

# The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the signing of THE BELFAST /GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

The Agreement was signed on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998, which that year was Good Friday. It was a political deal designed to bring about the end of 'the Troubles', which, after nearly thirty years of violence and conflict on the streets of Northern Ireland, had resulted in more than 3,500 deaths.

This year marks twenty-five years since the historic agreement was signed but the reality is that people from different parts of the community will approach this anniversary with mixed emotions. We can all be thankful that many lives were no doubt saved as a result of the Agreement but the relative peace that it brought came at a cost. Prisoners, those serving time for murder, were released back into the community and were able to return to their families, while victim's families had to show tolerance and acceptance, despite the reality that their loved ones would never return home.

We must remember that the signing of the Agreement was not the end of the journey to peace in Northern Ireland. It marked simply the first faltering steps down a very long road to a new, brighter, and shared future. That road will continue to be shaped by tolerance and respect for our differences, and a recognition of the need for greater understanding and reconciliation. The principles of the Agreement were based on '*partnership, equality and mutual respect*'. As we reflect on how far we have travelled, we must fully appreciate the sacrifices that were made as we capture a vision for what lies ahead.

In the journey from Good Friday to Easter, from death to new life, as people of faith we believe that love is stronger than hate and that the light of hope shines brightly in the darkness.

The following resources are offered by *The Church Leaders Group (Ireland)* for use in times of private prayer and public forms of worship marking the anniversary, recalling the events of the past and looking to the future.

The Most Reverend Eamon Martin  
The Most Reverend John McDowell  
The Right Reverend Dr John Kirkpatrick  
The Reverend David Nixon  
The Right Reverend Andrew Forster

## SENTENCES OF SCRIPTURE

‘Unless the Lord build the house, those who build labour in vain.’

*Psalm 127:1*

‘Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.’ *Isaiah 40:31*

‘What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.’ *Micah 6:8*

‘But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.’  
*James 3:17*

## INTRODUCTION

We have gathered here as a community to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the signing of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement; to pray for the healing of past hurts, the life of our community and the future of our country and these islands, but also to seek God’s guidance and hope for the future.

Lord God our Creator, you call your faithful people to advance your Kingdom in this world. Heal our divisions, unite us in your name, and draw us closer together in proclaiming your love and peace in this our country and in the world. We ask this in the name of the Prince of Peace, even Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*or*

Brothers and sisters, in meeting today we recall and commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. Let us come together to offer to almighty God our worship and praise and thanksgiving, to draw near to the throne of God in penitence and humility; to pray for ourselves and for all who seek to better our common life through public service and Christian citizenship. And to pray that in the power of his Spirit we may serve him in the pursuit of his heavenly realm.

*or*

Almighty God, you call us into a common fellowship of solidarity and love; as we remember the signing of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement twenty-five years ago, and reflect on the hopes and disappointments of the intervening years; draw near to us, and move us to work for peace and justice in the world around us; in the name of him who is the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

or

We worship God, who is good and just and true. He created and sustains the world and loves us though we have failed him. Today we gather to confess our sins and receive his forgiveness, to listen to his word, and to pray for the members of our legislative assembly and its executive. We ask for God's guidance and blessing, that we may do his will, and that all people may acknowledge his gentle and just rule.

## PENITENCE

Let us confess to God our share of the sins and shortcomings of the world, its pride, its selfishness, its greed, its evil divisions and hatreds. Let us confess our share in what is wrong, and our failure to seek and establish that peace which God wills for his children.

The gospel calls us to turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ. As we offer ourselves to him in penitence and faith, we renew our confidence and trust in his mercy.

Lord God, our maker and our redeemer, this is your world and we are your people: **come among us and save us.**

We have wilfully misused your gifts of creation;  
Lord, be merciful: **forgive us our sin.**

We have seen the ill-treatment of others and have not gone to their aid;  
Lord, be merciful: **forgive us our sin.**

We have condoned evil and dishonesty and failed to strive for justice;  
Lord, be merciful: **forgive us our sin.**

We have heard the good news of Christ, but have failed to share it with others; Lord, be merciful: **forgive us our sin.**

We have not loved you with all our heart, nor our neighbours as ourselves; Lord, be merciful: **forgive us our sin.**

May God who loved the world so much that he sent his Son to be our Saviour forgive *us our* sins and make *us* holy to serve him in the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

MINISTRY OF THE WORD  
*Some appropriate Scripture Readings:*

Isaiah 40:28-31  
Isaiah 61  
Micah 6:6-8  
Psalm: 33:1-5, 20-22  
Psalm 72:1-4, 13-14  
Psalm 100  
Psalm 121

Matthew 5:1-12  
Matthew 5:43-48  
Matthew 6:9-13  
Matthew 22:17-21,  
Luke 4:16-21,  
Romans 13:1-7  
II Corinthians 5:16-21  
I Timothy 2:1-6a  
I Peter 2:13-17

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Almighty God, you promised through your Son Jesus Christ to hear the prayers of those who ask in faith. We pray for your Church in all the world, for its unity and mission, and for all Christian leaders.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer.**

We pray that we may work for peace and embody Christ's ministry of reconciliation.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for those whose discipleship brings them into places of conflict and risk and those who help to demolish walls of mistrust and prejudice.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who stand alongside victims of hatred and sectarianism, that your Church may work unceasingly for human rights, equality and justice in the world.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for our MLAs and the leaders of this and of all nations, that they may be given the courage to choose good and reject evil in accordance with your will.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who display courage in upholding justice and in preserving peace throughout the world.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for our fellow countrymen and women who work for the resolution of conflict in our society and beyond.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for the sick, suffering and bereaved. We especially remember those among us who bear physical and psychological scars from the past.

Lord in your mercy

**Hear our prayer.**

*or*

*A selection of these prayers may be used.*

Almighty God, in your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ you have shown us the way of forgiveness and love: Help us, despite our wounded history, to celebrate all that is good and true in our common life and to affirm and acknowledge our common heritage, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

O God, healer of the broken and reconciler of the divided, we pray for the healing of our wounded history, and with thanksgiving for the peace and security we currently enjoy. Bless the work of all who seek to reconcile past divisions and all who dedicate themselves to the causes of justice and peace in our land. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Eternal God, Fount of wisdom; we ask you to bless the representatives we have elected; grant that through their discussions and decisions we may solve our problems effectively, enhance the well-being of our nation, and achieve together a fairer and more united society. **Amen**

Give peace in our time, O Lord: peace and reconciliation among the nations; peace and unity within the churches; peace and harmony in our communities and our homes; peace and love in all our hearts; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen.**

God of all power and might, we pray for this country, for all who are called to the responsibility of government, and for all who shape our society. May they be guided by your Holy Spirit and granted the gifts of wisdom, understanding and right judgement in all things, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

God of reconciling love, we give you thanks: for the rich diversity of cultures and traditions in our country; we give you thanks, O Lord, for those who safeguard our freedom and maintain peace and safety; we give you thanks, O Lord; for the memory of all who have worked for reconciliation and for those who continue to do so today, we give you thanks O Lord. **Amen.**

Almighty God, we long for the time when your kingdom shall come on earth: when people and nations shall acknowledge your sovereignty, seek your glory, and serve your good and righteous will. Help us not only to pray but also to work for that new day; and enable us by your grace to promote the cause of justice and peace, truth and freedom, both in our own society and in the life of the world; for the honour of Christ, our Saviour and our Lord. **Amen.**

*or*

*After each section leave time for silent reflection or the congregational response 'Lord, hear our prayer.'*

God, holy, sovereign, faithful and generous,  
God of healing, God of honour, God of hope,  
Yahweh – the one true God.

We remember the lives taken and the brave sacrifices given before and beyond this Agreement ...

We acknowledge residing pain, ongoing injustice and unfulfilled dreams...

We bring our fears and hopes to you, about what has been and what is yet to come...

We are grateful for the relative peace we live in, yet mindful of the distance still to travel...

We dare to believe that there are better things to come for this place and its people...

Give us new vision and a hope-filled imagination, soften our hearts and strengthen our hands...

Renew this land, restore your kingdom, revive your people...

Help us to be brave and kind in the pursuit of your goodness, truth and beauty...

#### THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

#### ACT OF COMMITMENT

Let us commit ourselves to responsible living and faithful service.

Will you strive for all that builds a peaceful society?

**We will.**

Will you seek to heal the wounds of the past?

**We will.**

Will you work for a just society for all?

**We will.**

Merciful God, may we accept the hope you have placed in the hearts of all people and live lives of justice, courage and mercy, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*or*

Let us pledge ourselves anew to the service of God and humanity, that we may help, encourage and comfort others, and support those working for the relief of those in need and for peace and the welfare of all people.

**Lord God our Father, we pledge ourselves to serve you and all people, in the cause of peace, for the relief of want and suffering, and for the praise of your name. Guide us by your Spirit; give us wisdom, give us courage, give us hope and keep us faithful now and always. Amen.**

## CONCLUDING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, grant to us a true sense of what it is to be your people in the world. We ask you to guard and guide all who reflect on the past, all who lead us in the present, and all who shape our future, that we may model our society on the image of Christ and to his glory, in whom we trust and through whom we pray. **Amen.**

## BLESSING

May the God of peace bless our memories, heal our divisions, and lead us into his light and love, and the blessing of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with *us* and remain with *us* always. **Amen.**

Go forth into the world in peace; be of good courage; hold fast that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the faint hearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honour everyone; love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; and the blessing of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with *us* and remain with *us* always. **Amen.**

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