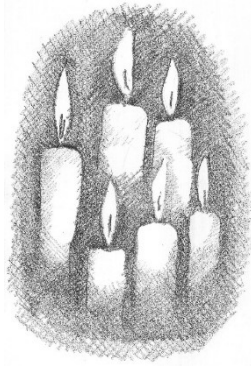


A PRAYER PILGRIMAGE

around the

PARISH OF CENTRAL EXETER



‘Come ye yourselves apart and rest awhile’

These words over the door into St Stephen’s church have invited people over the centuries to step aside from their activities, to be still and rest, opening their minds and hearts to the divine. The ancient churches, which now make up the Parish of Central Exeter, have been places of prayer and worship for the citizens of Exeter, surrounding areas and visitors all this time and continue to witness to the presence of God today.

This prayer pilgrimage has been written and compiled by members of the parish. We offer it as a way to enable you to visit these ancient buildings as the places of prayer that they have always been. If you want to learn about the history of the churches, there are leaflets or displays in each church apart from St Mary Arches, but you may want to read those on another occasion.

The prayers are focused at different places within or around the buildings, though wordless silence is also, of course, a perfectly valid response. There is a map to show the route that the pilgrimage follows starting at St Stephen’s. However, it is not essential to begin there, nor is it necessary to do all the churches at one time. We offer you these words, though remember that the psalmist encourages us all to ‘Be still and know that I am God’ (Psalm 46:10a). May this be your experience today.

A sketch map showing the suggested route between the churches is on the back cover

1. St Stephen's



During its 1000-year-long existence, the church of St Stephen's has seen many changes. Between 1658 and 1664 it was sold, returned dilapidated, rebuilt, burnt down and rebuilt again. In May 1942 it survived the devastation of the High Street during the Exeter Blitz. The most recent changes occurred with a major refurbishment finally completed in 2012.

4 points of prayer

1) Inscribed on the top step of the entrance is a verse from the New Testament book 'Letter to the Hebrews' - *Be welcoming to strangers: you may be entertaining angels unawares* (Hebrews 13:2). This in turn refers to the story in Genesis 18: 1-16 which tells of Abraham offering hospitality to three travellers who turn out to be angels, or even the Lord himself.

2) In the main body of the church are six banners, three in each of the north and south aisles, depicting images taken principally from Celtic Christianity: a leaping salmon, ferns unfurling, a wild goose, a triplet of hares, small fishes and a dove. The installation of the banners was the concluding part of the building's refurbishment. Further information is available in the booklet entitled "The Banners in St Stephen's Church".

3) Central to Christian worship is the service known variously as the Mass, Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, or (the term used in St Stephen's) Holy Communion. On the dais at the front stands a communion table which was commissioned and presented to the church in memory of a former and much-loved member of the clergy team.

4) On the back wall in the little upper chapel or sanctuary, informally known as the “Bow Room” (it sits on top of the medieval archway called “St Stephen’s Bow”), hangs the tapestry *Pieces of Light*, created in 1986 by tapestry artist Bobbie Cox. In three sections which continue with the altar frontal, its original location was on the east wall of the chancel (behind the communion table), and was moved to its current position when the Bow Room steps were opened up.

1. The Entrance

Almighty God,

I step into the entrance to this building
where worshippers have been welcomed for a thousand years,
and give thanks that you welcome me now.

I pray for all who will enter this holy place,
that they too may find a blessing within,
angels and strangers alike.

2. The Banners

Creator God,

the images of the beauty of creation are before me,
and I say with the psalmist “how wonderful are your works,
my soul knows it well”.

I praise you for the infinite variety of form and colour,
the minute and the mighty, the fragile and the fearsome:
each one a fellow creature whose home is the Earth.

3. The Communion Table

Companion God

I approach the communion table,
a reminder of the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples,
as one who would be a disciple now,
praying that I might know Christ's reassuring presence
as I seek to follow his way
through 'the changes and chances of this fleeting world'.

4. The Tapestry

Enlightening God,

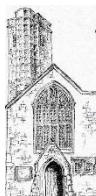
as I gaze at the "pieces of light"
where the darker and the brighter together
form the cross that unites heaven and earth,
I pray that the light and the shade of my own life
will hint at the cross of Christ,
and be acceptable in your sight.

* * *

An additional prayer

Thanks be to you, our Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits which you have given us,
for all the pains and insults which you have borne for us.
Most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother,
may we know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly,
day by day. Amen.

(Richard of Chichester)



2. St Martin's

The first church on this site was consecrated in 1065 by Bishop Leofric (who founded Exeter cathedral). Its tiny parish served the workers and traders who crowded into the houses in the surrounding streets. It has been under the care of the Churches Conservation Trust since 1995. In 2016 it was fortunate to survive the threat of fire when the nearby Royal Clarence Hotel, along with other buildings in Cathedral Close, burned down.

3 points of prayer:

1) The communion rails at the east end of the church, enclosing the altar on three sides, were, according to a seventeenth-century order from the Archbishop of Canterbury, designed to prevent parishioners' dogs reaching the altar.

2) The stone reredos dating from c. 1710, immediately behind the altar, is inscribed with the ten commandments, flanked on either side by a creed (a statement of Christian beliefs) and the traditional version of the Lord's Prayer.

3) The monuments on the walls, of which there are many splendid examples, include one on the north wall (on the left when facing the altar) which commemorates Philip Hooper, an 18th century benefactor who donated the above-mentioned reredos. He kneels at a prayer desk with a pile of books, and with a skull as a *memento mori*.

1. The Altar Rail

Gracious God

I kneel in the knowledge that though I was not worthy,
I have through your grace been made worthy.
I bring before you all who believe themselves lost,
unworthy because of real or imagined faults;
may they come to know and accept that in your eyes
they too are of infinite worth.

2. The Ten Commandments

Holy God,

I struggle to read the set-in-stone commandments
flanked by the prayer taught by your Son
and the beliefs of your church.
But I obey, Lord: forgive my disobedience;
I pray, Lord; save my tongue from insincerity;
I believe, Lord: help me in my unbelief.

3. The Memorials

Eternal God,

as I read these reminders of the transience of life,
I recall our common mortality
and the unknown hour of our going.
I pray for all who are now facing their death,
and for myself for when that time comes,
that we may know the peace of your presence.



3. St Petrock's

The current building dates from early medieval times. It may have been founded as early as the 6th century (when Petrock was a Welsh abbot), but some sources date it to the 11th century, and it has been extensively altered and enlarged over the centuries. Since 1994 the larger part of the church has housed a centre for homeless people. The part of the church retained for occasional services and bell-ringing has its entrance in the High Street.
(as the church is currently being repaired it is temporarily closed)

3 points of prayer:

1) The entrance to the homeless centre is in Cathedral Close. The church has a history of concern for the poor: in 1411 a parishioner gave funds in his will for a hundred poor persons in the parish to be properly clothed. Coincidentally, but fortuitously, when a number of churches in Exeter worked together on a homelessness project, St Petrock's was made available as the base for what is now a stand-alone charity.

2) The *Crown of Thorns* metal sculpture hangs in the medieval chancel (behind the glass screen and doors). According to the gospel narratives, a crown made from strands of thorn twisted together was placed on Jesus' head by Roman soldiers during the events leading to his crucifixion as part of their mockery. It is a symbol of Christ's suffering and a reminder that his kingship is "not of this world".

3) The bell ropes in the NW corner of the church ring a peal of six bells, said to be the lightest in Devon, which is occasionally rung by members of the Guild of Devonshire Ringers. The tower which houses the bells carries a tiny octagonal turret of 1736.

1. The Homeless Centre

Righteous God

I live in a world of the haves and have-nots,
and knowing myself to be blessed with much,
I pray for a generous heart
both in myself and in my society,
for feeding the hungry and housing the homeless,
knowing that this is where Christ will be found.

2. The Crown of Thorns

Saviour God,

this symbol of innocence being mocked
by savage violence
tears at the heart and at the mind;
I pray for all victims of violence in its many forms,
and for all who challenge its continuing use
within and between the nations of your world.

3. The Bell Ropes

Joyous God

as the ropes tell of hidden bells
needing the skill of ringers to release their music,
every atom of the world tells of you
and of your love, needing only our response:
ring out those peals of joyful tongues, then,
loudly, I pray! Everywhere!

4. St Olave's



Founded in late Anglo-Saxon times, the church is dedicated to St Olaf, a Christianized Viking king who died in 1030. For many years in the 17th & 18th centuries it provided a place of worship for French protestant Huguenot refugees, some of whose names are on memorial floor-slabs.

4 points of prayer

- 1) A war memorial dedicated to those from the then parish of St Olave who fell in the 1914-1918 World War. This is on the outside wall, to the right of the entrance, in a blocked doorway set into the tower exterior. Following damage, the head of the Christ figure was restored in 2016.
- 2) The Huguenot memorial floor-slabs inscribed with Flemish names, such as that to be found at the back of the church near the wall heater.
- 3) The reredos or altar triptych, dating from the early 1900s - the elaborate, screen-like structure behind the altar with its multiple colourful panels contains depictions of the Virgin and Child, angels, kings and saints, including St Olaf complete with his Viking double-headed axe with which he encouraged the heathen to convert to Christianity...
- 4) The 'Stations of the Cross': a sequence of 14 images depicting in mosaics Christ on the day of his crucifixion. The object of the images is to help the Christian faithful make a spiritual pilgrimage through contemplation of the events constituting the Passion of Christ. The sequence begins on the left-hand wall near the organ and continues counter-clockwise round the interior.

1. The War Memorial

Compassionate God

as I read the names inscribed here
beneath the crucified prince of peace,
I pray for your spirit of reconciliation
to be active in the world and in myself,
that where there is hatred, love may prevail,
and where there is hurt, we may help to bring healing.

2. The Huguenot floor-slabs

Welcoming God,

as I walk on flagstones bearing the names
of many persecuted for their faith,
who found sanctuary and worship within these walls,
I pray for all today under attack for their faith.
May I foster a spirit of welcome and openness
as I in my turn long to be welcomed.

3. The Reredos

Transcendent God,

you feel remote beyond the altar
with Mary, and angels, and a saint with a menacing axe;
I pray for the vision to see, within the stylized symbols,
the truths of your majesty and power
at work in the lives of ordinary people:
we who are neither angels nor saints.

4. Stations of the Cross

Vulnerable God,
inspired by the skill of the mosaicist
I follow the path taken by your Son
to the cross and the grave;
and pray for the strength to bear my own cross,
the willingness to help others bear theirs,
and trust in the resurrection life beyond the grave.

* * *

A prayer for the city & people of Exeter

Creator God,
Whose being encompasses all,
Whose love excludes no-one and no-thing,
Whose compassion is boundless and eternal:
We pray for the people and places of Exeter,
For all whose joys and worries, hopes and fears,
Inhabit these buildings and walk these streets.
Pour out your blessings, we ask,
And may your Holy Spirit be both guardian and guide
In the ceaseless activities of city life.
This we ask in the name of Christ. Amen.



5. St Mary Arches

The church dates from the 12th century, "Arches" possibly deriving from an arched thoroughfare outside the church in medieval times. It has been much altered and renovated over the centuries.

Today, as well as being the home of Unlimited Church (the youth church of the Diocese of Exeter), it is a base for Exeter's "Street Pastors", who work in the night-time economy at weekends, making communities safer by engaging with people on the streets to care for them, listen to them and help them.

1 point of prayer

For security reasons the church has to be kept locked when not in use, so the single point of prayer is the locked door itself, a frustrating contrast to the biblical promise concerning the door of heaven: "knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7).

1. The Locked Door

Merciful God,
through your Son you have promised
"ask and you will receive,
seek and you will find,
knock and the door will be opened...";
and though this building may still be locked,
I give thanks that the door to eternal life is ever open to all.

6. St Pancras'



The church stands on possibly one of the most ancient Christian sites in Britain. Now in the centre of the Guildhall shopping centre it provides a quiet respite from the busyness of life, with a simple communion service at lunchtime on Tuesdays, a lay-led meditation inspired by the Taizé community in France one Friday evening a month, and a Book of Common Prayer communion service on one Sunday morning each month.

3 points of prayer

1) The font, which dates back to the 12th century, is the oldest fixture in the building. Circular and tapering, it has a band of beaded ornament round the middle of the bowl. Over the centuries it would have been the focal point of many hundreds, probably thousands, of baptisms, as babies and infants were welcomed into the church's family.

2) The pulpit is a fine Jacobean, polygonal affair with carvings of foliage around rectangular panels. It was transferred from All Hallows in nearby Goldsmith St when that church was demolished in 1906. From here "the Word" would have been regularly preached during services, though nowadays the occasional sermon is delivered from the chancel.

3) The porch. As for any building, the porch is a transitional place as we move between two types of space – here, we are stepping out of a building known colloquially as "the house of God" back into the ordinary, secular world, epitomized by the shopping centre in which the church now stands. But it is a tenet of the Christian faith that God is not confined to special buildings, but is equally to be found in all the goings-on of human life.

1. The Font

Loving God,

as I touch the ancient stone of the font
where over the centuries babies have been blessed
with the water of baptism to receive their names,
I, (*your name*), give thanks for being a child of God;
and I pray that my name
will be entered for eternity in your book of life.

2. The Pulpit

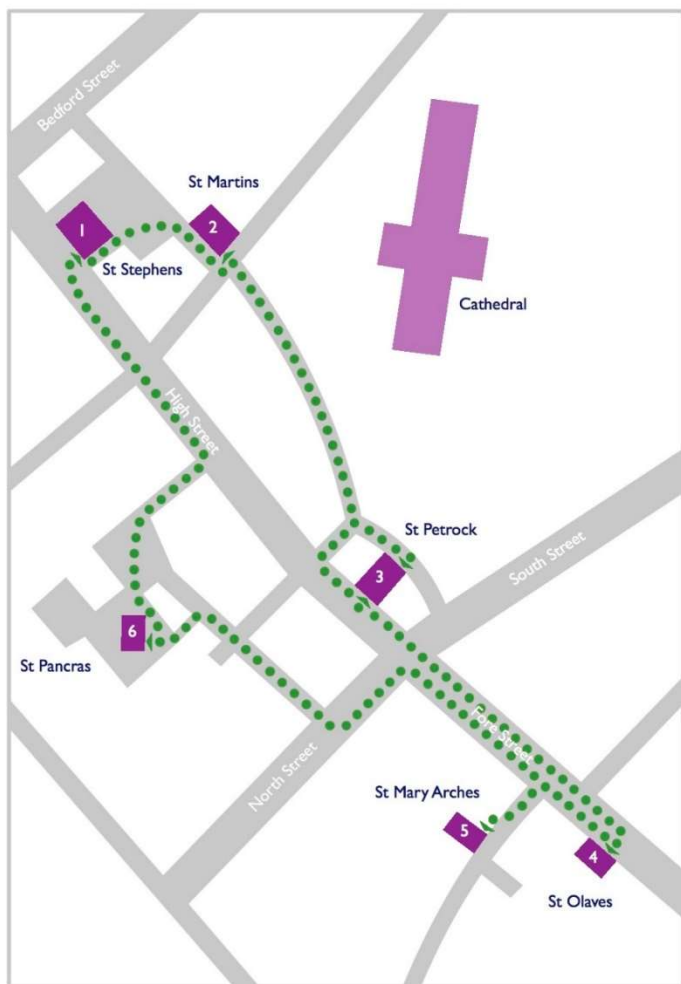
Living God,

whose true pulpit is all of creation,
for your word is heard through all of creation,
I pray that I and all who enter this quiet place
at the centre of the endlessly busy city
may open our ears and hearts to hear your still, small voice
speak your eternal word of good news.

3. The Porch

Boundless God,

as I move from the stillness of your presence here
back into the whirl of everyday life,
I pray for the continued assurance of your being with me
at even the busiest and most difficult of times,
and that should I ever forget you,
you will never forget me.



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