

Let's talk about.....

Saints

This is the first of an occasional series of resource sheets offered by the Roman Catholic and United Reformed Church Dialogue Group. This group brings together lay and ordained members of the Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales and Scotland and the URC. Its aim is to explore issues of faith and practice in both our traditions so that together we may deepen our insight into each other's traditions and our own journey of faith. This resource is designed for local RC and URC congregations to use together. It could be a one off meeting, or part of a regular pattern of meetings. The material could also be used by a wider 'churches together' style group. There are notes for facilitators at the end of the resource.

The members of the Dialogue Group would be very interested in receiving feedback from the use of this material or indeed suggestions for future topics. You can contact the Dialogue group via its co-secretaries:

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Something to get started....

We live in a world of celebrity culture. Are celebrities saints? Are saints celebrities? What can we discover about our faith when we think about sainthood and celebrity? What can we learn from each other?

Are there saints (those formally recognised by the church, and others not formally recognised) who inspire you in your journey of faith? Share their stories and the ways in which they inspire you in your discipleship.

Many local churches are dedicated to a particular saint. If this is the case for you, share with each other the story of the saint with whom you are associated. Do you celebrate this saint's life and witness in any particular way? What does it mean to you to have this connection with a particular saint?

There are many local saints throughout the British Isles. Find out about a saint that is associated with your local area. Are there events to celebrate their life and witness? What would you draw from their life to encourage your own discipleship?

Something to pray....

O God, fount of all holiness, make us each walk worthily in our vocation, through the intercession of your Saints, on whom you bestowed a great variety of graces on earth and a single glorious reward in heaven. ©ICEL 2010

As many as the leaves golden in autumn blowing along the streets are your saints.

As precious as bales gathered in the barns or stored at the field side are your saints.

As strong as the rocks graining the hillsides or forming the river bed are your saints.

As widespread as frost glazing the meadows and coating the branches are your saints.

As strange as it seems, grace makes possible that me and my neighbour are your saints.

© Terry Oakley Worship from the URC



Something to talk about.....

I was brought up from birth in the Roman Catholic tradition, and an awareness of saints is something with which I grew up, but this was not in any 'partisan' way. We had books/pamphlets in the house about individual saints, but there was no one individual to whom any of my extended family had a devotion which 'dominated' their personal prayer life. Indeed if I was to be asked who is my 'favourite saint', I would have trouble giving a genuine answer, because I can perceive various values in them all, more in some than in others no doubt but not in a way that puts one or a few in the lead.

There is much I admire in the lives of many saints, those from history and contemporary women and men who have been recognised by the Church. I find inspiration and encouragement in their witness. I find the idea of praying to a saint quite alien. I appreciate other people praying for me but would never ask a saint to do this.

'I regularly ask particular saints for their prayers when I need help in my daily life.'

'By asserting the intercession of the saints, if all you mean is that they continually pray for the completion of Christ's kingdom, on which the salvation of all the faithful depends, there is none of us who calls it in question.' *John Calvin*

Do any of these experiences resonate with your own?
Share your responses to the statements and your own experiences with one another.

".....the communion between our Communities, even if still incomplete, is truly and solidly grounded in the full communion of the Saints - those, who at the end of a life faithful to grace, are in communion with Christ in glory. These *Saints* come from all the Churches and Ecclesial Communities which gave them entrance into the communion of salvation.....In the radiance of the 'heritage of the saints' belonging to all Communities, the 'dialogue of conversion' towards full and visible unity thus appears as a source of hope." Pope St. John Paul II *Ut Unum Sint* (1995)

Some Scripture to ponder....

Read: Revelation 7.9-17

Reflect: The blessed in heaven began their journey to sainthood when in this world they come to have faith in Jesus as saviour, a faith which we express in the Sacrament of Baptism. The description of the blessed wearing white robes inspired the giving of white garments to the baptised – plunged into the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection they are redeemed and made holy. Thus we find various references in the New Testament to Christian believers being 'saints'.

The reference to the Christian community in Corinth shows us clearly that this vocation to holiness co-exists with ongoing practical sinfulness, but this does not prevent a real fellowship in holiness with Christ and the blessed in heaven whilst we are here on earth. The Church has from early centuries made a distinction of 'three states of the Church'. As the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught,

“Until , therefore, the Lord comes in his majesty,....., some of his disciples are pilgrims on earth, others who have departed this life are being purified, while others are in glory gazing ‘clearsighted on God himself as he is, three in one’; all of us, however, though in a different degree and manner, communicate in the same love of God and our neighbour and sing the same hymn of glory to our God. For all who are in Christ, possessing his Spirit, are joined together into one church and united with each other in him (cf. Eph 4:16).” Lumen Gentium 49

Now the disciples who are 'pilgrims on earth' clearly share in this holiness which is manifest in the community of the blessed in heaven, even if we, to a greater or lesser extent, are also marked by sin. (2 Cor. 4.7) We might say that there is an ongoing tension between the power of grace and the effects of sin within the lives of God's people on earth but that we are all on a journey towards sainthood.

What is it that makes someone a saint in your eyes?

How do you think this process of journeying to sainthood is manifest in your life or the lives of others you know?

How does it make you feel to think of yourself as a 'saint– in the process of formation?'

Does it change your attitude towards who are already declared saints by the Church and our interaction with them?

Something to think about.....

Sainthood and Celebrity?

It is often said that the saints were the celebrities of the Middle Ages with people traveling great distances to visit, and pray at, the relics of a saint, in the same way that people travel to 'Graceland' or visit the grave or memorial to a famous person. To what extent is this a helpful comparison today?

The cultural historian Daniel Boorstin describes a celebrity as 'a person who is known for his well-knownness'. (Daniel Boorstin, *The Image, A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, 1962, republished Vintage, 1992) Film critic and cultural historian, Neal Gabler writes, "A celebrity arrives on the scene from circumstances not very different from ours. He enters the wondrous world of show business where he encounters his own trials and temptations from drugs to sex to career setbacks, and, having survived them, he returns to us via the media to pass on what he has learned, which is, basically, that he is no different from us, that his priorities are the same as ours, that for all the fame and power and glory and sex he has, the only thing that truly matters is knowing who you are.... those who live celebrity are the sanctified, the best, the most deserving. And having conspired in the creation of this new art form as fans, we get the dispensation to watch them, to share them, to consume them, to enjoy them, to

bask in their magnificence and to imagine that we might have a narrative of our own some day, allowing us to join them.' (Neal Gabler, 'Toward a New Definition of Celebrity', <https://learcenter.org/pdf/Gabler.pdf>)

Here is a basic distinction between celebrities and saints. A celebrity life tells us a story of wish-fulfilment, for if they are no different from us, we might yet find our lives change to become like theirs. Saints, by *their* lives, retell a very different story, one of self-sacrifice: service, opposition to the powers of evil, suffering, death and resurrection.

**Are there celebrities you would consider contemporary secular Saints today
or others who you would not consider candidates for sainthood?**

Something to sing....

The hymns we sing proclaim our theology as much as the sermons we preach. What do these two hymns tell us about saints and sainthood?

For all the saints who showed your love

in how they lived and where they moved,
for mindful women, caring men,
accept our gratitude again.

For all the saints who loved your name,
whose faith increased the Saviour's fame,
who sang your songs and shared your word,
accept our gratitude, good Lord.

For all the saints who named your will,
and saw the kingdom coming still
through selfless protest, prayer, and praise,
accept the gratitude we raise.

Bless all whose will or name or love
reflects the grace of heaven above.
Though unacclaimed by earthly powers,
your life through theirs has hallowed ours.

John Bell & Graham Maule.

Tune: O Waly, Waly or LM

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Hail Mary, our icon of trust in God's Word

in faith you conceived, and God's life in you stirred.
O woman of wisdom, now show us the way
the faithful in confidence call on your name.

Hail, mother of Jesus, of all mothers blest
to you joyful praises and prayers are addressed.
The saints and the angels your glory proclaim;
the faithful in confidence call on your name.

We pray you, O woman of all women blest
to care for the homeless, the poor and oppressed.
Be with us, your people, in joy and in pain;
be near us to cheer us til heaven we gain.

To God, your creator, glad hymns with us raise
To Jesus, your Son and the Spirit, give praise.
And pray for the churches, that all may be one:
On earth as in heaven, may God's will be done.

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Notes for facilitators.

This material uses a receptive ecumenism approach. You can find out more information about receptive ecumenism at https://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/91312/Home/Resources/Theology/Receptive_Ecumenism/What_is_Receptive/What_is_Receptive.aspx

The Dialogue Group is very interested in your feedback as it develops resources for local congregations to use so any feedback you are able to give will be gratefully received.