

## Opening Prayer

We come to you today, oh great God of diversity and inclusion. It was you who steered the creation into existence with its magnificent variety, seen in the sheer beauty of earth's architecture, the vastness of the animal kingdom, the brilliance of our planet's flora. And, even more remarkably, how it all blends into the symphony of life that we live in. And then there is each one of us, knitted together in individual wombs, perfectly designed for its place in it all.

However, as we all know, in our brokenness, we have messed things up at every level, disrupting the perfect patterns and design you originally intended. As humankind, failing to respect that the cornerstone of creation's function is its diversity and its need for inclusion of all in it, we have interfered where it has met our instant needs, failing to recognise the multiple dominoes that fall as a result. These chain reactions are all around us, not only in the increasingly rapid damage being done to the physical planet but also in the multifaceted destructive ways in which we relate to one another as humankind.

It was into this brokenness that you stepped 2000 years ago with a solution, arguably even more relevant now than it was way back then. You inaugurated a new way of being for creation, first in your own body and then, in your new body, us, the church, exactly as we hear sung each week, "Christ has no body now but ours". Brilliant in its design, as with the physical creation, the cornerstone of its function is the diversity of its parts and their need to all play their roles. We know so well the places where your word speaks of the critical interdependence of each part of the body if it is going to function as intended.

We sit here today, beautiful in our difference, each one with a place and a role yet, we confess that we so often fail to acknowledge this, let alone live it. We drift constantly into worldly ways of thinking and acting, giving honour to some people and disregarding others. We regularly fail to see the value in the hidden parts or those that we consider less presentable, while you have a different plan, giving greater honour to those who lack it, specifically so that there would be no division. We have allowed ourselves to be infected with a range of "isms", apportioning value to things that hold no value to you at all. Forgive us, gracious God, and we ask again and again, please open our eyes to see the beauty in diversity and inclusion that is as clear as day to you.

As we turn to you again for grace and recalibration into your ways, what better time to do this than today when we celebrate the day that the same Spirit that you embodied on this earth, burst onto humankind, to speak into its diversity with tongues of fire to empower us and tongues of diverse communication to include us all. Not only did you speak so we could **hear** but you enabled us so we could **do**. We recommit ourselves to an openness to see the diversity in your design and to live out the full inclusivity that you intended.

We close, speaking not to **my** parent in heaven but to the one who welcomes us all.