

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2019

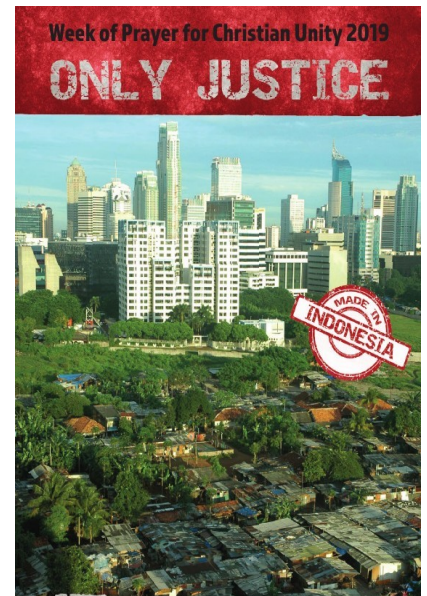
Only Justice 18-25 January

Welcome

Last year we were invited to reflect upon the continuing impact of the Transatlantic Slave Trade upon Caribbean society and upon Christian unity and witness. This year we are reminded again that our prayer for unity is offered up amidst injustice and that Christian disunity is in so many ways related to the divisions in our world.

The Churches of Indonesia, from whom the material comes, speak out of a context of ethnic and religious diversity, and where there is a strong emphasis upon the need for a unity that is found in diversity, and one built on solidarity and collaboration. Yet they also highlight issues of economic injustice and how religious pluralism can face challenges in the face of radicalization.

This gives us an opportunity to reflect upon the context in which we pray for Christian unity. How do divisions in our society contribute to divisions in the Church? How does injustice in our Irish context create challenges in pursuit of our shared life together?



Introduction to this year's theme

Our prayers for Christian unity are offered within a context of a world where corruption, greed and injustice bring about inequality and division. We ourselves are often complicit in injustice, and yet called together to form a united witness for justice and to be a means of Christ's healing grace for a fractured world.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2019 material has been prepared by Christians from Indonesia, which is the largest country in South East Asia, made up of more than 17,000 islands, 1,340 different ethnic groups and over 740 local languages. It is united in its plurality by one national language Bahasa Indonesia. With some 86% of its 260 million people estimated to be Muslim, Indonesia has the largest Islamic population of any country. About 10% of Indonesians are Christian from various traditions, as well as Buddhist and Hindu communities. The nation is founded on five principles called Pancasila, with the motto Bhineka Tunggal Ika (Unity in Diversity). Across the diversity of ethnicity, language and religion, Indonesians have lived by the principle of gotong royong which is to live in "solidarity and by collaboration". This means sharing in all aspects of life, regarding all Indonesians as brothers and sisters.

This harmony can be fragile at times and is threatened in particular ways. Gotong royong sits ill at ease with the neo-liberal approach to economics that has led to Indonesia's economic growth - with that has come corruption that infects politics and business, often with devastating effects on the environment. Meanwhile those who are supposed to promote justice and protect the weak fail to do so. As a consequence, a country rich in resources bears the burden of many people living in poverty. This is reflected in a traditional Indonesian saying, "A mouse dies of hunger in a barn full of rice". Particular ethnic and religious groups are often associated with wealth in ways that have fed tensions. As a result the radicalization that pits one community against another has grown and is exacerbated by the misuse of social media to demonize particular communities.

A common Christian response to such a reality whilst acknowledging our own complicity, heeds Jesus's prayer "that they all may be one", and enables us to combat injustice.

Moved by these concerns the Christians of Indonesia found that the words of Deuteronomy, "Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue..." (see *Deut. 16:18-20*) spoke powerfully to their situation and needs. Before the people of God enter the promised land they renew their commitment to the Covenant. The passage comes in a chapter whose central theme is the festivities to be celebrated by the Covenant people. After each festival the people are instructed, "Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns" (*Deut. 16:14, see also 16:11*). Indonesian Christians look to recover this same spirit of inclusive festivities across communities, which they previously enjoyed. This is rooted in justice, which is why we have a verse about appointing judges.

Jesus reaffirms this when he says that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who hunger and thirst and are persecuted for justice (*cf. Matt. 5:6, 10*), and the Church is called to be a foretaste of this kingdom. However, in this disunity Christians fall short and fail to be a sign of God's love for his people. Just as injustice has widened the divisions that have riven Indonesian society, so injustice has also fed the divisions of the Church. Indonesian Christians speak of the need to repent of the injustice that causes division, but also believe in the power of Christ to forgive and heal. They speak of finding themselves united under the cross of Christ, calling both for his grace to end injustice and for his mercy for the sin which has caused division.

DAY 1

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2019

18th Jan 2019

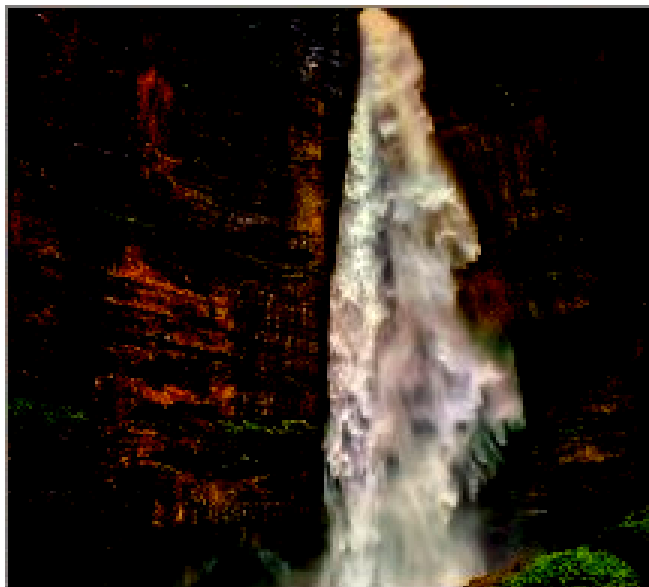
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2019

ONLY JUSTICE



Amos 5:22-25

Luke 11:37-44



Starting Point

Christians in Indonesia recognize that in their land there are people who passionately try to practise their faith, but who oppress those of other beliefs. In the prophecy of Amos, God rejects the worship of those who neglect justice. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus reminds us that the outward sign of true worship of God is acting justly. Christians can sometimes be very committed to prayer and worship, but less concerned for the poor and the marginalized. When, as Christians, we work together on justice issues we grow closer to one another and to God.

Reflection

At the table
we sit,
empty plates, but for a few crumbs.

Everyone's had their fill again,
satiated,
at least for now.

Turning on the taps
we fill our bowls,
in the hope that the stains
will disappear.

The water cascades
over cup
and plate,
cleansing it
of any sign of human contact,
as if there had never been a meal.

In our polite conversation
and edgy discourse,
we fool ourselves
into thinking we are making
a difference.

We faithfully gather,
but are we just acting,
waiting,
for the others to speak up
as we wash our hands?

Let justice roll down like waters (Amos 5:24)

Prayer

God of all,
you have shown us the path
of justice.
You are the father of the orphan.
You are the constant companion of
the widow.
You are the friend of the stranger.
In each of these,
may we meet you
and recognize the wind of
your Spirit,
moving us toward the need
for justice.
In all that we do,
may we know your grace and mercy
and offer healing and justice in
your name.



Questions

- How would you describe justice?
- Where have you recognized justice in action?
- Can we have unity without justice?

Go and Do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

‘Charity is no substitute for justice withheld’.

Take time to reflect and remember campaign successes of the recent and distant past, e.g. the abolition of transatlantic slavery and the end of apartheid in South Africa. Visit Go and Do to read about recent successes in the campaign for tax justice.

Celebrate the successes and get together to discuss what action your community of churches could take to challenge injustice that is happening now. Visit Go and Do for some creative activism ideas.

DAY 2

19th Jan 2019



Ephesians 4:22-25

Matthew 5:33-37

Starting Point

The letter to the Ephesians presents a call for Christians to be honest and accountable to each other, so that we may grow in community. There is no place for deceitfulness, for it serves only to impair our relationships and so destroy that community. We are called to live an authentic life

of faith and stand up for the truth. Our yes must mean 'yes' and our no must mean 'no' – with no equivocal language or dishonest behaviour. Dishonesty disrupts the unity of the Church for which we are called to pray and work.

Reflection

If I am to speak truth to power,
whose truth do I speak?
Whose justice do I seek
in the space between my right-ness
and that of the 'other'?
If I say 'yes' to justice,
does that make it all mine?
What of the grey between
the emphatics?

'Let me declare boldly,
sure-footedly
that my yes is
a "yes-yes", and my
no is "no".' Says Jesus.

'Let me draw clarity
in the sand that
defines and refines
knowledge, truth and tales

in such a way
that all are sure.

'Let me dwell deep
in the place within
where, regardless of the
outward form
you know beyond doubt's shadow,
that truth and justice,
peace and righteousness lie.

'And let me,
in my boldness
turn widdershins
the hypocrisy of
those who confuse integrity

with fake-ness,
who obscure truth with falsehood
and call it news.

'Let me boldly be good news.'

Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No' (Matthew 5:37)

NO

YES

Prayer

God of justice,
grant me the wisdom to see right
from wrong.
Let my heart be guided by honesty
and my lips speak truth.
In times of doubt, cloak me in
courage the colour of trust.
Birth in me the passion for unity
and peace
so that I may be a good news bearer
for all.
In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Questions

- What does it feel like to have your words distorted?
- Look at on-line or paper copies of current news items. Can you distinguish spin, or 'fake news' – what are the markers of such items?
- How, in our churches, do we tell, or re-tell our own stories in order to set ourselves in a good light?

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Not everything we read or see in the news is true. 'Fake news' has become a catch-all term for stories that are deliberately made up and also those that have some truth to them but are not reported accurately.

Hold a newspaper reading breakfast for the churches in your area and take time to discuss the headlines and equip yourselves with the skills to discern what is true in this 'post-truth' age? Visit Go and Do to find out some steps for identifying fake news that you can discuss over breakfast.

Visit Go and Do to find out about and join the campaigns challenging the negative and scaremongering reporting in the media.

DAY 3

20th Jan 2019

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2019

ONLY JUSTICE



Psalm 145:8-13

Matthew 1:1-17



Starting Point

Christians in Indonesia live within a context of great diversity. Indonesia is a nation of over 17000 islands and 1340 ethnic groups. The churches are often separated along ethnic lines, and some may wound the unity of the Church by regarding themselves as sole guardians of the truth. There are those who are excluded and pushed to the margins. The scripture passages for today remind us that the love of God transcends the boundaries of ethnicity, culture, race, and religion. God is broken with those who are broken. God stands outside with those who are excluded. God includes everyone in the plan of salvation and none are left out.

Reflection

Born
Endangered
Love - withheld misdirected
misused hidden from me

Broken
Untended
Self - withheld misdirected
misused hidden from me

Rejected
Cast away
Place - withheld misdirected
misused hidden from me

Found
Harboured
Love - offered whole healthy
including me

Broken
Tended
Self - offered whole healthy
including me

Accepted
Welcomed
Place - offered whole healthy
including me

Pain
Acknowledged
Love - chosen given
accepted returned

The Lord is gracious and merciful to all (Psalm 145:8)

Healing
Started
Self – chosen given accepted returned

Wholeness
Sometimes
Place – chosen given
accepted returned

God
born
broken
rejected
Life – restored remade including me

Questions

- Where do you see God's grace and mercy in action?
- Who are those on the margins of your communities?
- What can you/we do to engage those who feel beyond God's reach?

Prayer

God of all humanity
your Son was born into a line
of men and women,
ordinary and extraordinary.
Some of them were remembered
for their great deeds,
others more for their sins.
Give us an open heart to share your
unbounded love,
and to embrace all who experience
discrimination.
Help us to grow in love beyond
prejudice and injustice.
Grant us the grace to respect the
uniqueness of each person,
so that in our diversity we may
experience unity.
This prayer we make in your
holy name. Amen



*The Lord is gracious and
merciful, slow to anger and
abounding in steadfast love.*

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

God stands with those who are most marginalized. Consider how your churches might join with those who are most marginalized in our societies. Contact local organizations working to support destitute asylum seekers and find out how you can help best. Visit Go and Do to find out more.

Take action to ensure those who are displaced but excluded from the UN resolutions on rights of refugees are included and given the support they need. Visit Go and Do to find out more.

DAY 4

21st Jan 2019

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2019

ONLY JUSTICE



Hebrews 13:1-5

Matthew 6:25-34



Shopping in Bali

Starting Point

God's goodness has provided ample food and fresh water to sustain life for all and yet many people lack these necessities. Human greed frequently leads to corruption, injustice, poverty and hunger. Jesus teaches us not to be concerned about accumulating more material things than we need. We should, rather, be concerned with proclaiming the Kingdom of equity and announcing God's reign of justice. Christians are called to live lives which enable the waters of justice to flow.

Reflection

I scrape together
the crumbs of my excess,
perhaps enough to feed
the sparrows?

I soak up
the spilling over of my cup,
perhaps enough to drown
my sorrows?

I ask myself,
when is enough
ever going to be enough?

You ask me
if I can spare any change
and I worry
that I do not have enough

enough good reason
enough good will
enough compassion
enough empathy
enough humanity
enough energy
enough desire
enough courage
to make the change that is
sorely needed.

Be content with what you have (Hebrews 13:5)

**"NEVER WILL I LEAVE YOU
NEVER WILL I FORSAKE YOU"**

HEBREWS 13:5

Prayer

God of the seasons,
whether in bountiful harvest,
or when there is no yield for what
we have sown;
let us be content,
that your grace is sufficient.
Help us to have the generosity
of spirit,
to share what we have
with those who have not.
May we all be blessed
with love, grace, compassion
and mercy,
as we seek to walk humbly
and do justly,
for your name's sake. Amen.



Slums in Bogor

Questions

- Share a story of a time when you did not have enough – how did you feel?
- What do you find the most difficult thing to share?
- What do you find the most difficult thing to receive?

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Pay attention to the advertising messages you receive, on buses, billboards, TV, newspapers, online. Reflect on the messages that we are absorbing everyday about what we supposedly need.

Reflect on your identity as a consumer and consider the steps we can take as individuals and as a community of churches to live simply so others can simply live?

Plan a Lent journey between the churches in your area that involves a fast from buying and how we might count and share our blessings instead. Visit Go and do to find out more.

DAY 5

22nd Jan 2019

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2019

ONLY JUSTICE



Amos 8:4-8

Luke 4:16-21



Starting Point

The prophet Amos criticized traders who practiced deceit and exploited the poor. God, who sides with the victims of injustice, will not forget such wrongdoing. In a globalized world, such marginalization, exploitation and injustice is rampant. The gap between rich and poor is becoming wider. Economic demands become the deciding factor in our relationships and the demands of justice are more and more pushed to the side-lines. Christians are called to challenge the prevailing attitudes and to work for justice.

Reflection

I'll believe it when I see it!
I've heard it all before!
'Things can only get better'
'Audacity of hope'
Promises of something new!
Good news?
They are just bus-slogans when the
poor remain poor,
the vulnerable abused and no-one
speaks out!
Do you think I can jump up
and dance
when my hands and feet are made
heavy with the anger from
broken promises?
And so I stare at you,
because to stare is all I can do.

But
if 'good news' means
rising up against power,
overturning the tables down the
road in the big city,
walking, talking and eating with
people like us,
going the whole way with us,
not departing when things get
too tough,
even when the suffering becomes
too great to endure,
this would truly be something new.
It would be good news fulfilled.
Then I could be tempted to trust
one more time.

To bring good news to the poor (Luke 4:18)

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.

Luke 4:18

Prayer

God, the bringer of good news,
forgive our lust for power
and free us from the temptation to
oppress others.

Instil in us the determination
to see your good news made real in
us and those around us,
as we share in the mission of your
Son Jesus
to fulfil your promise of freedom
from poverty and oppression.
We pray in his name. Amen.



Questions

- Where do you see deceit and false promises?
- Who are the poor and the powerful in your community?
- What can we do to bring the good news of the gospel to both the powerful and the poor?

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

The World Economic Forum meets from 22nd – 25th January 2019 in Davos, coinciding with when many churches mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. It is a moment that highlights the extreme disunity and inequality across the world. 42 people own the same wealth as the poorest 50 percent (Oxfam 2018).

Take time this week to work together for a world where there is unity not just between Christians but where we as human beings can flourish together. Renew your commitment to trade that is fair and ethical and to continue to campaign for taxes to be paid. Visit Go and Do for more information.

DAY 6

23rd Jan 2019

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2019

ONLY JUSTICE



Jeremiah 10:12-16

Mark 16:14-15



Starting Point

We are, today, facing a serious global ecological crisis and the survival of the planet is threatened. The passage from Mark's Gospel reminds us that, after his resurrection, Jesus commissioned the disciples to proclaim the good news to the whole creation. No part of creation is outside God's plan to make all things new. So, Christians are called to promote values which reconcile humankind with all creation. When we join with other people in defence of our common earthly home, we are not just engaging in activism, but we are fulfilling the Lord's command to proclaim to all creation the good news of God's healing and restoring love.

Reflection

Proclaim the good news to all
of creation,
not just to my small part.

Oh God, who made the world,
both body and gift.

Your creation groans.
What have we done?
Land and sea polluted,
death and destruction,
communities gone,
families displaced.
While we sit in comfort.

Your creation groans.
What have we done?
A damaged world,
a broken system.
Upheld by stupidity, destruction,
neglect and greed.
An abuse of God's gift,
while we disconnect.

Where is God's voice,
God's rolling waves of justice?
We too are God's body,
thinking beyond ourselves,
seeing consequences,
listening for the still small voice,
swimming against the tide.

Asking what shall I do?

The Lord of hosts is his name (Jeremiah 10:16)



Air pollution at the edge of Surabaya

Prayer

Loving God,
by whose breath all things came
to be,
we thank you for the world
which manifests your glory,
diversity and beauty.
Grant us the wisdom to walk gently
upon the earth
and to share together your good news
with all creation. Amen

Questions

- Where do you see an abuse of human power, leading to destruction or neglect?
- Where do you see God's justice in the created world?
- Where can we make a difference?

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Wrap up warm, pack a flask and organize a nature walk with the churches in your area. Take it as time to journey together and to reconnect with the natural world of which we are all a part. You could go to a park if you are in the city, or step outdoors if you are in the countryside.

Pray for another way for the world and that we as humanity might work with creation rather than against it. Visit Go and Do to take action in the next stage of the climate justice campaign.



1 Samuel 1:13-17 Matthew 15:21-28

Starting Point

The marginalization and dismissal of women's voices continues in our own times and in our own culture. Within our own churches we are often complicit with attitudes and actions that devalue women. As we become more aware of the issues, so we begin to recognize the many ways in which women are subjected to violence and injustice. Human trafficking, exploitation of women and children, and sexual abuse continue to be the reality for many women. In the scripture readings both Hannah and the Canaanite woman are dismissed as 'worthless' nuisances. But they stand up for themselves, change the perceptions of Eli and Jesus, and achieve their deepest desire. Many women are unable to challenge marginalization and exploitation. As Christians unite in prayer and the study of the Scriptures, truly listening for God's voice, we discover that God also speaks today through the cries of the most abused in society.

Reflection

Hannah

Weeping silently,
praying from the heart before
the Lord,
why does Eli think she is drunk?
Quiet, dignified, refuting her accuser,
she is promised her heart's desire.

The Canaanite woman

Nameless,
fierce and canny on behalf of
her daughter,
turning insult to advantage,
rejection to praise resounding
throughout centuries.
Great is your persistent faith!

The 'worthless' woman

Belittled, discounted, invisible,
why won't you hear my story?
Why won't you believe what they are
doing to me?
Desperate worm turning,
speaking out, #MeToo,
a tsunami of testimony, standing
strong together,
mountains pushed aside.
Nothing is impossible with God.

Woman, great is your faith! (Matthew 15:28)

Prayer

Gracious God,
you are the source of human dignity.
By your grace and power
the words of Hannah, from the midst
of her tears,
challenged and turned the heart of
Eli the Priest.

By your grace and power
the Canaanite woman was
emboldened to reject rejection
and move Jesus to heal her daughter.
As we strive for a Church which
unites all humanity,
grant us the courage to reject all
forms of violence against women
and to celebrate the gifts
that women bring to the Church.
This we pray through Jesus Christ
our Lord,
in whom all may find their true
worth and calling. Amen.



Questions

- How would you describe a person of great faith? Think of someone you know.
- Can you remember a time when you felt marginalized or dismissed?
- What can we do to empower women, children and other marginalized people in our community?

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Visit Go and Do to find out how the Side by Side faith movement for gender justice is making great progress across the world.

Organize a local event with the churches in your area to mark and celebrate International Women's Day on Friday 8th March. Visit Go and Do for resources and ideas.

Wear black each Thursday in solidarity with all across the world who are working and longing for the day when there is an end to violence against women. Find out more at Go and Do.

DAY 8

25th Jan 2019

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2019

ONLY JUSTICE



Psalm 27:1-4

John 8:12-20

Starting Point

Over the past eight days the churches of Indonesia have helped us consider difficult situations facing the world. Many of these have raised questions of justice. The Church has been complicit in many instances of injustice and, through that complicity, we have damaged our unity and diminished the effectiveness of our witness to the world. Christians gather for common prayer, professing common faith and to listen for God's voice. Although the many injustices wound us, we do not lose hope, but are called to action. The Lord is our light and salvation, the stronghold of our lives. We do not fear.

Reflection

Hope

Forgive us how we've devalued you:
'We live in hope' and yet don't hope
to live,
'Hope so', when we have none in
our hearts.

Show us who you really are:
disturb the deathly ease of
our despair
and give us the courage to embrace
your pain:
impudent in the face of hate,
unrelenting under oppression,
daring to resist the entropy
of division.

Goad us to take up that felon's cross
whose agony
laid empty the grave.

The Lord is my light and my salvation (Psalm 27:1)

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

— Psalm 27:1

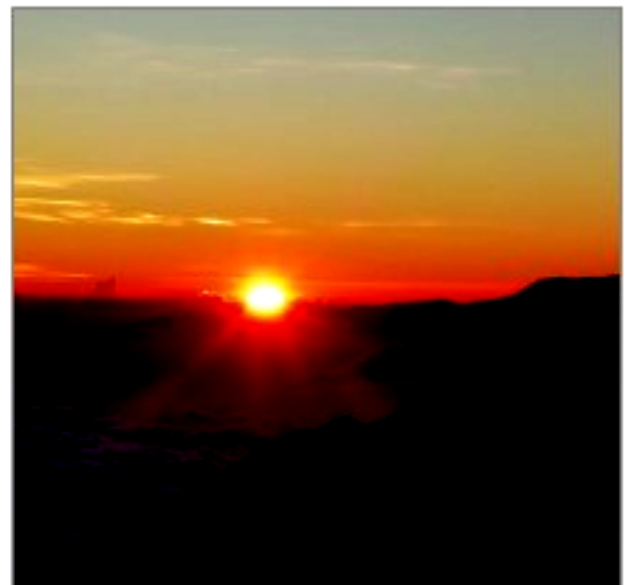
Prayer

God our hope,
we praise you for your
loving kindness.

Uphold us when we are about to
give up,
show us your light when all around
seems dark.

Transform our lives that we may
bring hope to others.

Help us to live united in our diversity
as a witness to your communion,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
one God now and forever. Amen.



Questions

- How has Jesus empowered you to witness to what is right?
- Where in the life of your church or group of churches do you most need the gift of hope?
- What is your best hope for your community?

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Generate hope by sharing your actions and prayers for justice on the CTBI prayer wall using the #wpcuwall hashtag on Twitter and visit www.weekofprayer.org to see the actions others have taken.

The Christian Aid Week 2019 packs for organizers will be landing on doormats across the UK and Ireland this week. Plan to get involved in this other week of the year that witnesses Christian unity across the UK and Ireland. Visit Go and Do to find out more.