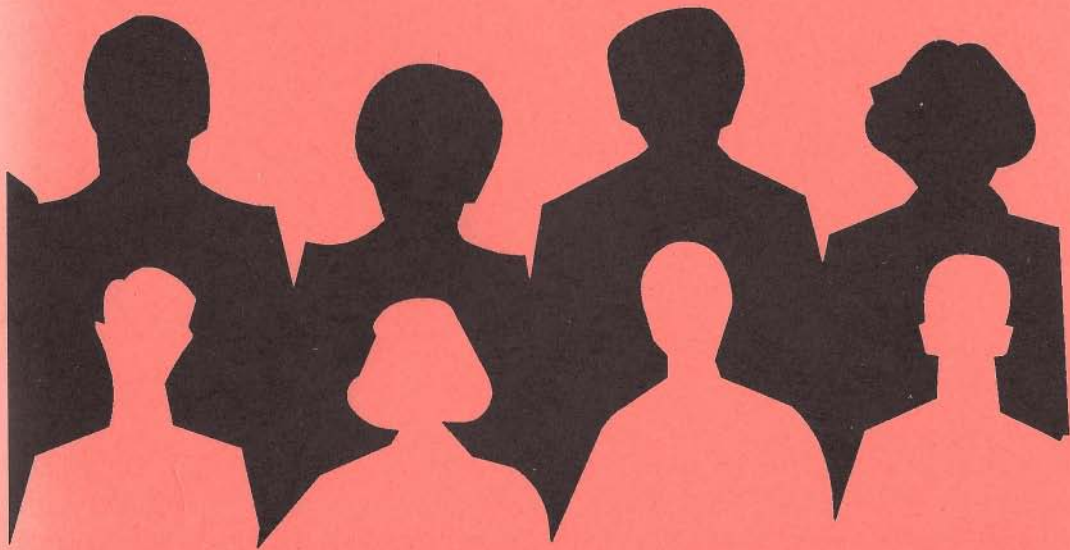


WE ARE HERE

a book
of prayers
for
corporate
worship

by Cliff Reed



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Lindsey Press



A Unitarian Publication

This is the first in what may become an annual series of collections of meditations, prayers, and readings for use in worship sponsored by the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. It is hoped these volumes will prove useful for private reflection and in services of worship of any faith, as well as in Unitarian and Free Christian services.

A complete list of publications, may be obtained by application to the Information Department of the General Assembly, at the address printed below

Published by the Unitarian Information
Department of the General Assembly of
Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

Essex Hall
1 - 6 Essex Street
Strand, London
WC2R 3HY
(071) 240 2384

Typeset, design, and cover design
by *Van der Heijden Publishing*
37 Selwood Road
Croydon, Surrey CR0 7JU

ISBN 0 85319 922

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of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches



www.unitarian.org.uk/docs

PREFACE

The quality of our worship, however we understand that much misused word, is deeply affected by the quality of prayer. This is so whether we are participating in a traditional church service, in a small fellowship meeting in a private home or spending time in solitary contemplation.

It follows in a movement such as ours which encourages individuals to be open to religious truths from many sources, that the publication of new worship material is especially welcome. I hope that this selection of prayers by the Reverend Cliff Reed will prove its value by enriching the quality of worship in congregations and fellowships across the country as well as providing a treasured aid to personal reflection.

Matthew F. Smith

February 1992

About the author



Cliff Reed was born in London in 1947, a “son of the manse”, his father having been a Baptist minister who turned Unitarian. The author’s first career was in librarianship, working both in Britain and for a time in Georgetown, Guyana, with Voluntary Service Overseas. In 1972 he entered Unitarian College, Manchester to train for the ministry, taking a degree in theology at Manchester University at the same time. He finished at college in 1976 and began his current ministry at Ipswich, Framlingham and Bedfield in Suffolk.

Cliff has served the denomination in a number of capacities, most recently as a member of the Objects Review Commission and as Unitarian representative on the late lamented British Council of Churches. In his local area he has been active in the Council for Racial Equality, the peace movement, interfaith activities, Cruse and Amnesty International’s Urgent Action Panel. Hobbies include birdwatching, walking in the country and going to the theatre.

Cliff is married with two sons.

PREPARATION

PRAYER BEFORE LEADING WORSHIP

O God, be with us in our worship here today.
May I, despite all anxieties and irritations,
be a true vehicle of your Spirit to those
assembled here. Amen.

MEETING FOR WORSHIP

We meet for worship in a world of wonder and plenty,
but a world long-shadowed
by the folly and wickedness of our kind.
May our worship and our prayer not forget the shadow,
but by the power of the Spirit
rise above it to bring peace and hope
to our lives and the world's.

HOUSE OF HOPE

Hope brings us here:
hope of inspiration,
hope of comfort,
hope of enlightenment,
hope of love.

This is the house of hope,
where people come
to find in fellowship
the hope that saves.

Spirit of hope, within us and
among us, restore our faith
in life's promise;
empower us to save the world.

HOUSE OF PEACE

From the world's strife,
we come to the house of peace;

From victory's pride,
we come to the house of humility;

From defeat's shame
we come to the house of self-respect;

From the world's division,
we come to the house of unity.

Let us repent, give thanks, and worship.

WE COME...

We come to share with each other the divine peace.

We come to discover our oneness with each other,
and with God.

May there be trust between us, and a willingness to be
open.

May there be love between us, a true caring
and a true respect.

From the troubles and concerns of the world we turn
aside for this time together.

From journeying the desert path we pause to share the
life-giving waters.

From the fountain of the Spirit we drink to quench our
hearts' thirst.

WE ARE HERE

We are here - frail, flawed and far from perfection - yet we are here.

We are here to worship you - the source of all that we know to be true and holy - by whatever name we call you, whatever we - with darkened minds - conceive you to be.

We are here to celebrate the life that you have given, the universe you have made, the miracle of human personality wherein you have manifested yourself.

We are here to give thanks for those you have spoken in, those whose lives have revealed your life.

We are here to build community, to create with you a universe of love, enfolding all that lives, all that is.

We are here to build this church, to build it with the gifts of your Spirit, for the hope and salvation of humanity.

We are here. You are with us. Help us to know it.

WORSHIP

Once more we gather to worship;
to bring our praise and thanksgiving to you,
Source and Symbol of all that we hold to be good and true.

Once more we commune with each other;
to affirm and celebrate the life you give us,
and all that makes it creative and eternal.

Once more we commune with you;
opening ourselves to your Spirit;
rediscovering the divine dimension of
our own being, blending mind and spirit
in the quest for truer service.

Once more we bring our fractured, fractious
selves to this sacred place.
Before we offer the gift of self at your altar,
help us to make peace with each other. May all
enmity and resentment be consumed in the furnace
of your love.

This we ask in the spirit of Jesus, in whom
that love was a mighty flame, lighting the
darkness of our long betrayal. Amen.

FOR PRAYER

We pray for the ability to pray.

We pray that our doubts, our petty thoughts, our vanity be put aside, that we can focus on you and our petition.

We ask that through prayer we may encounter you within ourselves, and release your power into the world.

We come to you well-aware of our weakness, our lack of concentration, and we ask that you break through our deadening apathy. Enable us to use our lives for your loving purpose, rather than our own selfish ends.

We pray too for strength, for the courage to encounter our own fear and conquer it, so that self-concern is banished and we can commit ourselves to love.

We ask for endurance in love, so that its pain does not drive us into the spiritual death of the hardened heart.

In prayer may we find you, and our true selves also, so learning the reality of your being and striving to make it real to those around us.

SPIRIT...

Spirit of wonder — open our eyes and minds and souls to the miracle of the natural, the material and the everyday.

Spirit of wisdom — open our spirits to the depths and dimensions of reality, may we realise that there are many ways of being real.

Spirit of truth — open our consciousness to your infinite manifestations, your numberless incarnations; lead us through reason and experience to enlightenment.

Spirit of love — open our hearts to all whom you have made; break down the partitions our blind pride has thrown up to keep us apart.

Spirit of unity — creator, mover, healer: make us whole, at one with ourselves, our world and you.

THE TEST

We come to you weak and doubting:
do not bring us to the test.

We come to you selfish and fearful:
do not bring us to the test.

We ask for courage to do your will,
the courage to oppose the wickedness
in ourselves and in the world.

We ask for the spirit of self-sacrifice
to free us for caring and compassion.

We ask for faith to give us resolution
and purpose in your service.

We ask for strength to face the evil and
suffering of the world and not despair.

But it is hard. If it is your will, use us,
but lest we should fail you,
do not bring us to the test.

CONSEQUENCES

O God of love, we come before you as creatures made
in your image. Like you, we can be creative; like you,
we can be caring. You made us, and declared us good.

Never let us forget that, O God. We have worth, we
have the possibility to be like you, so save us
from the sin of self-hatred, self-contempt.

But save us also from pride, from the sin of believing
ourselves answerable to no-one.
Save us from the idolatry of self, from the
illusion that of ourselves we are sufficient.

Teach us responsibility, O God, teach us that
what we do is fraught with consequences for
ourselves and for the world. Teach us the humility
that puts us right with you, the repentance
that clears the way for your healing touch.

Your image in us is besmirched and obscured,
your likeness in us is compromised and dim.
Our actions and our world are blighted by
our perversity. But grant us your hope, O God,
the hope that by your power we can be cleansed,
and your image and likeness in us restored.

We would be stewards of what you have made,
co-creators with you in what you are yet making.
We would live responsibly, with due thought for the con-
sequences of all that we do. For this we need your
wisdom, your guidance, your truth. Grant them to us,
O God, and grant us the humility to receive them.

CONFESSION

MEA CULPA

In pride, in indifference, in self-concern,
we come to you.

Rebuke our presumption.

Prise open the shells in which we hide, cut off from you
and from each other.
Shatter our false security.

Do not spare us until we stand naked before you,
stripped of all pretension.

And then, when we are ready, we can pray.
And we pray for forgiveness:

for all our arrogance, our spite, our anger...

for all our greed, our meanness, our self-justifying
excuses...

for all our cowardice, our fear, our compromise with
evil...

for all these and more, we ask forgiveness.

We confess our sin, the wall that stands between us. We
would break it down, help us with your love. Show us
how illusory is our self-sufficiency, how hollow our
boasts of virtue and strength. Reveal to us our weakness
and imperfection, that we may know the truth and turn
again to you...

...You are mystery beyond our understanding, yet you
are there - loving, accepting, reconciling. Forgive us our
many trespasses, and make us whole.

THOUGHTLESS WORDS

By the power of the Spirit,
whose gift is self-control,
may we be on guard against
the thoughtless word.

May we remember the power of words,
and know that we must account for what
we say before the divine tribunal of
conscience and humanity.

May our words reflect holiness and truth;
May they heal and reconcile, show reverence
and respect, build community and foster
relationships of love.

May they never be barbs to tear the feelings of others;
clubs to batter down their humanity;
poisons to corrupt and kill by stealth.

Out of our own mouths are we acquitted
or condemned.

We pray for forgiveness and for the ability
to curb the unruly tongue;
for the wisdom to measure our words before
we let them loose. May the Spirit inspire what we say,
and may our words sow peace and hope and love.

INHERITANCE

LIGHTBEARERS

In the darkness of centuries we have sought the light,
— we have revered those in whom it has shown to
illuminate the path.

But we have feared the light as well, and we have
snuffed out those in whom the flame burned too brightly.
They lit up corners we would rather have kept in shadow.

Recall us to our seeking, and may we see again the divine
truth — flaming brightly in the lantern-souls of human-
kind. Help us to receive the light and make it ours.

It illuminates the way to a glorious destiny — a freedom
we can scarcely comprehend, a love that dispels the
shades of death.

Unite us — beyond all barriers of time and space — with
all whose spirits have been kindled by your Spirit. May
we leave behind the hatred and the arrogance of the
darkness; share the glimpses of the brilliance that each
has seen — and make us your lightbearers to those who
fear the night.

THE INHERITORS

LEADER: We are the inheritors.

CONGREGATION: We inherit the faith and the
traditions of those who have lived before us.

LEADER: We inherit their struggle and their
suffering, and all that these won.

CONGREGATION: We inherit the fruits of their courage
and their generosity, the afterglow of their vision.

LEADER: We inherit as a unity the mingling of their
diversity.

CONGREGATION: We inherit the Spirit that brings all
things to be, moulding purpose out of chaos through the
power of creative love.

LEADER: We, the inheritors, now give thanks for all that
we have received...

(SILENCE)

LEADER: We who inherit must now bequeath;
our inheritance is not ours to keep.

CONGREGATION: May our bequest be all that we have
found of joy and compassion, all that we have found to
be divine.

ALL: May the people of tomorrow be blessed, not cursed,
by what we leave them. Amen.

ANNIVERSARY

Spirit of Truth, who guided the faithful generations of the past, be with us as we try to follow them.

Through doubts, perplexities and shifting understandings, remind us of what is essential. Make our faith a living, dynamic thing that truly honours you. Make it a vehicle of your love.

Help us to create a community that reconciles those whom sin has sundered; a community that is loving, yet open to the whole world. When we would hedge it about with our own prejudices, rebuke us.

May our gratitude for those who went before find expression in a deeper commitment to your good news which they proclaimed.

May we proclaim it too, and may we live it, your prophets and your healers to this lost and broken world.

TELL US...

Creator Spirit, breathing down the centuries, breathing through the lives of men and women, we pause to listen to you. Tell us of your purpose, and our part in it.

Tell us how you led our first parents out of brute-like innocence into consciousness.

Tell us how you led Israel out of slavery in Egypt into the promised land.

Tell us how you filled Jesus with your being, and opened the way of deliverance to the imprisoned soul.

Tell us how you guided humanity's liberators, healers and prophets in every age and every land, granting them a vision and the strength to achieve it.

Tell us the story of the human race, and how it reveals your presence within us and amongst us. Tell us how you offer us a choice, as you did to all who went before, a choice for life and good or for death and evil.

Tell us of those who chose rightly, and help us to do the same.

THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES (Hebrews 12:1)

And what of ourselves? — surrounded by this cloud of witnesses:

those who have gone before,
those who have lived and died for truth,
those who ran the race with resolution,
those who followed Jesus and shared his cross.

What of ourselves? We stand where they once stood, the torch is ours to carry for a time.

May we find the courage which our forbears found.
May we search within ourselves and find the divine wellspring, the water of life, of which they drank.
May we be granted the vision to build a world where people are valued and the earth respected.
May we receive the strength to be true in the face of hatred and suffering.

With our eyes fixed on Jesus, fixed on all the martyrs of God and of humanity, we give thanks for their lives, for their sacrifice, and pledge ourselves to their memory.

As a cloud they surround us still, lending us their inspiration. Grant us, O loving Spirit of God, the love we need to follow in their footsteps and be their faithful sons and daughters.

COMMUNITY

HELP US TO LOVE

Living Spirit of Love, we come before you once again in need of your help.

We hear your call, and sometimes we even try to respond, but we don't do very well.

You would have us love our neighbour as we love ourselves. You would even have us love our enemies. But so often we have heard those words, admired the sentiment, and then forgotten them.

Help us to love, O God, to get beneath the hatred and the prejudice, the ignorance and the self-righteousness, to see another human soul as weak as our own.

In this hour of quietness, help us to hear your call; but more important still, may we hear it and obey it when we return to the world beyond these walls.

We ask this for the sake of our neighbours, our enemies and ourselves. Amen.

FOR LOVE IN COMMUNITY

We pray for love to be the guiding light of our community of faith.

We pray for unflagging energy and enthusiasm in your service.

We pray for hope in the face of despair, resolution in the face of trouble.

We pray for the gift of generosity to meet the needs of your people, to rejoice with them and to mourn with them.

We pray for humility, that we may treat each other respectfully; for the strength to forgive our persecutors and pay back good for evil.

We pray that our fellowship may be true to the Spirit that gave it birth; that its warmth will bring new life to hearts that have grown cold.

LET ALL WE DO...

LEADER: We would be a community where the Spirit dwells; where faith sustains, hope guides and love rules.

CONGREGATION: Let all we do be done in love.

LEADER: We would sow our seed in the field of the Spirit, and ask for strength never to tire of doing good.

CONGREGATION: Let all we do be done in love.

LEADER: May the harvest of the Spirit be ours; may love and joy, peace and patience, kindness and goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self-control be the hallmarks of our life together.

CONGREGATION: Let all we do be done in love.

LEADER: Let us work for the good of all; opening ourselves to your Spirit, receiving the power and the vision that we need.

CONGREGATION: Let all we do be done in love.

LEADER: May your Spirit make us one — healing the gaping wounds in ourselves, our community, our world — and may all we do be done in love.

FOR OTHERS

We hold in our thoughts and prayers all those of our fellowship, all those of our families and our wider kindred, who are in need of solace.

For the sick, may there be healing and strength.

For the distressed in mind may there be peace and tranquillity of Spirit.

For the embittered may there be reconciliation and a new beginning.

For the despairing may there be faith and rekindled joy.

For the fearful may there be courage and unquenchable hope.

With trembling hands we reach out to those who suffer. May love and life flow out through us to restore, to relieve and to re-create.

A FELLOWSHIP OF FREE SOULS

LEADER: This is a fellowship of free souls, open to all who come in goodwill to worship and to share.

CONGREGATION: May our circle be open.

LEADER: This is a fellowship of free minds, where honest doubt may test and question without fear or censure.

CONGREGATION: May our minds be receptive.

LEADER: This is a fellowship of free hearts, where, we trust, differing belief is no restraint on friendship and mutual respect.

CONGREGATION: May our affection be unconditional.

LEADER: This is a fellowship of the free voice, where all may speak their truth in love, and be heard.

CONGREGATION: May we listen when others speak.

LEADER: This is a fellowship of the free Spirit, who gives us life and holds us in a unity deeper than all diversity.

CONGREGATION: May we realise our oneness with each other.

LEADER: This is a fellowship of free souls — free to care, free to find faith and express it, free to show compassion — remembering always that we are never truly free while others are in bondage.

THE WORLD

IN THE SPIRIT OF LIBERTY

In the Spirit of liberty, peace and justice
we pray with the people of _____, of
all places where humanity is demeaned and denied.

We pray that those who work for a better future be
strengthened and empowered; that those who are
crushed by their burdens be borne up and delivered of
them.

We pray that those enmeshed in lies, deceit and delusion
be freed by the power of truth; that those who look on
justice with fear may receive the courage to repent.

We pray that we may play our part in redeeming
all lands — including our own — from the touch of
tyranny, whatever mask it wears, but save us from the
bitterness of the vengeful spirit.

We pray for the grace to feel our oneness
with all people, to feel the weight of their chains, the joy
of their liberation. May we open our hearts to the cries,
the shouts and whisperings of humanity...

To live together in peace, plenty and mutual respect: this
is the long hope of the human race. May all who work for
its realisation feel the power of their communion. Amen.

EVEN THESE LEAST

Spirit of compassion,

We gather here in comfort and security,
and for this rare blessing we are truly thankful.

But save us from feeling too comfortable.
Remind us that all too many are not as fortunate
as we are.

We hold in our thoughts today the people of...,
people everywhere who are weighed down with anguish,
grief and want.

You are with them, O God, you don't need to be asked,
though we may not always believe it.
Help us to be with them too. Grant us the gift of true
compassion, the love that acts.

So may we hear your call in those who need us;
may we hear it in our own selves. And may we be
ready to stand before you when judgement comes,
and we see your face in suffering humanity.

FOR TOLERANCE

O God of love, we pray for all who suffer from the intolerance of others, whose lives are threatened by those who presume to judge in your name. Grant them courage.

We pray for all whose feelings are hurt by insensitivity and contempt, who feel their deepest convictions to have been abused and despised. Grant them forbearance.

We pray for those who seek the death and damnation of those who upset them and disturb their certainty. Grant them love.

We pray for ourselves. Remove from us all arrogance, self-righteousness and hatred. Grant us the gift of humility, the impulse to mercy, the grace of compassion.

This we ask in the Spirit of all your messengers. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR PEACE

O God, we pray for peace, in _____, wherever in the world war and strife and discord afflict and divide your people.

We pray for justice, for the fair resolution of all grievance, dispute and wrongs; for that just ordering of the world which alone opens the way to reconciliation and lasting peace.

We pray for all who threaten, violate and disturb the world's peace: melt their hardened hearts and rekindle your light in their darkened souls. Grant us the love to forgive them.

We pray for all who must make hard decisions about impossible dilemmas; for the leaders of nations and of armies. Grant them wisdom, and grant us the forbearance not to judge.

We pray for all who march and campaign for peace. May they not lose heart. Keep them humble and ever-mindful of their responsibility to the victims of aggression and tyranny.

We pray for the innocent, caught up in wars not of their making. Be with them in their fear, their misery, their hunger, their pain and their bereavement — and help us to be with them too.

We pray for ourselves: grant us peace in our hearts and the strength to care.

This we ask in the name of all your messengers. Amen.

A PRAYER IN WARTIME

O God, we prayed for peace, but war came. Be with us in our sorrow, lift us from despair, help us to pray that prayer still. Save us from self-pity and disillusion and turn our prayers outwards to all who need them.

For those who dwell in the valley of the shadow of death, for those who are called upon to take up arms and those against whom arms are used, we ask your mercy and comfort and the gift of courage.

For those who claim their war is holy, fought for you and the faith you gave, we ask the realisation that they fight only for themselves, that you need no defender.

For those who wait in helplessness at home awaiting news of loved ones, we pray that the news be good. For those who face the desolation of loss we have no need to ask your concern — you are there with them in the pit. Help us to be alongside them too.

For those whose long-suffering under injustice has bred the soul-consuming cancer of bitterness, we ask deliverance from one and healing for the other.

For those who must bear the responsibility of government and command, we ask wisdom and the will for peace; for the tyrant and the warmonger we ask the thunderbolt of repentance.

O God, beyond the present strife the vision of peace still beckons. Keep it bright before us. May it burn away the shades of hatred and enmity, and may the love we so often reject win the victory in our hearts, and those of all humanity. Amen.

CREATION

WE REJOICE

Let us rejoice in the light of day
and the quietness of night,

Let us rejoice in the beauty of the earth
and the oneness of the human family.

We rejoice in our homes, hallowed by love,
where we find refuge from the cold and storm.

We rejoice in the love of parents,
who have nurtured our lives,
with whose blessing we have gone forth
to our own work in the world.

We rejoice in the children who bless our homes,
whose eager minds and hearts are the promise
of tomorrow.

We rejoice in friends who share our sorrows
and our joys,
in the fullness of the abundant life,
in the serenity of old age,
and the peace which comes at last.

(Adapted from, *A New Prayer Book*.)

First published in 1923, this piece was adapted for Unitarian use in *Services of Religion* (1937) and again in *Hymns for the Celebration of Life* (1964). This further adaptation by Cliff Reed was done in 1989.

WE GIVE THANKS

For the earth we give thanks — may we respect it, enjoy
it and hand it on unspoiled.

For living beings we give thanks — may we reverence
them, wonder at them and share the world with them as
best we can.

For children we give thanks — may we love them, guide
them and let them go when the time comes.

For grown-ups we give thanks — may we suffer them,
forgive them and try to do better ourselves.

For ourselves we give thanks — may we know them, con-
front them and learn that they are worth loving.

For God we give thanks — Whoever, whatever, He, She or
It may be, without God there would be nothing to give
thanks for, nothing to give thanks.

Let us give thanks in the communion of silence...

We can live, we can love, we can celebrate this miracle of
which we are part — Thank you Lord!

STEWARDSHIP

O God, may we be wise stewards of the life that you have given. May compassion for our fellow beings, and reverence for your whole creation, be the twin beacons that light our path.

In the conflicts and complexities of the world, give us the humility to avoid the easy judgement, the thoughtless condemnation. And may we always tend to that which is loving, kind and full of respect towards our brothers and sisters in the community of living beings.

Help us to perceive the holiness of the world, the holiness in which we all share. Guard us against the cynicism which springs from selfishness, and the selfishness which springs from fear.

Teach us that only love can cast out fear, and that love requires our submission to your life-giving Spirit. If we are the servants of life and the channels of love, then we are your instruments, for these are not ours to give or take.

And when we face the world, with all its subtlety and insoluble dilemma, be with us as, with inadequate resources, we make our decisions. And God, forgive us if they're wrong.

PRAYER TO THE CREATOR (2 Esdras 9:18-21)

Creator Spirit,
who planned the world with us in mind when we were but potentialities in the universe's infancy, we pause in wonder and gratitude at your handiwork.

Before we came to be,
this world was prepared. We found it ready to feed us, ready to reveal its secrets to our questing minds.

But we grew arrogant,
turned to a corrupting idolatry of ourselves.
We have spoilt so much of your world, endangered it with our wickedness and folly.

May we be healed,
may we learn our proper role, no longer living as aliens in our home. Bring to birth within us the realization of our oneness with creation.

You have given us many gifts,
and the greatest of these is love, which, through us, you have inserted into your great machine. May we love your creation, its beauty and its majesty, and may we love the people who share it with us. Give us, we pray, the will and the wisdom to make of the earth a garden that all humanity can share in peace and plenty. Amen.

AT THE SHARING OF WATER

Water is the silver thread that binds all life together. For water, prerequisite of our physical existence, we give thanks.

In token of our common dependence with all that lives on earth, we share this water...

...Water is the symbol of the divine Spirit flowing through Creation, the “living water” that transforms existence into true life.

With the woman at Jacob's well we ask for that “living water”: O God, strike the rock of our hardened hearts, that the inner spring may fill us with eternal life.

Water has always had deep spiritual significance, both within Christianity and in other traditions. The renewed emphasis on Creation Spirituality in the face of humanity's abuse of the earth makes the celebration of its “elements” all the more important. This brief act of worship — which can be part of a larger one — aims to bring people closer to each other and closer to the creative Spirit by the simple act of sharing water. A common cup can be passed, or individual cups filled from a common source.

AT THE SHARING OF BREAD AND WINE...

In sharing this broken bread, we acknowledge our dependence on the divine bounty of the earth; our unity with all people who, like us, receive their daily bread in gratitude and humility.

In sharing this juice from the fruit of the vine, we acknowledge that we are part of the vine of life, with its branches and tendrils in every nook and cranny of this good earth, its roots in the divine source of all that is.

REFLECTION

THE VOICE IN THE SILENCE

We come before you in silence, O lover of souls.
We try to still our minds, drive out distracting
thoughts that trouble our peace.

In the silence we listen, trying to hear you
through the clutter in our heads. And then, for
a moment we reach a space of clear, dark tranquillity.
Something is happening just beyond
the reach of consciousness. Is that your voice, O God,
whispering just beyond earshot?

Speak to us in these few fleeting moments of
insight, open the shutters of our imprisoned
spirits that the warmth of your sun-bright love
may enfold us and lead us out to freedom.

If, in hard-won stillness we hear your Word, O God,
may we learn to hear it and to heed it in the chaos
of the world.

PILGRIM'S PRAYER

Guiding Spirit, show us an open road,
a pilgrim track.

The blind alleys of our folly wear a dreary
look, we must break out and find a better way.

Show us the path of deliverance from the
byways and cul-de-sacs in which we wander,
trapped in a maze of old ideas, old hatreds,
old fears; condemned to tread the same old
ground we have trodden before.

We seek the bright highway to wholeness, which
cuts through the walls and spans the chasms
keeping us apart; which unites those who have
been sundered, binds up our shadowed, fractured
world like a ribbon of light.

We would join the pilgrims of the human race,
search out the healing, holy shrine where souls,
peoples and planets are made whole.

Show us your highway, O God;
open our eyes to see that it
runs just outside our door.
Help us to make the first step along it. Amen.

FOR TRUE RELIGION

We pray for a religion that really means something,
O God. A religion of self-giving love, of all-controlling
faith in truth and justice, mercy and compassion.

May the Spirit you give your children be ours,
saving us from part-time religion: the faith
that is left behind in church, the commitment
that comes off with the Sunday suit.

We see your suffering people — without food,
without shelter, without hope. We see your world —
abused, divided, ill-governed. We see the blind guides
who claim to lead — leading your people to disaster.

We pray for a religion that can face this reality and not
retreat into fantasy. A religion that reflects your radiance
in the world's darkness; that brings sustenance
according to need— food to the hungry, shelter to the
homeless; humility to the proud, gentleness to the cruel.

We pray for a religion that opens hearts closed against
love, minds closed against all but their own prejudice.

We pray for a religion that will heal our true selves, and
through us reach out to heal the world.

Let the words of our mouths
and the meditations of our
hearts be acceptable in thy sight,
O God, our strength
and our redeemer. Amen.

A SIMPLE FAITH

O God, grant us a simple faith.

Help us to know you directly
in the depths of our own souls.

Help us to use our minds
to understand your will and how to do it.

Help us to know our unity with all
people, beyond all barriers erected
by our vanity and pride.

Help us to hear you speak in those
who know you best, that we may come
to share their oneness with you.

Help us to a faith that acts in this
world for love's sake, that builds
your kingdom of peace and justice in
the world we know.

This we ask in living remembrance
of Jesus our brother. Amen.

NOW

You are the eternal, the timeless.

You would have us dance and sing in celebration of
the present moment,
but we can't see your smile or hear your song.

But how will we see you if we don't look where you are?

We search the past — through its dusty libraries,
its darkened ruins, its bloodsoaked battlefields,
but you are not there.

We find only idols — and people bowing down to them.
Of you there is but a whisper — “Why do you seek the
living among the dead?”

We search the future, straining our eyes to find you.
But we see nothing — only our own images and maybes
reflected back on fearful, hopeful faces.
And we hear a whisper — “Do not be anxious about
tomorrow; tomorrow will look after itself.”

You are now — in us, with us:
the present is your dwelling place.
Call us out from bondage, touch us with eternity; free us
from the drag of the past, the pull of the future.
May we know you, love you, serve you — not yesterday,
not tomorrow — but now, in this timeless moment.

UNITY OF LOVE (After St. Dionysius)

O God, source and origin of all that is divine, all
that is good and beautiful, in you there is calmness,
peace and concord. We are divided from each other by
dissensions, and we ask that you will restore us to
fellowship, bring us back into a unity of love,
a reflection of your divine nature.

You are above all things, and within all things,
so make us one in spirit even if we are of different
mind. May the embrace of charity and the bonds of
affection unify us spiritually, both in ourselves
and in each other.

Make us one through that peace of yours that makes
all things peaceful, and which speaks to us through
the grace, mercy and tenderness of Jesus, your Son,
our brother.

GRANT US A VISION

O God, grant us a vision lest we perish.
Our fragile hopes are in that which cannot last,
our faith in things as frail as we are ourselves.
Reveal to us your all-sustaining power, revive
our souls with the inflow of your love.
Grant us the vision of a world made whole
and free, and the wisdom to mould our lives by it.
We ask this in the spirit of all your messengers.

In your unity may we find the world's unity,
and our own. Amen.

WORDS FOR A SILENCE

Let there be silence between us for a time.
And in the silence may we listen...

May we listen as the mind is stilled, may we
listen for the deeper thoughts, for the
promptings of the Spirit...

As we have shared this silence, so now may anyone
who wishes to, share their thoughts, their prayers,
their fears, their joys...

OUT OF SILENCE

Out of silence we return to the tumult
of our lives. As you spoke to us in our
solitude, speak still through the clamour
of the world — and grant us the peace to
hear you.

RESTORATION

O God, indwelling our humanity and opening the door to life in its fullness, restore us with your Spirit.

Help us to let go of our precious souls that they may flow through your world in joyous love. Amen.

BENEDICTION

BENEDICTIONS

Teach us true respect for all people,
Stir in us response to the call of duty;
Strengthen us to cherish the weak,
And give us vision lest we perish.
Send us knowledge, O God,
Grant us true wisdom from above,
And may justice and truth be ours for ever.
Amen.

(An adaptation of verse 2 of the Jamaican National Anthem.)

May the water of life touch us with
creative love; and may the leaves of
the tree of life heal us and our
wounded world. Amen.

May the light of God burn brightly in our souls.
May the power of God be manifest in our hearts.
And may the strength of God work in us for
the building of the Kingdom.

Bless us and keep us, strengthen us and inspire us,
Send your Spirit among us, and give us peace. Amen.

BENEDICTIONS

And may the blessing of peace be ours at
this time of parting, and may the unity of
love enfold us all on whatever roads we
travel. Amen.

And now may the promise and the hope
that Jesus brought to the waiting world,
be ours through this Easter season, and
throughout our lives. Amen.

May nature's peace flow into you as sunshine
flows into trees. May the winds blow their
own freshness into you and the storms their
energy. And may your cares drop off you like
Autumn leaves. Amen.

(AFTER JOHN MUIR)

Peace to the earth and its myriad creatures.
Peace to the nations and their many peoples.
Peace to our neighbours and their troubled hearts.
Peace to ourselves and to all we touch. Amen.

BENEDICTIONS

May we have the salt of friendship among ourselves, and may we live in peace with one another. Amen.

(Adaptation of Mark 9:50)

And may the Spirit who flows through all creation, who speaks through the prophets and the poets of the human race, and who acts through those who care, be with us here today and awaken us to the unconquerable power of life. Amen.

**Scanned by
James Barry
as a volunteer**