

PASTOR'S THOUGHTS

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A Historic Moment of Prayer: Echoes of Division and Unity in the Church of England

In 1534, King Henry VIII decided to break away from the Catholic Church due to his desire to remarry and the Church's refusal to recognise his right to do so. The Pope's refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of his marriage to Anne Boleyn led directly to the formation of the Church of England. This was not simply a minor disagreement; it marked a decisive break from centuries of Catholic tradition. The newly formed Church of England placed the English monarchy, rather than the Pope, at its head.

Nearly five centuries later, on Thursday 23 October 2025, King Charles III entered Westminster Chapel in a moment of ecumenical reflection. A period of solemn silence was followed by a joint prayer, bringing together different Christian traditions in a rare display of unity. Though such gestures may seem insignificant to many, this act of shared prayer carries deep symbolic weight.

The timing of this event is particularly significant. The Church of England currently faces renewed internal division, echoing its original split from Rome. Whereas the 16th-century break centred on King Henry VIII's marital situation, today's tensions revolve around the Church's position on same-sex marriage and the ordination of women bishops. These issues have created further fractures within the Anglican Communion, leaving the future of its unity uncertain.

Throughout church history, divisions have often arisen from theological disagreements and differing interpretations of doctrine. Too often, the Church has struggled to embrace meaningful dialogue and navigate its differences with grace. Yet true unity does not require uniformity. It is

grounded in the ability to coexist, even amid disagreement, for a higher purpose.

A house divided cannot stand, but when God's people come together, there is strength in unity. This simple act of shared prayer is a reminder of Christianity's common foundation: the belief in the incarnation of God through the Virgin Mary, the life and death of Christ, and his resurrection. These core truths transcend denominational boundaries and remind the Church that its greatest strength lies not in division, but in shared faith.

German Scholar Jürgen Moltmann wrote in his book, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (1977)

"The unity of the Church does not depend on uniformity of practice or thought, but on the shared confession of Christ as Lord."

This we also find underpinned in Ephesians 4:4–6 "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

In all this, let us pray for a united unity of the church to the glory of God.
