Opening Prayers

Everlasting, ever-loving God, in the quiet of these moments, in this sacred space steeped in the worship of past generations, we join that great cloud of witnesses to proclaim that you are our God and we are your people.

In this sacred space our memories return to the serendipities that delighted us with spontaneous insights into the God of Surprises, lighting a spark of new life, new energy, new vision. We linger, immersed in the sacramental moments when your abundant grace and extravagant love overwhelmed us, restoring our souls, nurturing our faith, gently drawing us into deeper devotion.

We are awed by the beauty of holiness and celebrate every life-giving encounter with the One who makes all things new. This is our beautiful Heritage: You are our God, and we are your people.

Yet even the beauty of this sacred space bears barbs which pierce our humanity. Bright windows unintentionally yet with subtle superiority, filter the light of Christ making it available to a select few, denying the rich diversity of colour – all the colours of the rainbow. Marble plaques remind us of servants and heroes but ignore the pain of exclusion. We are broken by the realisation that through ignorance or intention, apathy or action, fear or favour, we have brought pain to others and to the Eternal Heart of Love. This is our flawed Heritage. But still, you are our God, and we are your people.

On a warm Sunday afternoon late in 1981, the light from these windows was obscured and the marble plaques were hidden from view. Young people clambered into the windowsills and clung to the pillars, older folk squeezed into the pews and crowded the communion rail, yet others filled every available space, all eager to receive feedback from the national “Journey to a New Land” conference. Stories were told, pain was shared, forgiveness sought and freely granted, and with hope and determination we committed ourselves to a New Land.

With shame we acknowledge that 40 years later our land is bleeding and broken, divided and disillusioned. Our painful heritage of enshrined discrimination weighs as heavily as the bell enclosed in the steeple that rises above this sacred space. And – like the bell – all too often, we have been silent. In the presence of that great cloud of witnesses, we pray for wisdom and compassion, that our lives may bring healing, not harm; we ask for Jeremiah-courage to purchase and plant and build, to invest ourselves, our time, talents and resources, that the heritage we bequeath to future generations will express in every way God’s plan for good and not evil, for prosperity, hope and a future for all.

In your great name we pray. Amen.