



The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell, participated in an ecumenical service at the Basilica of St Paul's Outside the Walls in Rome today, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The occasion also marked the farewell of Archbishop Ian Ernest, concluding his role as the Archbishop of Canterbury's Personal Representative to the Holy See and Director of the [Anglican Centre in Rome](#).

The service of Vespers combined with Archbishop Ian's farewell ceremony celebrated his contributions over the past five years.

Reflecting on this, Archbishop Stephen said: "It was a joy to return to the Anglican Centre in Rome and a privilege to mark the end of Archbishop Ian's remarkable time of service. Archbishop Ian has been an inspiring advocate for Christian unity, demonstrating a deep commitment to building bridges across denominations. Ending his tenure with an ecumenical service during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was a fitting tribute. The Anglican Centre exemplifies a living commitment to the full, visible unity of the Church, fostering conversation through worship, hospitality, and education. By working collaboratively with all Christians, it continues to strengthen the bond between the Anglican Church and the Holy See."

Archbishop Ian Ernest said: "All of us have responsibilities—whether a doctor healing, a teacher guiding, or a parent nurturing. The task may feel heavy, but when we allow the grace of God to flow through us, He will guide us. Everything I've done in fostering the bond between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion has been made possible through His grace."

And speaking of what comes next he said: "I wish to give myself some time of rest and some moments of reflection on my life and the various callings I have had from God. These moments rooted in prayer will surely help me to discern the way forward."

The farewell address delivered by Archbishop Stephen at St Paul's Outside the Walls is available below:

It is my honour, in this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, to be with you at this service and to bring greetings from the Church of England, and on behalf of the whole Anglican Communion to give thanks for the tenaciously faithful and enormously kind ministry of Archbishop Ian Ernest as Director of the Anglican Centre here in Rome and as the Archbishop of Canterbury's envoy to the Holy See and for the companionship and witness of his wife Kamla.

As followers of Jesus Christ we believe that all human beings are made in the image of God. This means made in the image of God the Holy Trinity, and therefore made for community, and we can never be the people - or the Church - we are meant to be until we discover this. Until it is revealed in us.

Therefore, if we find ourselves asking, 'Why another week of prayer for unity and unity still no closer? Unity for what?' we answer, because it is the will and prayer of Christ for his Church. And because God is one. And because the unity of God is the beginning and the end of Christian life, and the means of discovering human identity in Christ.

Unity is the gospel we proclaim – a unity the human heart longs for and the world so urgently needs.

Therefore, for the church on earth, unity cannot be an option. It is a gift to be enjoyed not a reward to be earned. Something given; ours because of who God is and because of what God has done in Christ. It is something to be maintained by the humility, gentleness and faithfulness of the lives we lead (see Ephesians 4.2).

We have seen so much of this faithfulness in Archbishop Ian's and Kamla's hospitality and ministry and in the friendships they have built, not least with the Holy Father himself; friendships that have honoured difference as well as yearning for unity.

Karl Rahner once wrote that –

'Ultimately only one thing can give unity in the Church on the human level: the love which allows another to be different, even when it does not understand him.'

The Church is Christ's body here on earth. A body which is one. A body which contains difference. Our baptism is into the dying and rising of Christ and incorporates us into his body. We are different. And we are one. Therefore the unity of the church is not an uncompleted work of art, something abandoned that needs finishing, but an already existing masterpiece, created by God, and intimately united to the life of God in Trinity.

Here on earth it may be tarnished and neglected, and because of this the world we are called to serve is aghast that we who speak for the unity of God are so disunited ourselves.

It needs restoring. And this will involve much listening to each other and learning from each other in the different limbs of our Christian traditions so that a deepening and intimate love for each other will become the means whereby Christ is revealed. And the world believes.

Yes, there are still disagreements. But is there a more important message for our world to hear today than it is possible for those who disagree to live together in love?

The Anglican Centre and the Anglican Church remains deeply committed to this ecumenical endeavour; not to create unity, but to reveal it. To receive as well as to give.

'This is the commandment we have from God' says John, 'Those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.' (1 John 4. 21)

Then we will enjoy our differences, grow in ever more beautifully diverse expressions, become the church we are meant to be in a community of communities, in covenant relationship, and serve the needs of God's world and answer its deepest longing, which is to live together in peace.

As the English Anglican poet W. H Auden has said: 'We must love one another or die.'

- [i](#)Karl Rahner, *The Heart of Rahner*, Burn & Oates, 1980, Pg 113.

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