

Ecumenical worship service. © Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

The Gathering

Introductory hymn: For the healing of the nations (Cwm Rhondda) Number 150

During the singing of the hymn, the Reverend Anne Paton, the Interim Moderator of St. Margaret's and Crosshill, will enter the church with Ian Douglas, Reader in St. Margaret's and Crosshill and Fr. Ness. They will be led by a parishioner carrying the Book of Gospels.

Words of welcome

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

Congregation And also with you.

Fr. Ness 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.

Ian Douglas 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.

Listening to the Living Word of God

The Rev. Anne: Let us listen attentively to the Word of God. (all sit)
Father in heaven, open our hearts and minds to Your Word.

Congregation Your words are spirit and life!

The Rev. Anne Lead us to grow closer to each other in unity and charity.

Congregation Your word is a lamp to our path!

The Rev. Anne A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

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.'

Acts 27:18-26

Invocation of the Holy Spirit

Fr. Ness Spirit, breath of God's loving, come upon this gathering and dwell among us.

Congregation Come, Holy Spirit!

Fr. Ness Spirit and Consoler, shine Your light in our darkness.

Congregation Come, Holy Spirit!

Fr. Ness Spirit and Advocate, be our hope when we feel abandoned

Congregation Come, Holy Spirit!

Fr. Ness Spirit, Helper and Guide, bring us to eternal safety.

Congregation Come, Holy Spirit!

Fr. Ness Spirit and Comforter, help us heal and restore what we have damaged and lost.

Congregation Come, Holy Spirit!

Ian Douglas 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.

Acts 27:27-32

Prayers of pardon and reconciliation

Fr. Ness Forgive us, Lord, for remaining in darkness rather than seeking Your light.

Congregation **Lord, have mercy!**

Fr. Ness Forgive us, Lord, for past mistakes, mistrust and misdeeds between Christians from different churches and communities.

Congregation **Lord, have mercy!**

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

Congregation **Lord, have mercy!**

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

Congregation **Lord, have mercy!**

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

Congregation **Lord, have mercy!**

Fr. Ness 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.

Congregation **Amen**

Hymn: Bind us together, Lord. Number 65.

The Rev. Anne. 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.

Acts 27:33-38

The Apostles' Creed.

All stand.

The Rev. Anne Dear brothers and sisters, Saint 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:

Congregation **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.

St. Brendan's 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.

You shall cross the barren desert Number 644.

Acts 27:39-44

St. Margaret's 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.

Acts 28:1-10

Reader This is the Word of the Lord.

Congregation Thanks be to God who saves and who heals!

Homily The Rev. Anne Paton, Interim Moderator.

The prayers of the people

Ian Douglas 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.

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

Congregation Hear our prayer for Trust.

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

Congregation Hear our prayer for Perseverance.

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

Congregation Hear our prayer for Harmony.

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

Congregation Hear our prayer for Courage.

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

Congregation Hear our prayer for Unusual Kindness.

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

Congregation Hear our prayer for Transformation.

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

Congregation Hear our prayer for Generosity.

Ian Douglas Gracious God, listen now to the prayers of our hearts which we pray in silence.

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

**Congregation 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

Ian Douglas 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.

Congregation **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.**

Swanwick Declaration 1987

The Rev. Anne May God the Father, who called us from darkness into light,
make us true bearers of God's light.

Congregation **Amen.**

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

Congregation **Amen.**

The Rev. Anne 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.

Congregation **Amen.**

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

Congregation **Amen.**

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

Concluding hymn: Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? Number 632.

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