



# THE COMMUNION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

## A Pastoral Letter to the Teulu Asaph from the Bishop

July and August 2022

**W**e say it often: “The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.” We’re quoting St Paul, of course, who originally wrote those words when greeting the early Church community in Corinth (2 Corinthians 13.14).

However, that third phrase about the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is about more than a sense of happy togetherness. It is a translation of the Greek word, *koinonia*, which is a very deep word in meaning. It can also be translated as “communion”, which is about the profound sharing between people and God, the experience of deep love and firm commitment which arises from the relationship that Jesus had with the Father, and into which we are adopted by grace through faith. The medieval spiritual writer, Julian of Norwich, spoke of this when she wrote about one of her visions of Jesus, who assured her that in spite of sin in the world, “all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well” because of his great love and the work of redemption. It can manifest in emotion, a deep sense of personal peace, but it is not about feeling, it is the fundamental truth that Christ has paid the price for us, and that nothing can now separate us from the love of God (Romans 8.38).

There’s more. If God brings us into this relationship with him, we are also brought by faith into this relationship with other Christians. When we were baptised into Christ, we were baptised into one body (1 Corinthians 12.13), and we have all become sisters and brothers in God’s family, able to experience communion, fellowship, with one another. At its best, this is a powerful experience among Christians, in which we sense, beyond our physical senses, a deep link and friendship with other Christians. However, again, it is more than feeling, God has bound us in Christ, together into one people, in order to be built up in a temple to his glory (1 Peter 2.5). It is God’s action, and God’s desire, that we be united in fellowship. This is why it is a sin when Christians argue, or behave sometimes abominably to one another. It is a denial of Christ’s love at work among us. It is also why God calls Christians to work hard to be united in love and in mission.

This summer, two major conferences are taking place in which I am honoured to be representing the Church in Wales. As you read this, the 15<sup>th</sup> Lambeth Conference will have begun in Canterbury. No doubt the press will want to report on our divisions, but, in reality, we bishops have all been called to work hard to be in Communion, in fellowship, to make the Anglican Communion a reality. To fail would be a denial of Christ. The Anglican Communion achieves so much on a global stage, we must work to deepen the communion Jesus gives us and to strengthen our common witness to him.

Later, in September, the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches will be meeting in Germany. Bringing together not just one Christian World Communion, but all the Christian World Communions, this assembly will represent the widest possible spectrum of God’s family, from Syrian Orthodox to Brazilian Pentecostals, and everyone in between. There’ll be challenges there as well, not least the presence of the representatives of Russian and Ukrainian Churches in the same room. As at Lambeth, God calls us to build our living out of the communion we have been given in Christ.

These are not mere feel good rallies. They are an attempt, in the Holy Spirit, to bring the Churches of Jesus Christ into a deeper relationship so that we may live out God’s command to love in a way which will serve the world, and be the proof of the pudding for the Christian faith. So please pray for me, and for all of us who will attend either of these conferences. The future of the witness of the Christian Churches depends on us finding ways forward together. Nor is this irrelevant to your own faith – for you are called to communion with your neighbour – in order for the love of Christ to be manifest here in our home and diocese. Global or local, it is the same task and mission.

