Our times of insecurity and fear confront us with a reality where distrust and uncertainty come to the forefront of relationships. This is the challenge of the parable today: to whom am I a neighbour?



Romans 13:8-10  
Psalm 119:57-63

## From All Saints

Hale Barns used to be the village for a farming community. Now people commute to work and school. Many, for fear of crime or invasion of privacy, shut themselves in behind gates and intercoms. It's hard to love your neighbour when you don't see them, to know what emotional, spiritual and financial issues they are facing. Pray for those we do see in cafe or at checkout and for those we don't see behind their high hedges.

God of love,  
who writes love in our hearts,  
instil in us the courage to look  
beyond ourselves  
and see the neighbour in those  
different from ourselves  
and to be the unexpected  
neighbour,  
that we may truly follow Jesus  
Christ –  
our brother and our friend,  
who is Lord, for ever and ever.  
**Amen.**

## So who is my neighbour?



## Reflection

The Lawyer's Tale  
I love God's Law.  
I dearly, dearly want to keep the Law.  
It's the foundation of my life  
and my eternity.  
But I want to know how,  
I want to do it right.  
That's why I asked  
who it is that I should love as myself.  
And he answered  
with a tale about a strange encounter,  
an encounter of strangers.  
And I will reflect  
about the one who showed mercy.  
And I bear the challenge  
to be like that one,  
to walk  
in the outlaw's shadow.



## All Saints, Hale Barns with Ringway

**Please pray for:**

**Give thanks for the All Saints Bubble Church team and pray for families with young children to come and enjoy worship together.**

**Give thanks for Jewish and Muslim friends and pray for understanding and respect between all the faith communities in Hale and Hale Barns as world events challenge relationships.**

**Give thanks for residents and staff at Halecroft Grange and pray for the building up of the community of Christians of all denominations there.**

**Give thanks for the beauty and complexity of creation and pray for courage and opportunity to heal the earth. (... and that the gardeners don't mow down the wildflower meadow at All Saints again this year!).**

**Go and Do—(see [www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo))**

**Personal: Think of a person you have never really thought of as your neighbour. How can you be a neighbour to them in a practical way?**

**Local: Think of the church/congregation geographically nearest to your own with which you have little or no contact, and make contact!**

**Global: Take practical steps as a church or group of churches to be neighbours to the people of Burkina Faso.**

## Questions

### Personal:

Why do you think the lawyer asked his first question?

### Local:

Who are the people who are excluded within your community and why?

### Global:

How can you, and your church or group of churches, be neighbours to people in other parts of the world with whom you have little or no contact?

# Day Four - Sunday 21st January

**When he saw him, he passed by on the other side.  
(Lk 10:31)**

St. Elizabeth's



**May we never turn away from those in need**

## **Commentary from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland**

The priest and Levite who walked by on the other side may have had religious reasons for not helping. The beginning of the text for the Week of Prayer tells us how the teacher of the law wanted to justify himself. The priest and the Levite in the parable would have felt justified in what they had done. Yet on many occasions, Jesus is critical of religious leadership for placing the rules of religion ahead of the obligation always to do good.

The prophet Isaiah gives us this same encouragement in chapter 58; it is better to do good than just to look good. As Christians, how far are we prepared to go beyond good conventions? Sometimes these seemingly trivial conventions can become dominant, distracting us from what really matters. The Covid-19 pandemic interrupted our ecclesial and culturally conditioned short-sightedness, pulling the rug from under our routines. But many of us, if we're honest, may have returned to those routines.

This parable of Jesus not only challenges us to do good, but also to widen our vision. We do not learn what is good and holy only from those who share our confessional or religious worldview, but often from those who are different from us. Light and love are embodied in our enemy too. The Good Samaritan is often the one we do not expect. When we open our eyes to see how God's love is revealed by our fellow Christians, we are drawn closer to them and so are drawn into deeper union with them.

SHARE YOUR FOOD WITH THE  
**HUNGRY**  
PROVIDE THE POOR  
WANDERER WITH  
**SHELTER**  
WHEN YOU SEE THE NAKED  
**CLOTHE THEM**

Isaiah 58:7

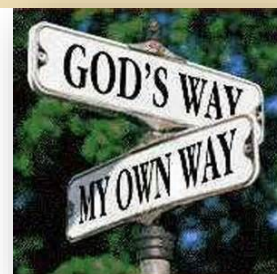


Isaiah 58:4-8a

Psalms 34:15-22

## **From St Elizabeth's**

If we want to live a faithful life, we have to accept that God's way might not be easy. The route to life is a path that denies self, and instead commits faithfully to loving others first. It was and still is revolutionary, but it is the way of Christ and blessing.



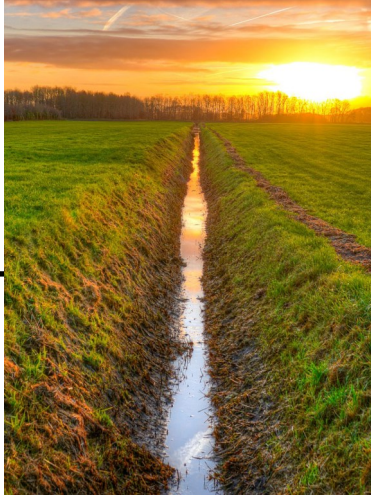
Lord Jesus Christ,  
may our eyes not look away,  
but be wide open to the world  
around us.

As we travel through life,  
may we stop and reach out,  
bind up the wounded  
and in so doing experience  
your presence in them.  
Give us a renewed commit-  
ment to journey with you to-  
wards unity.

**Amen.**

## Reflection

Down that road  
on the other side  
you'll find sacred dirt  
holy ditches  
where light is incarnate  
embodied in our enemies  
like a gift presented  
blinded to what's inside  
unwrapped,  
we find our neighbour.



**St Elizabeth's**

## Questions

### Personal:

What gets in the way of you doing good?

### Local:

Who are the people who behave like the Good Samaritan in your community?

### Global:

How can you widen your vision of being a good neighbour globally?

**Please pray for:**

**for our diminishing number of farmers, contending with the changing weather conditions.**

**for the continuing support in Ashley of non - churchgoers, evidenced by the success of our Fab 50 initiative.**

**for the outreach of our regular and successful musical concerts**

**for Ashley St Elizabeth's and St. Peter's Hale to work more closely together, to help each other.**

**Go and Do—(see [www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo))**

**Personal: Reflect on your own circle of relationships and their geography. Choose today to walk through another part of town. What do you see and who do you notice?**

**Local: Seek out a project in a local community near you that supports people often not seen. Look for ways in which you can support and encourage their work.**

**Global: Take some time to research the conflict in Burkina Faso and the challenges facing the Church there.**

# Day Five - Monday 22nd January

**He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. (Lk 10:34)**

Altrincham  
Baptist Church  
& The Hub



**Lord, help us see the wounds and find hope**

## Commentary from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

The Good Samaritan did what he could out of his own resources: he poured oil and wine and bandaged the man's wounds and put him on his own animal. The Samaritan went further still by promising to pay for the man's care. When we see the world through the Samaritan's eyes, every situation can be an opportunity to help those in need. This is where love manifests itself. The example of the Good Samaritan motivates us to ask ourselves how to respond to our neighbour. He gave wine and oil, restoring the man and giving him hope. What can we give, so that we can be a part of God's work of healing a broken world?

This brokenness shows itself in our world through insecurity, fear, distrust and division. Shamefully, these divisions also exist between Christians. Though we celebrate sacraments or other rituals of healing, reconciliation and consolation (often using oil and wine), we persist in behaviours that cause division, wounding the Body of Christ. The healing of our Christian divisions promotes the healing of the nations.

In this process of healing, we have to recognise our own vulnerability – how will others know how to engage in a journey of healing if we are unwilling to bare our wounds? How do we empower such courageous behaviour, recognising there is a cost?

Gracious God,  
You who are the source of all love and goodness:  
enable us to recognise the needs of our neighbour.  
Help us to be honest about our need for healing.  
Change us, so that we can love all.  
Help us to overcome the obstacles of division,  
that we might build a world of peace for the common good.  
Thank you for your renewing work in creation  
and for leading us to a future which is full of hope:  
you who are Lord of all, yesterday, today and forever.  
**Amen.**



Joel 2:23-27

Psalm 104:14-15, 27-30

## From Altrincham Baptist

The other week, it was a Tuesday, I found myself in (the) Asda on Blackburn Road, North Bolton at about 10am. Not a usual destination. I was visiting an Iranian family who had been 'dispersed' from The Ashley Hotel in Hale and thought that, given the remarkable culture of hospitality in Iran, I really ought to get them something; father, mother and son.

Perusing the shelves I was juggling, generosity, practicality and my own bank balance. I saw a cafetiere – good for nice coffee, flowers and a craft set – but which ones, the 'budget' range, or the quality kind. At that point, in aisle 3, God reminded me of his lavish and incomparable generosity to me, so I went with the metal cafetiere, the Lavazza coffee and the best flowers.

Luke 10:34 tells us that wounds were dressed with oil and wine, costly and ungrudging. I hope I got somewhere close to mimicking such generosity.

## Reflection

The bread lies broken  
crumbs spilled from the table trampled underfoot.  
Wine stains bled through linen  
where cups overflowed.  
The lingering taste of stories shared  
grows stale in the mouth.  
Indelible marks,  
evidence of where we sat together for a time,  
but what now?  
Others need their share –  
wine to gladden soul  
oil to anoint and heal  
bread to strengthen.  
We need to reset our tables  
to find an unfamiliar seat,  
and when the music stops  
what will it have cost?

## Questions

### Personal:

What wounds do you see?

### Local:

Where are you recognising  
signs of hope in your  
community?

### Global:

What can we give, so that we  
can be part of God's work of  
healing a broken world?



## Altrincham Baptist & The Hub

### Prayer requests

That we might *understand and appreciate* God's lavish gifts to us.

That we would *learn and grow* in generosity, a generosity which changes the church.

That the church would *deepen* its discipleship – our following of Jesus.

That we might have *wisdom* in responding to the many new lives with which we are engaging.

Go and Do—(see [www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo))

**Personal:** What areas of difference or tension in your communities might you meaningfully seek deeper understanding around? Begin a compassionate and generous conversation with some others about this.

**Local:** What groups already exist in your area that are actively involved in healing in some way? Explore meaningful ways of engaging with them.

**Global:** Take time as a church group to tend to the earth and be part of healing a broken world (“renew the face of the ground” Ps: 104). As you do this consider the impact of your lifestyle on other parts of the world.

# Day Six - Tuesday 23rd January

Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. (Lk 10:34)

The Vine  
Hale  
Methodist



Lord, turn our churches into 'inns', welcoming those in need

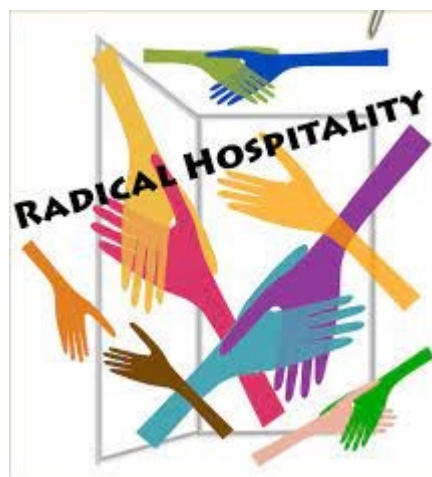
## Commentary from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

The man who fell into the hands of robbers was cared for by a Samaritan. The Samaritan confronted his own fear and prejudice and moved beyond it. He saw a stranger in need and brought him to an inn. "The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend'" (Lk 10:35).

In any human society, hospitality and solidarity are essential. They require the welcoming of strangers, migrants and all people without a home. Such hospitality can require sacrifice, but it is an important witness to the Gospel, particularly in contexts of religious and cultural pluralism. When faced with insecurity, suspicion and sometimes violence, we tend to mistrust our neighbours and extending and accepting hospitality becomes more difficult.

Welcoming 'the other', and being welcomed in turn, is at the heart of ecumenical dialogue and practice. Christians are challenged to turn our churches into inns, open and inviting spaces where our neighbours can find Christ. Such hospitality is a sign of the love that our churches have for one another and for all.

When we, as followers of Christ, move beyond our traditions and choose to practise ecumenical hospitality, we stop being strangers and start being good neighbours.



Genesis 18:4-5

Psalms 5:11-12

## From The Vine

Outrageous and radical hospitality isn't a weak cup of tea and curled up biscuit—it is intentional, real and life transforming. The Methodist Covenant prayer invites us annually to recommit ourselves to God. God initiates this covenant and we respond "I am no longer my own but yours." God teach us and lead us in ways which challenge our comfort and complacency. Dispel our prejudice and by your Spirit open our lives to interruption, discomfort and grace for your sake and your Kingdom.

God of unity

In Jesus, you showed us the meaning of hospitality, by caring for our fragile humanity. Help us to become a community that generously welcomes those who feel abandoned and lost, together building an inn where all are welcomed and loved. May we become closer to each other as we flaunt your unconditional love in the unity of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

## Reflection

What stops me from action?  
What silences our unity?  
Clinging to familiarity.  
Paralysed by fear of change, rejection and judgement.  
Or simply a lack of time.  
Justifying a choice to keep on walking.  
To discard a treasure.

Where is Christ in the face of the other?  
Rescuing, welcoming, accepting me.  
Joining me in prayer, worship and witness.  
Seeing me as I look into the eyes of those in need.  
The unexpected jewel reflecting something of the face of God.

## Questions

### Personal:

When have you seen Christ in someone who was not like you?

### Local:

Are there churches or spaces that act as an 'inn' near you?

### Global:

Is your country welcoming of those in need, or not?



## The Vine, Hale Methodist Church

### Please pray:

**Giving thanks for all are visitors in our community especially all who currently live at the Ashley Hotel—from the youngest to the oldest and our pray for our ability to be generous hosts.**

**Giving thanks for our partnership in the gospel as we provide a location for refugees and asylum seekers to cook food and have their own warm space in the church.**

**Giving thanks for our lunch clubs and All in Worship which offers an opportunity for all to grow in Christ.**

**Pray that radical hospitality increases and that our churches become safer spaces for all — welcoming , affirming and inclusive.**

Go and Do—(see [www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo))

**Personal: Find out about the life of a Christian from another tradition who has been a 'good neighbour'. What did they do and what can you learn from this experience?**

**Local: What ecumenical 'treasure' can be found in your area? Find out what Christians are doing together and get involved.**

**Global: Consider your neighbours in a different part of the world. Join the World Council of Churches Prayer Cycle and commit to praying regularly for your neighbours and understanding them better.**



# Day Seven - Wednesday 24th January

Jesus said: "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour?"

Holy  
Angels



**Lord, show us how to respond to our neighbour**

## From Holy Angels

Pope Francis invites us to recognise that the Samaritan: "had compassion", that is, his heart, his emotions, were moved! This is the difference. The other two "saw", but their hearts remained closed, cold. While the Samaritan was in synchrony with the very heart of God. Indeed, "compassion" is an essential characteristic of God's mercy. God has compassion on us. What does this mean? He suffers with us, he feels our suffering. Compassion means "suffer with". .... In the gestures and deeds of the Good Samaritan we recognize the merciful acts of God in all of salvation history. It is the same compassion with which the Lord comes to meet each one of us: He does not ignore us, he knows our pain, he knows how much we need help and comfort. He comes close and never abandons us." Pope Francis continues: "Jesus reverses the perspective: do not stand by classifying others by sight who is neighbour and who is not. You can become neighbour to any needy person you meet, and you will know that you have compassion in your heart, that is, whether you have the capacity so suffer with the other". The Parable of the Good Samaritan, then, is about the Incarnation – the presence of Christ in our history and in the Church; He who - as the Christmas Carols remind us - out of compassion, has come down to share our state with us; and to share with us God's love. He who makes himself our neighbour, a deliberate "living with" not on the basis of geography or of tribal loyalty; a "neighbourliness" which has nothing to do with which street we happen to live on, but a neighbourliness of Christ's compassion; of Christian compassion.



Philippians 2.1-5  
Psalm 10:17-18

## Commentary from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

At the end of the parable, Jesus asked the lawyer: who was the neighbour to the man who was robbed? The lawyer replied "the one who showed him mercy". He does not say "the Samaritan" and we might imagine that the hostility between Samaritans and Jews made that answer hard to admit. We often discover our neighbours in the most unexpected people, even those whose very name or origins we find difficult to utter. In today's world, where polarised politics often set those of different religious identities against one another, Jesus challenges us through this parable to see the importance of our vocation to transgress borders and walls of separation.

Like the lawyer, we are challenged to reflect upon how we live our lives, not merely in terms of whether we do good or not, but whether, like the priest and the Levite, we are neglecting to do mercy.

Holy God, your Son Jesus Christ came among us to show us the way of compassion.

Help us by your Spirit to follow his example, to serve the needs of all your children, and so witness together as Christians to your ways of love and mercy.

We pray in Jesus' name.

**Amen.**

## Reflection

Them,  
those people,  
people like that,  
you know...

But you don't know,  
that's the point,  
because you don't want to know.  
They're not important,  
as long as they know their place.

Thanks be to you, dear God,  
that your interfering mercy  
has put us in our place  
for those others.

## Questions

### Personal:

How can you 'do mercy' today?

### Local:

What borders and walls of separation need to be transgressed in your locality?

### Global:

How should the Church share the gift of mercy with the world?



## Holy Angels

Pope Francis therefore invites us to take these points to prayer:

“Do I believe? Do I believe that the Lord has compassion on me, just as I am, a sinner, with many problems and many issues?”.

The answer is: “Yes!”. But each one must see in his heart whether he has faith in this compassion of God, of the good God who draws close, heals us, caresses us.

Do I reject him? If so, he waits: he is patient and is always beside us.

All this teaches us that compassion, love, is not a vague sentiment, but means taking care of the other even paying for him. It means compromising oneself, taking all the necessary steps so as to “approach” the other to the point of identifying with him: “*you shall love your neighbour as yourself*”.

This is the Lord's Commandment.

Go and Do—(see [www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo))

**Personal:** Learn some basic phrases in the language of a group of people new to your area, and use them.

**Local:** Think of ways in which your church or group of churches can receive from the people they help.

**Global:** Discover the ways Christians, churches and people of other faiths have been merciful to those who would have least expected it.

# Day Eight - Thursday 25th January

Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise". (Lk 10:37)

Churches  
Together in  
Hale



**Lord, may our mercy be a sign of your Kingdom**

## Commentary from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Through these words – “Go and do likewise” – Jesus sends each of us, and our churches, to live out His commandment to love. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, we are sent out to be “other Christs”, reaching out to a suffering humanity in compassion and mercy. Like the Good Samaritan towards the injured man, we can choose not to reject those who are different, rather cultivating a culture of proximity and goodwill - actively seeking out and moving towards opportunities to be hospitable, to welcome and to share - in our common task to bring to fruition the dream of God.

In considering how Jesus’ invitation to “Go and do likewise” speaks to our own lives, we must not lose sight of the need for compassion and mercy in places we may not be willing to go, or have no direct connection with, such as areas like the Sahel region affected by inter-communal conflict. To truly be neighbours, our horizons must expand beyond that which does not cost us anything, encompassing the whole world, as we intentionally strive for justice and unity, learning how Christ’s love can visit us through the welcoming of others.

Striving together for merciful unity helps rebuild relationships, so that violence can give way to solidarity and peace. As mutual trust and confidence increase, we become more willing to reveal our wounds, including ecclesial wounds, in the hope that Christ’s love may visit and heal us through each other’s love and care.



**Go and do likewise**



**Romans 12:9-13**

**Psalms 41:1-2**

## From Churches in Hale

Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise’. (Luke 10.37)

God wants us to work together, setting aside differences of tradition and understanding, and working to meet the needs of all God’s children. This Week of Prayer concludes as we commemorate the Conversion of St Paul – a man changed from persecutor to preacher, proclaiming the Good News and encouraging the different churches to love one another.

Mothering God, who holds the world in loving embrace, may we care for each other as you do, each and every soul.

Holy Spirit, giver of life, open us to each other and strengthen our bonds of communion and grow us in mutual affection.

Prince of Peace, give us the resolve to live out the Gospel faithfully that we may be radical welcomers and reconcilers.

## Reflection

After the cacophony was over,  
there was painful stillness.  
Moments of lucidness punctuated with nothing.  
Breathless.....in the dirt..... I pray.

Selah

A hand upon my body  
different from before.  
The intention of the touch - mindful of the pain still  
present -  
is to tend, not to harm.

Selah

The smell of wine poured to soothe  
bittersweet tannin in my mouth.  
The feeling of oil running down my skin  
the wounds of the body the meeting place for pain  
and peace  
a balm for mind, body and soul.

Selah

Blurred figures linger as I move  
weightless in unknown surroundings  
yet the familiar touch of compassion.  
Faint murmurs in unfamiliar tongues  
promise care.  
This time, as I open my eyes,  
having never seen you before  
I recognise your mercy.



## Questions

### Personal:

What does this call of Christ  
imply for your relationships  
with members of other  
churches?

### Local:

What is it that people recognise  
in the flavour of what we do  
(together) as the Church that is  
meaningful?

**Global:** What does/might  
merciful unity look like on a  
global scale?

### We Pray:

**For the work of Churches Together  
in Britain and Ireland  
For the work of Churches Together  
in Hale  
For Altrincham Christians Togeth-  
er, and Churches Together in  
Timperley  
For Christians throughout the  
world  
That all who call themselves Chris-  
tians may be strengthened to live  
out their faith, showing the love of  
God in this troubled world. Lord,  
may our mercy be a sign of your  
Kingdom**

**Go and Do—**(see [www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo))

**Personal:** Reflect on how you have experienced ‘other Christ’s’ and been Christ to others, then share some stories about this with others, and pray for more opportunities.

**Local:** Where is God already at work in your community? Map out where you live highlighting the places where you notice something happening that may be God’s dream for your communities. Explore how you might join in and go and do likewise.

**Global:** ‘Go and do likewise’ does not mean we have to go to places such as the Sahel region to have an impact. Explore ways of connecting with churches and partner organisations in Burkina Faso and other places that seem far away and actively seek deeper connection and understanding of situations/context.

With thanks to all who have contributed to this  
resource