Prayer of Confession by Steve Millington (Australia)

Introduction

This year the Baptist World Alliance had its Annual Gathering in Zurich in Switzerland because 500 years ago a number of Christians took the bible to heart and were baptised on profession of their faith in Jesus a Lord. This was the start of what was called the ‘Radical Reformation’, from which Baptists today trace their roots.

One of the leaders of these Anabaptists was Felix Manz, who was drowned in the river Limmat in Zurich because he stood firm in the belief that only believing Christians should be baptised. Many other Anabaptists suffered personal loss, oppression and martyrdom because they shared this belief.

Across the centuries many, many people who believed God’s call and walked in obedience to Christ as Lord, suffered torture and death. The same continues today, with signs and statistics showing that there are countries and regions in the world where Christians were once able to able to live and work safely that are becoming increasingly hostile.

Confession Prayer

Father forgive us for our attitude toward the call to take up our cross and follow you. We take for granted the liberty and freedom where we live. Frequently we have failed to bear witness to the hope we have in you and have avoided conflict by not being your witnesses.

Father we confess that we have failed you in this and so many other ways. Please forgive our sin and enable us to take up our cross and follow you. AMEN

Announcement of Forgiveness

The good news is that God has promised that those who confess their sin in true repentance will be forgiven because Jesus has died and risen to new life beyond the grave. So, brothers and sisters, know that you are forgiven and go forward in the peace, joy and hope that Jesus brings.
Prayer of Lament and Petition

Free prayers may be offered for Christians who are today facing persecution and martyrdom around the world. These prayers may be preceded by, or interspersed with, or even followed by words of lament based on Revelation 6:10:

“How long, oh Lord, how long, until you bring all the evil in this world to an end and bring in your kingdom of justice and peace?”
God of justice and righteousness, be with us, each one in our own place in your world that you so love. We turn our hearts to you with love and thanksgiving for you are God and Father of us all. As we observe this Human Rights Sunday, our thoughts are disturbing as we remember those whose human rights have been violated; those who suffer abuse and mistreatment, discrimination and separation from family and friends. Don’t let us turn away from your call to love our neighbor in word and deed. Lead us in right paths of compassion. Grant us strength of spirit to do justice and to seek it for others. Grant to the victims the awareness of your presence that transcends their circumstance and grace sufficient to endure. We remember also those who violate the rights of others, those who are aggressively thoughtless and careless of the rights and needs of others while they seek to acquire more to please themselves. Move them to repentance, and forgive us when we remain silent and idle and move us to be part of your loving solution. Create in us clean hearts that we might be instruments of your peace and witnesses to the power of your love to transform people and circumstances. Be among us and within us that we might be and do what is pleasing in your sight. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.
Call to Worship by William Tuck (USA)

Leader: The God of endless God draws us to this place today.  
People: May we be open to the gift of that divine Presence.  
Leader: Drawing on this divine love, may we strive for justice, peace, and reconciliation with all persons.  
People: Help us to live in harmony with all your children, young and old.

Call to Worship

Leader: God of Justice and Mercy, we lift our voices to You  
People: We confess that we do not always practice justice and mercy.  
Leader: Forgive us for our lack of compassion and discernment.  
People: Open our hearts and minds to sense the loving way of Christ, our Lord, in the way we treat others.

Call to Worship

Leader: Eternal God, we know that You love all people regardless of their race or color.  
People: Forgive us when we fail to respect and affirm those who are a different color, race or age than we are.  
Leader: As Jesus, Your Son, reached out with love to all and died on the cross that all might have redemption from their sins;  
People: May we, who claim Him as Lord, strive to follow his example as we respond to all those who cross our path.
PASTORAL PRAYER

Eternal God, we come to worship today to be loved and to love. May we hear Your voice calling us today to be, to serve, and to give. We have been taught that Your spirit is love. We pray that You will teach us how to know the meaning of love, especially Your love. May we learn to listen to its many voices. May we hear the sound of love in the greeting of a friend, the sighing sleep of a baby, the exchanging of vows at the marriage altar, the laughter of children at play, in words of encouragement in times of need, and in the forgiving words of Your acceptance of us.

Forgive us for putting our faith and force in might instead of love. Forgive us for putting our faith in wealth and prestige instead of love. As men and women in the past saw Your love in Jesus Christ, so now may we let them see the love of Jesus Christ in us today. May they see it in the hand we extend to lift someone who has fallen, as we listen to a friend pour out his or her difficulties. May love be seen in our concern for the needy, the lonely, the bereaved, the hurting, and suffering of those around us. May we reach out to all persons regardless of their race, color, sex or religious beliefs or even to those who deny you with love and a compassionate spirit, even as Christ reached out to all he met in his pilgrimage. Forgive us for being judgmental and critical of those who are different from us. Help us to love all persons as Christ has loved us even when we have been unlovable.

O God, who loves all the world, love each of us today. We confess that there are times that we feel so unlovable because of our sins. We feel unclean, filthy, misguided, perplexed, and saddened. Love us still. May the embrace of Your presence be so real that we will know the assurance of Your forgiving love and how to extend that love to others. Touch us, forgive us, redeem us, direct us. O love that will not let us go, we rest our weary souls in You. We give You back the life we owe, that we may richer, fuller be. In the loving name of Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.
A LITANY OF GOOD WILL

Leader: The Church declares boldly that God is the Creator of all persons.

People: We thank God for our Creator’s divine love and grace.

Leader: We acknowledge, however, that racism has a long history in our world.

People: Forgive us, O God, when we have allowed prejudice to determine our relationship with other persons.

Leader: May Jesus Christ help us to break down all racial barriers and enable us to love all persons as Christ accepts and loves us.

People: May we be bridge-builders to witness to Christ’s transcending love that crosses all barriers, persons, sexes, and races.

Unison: As God welcomes all persons with divine love, grant that we will work for racial harmony and good will toward all persons. Amen.
Reflection by Lina Toth (Andronoviene) (Lithuania/Scotland)

...By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Luke 1:78-79

We find ourselves
Time and again

Between light
And darkness

Between hope
And despair

Between goodwill
And violence

Between fear
And courage

Sometimes impatient
Sometimes despondent

When will the dawn from on high break upon us?

Will we see the dawn of your tender mercy
When we plead for those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death?

May that dawn from on high
Guide our feet into the way of peace

Peace for all.
Corporate Prayer by Guilherme Almeida (Brazil/USA)

God of Love and Joy,
We turn our hearts from ways of destruction to ways of kindness and self-control. We offer our hearts to You.
Awaken us to Your presence.
Give us an imagination to dream dreams.

God of Freedom,
We approach You with deep gratitude for Your boundless grace towards all Your children. We offer our talents to You.
Deliver us from a rhetoric of hate.
Give us courage to see visions.

God of Our New Identities,
Clothe us and give us a place to belong.
Reveal to us new ways to act justly.
Embolden us to work for a fair and free world.

God of Peace,
Encourage us to be patient and continue working for wholeness.
Renew our love for justice.
Give us strength to prophesy, even as we learn the language of the voiceless.

God of Strength,
Help us share wisdom, help us be present.
Guard our feet as we walk humbly with You, as we walk alongside one another as equals.

In Your Matchless Name we pray. Amen.