



On your marks

Every year the third week of January is observed by the Church as the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Among the last recorded words of Jesus in the Gospel of John, we read that Jesus prayed that all who followed him should be one, even as he and God the Father were one. This would be the way that the world would be drawn to the truth of God. Sadly however through its two thousand-year history the Church has more often been marred by division and hostility rather than marked by unity and love.

Thankfully the children in our groups are often less aware or concerned by the many issues that still divide the Church and spoil its witness to the world. The following idea for a presentation for this special week can speak very powerfully if performed by children and may re-awaken us to the oneness, for which Jesus prayed.

Get set

The following presentation can involve as many children as you have in your group; however it will also need some adults too and this would work especially well if you're using it as part of all-age worship. The message of unity is after all for all of us from all of us!

You will need:

- Four full pages from a broadsheet newspaper. Check carefully the suitability of the news that is carried on these pages. Why not choose a holiday or an advert page at this time of year! These four pages should be opened out and then stuck together as one large page. Now cut out a piece from a strip of plain wallpaper long enough to reach from one corner of your new full-size page of newspaper to the opposite corner. Along this write boldly and clearly in large letters the words **GOOD NEWS**.
- a number of pairs of scissors
- scripts for the narrators (see below)

The Church has often lost its way with regard to its core beliefs and sometimes divisions and schisms have been important in order to return us to basics. Nevertheless too often the Church has divided again and again over less central issues such as the quality of its leadership, the interpretation of words, the use of images and ritual, personal tastes and different approaches to mission. The following piece explores this with verses from the New Testament to accompany an acted visual aid.

Go!

1. The children who are to present this sketch should come forward carrying the folded extra-large newspaper. While the first narrator reads the following piece, the paper should be unfolded slowly to its full-size.



Narration 1

In the beginning was the Church and the company of those who believed were of one heart and one mind. With great power they gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great grace was upon them all (Acts 5: 32-33)

2. By the end of the first reading the unfolded newspaper should be held so that it is completely open and displaying the diagonal message clearly of **GOOD NEWS**.
3. As the next narrator reads the following, one of the group already at the front holding the paper should take some scissors and cut the large newspaper into two.

Narration 2

But it has been reported that there is quarrelling among you. What I mean is that some say 'I belong to Paul' or 'I belong to a Apollos' or 'I belong to Peter' or 'I belong to Christ'. I appeal to you that all of you should agree and be united in the same mind. (1 Corinthians 1:10-12)

4. As the next narrator reads the following, two of the group at the front should set about cutting the two parts of the newspaper into two more sections, so that four separate pieces need to be held.

Narration 3

Don't judge each other about eating or not eating certain foods; or keeping or not keeping particular festivals; or about how best to pray; or what angels are like; or whether this or that is a vision or not. These are only shadows of what is to come. What matters is Jesus Christ. Hold fast to the head from whom the whole body grows with a growth that is from God. (Colossians 2: 16-19)

5. As the next narrator reads the following, four from the group should now cut or neatly tear up each of the pieces of paper that are up at the front to create 8 pieces. Each time the paper is cut up the people holding them should move a little away from the others so that the words **GOOD NEWS** are not only cut up but also become more and more separated and difficult for the audience or congregation to read. At this stage you may need to recruit some further help for your group from the congregation in order to hold the separate pieces. Invite people up to join the group. Gradually the **GOOD NEWS** is beginning to be diluted and divided.

Narration 4

What if the foot says 'because I'm not a hand, I do not belong to the body'? Or what if the ear says 'because I'm not an eye, I do not belong to the body'? And the eye cannot say to the head, 'I have no need of you', nor can the head say to the foot 'I have no need of you'. God arranged it all as a single body so that all should suffer and all should rejoice together. (1 Corinthians 12: 14-26 selected)

6. As the next narrator reads the following, the eight parts of the original extra-large newspaper will become 16 and then 32 as each is cut or torn in half again and again. By now a large number of people should be involved holding the various pieces of the broken **GOOD NEWS** and they should begin to scatter themselves more widely around the building.



Narration 5

Some say: 'you have faith and I have works'. You can't have faith without works and nor can you have works without faith. Faith must be active along with works. (James 2: 18-22)

Some say that here is the place to worship while others say there is the place to worship. But God is Spirit and those who worship him must worship him in Spirit and Truth. (John 4: 24)

Narration 6

There are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working but it is the same God who inspires them in everyone. (1 Corinthians 12: 4-6)

You may speak in the tongues of men and angels: you may have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries; you may have faith that can move mountains... but if you do not have love, you are nothing. So make love your aim. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3; 14:1)

7. The 16 or 32 pieces of the newspaper should now be held by people all around the church. They should freeze on the spot, while the following is read slowly and deliberately.

Narration 7

In the beginning was the Church but today there are many churches. In the beginning it was easy to see the good news but today it is hard for the world to read the message. In the beginning it was not difficult to encounter the Spirit of Jesus at work, but today it seems as if he is broken into lots of tiny pieces.

8. As the next narrator reads the following, the different pieces should begin to come together again and reassemble at the front. It won't be a perfect match but the words **GOOD NEWS** should slowly appear again. It won't be easy to hold all the pieces in a position so that they remake the original over-sized newspaper and it may mean that some people have to kneel down and others have to stand on a chair. This itself becomes symbolic of the effort needed to be the unity for which Jesus prayed.

Narration 8

But though there are many pieces you are one body and individually members of that body. Agree in the Lord. Put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which you were indeed called into the one body. Love one another as I have loved you. For love is the fulfilment of the law

9. When everyone is standing and the newspaper has been reassembled and the words **GOOD NEWS** are visible once again, the final narrator speaks the words that Jesus prayed in John 17:

Narration 9

Jesus said: I pray for all who believe in me that they may be one; even as you Father are in me and I am in you, I pray that they may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (John 17:21)



10. Complete the presentation with everyone now saying together, loudly and clearly:

Unity in Jesus is GOOD NEWS for God's world