

GENERAL SYNOD

STATEMENT FROM THE ARCHBISHOPS OF CANTERBURY AND YORK ON THE REFORMATION ANNIVERSARY

This year, churches around the world will be marking the great significance of the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation in Europe, dated from Martin Luther's 95 Theses protesting against the practice of indulgences, on 31 October 1517 at Wittenberg. The Church of England will be participating in various ways, including sharing in events with Protestant church partners from Continental Europe.

The Reformation was a process of both renewal and division amongst Christians in Europe. In this Reformation Anniversary year, many Christians will want to give thanks for the great blessings they have received to which the Reformation directly contributed. Amongst much else these would include clear proclamation of the gospel of grace, the availability of the Bible to all in their own language and the recognition of the calling of lay people to serve God in the world and in the church.

Many will also remember the lasting damage done five centuries ago to the unity of the Church in defiance of the clear command of Jesus Christ to unity in love. Those turbulent years saw Christian people pitted against each other, such that many suffered persecution and even death at the hands of others claiming to know the same Lord. A legacy of mistrust and competition would then accompany the astonishing global spread of Christianity in the centuries that followed. All this leaves us much to ponder.

Remembering the Reformation should bring us back to what the Reformers wanted to put at the centre of every person's life, which is a simple trust in Jesus Christ. This year is a time to renew our faith in Christ and in Him alone. With this confidence we shall then be ready to ask hard questions about those things in our lives and the life of our churches that get in the way of sharing and celebrating faith in Him.

Remembering the Reformation should also lead us to repent of our part in perpetuating divisions. Such repentance needs to be linked to action aimed at reaching out to other churches and strengthening relationships with them. This anniversary year will provide many opportunities to do just that, beginning with this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

We therefore call on all Christians to seek to be renewed and united in the truth of the gospel of Christ through our participation in the Reformation Anniversary, to repent of divisions, and, held together in Him, to be a blessing to the world in obedience to Jesus Christ.

For further information about the Church of England's participation in the Reformation Anniversary, please see the Council for Christian Unity's dedicated web page on the Church of England website, at <https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/work-other-churches/reformation-anniversary.aspx>. This includes links to websites hosted by the Council of Lutheran Churches in Great Britain, the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD) and the Lutheran World Federation that also provide extensive information and resources.