

*Resources for*  
**THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**  
*and throughout the year*

Called to proclaim  
the mighty acts of the Lord  
*(cf. 1 Peter 2:9)*

*Jointly prepared and published by*  
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# **TO THOSE ORGANIZING THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**

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## **The search for unity: throughout the year**

The traditional period in the northern hemisphere for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is 18-25 January. Those dates were proposed in 1908 by Paul Wattson to cover the days between the feasts of St Peter and St Paul, and therefore have a symbolic significance. In the southern hemisphere where January is a vacation time churches often find other days to celebrate the week of prayer, for example around Pentecost (suggested by the Faith and Order movement in 1926), which is also a symbolic date for the unity of the Church.

Mindful of the need for flexibility, we invite you to use this material throughout the whole year to express the degree of communion which the churches have already reached, and to pray together for that full unity which is Christ's will.

## **Adapting the text**

This material is offered with the understanding that, whenever possible, it will be adapted for use in local situations. Account should be taken of local liturgical and devotional practice, and of the whole social and cultural context. Such adaptation should ideally take place ecumenically. In some places ecumenical structures are already set up for adapting the material; in other places, we hope that the need to adapt it will be a stimulus to creating such structures.

## **Using the Week of Prayer material**

- For churches and Christian communities which observe the week of prayer together through a single common service, an order for an ecumenical worship service is provided.
- Churches and Christian communities may also incorporate material from the week of prayer into their own services. Prayers from the ecumenical worship service, the "eight days", and the selection of additional prayers can be used as appropriate in their own setting.
- Communities which observe the week of prayer in their worship for each day during the week may draw material for these services from the "eight days".
- Those wishing to do bible studies on the week of prayer theme can use as a basis the biblical texts and reflections given in the eight days. Each day the discussions can lead to a closing period of intercessory prayer.
- Those who wish to pray privately may find the material helpful for focusing their prayer intentions. They can be mindful that they are in communion with others praying all around the world for the greater visible unity of Christ's Church.

# BIBLICAL TEXT FOR 2016

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*1 Peter 2:9-10*

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME FOR THE YEAR 2016

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Called to proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord

*(cf. 1 Peter 2:9)*

### **Background**

The oldest baptismal font in Latvia dates from the time of the great evangeliser of Latvia, St Meinhard. It was originally located in his Cathedral in Ikšķīle. Today it stands at the very centre of the Lutheran Cathedral in the country's capital, Rīga. The placement of the font so near to the Cathedral's ornate pulpit speaks eloquently of the relationship between baptism and proclamation, and the calling shared by all the baptised to *proclaim the mighty acts* of the Lord. This calling forms the theme of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity for 2016. Inspired by two verses from the First Letter of St Peter, members of different churches in Latvia prepared the resources for the week.



Archaeological evidence suggests that Christianity was first brought to Eastern Latvia in the 10th century by Byzantine missionaries. However, most accounts date Latvia's Christian origins to the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the evangelising mission of St Meinhard, and later of other German missionaries. The capital, Rīga, was one of the first cities to adopt Luther's ideas in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Moravian missionaries (Herrnhut Brethren) revived and deepened Christian faith throughout the country. Their descendants were to play a central role in laying the foundations for national independence in 1918.

The past, with its various periods of conflict and suffering, has had noticeable consequences for church life in Latvia today. It is a sad fact that the use of force by some early missionaries and crusaders misrepresented the essence of the Gospel. Over the centuries, the land of Latvia has been a religious and political battleground for various national and confessional powers. Changes in political dominance in different parts of the country were often reflected in changes in people's confessional affiliation too. Today, Latvia is a crossroads where Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox regions meet. Because of this unique location, it is home to Christians of many different traditions, but no single one of them is dominant.

Latvia first existed as a state from 1918 until 1940, in the wake of the First World War and the fall of the Russian and German empires. The Second World War and the decades that followed with their totalitarian anti-Christian ideologies – atheistic Nazism and Communism – brought devastation to the land and people of Latvia, right up to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. During those years, Christians were united in common witness to the Gospel – even to the point of martyrdom. Christians discovered their participation in the *royal priesthood* mentioned by St Peter through enduring torture, exile and death because of their faith in Jesus Christ. This bond of suffering created deep communion among Christians in Latvia. Through it, they discovered their baptismal priesthood, through which they were able to offer their sufferings in union with the sufferings of Jesus, for the good of others. The Bishop Sloskans Museum (he spent 8 years in Soviet lagers) is an expression of this common experience. On the inner wall of this museum there are four lists of martyrs and persecuted Christians – members of the Orthodox, Lutheran, Baptist and Catholic churches.

The experience of singing and praying together – including the National Anthem, *God Bless Latvia* – was crucial to Latvia regaining its independence in 1991. Fervent prayers for freedom were offered in many churches throughout the city. United in song and prayer, unarmed citizens built barricades on the streets of Rīga and stood shoulder to shoulder in defiance of the Soviet tanks.

However, the totalitarian darkness of the 20<sup>th</sup> century estranged many people from the truth about God the Father, his self-revelation in Jesus Christ and the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. Thankfully, the post-Soviet period has been one of renewal for the churches. Many Christians come together for prayer in small groups

and at ecumenical services. Conscious that the light and grace of Christ have not penetrated and transformed all the people of Latvia, they want to work and pray together so that the historical, ethnic and ideological wounds which still disfigure Latvian society may be healed.

### **The call to be *God's people***

St Peter tells the early Church that in their search for meaning prior to encountering the Gospel they were *not a people*. But through hearing the call to be God's *chosen race* and receiving the power of God's salvation in Jesus Christ, they have become *God's people*. This reality is expressed in Baptism, common to all Christians, in which we are born again of water and the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3:5). In Baptism we die to sin, in order to rise with Christ to a new life of grace in God. It is an ongoing challenge daily to remain aware of this new identity in Christ.

*How do we understand our common call to be "God's people"?*

*How do we express our baptismal identity as a "royal priesthood"?*

### **Hearing of God's *mighty acts***

Baptism opens up an exciting new journey of faith, uniting each new Christian with God's people throughout the ages. The Word of God – the Scriptures with which Christians of all traditions pray, study and reflect – is the foundation of a real, albeit incomplete, communion. In the shared sacred texts of the Bible, we hear of God's saving acts in salvation history: leading his people out of slavery in Egypt, and *the great mighty act* of God: the raising of Jesus from the dead, which opened new life to all of us. Furthermore, prayerful reading of the Bible leads Christians to recognise the *mighty acts* of God also in their own lives.

*In what ways do we see and respond to God's "mighty acts": in worship and song, in work for justice and peace?*

*How do we treasure the Scriptures as the living Word, calling us to greater unity and mission?*

### **Response and proclamation**

God has chosen us not as a privilege. He has made us holy, but not in the sense that Christians are more virtuous than others. He has chosen us to fulfil some purpose. We are holy only insofar as we are committed to God's service, which is always to bring his love to all people. Being a priestly people means being in service to the world. Christians live this baptismal calling and bear witness to God's *mighty acts* in a variety of ways:

*Healing wounds:* Wars, conflicts and abuses have wounded the emotional and relational lives of the people of Latvia and many other countries. God's grace helps us to beg forgiveness for the obstacles which prevent reconciliation and healing, to receive mercy, and to grow in holiness.

*Searching for truth and unity:* Awareness of our common identity in Christ calls us to work towards answering the questions that still divide us as Christians. We are called, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, to share our experiences and so discover, that in our common pilgrimage, Jesus Christ is among us.

*An Active Commitment to Human Dignity:* Christians who have been brought *out of darkness* into the *marvellous light* of the Kingdom recognise the extraordinary dignity of all human life. Through common social and charitable projects we reach out to the poor, the needy, the addicted and the marginalised.

*As we consider our commitment to Christian unity, for what should we beg forgiveness?*

*Knowing the mercy of God, how do we engage in social and charitable projects with other Christians?*

## **Introducing the rest of the materials**

The ecumenical Celebration uses the symbols of a Bible, a lighted candle and salt to express visually the *mighty acts* that we are called, as baptised Christians, to proclaim to the world. Both salt and light are gospel images that Jesus uses in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Mt 5:13-16). They describe our Christian identity: *You are the salt... You are the light....* And they describe our mission: *salt of the earth... light of the world...*

Salt and light are images of the what it is that Christians have to give the men and women of our times: we take a word from God that gives flavour to life, which can so often seem bland and empty; and we take a gracious word that guides and helps people to see and understand themselves and their world.

Representatives of a variety of ecumenical projects in Latvia were asked to reflect on the chosen theme and the experience of their work. Their reflections form the basis of the materials offered for the eight days of the Octave.



# **THE PREPARATION OF THE MATERIAL FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2016**

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The preparatory work on the theme for this year's week of prayer material was undertaken by a group of representatives from different parts of Latvia, brought together at the invitation of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Rīga, the Most Reverend Zbignevs Stankevičs.

Gratitude is extended in particular to:

Ms Anda Done (Lutheran Church)

Mr Levi Ivars Graudins (Latvia House of Prayer for All Peoples)

Ms Zanna Hermane (Vertikale Television, Sunday Morning Christian Programme)

Mr Nils Jansons (Chemin Neuf Community)

Sr Rita Refalo (Religious of the Pro Sanctitate Movement)

Ms Velta Skolmeistere (Catholic Youth Centre of the Archdiocese of Riga)

Ms Gunta Ziemele (Catholic Youth Centre of the Archdiocese of Riga)

The texts proposed here were finalized during a meeting of the International Committee nominated by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The members of the Committee joined with representatives of the Latvian Churches in September 2014 at the Rīga Metropolitan Roman Catholic Seminary. They extend very heartfelt thanks to Mgr Pauls Kļaviņš for generously hosting the meeting, and to the staff and students of the seminary for their kind hospitality. In particular they wish to thank Fr Aivars Līcis and Fr Kārlis Miķelsons who facilitated their work and visits. The participants were generously accompanied and guided on a visit to the Island of St Meinhard on the Daugava River near Ikšķile with ruins of the first Cathedral (consecrated in 1186), the Lutheran and Catholic Cathedrals of Rīga, and St Saviour's Anglican Church in Old Rīga. These visits proved to be invaluable in the production of the text.

# **ECUMENICAL WORSHIP SERVICE**

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## **Introduction to the Worship**

The Latvian writing group suggests that representatives from different churches enter carrying a Bible, a lighted candle (which may be a Paschal or Easter Candle) and a bowl of salt. They further suggest that each of these symbols is provided by a different congregation. The Bible should be placed on the lectern for the readings, and the salt and candle may be placed either by the lectern, as they are symbols of God's Word, or by the font, as they are signs of our baptismal calling.

A basket of small candles should also be set on the sanctuary so that after the homily members of the congregation can light individual candles from the flame carried in at the beginning of the service.

Although no hymns have been indicated, the Latvian writing group suggest Trinitarian hymns. They also suggest that the responses Kyrie Eleison and Christe Eleison be sung. During the Liturgy of the Word a short congregational response is provided in the text. The introduction to the readings uses the expression, "explosion of love", which comes from the founder of the Pro Sanctitate movement, Guglielmo Giaquinta. This movement is active in Latvia and its members contributed to the preparation of this celebration.

After the service:

A Latvian symbol of hospitality is bread, particularly black bread. When people move to a new home friends will often present a loaf of bread with salt sprinkled on top in the shape of a cross as a sign of blessing. The Latvian writing group invite Christians around the world to imitate this gesture of hospitality in their time of fellowship after the service.

# Order of Service

Called to proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord  
(cf. 1 Peter 2:9)

L: Leader  
A: All  
R: Reader

## I. Gathering

### Processional hymn

*Those leading the celebration enter and may carry a Bible, light and salt.*

### Words of welcome

L: Dear friends in Christ, as we gather together in this service of prayer for unity, we thank God for our Christian dignity and vocation, described in the words of St. Peter: “*You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light*”. We pray this year with the Christians of Latvia, who have prepared this service in the hope that we may grow in our communion with our Lord Jesus Christ and with all our brothers and sisters aspiring to unity (cf. 1 Peter 2:9).

## II. Prayers for the Holy Spirit

L: Holy Spirit, gift of the Father through his Son Jesus Christ, dwell in us all, open our hearts and help us to listen to your voice.

**A: Holy Spirit, come upon us.**

L: Holy Spirit, Divine Love, source of unity and holiness, show us the love of the Father.

**A: Holy Spirit, come upon us.**

L: Holy Spirit, Fire of Love, purify us, removing all the divisions in our hearts, in our communities and in the world, and so make us one in Jesus’ name.

**A: Holy Spirit, come upon us.**

L: Holy Spirit, strengthen our faith in Jesus, truly divine and truly human, who carried our sins of division to the Cross and brought us to communion in his Resurrection.

**A: Holy Spirit, come upon us.**

L: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, dwell in us so that we may become a communion of love and holiness. Make us one in you, who live and reign for ever and ever.

**A: Amen.**

### **Song of praise**

### **III. Prayers of reconciliation**

L: God invites us to reconciliation and holiness. Let us turn our minds, hearts and bodies to receive the grace of reconciliation on the way to holiness.

*Silence*

L: Lord, you created us in your own image. Forgive us when we do not respect our nature and the world that you gave us. *Kyrie eleison.*

**A: Kyrie eleison.**

L: Jesus, you invite us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. Forgive us when we fail to be holy, to be people of integrity and to respect human rights and dignity. *Christe eleison.*

**A: Christe eleison.**

L: Lord of life, of peace and of justice, forgive us when we transmit the culture of death, of war and of injustice, and fail to build a civilization of love. *Kyrie eleison.*

**A: Kyrie eleison.**

L: Merciful God, fill us with your grace and holiness. Make us apostles of love wherever we go. This we pray through Christ, our Lord.

**A: Amen.**

### **IV. Proclamation of the Word of God**

R: The Word of God that we will hear is an explosion of love in our lives.  
Listen and you will live.

**A: Thanks be to God.**

*Isaiah 55:1-3*

R: Listen and you will live.

**A: Thanks be to God.**

*Psalm 145:8-9, 15-16, 17-18*

R: I will bless your name for ever and ever.

**A: I will bless your name for ever and ever.**

R: The Lord is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
The Lord is good to all,  
and his compassion is over all that he has made.

**A: I will bless your name for ever and ever.**

R: The eyes of all look to you,  
and you give them their food in due season.  
You open your hand,  
satisfying the desire of every living thing.

**A: I will bless your name for ever and ever.**

R: The Lord is just in all his ways,  
and kind in all his doings.  
The Lord is near to all who call on him,  
to all who call on him in truth.

**A: I will bless your name for ever and ever.**

*1 Peter 2:9-10*

R: Listen and you will live.

**A: Thanks be to God.**

*Matthew 5:1- 16*

R: Listen and you will live.

**A: Thanks be to God.**

**Homily**

**V. A gesture of commitment to be salt and light**

*The Leader then makes the following invitation to the congregation:*

L: We have listened to the Scriptures which we honour and treasure,  
and we have been nourished together at one table of the Word.  
We will carry this holy Word out into the world with us,  
for we are joined in one mission,  
to be Salt of the Earth, to be Light to the World,  
and to proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord.

As a sign of this mission in which we share, we invite those who wish to come forward, and taste a small pinch of this salt and to light an individual candle from this one flame. We encourage those who do so to keep the flame alight until the end of the service.

## **VI. Prayers of hope**

L: As God's children, aware of our dignity and mission, let us raise our prayers and affirm our desire to be a holy people of God.

*Silence*

L: Loving Father, transform our hearts, our families, our communities and our society.

**A: Make all your people holy and one in Christ.**

L: Water of life, quench the thirst that exists in our society, the thirst for dignity, for love, for communion and holiness.

**A: Make all your people holy and one in Christ.**

L: Holy Spirit, Spirit of joy and peace, heal the divisions caused by our misuse of power and money, and reconcile us across different cultures and languages. Unite us as God's children.

**A: Make all your people holy and one in Christ.**

L: Trinity of love, lead us out of darkness into your marvellous light.

**A: Make all your people holy and one in Christ.**

L: Lord Jesus Christ, we are made one with you in baptism and therefore we unite our prayers to yours in the words you taught us.

**A: Our Father....**

## **VII. Sharing of the peace**

L: Jesus says:

You are the salt of the earth.

You are the light of the world.

Let your light shine before others,

so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Be salt of the earth.

Be light to the world.

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

**A: And with your spirit.**

L: Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

## **VIII. Blessing and dismissal**

L: Blest be the poor in spirit.

Blest be those who mourn.

Blest be the meek.

Blest be the merciful.

Blest be the pure in heart.

Blest be the peace-makers.

Blest be the persecuted.

Blest be you by God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**A: Amen.**

L: Go in the peace of Christ.

**A: Amen.**

# **BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS FOR THE EIGHT DAYS**

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## **DAY 1    Let the stone be rolled away**

Ezek 37:12-14    I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves,  
O my people.

Ps 71:18b -23    Your power and your righteousness, O God, reach the high heavens.

Rom 8:15-21    We suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Mt 28:1-10    He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.

### **Commentary**

*Today's reflections are prepared by the Catholic Youth Centre of the Archdiocese of Rīga, and spring from their experience of organising an Ecumenical Way of the Cross: a very influential annual ecumenical event in the life of Latvia. This experience prompts reflection on what the passion and resurrection mean in the Latvian context, and what are the Lord's mighty acts that baptised Christians are called to proclaim.*

- Latvia's Soviet history continues to cast a shadow over the people of this nation. There is still much grief and pain; wounds inflicted which are difficult to forgive. All of this is like the large stone which covered the mouth of Jesus' tomb. Wounds such as these imprison us in a spiritual grave.
- But if, in our suffering, our pain is united to his pain, then the story does not end here, locked in our graves. The earthquake of the Lord's resurrection is the earth-shaking event that opens our graves and frees us from the pain and bitterness that hold us in isolation from one another.
- This is the mighty act of the Lord: his love, which shakes the earth, which rolls away the stones, which frees us, and calls us out into the morning of a new day. Here, at this new dawn we are re-united with our brothers and sisters who have been imprisoned and hurting too. And like Mary Magdalene we must "go quickly" from this great moment of joy to tell others what the Lord has done.

### **Questions**

- What are the events and the situations of our lives and the circumstances that make us lock ourselves in the grave – in sadness, grief, worries, anxiety and despair? What keeps us from accepting the promise and joy of the resurrection of Christ?
- How ready are we to share the experience of God with those whom we meet?



## Prayer

Lord Jesus, you have always loved us from the beginning, and you have shown the depth of your love in dying for us on the cross and thereby sharing our sufferings and wounds. At this moment, we lay all the obstacles that separate us from your love at the foot of your cross. Roll back the stones which imprison us. Awaken us to your resurrection morning. There may we meet the brothers and sisters from whom we are separated. Amen.

## DAY 2 Called to be messengers of joy

Is 61:1-4	The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed.
Ps 133	How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!
Phil 2:1-5	Make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.
Jn 15:9-12	I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

## Commentary

*In the Soviet era a Christian presence through public media was impossible in Latvia. After independence, Latvian State Radio began broadcasting Christian programmes with a focus on unity and mission, providing a forum for leaders from diverse churches to encounter one another. This public witness of mutual respect, love and joy contributed to the spirit of Latvian ecumenical life. The experience of the creators of Christian programming at the Latvian State Radio inspired this reflection.*

- The joy of the Gospel calls Christians to live the prophecy of Isaiah: “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has appointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed”. We long for Good News to mend our broken hearts and to release us from all that binds us and makes us captive.
- When we are saddened by our own suffering, we may lack the vigour to proclaim the joy that comes from Jesus. Nevertheless, even when we feel unable to give anything to anyone, by bearing witness to the little that we have, Jesus multiplies it in us and in the people around us.
- In the Gospel Jesus says, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love” and “love one another as I have loved you”. It is in this way that we discover his joy in us, so that our joy may be complete. This mutual love and mutual joy is at the heart of our prayer for unity. As the psalmist says, “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!”

## Questions

- What smotherers joy in the world and in the churches?
- What can we receive from other Christians so that Jesus' joy may be in us, making us witnesses of the Good News?

## Prayer

God of love, look upon our willingness to serve you despite our spiritual poverty and limited abilities. Fulfil the deepest longings of our hearts with your presence. Fill our broken hearts with your healing love so that we may love as you have loved us. Grant us the gift of unity so that we may serve you with joy and share your love with all. This we ask in the name of your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## DAY 3 The witness of fellowship

Jer 31:10-13

They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion.

Ps 122

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you.

1 Jn 4:16b-21

Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters are liars.

Jn 17:20-23

That they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me.

## Commentary

*For over a decade Chemin Neuf, an international Catholic community with an ecumenical vocation, has been present in Latvia, with both Catholic and Lutheran members. Together they experience the joy that comes from fellowship in Christ, as well as the pain of disunity. As a sign of this division, they place an empty paten and chalice on the altar during evening prayer. Their experience inspired this reflection.*

- Division amongst Christians is an obstacle to evangelisation. The world cannot believe that we are Jesus' disciples while our love for one other is incomplete. We feel the pain of this division when we cannot receive together the body and blood of Christ at the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity.
- The source of our joy is our common life in Christ. To live our life of fellowship every day is to welcome, love, serve, pray and witness with Christians from diverse traditions. It is the pearl of great value given to us by the Holy Spirit.
- The night before his death, Jesus prayed for unity and love amongst us. Today we raise our hands and pray with Jesus for Christian unity. We pray for the

bishops, ministers and members of all churches. We pray that the Holy Spirit will lead us all on this path of unity.

## Questions

- How do we regard Christians of other churches and are we prepared to ask forgiveness for prejudice towards them?
- What can each of us do to decrease division amongst Christians?

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, who prayed that we might all be one, we pray to you for the unity of Christians according to your will, according to your means. May your Spirit enable us to experience the suffering caused by division, to see our sin and to hope beyond all hope. Amen.

## DAY 4    **A priestly people called to proclaim the Gospel**

- Gen 17:1-8            Your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations.
- Ps 145:8-12        The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- Rom 10:14-15      And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard?
- Mt 13:3-9            Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

## Commentary

*These reflections were inspired by the producers of the Sunday morning Christian programme Vertikale. The challenge of maintaining this Christian voice on Latvian national television has taught them that it is only when we learn to recognise other Christians as brothers and sisters that we can dare take God's Word into the public space.*

- In today's world more than ever, words flood into our homes: no longer just from our conversations, but from television, radio and now from social media. These words have the power to build up and to knock down. Much of this ocean of words seems meaningless: diversion rather than nourishment.
- One could drown in such an ocean where there is no meaning to grasp. But we have heard a saving Word; it has been thrown to us as a lifeline. It calls us into communion, and draws us into unity with others who have heard it too. Once we were not a people, but now we are God's people.

- More than this, we are a priestly people. United with others who have received his Word, our words are no longer mere drops lost in the ocean. Now we have a powerful Word to speak. United we can speak it powerfully: *Yeshua* – God saves.

## Questions

- What personal ambitions, competitive spirits, false assumptions about other Christians, and resentments obscure our proclamation of the Gospel?
- Who hears a life-giving word from us?

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, you said that everyone will know that we are your disciples if there is love among us. Strengthened by your grace, may we work tirelessly for the visible unity of your Church, so that the Good News that we are called to proclaim will be seen in all our words and deeds. Amen.

## DAY 5 The fellowship of the Apostles

Isa 56:6-8	For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.
Ps 24	Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
Acts 2:37-42	They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.
Jn 13:34-35	I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.

## Commentary

*The fellowship of Christian leaders shapes the visible expression of ecumenical life in Latvia. They gather regularly at Gaizins, Latvia's highest hill, and other locations, for a 40-hour period of prayer and simple fellowship around shared meals. For the duration of these meetings they are supported in non-stop prayer and worship by the faithful. These encounters renew the leaders as fellow-workers in Christ. The experience of the founder of the Latvia House of Prayer for All Peoples inspired this reflection.*

- Jesus' commandment to love one another is not theoretical. Our communion of love with one another becomes concrete when we gather together intentionally as Christ's disciples, to share fellowship and prayer in the power of the Spirit.
- The more that Christians, especially their leaders, encounter Christ together in humility and patience, the more prejudice diminishes, the more we discover Christ in one another, and the more we become authentic witnesses to the kingdom of God.

- At times ecumenism can seem very complicated. Yet joyful fellowship, a shared meal and common prayer and praise are ways of apostolic simplicity. In these we obey the commandment to love one another, and proclaim our *Amen* to Christ's prayer for unity.

## Questions

- What is our experience of encountering one another as brothers and sisters in Christ through Christian fellowship, shared meals and common prayer?
- What are our expectations of bishops and other church leaders on the path towards the visible unity of the Church? How can we support and encourage them?

## Prayer

God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may you give to all Christians, and especially to those entrusted with leadership in your Church, the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that with the eyes of our hearts we may see the hope to which you have called us: one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above and through all and in all. Amen.

## DAY 6 Listen to this dream

Gen 37:5-8	Listen to this dream that I dreamed.
Ps 126	We were like those who dream.
Rom 12: 9-13	Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour.
Jn 21:25	The world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

## Commentary

*Christian disunity hurts. Churches suffer from their inability to be united as one family at the Lord's Table; they suffer from rivalry and from histories of combativeness. One individual response to disunity emerged in 2005 in the form of an ecumenical journal: Kas Mus Vieno? ("What unites us?"). The experience of producing the journal inspired this reflection.*

- Joseph has a dream, which is a message from God. However, when Joseph shares his dream with his brothers they react with anger and violence because the dream implies that they must bow down before him. Ultimately famine drives the brothers to Egypt and they do bow before Joseph, but rather than the abasement and dishonour they fear, it is a moment of reconciliation and grace.
- Jesus, like Joseph, unfolds to us a vision, a message about the life of his Father's kingdom. It is a vision of unity. But like Joseph's brothers, we are

often upset, angered and fearful of the vision and what it seems to imply. It demands that we submit and bow to the will of God. We fear it because we fear what we might lose. But the vision is not about loss. Rather, it is about regaining brothers and sisters we had lost, the reuniting of a family.

- We have written many ecumenical texts, but the vision of Christian unity is not captured in agreed statements alone, important though these are. The unity God desires for us, the vision he puts before us, far exceeds anything we can express in words or contain in books. The vision must take flesh in our lives and in the prayer and mission that we share with our brothers and sisters. Most of all it is realised in the love we show for one another.

## Questions

- What does it mean to place our own dreams for Christian unity at the feet of Christ?
- In what ways does the Lord's vision of unity call the churches to renewal and change today?

## Prayer

Heavenly Father, grant us humility to hear your voice, to receive your call, and to share your dream for the unity of the Church. Help us to be awake to the pain of disunity. Where division has left us with hearts of stone, may the fire of your Holy Spirit inflame our hearts and inspire us with the vision of being one in Christ, as he is one with you, so that the world may believe that you have sent him. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

## DAY 7 Hospitality for prayer

Is 62:6-7	Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have posted sentinels; all day and all night they shall never be silent.
Ps 100	Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness.
1 Pet 4:7b-10	Be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers.
Jn 4:4-14	The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

## Commentary

*The experience of praying together on each of the eight days of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity has helped Christians in the small town of Madona to come together in friendship. A particular fruit of this has been the opening of an ecumenical prayer chapel in the centre of town, complete with elements from*

*Lutheran, Catholic and Orthodox traditions. Here the Christians of Madona join in continuous round the clock prayer. This experience forms the background of the following reflections.*

- As long as God's people are divided, and Christians are estranged from one another, we are like Jesus in Samaria, strangers in a foreign land, without safety, without refreshment and without a place of rest.
- The people of Israel longed for a place of safety where they could worship the Lord. Isaiah tells us of the Lord's mighty act: he posted sentinels on the walls of Jerusalem so that his people could worship him in safety day and night.
- In the Week of Prayer our churches and chapels become places of safety, rest and refreshment for people to join in prayer. The challenge from this week is to create more places and protected times of prayer, because as we pray together, we become one people.

## **Questions**

- How can we promote mutual hospitality among parishes and congregations in our locality?
- Is there a place in our neighbourhood where Christians from different traditions can gather in prayer, and if not can we help to create such a place?

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, you asked your apostles to stay awake with you and to pray with you. May we offer the world protected times and spaces in which to find refreshment and peace, so that praying together with other Christians we may come to know you more deeply. Amen.

## **DAY 8    Hearts burning for unity**

Is 52:7-9	How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news.
Ps 30	You have turned my mourning into dancing.
Col 1:27-29	How great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you.
Lk 24:13-36	Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

## **Commentary**

*Different churches in Latvia have been able to work together in evangelisation through the use of the Alpha Course, developed in the Anglican Church of Holy Trinity, Brompton, London. Latvians who have come to faith through this*

*programme remain open to learning and being enriched by the gifts of other Christian communities. This experience inspired the following reflections.*

- The disappointed disciples who leave Jerusalem for Emmaus have lost their hope that Jesus was the Messiah and walk away from their community. It is a journey of separation and isolation.
- By contrast, they return to Jerusalem full of hope with a Gospel message on their lips. It is this resurrection message that drives them back into the heart of the community and into a communion of fellowship.
- So often Christians try to evangelise with a competitive spirit, hoping to fill their own churches. Ambition overrides the desire for others to hear the life-giving message of the Gospel. True evangelism is a journey from Emmaus to Jerusalem, a journey from isolation into unity.

## **Questions**

- What are the disappointments that isolate us from others?
- What are the gifts (initiatives, methods, and programmes) that we can receive from other Christian communities?

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, you have made our hearts burn within us, and have sent us back upon the road towards our brothers and sisters, with the Gospel message on our lips. Help us to see that hope and obedience to your commands always lead to the greater unity of your people. Amen.



# THE ECUMENICAL SITUATION IN LATVIA

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## I. The Christian Churches

“Living ecumenism”: these words describe the ecumenical situation in Latvia today. Christians from different traditions are increasingly meeting each other for common prayer and common witness in a growing number of places and occasions. Part of this dynamic comes from the fact that the three largest confessions are approximately equal in size, while the smaller churches are very active. Latvia is a kind of watershed between the Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox traditions. According to official data released in 2011, 34.3% of the population are Lutherans, 25.1% are Roman Catholics, 19.4% are Orthodox and Old Believers, 1.2% belong to other Christian churches (such as Baptists, Adventists, Pentecostals, and other free churches), while 20% identify themselves as of other religions or no religion. Latvia officially acknowledges six religious traditions: Lutherans, Catholics, Baptists, Orthodox, Old Believers and Jews.

## II. Lived ecumenism

Although churches in Latvia have not come together in a national council of churches, ecumenical life goes on bearing good fruit. Cooperation among Christians in Latvia is vital today if the Christian message is to reach contemporary post-modern society in all its diversity and abundance of opinions. The ecumenical cooperation and relationships between different denominations in Latvia, is, one could say, based on proclaiming the *mighty acts of the Lord*.

It is a regular practice in Latvia that bishops from the Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran and Baptist churches address a common message to society on issues of ethics, the protection of life, or social justice. Due to the fraternal relationships between the heads of the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran churches in Latvia, the consecration of the present Roman Catholic Archbishop took place in the Lutheran Cathedral of Rīga.

The leaders of the different churches join together during the celebration of the most important remembrance days and holidays, such as the National Independence Day on November 18<sup>th</sup>. The Word of God is proclaimed, speeches are made and musicians from many Christian churches are engaged.

One of the platforms for ecumenical collaboration, with the involvement of the State of Latvia, is the so called Spiritual Affairs Council, which includes the leaders of so called traditional denominations of Latvia (including Jews), presided by the Prime Minister, about once a year.

There is one excellent fruit of ecumenical collaboration regarding the state schools. Four main confessions together elaborated materials for the first three classes, approved by the Ministry of Education, with Christian teaching.

However, relationships between bishops and clergy of Latvian Christian Churches go beyond ecumenical services: they are rooted in genuine friendship. This challenges the dividing walls built in earlier centuries, and allows each to recognise in the other a fellow minister of the Gospel. Catholic, Lutheran and Baptist bishops meet regularly. They pray, praise God together in a fraternal atmosphere, and discuss issues relevant to Latvia.

There are also many examples of ecumenical cooperation among communities and at parish level. There are, for example, jointly organised evangelisation programmes based on the Alpha Course. The Catholic parishes of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus and St Mary Magdalene, the Rīga Luther Church in Tornakalns, and the Baptist community in Āgenskalns join together in fellowship, social projects, and in publishing a calendar. Since the year 2000, the different Christian communities in Madona celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity each day in a different community. Through this experience many come to meet their brothers and sisters from other Christian traditions for the first time. A special fruit of this experience was the creation of the first ecumenical prayer chapel in Latvia, where brothers and sisters of different confessions can pray. The doors of the chapel are open day and night. Catholics and Lutherans take turns and ensure a constant prayerful presence in the chapel.

Besides activities organized by churches or parishes, there are several ecumenical initiatives undertaken by highly motivated individual Christians. An eloquent example is the opening of the first ecumenical St John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene chapel in the small village of Igate. The building of the chapel was a private initiative. It is used by people from the four major Latvian Christian traditions – Lutheran, Catholic, Orthodox and Baptist. The building was blessed on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2013 by the Catholic, Lutheran and Baptist bishops. One of the special intentions of the people from Igate is to pray for children, born and unborn, and for their mothers, and to help them.

Another example of individual initiative was the Gaizins Summit. A lay Christian invited the heads of the different Latvian churches to meet together at Latvia's highest hill, Gaizins, for fellowship and prayer. They accepted. For the duration of these meetings they were supported in continuous prayer and worship by the faithful. This gathering has been organized seven times so far, and many more church leaders have joined.

*What Unites Us?* is a journal launched ten years ago by an individual lay person. It was inspired by a deep longing for the unity of the Church. In the first issue it focused exclusively on the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Later on its

different issues were dedicated to specific ecumenical themes. The journal is distributed free of charge in local communities of different churches.

Ecumenical co-operation can be found in the various prayer groups and communities of “Chemin Neuf”, “Blue Cross”, and “Kalnskola”, “Effata” as well as in social action projects such as prison chaplaincy, and in the Rehabilitation Centre for former drug and alcohol addicts, the “Bethlehem House of Mercy”. In all these movements and organizations, in daily prayer and mission, Christians from different churches join hands and contribute to Christian unity with their everyday service.

As Latvia is rich in Christian traditions, this influences family life. There are many inter-church couples that have to face in daily life all the questions related to the remaining divisions among Christian churches, such as wedding ceremonies, catechesis of children, attendance of Sunday services, and, most importantly for practising Christians, Holy Communion.

Christian families also face the problems presented by our modern globalised society. Dedicated particularly to serving families, the “Cana Fraternity” has been active in Latvia since 1994. Ecumenical family festivals, designed to draw attention to family issues and strengthen families, started in 2006 in cooperation with the municipality of Rīga. These events are especially supported by different free churches in Latvia in cooperation with the three larger traditions.

Media is very important for evangelization. An ecumenical team produces Christian programmes that are regularly broadcast by the Latvian State Radio and which promote unity and fellowship amongst Latvian Christians. A Catholic video information centre, “Emanuel’s”, produces the television programme “Vertikale” on Latvia’s Channel 1. The programmes try to show what unites Christians rather than what divides them. The producers of the programmes look for witnesses of Christ among the Orthodox, Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists and other Christian communities. In addition there is an evangelical radio station, “Latvian Christian Radio”, with many programmes of ecumenical relevance.

The Way of the Cross, celebrated every year, takes place on Good Friday in the streets of several cities in Latvia – Kuldīga, Valmiera, Madona, Liepāja amongst others. In Rīga, the Ecumenical Way of the Cross is organized by the Catholic Youth Centre of the Archdiocese of Rīga and brings together thousands of people, Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals and other churches as well as Catholics. At the head of the procession the bishops and ministers of different churches walk side by side. Besides the usual contents of the Way of the Cross, it includes appropriate performances by professional actors from various theatres of Latvia, who also are from different denominations. This prayer unites people not only in a religious, spiritual way, but also in a cultural way. In this shared moment of devotion and reflection all Christians are united by the prayer of the Way of the Cross: “We

adore you, O Christ, and we praise you. Because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.”

### **III. Challenges to the ecumenical movement**

There are stable bases for developing ecumenism in Latvia because none of the churches is dominant and there are many ecumenical activities. At the same time it has to be admitted that such activities are developed by the relatively small group of people who are very open to ecumenical relations while many Christians remain either indifferent or even antagonistic to it.

Another challenge is the lack of official theological dialogue commissions between the churches in Latvia. Several issues call for ecumenical dialogue. Agreement on these issues would certainly motivate lay people to be more ecumenically engaged.

It is possible to say that ecumenical development relies largely on personal relationships and fellowship that ensure a successful realization of ecumenical events. In many cases, one of the churches takes the initiative but the responsibility for it is not quite shared by the churches. A small number of enthusiasts carries most of the burden. The task for the churches is to find a way to ensure an equal sharing of responsibility for ecumenical initiatives.

Finally, a very important challenge to the growth in communion is the political situation, which weakens the bonds of fellowship with brothers and sisters who belong to the Latvian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). Thus new possibilities in deepening relationships need to be sought.

# **WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**

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## **Themes 1968-2016**

In 1968, materials jointly prepared by the WCC Faith and Order Commission and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity were first used.

- 1968 To the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:14)
- 1969 Called to freedom (Galatians 5:13)  
(Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)
- 1970 We are fellow workers for God (1 Corinthians 3:9)  
(Preparatory meeting held at the Monastery of Niederaltaich, Federal Republic of Germany)
- 1971 ...and the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:13)  
(Preparatory meeting in Bari, Italy)
- 1972 I give you a new commandment (John 13:34)  
(Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1973 Lord, teach us to pray (Luke 11:1)  
(Preparatory meeting held at the Abbey of Montserrat, Spain)
- 1974 That every tongue confess: Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:1-13)  
(Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1975 God's purpose: all things in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-10)  
(Material from an Australian group – Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1976 We shall be like him (1 John 3:2) or, Called to become what we are  
(Material from Caribbean Conference of Churches.  
Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)
- 1977 Enduring together in hope (Romans 5:1-5)  
(Material from Lebanon, in the midst of a civil war.  
Preparatory meeting held in Geneva)
- 1978 No longer strangers (Ephesians 2:13-22)  
(Material from an ecumenical team in Manchester, England)
- 1979 Serve one another to the glory of God (1 Peter 4:7-11)  
(Material from Argentina – Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)

- 1980 Your kingdom come (Matthew 6:10)  
(Material from an ecumenical group in Berlin, German Democratic Republic – Preparatory meeting held in Milan)
- 1981 One Spirit - many gifts - one body (1 Corinthians 12:3b-13)  
(Material from Graymoor Fathers, USA – Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1982 May all find their home in you, O Lord (Psalm 84)  
(Material from Kenya – Preparatory meeting held in Milan, Italy)
- 1983 Jesus Christ - the Life of the World (1 John 1:1-4)  
(Material from an ecumenical group in Ireland – Preparatory meeting held in Céligny (Bossey), Switzerland)
- 1984 Called to be one through the cross of our Lord (1 Corinthians 2:2 and Colossians 1:20)  
(Preparatory meeting held in Venice, Italy)
- 1985 From death to life with Christ (Ephesians 2:4-7)  
(Material from Jamaica – Preparatory meeting held in Grandchamp, Switzerland)
- 1986 You shall be my witnesses (Acts 1:6-8)  
(Material from Yugoslavia (Slovenia) – Preparatory meeting held in Yugoslavia)
- 1987 United in Christ - a New Creation (2 Corinthians 5:17-6:4a)  
(Material from England – Preparatory meeting held in Taizé, France)
- 1988 The love of God casts out fear (1 John 4:18)  
(Material from Italy – Preparatory meeting held in Pinerolo, Italy)
- 1989 Building community: one body in Christ (Romans 12:5-6a)  
(Material from Canada – Preparatory meeting held in Whaley Bridge, England)
- 1990 That they all may be one...That the world may believe (John 17)  
(Material from Spain – Preparatory meeting held in Madrid, Spain)
- 1991 Praise the Lord, all you nations! (Psalm 117 and Romans 15:5-13)  
(Material from Germany – Preparatory meeting held in Rotenburg an der Fulda, Federal Republic of Germany)
- 1992 I am with you always... Go, therefore (Matthew 28:16-20)  
Je suis avec vous... allez donc  
(Material from Belgium – Preparatory meeting held in Bruges, Belgium)

- 1993 Bearing the fruit of the Spirit for Christian unity (Galatians 5:22-23)  
(Material from Zaire – Preparatory meeting held near Zurich, Switzerland)
- 1994 The household of God: called to be one in heart and mind (Acts 4:23-37)  
(Material from Ireland – Preparatory meeting held in Dublin, Republic of Ireland)
- 1995 Koinonia: communion in God and with one another (John 15:1-17)  
(Material from Faith and Order – Preparatory meeting held in Bristol, England)
- 1996 Behold, I stand at the door and knock (Revelation 3:14-22)  
(Material from Portugal – Preparatory meeting held in Lisbon, Portugal)
- 1997 We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God  
(2 Corinthians 5:20)  
(Material from Nordic Ecumenical Council – Preparatory meeting held in Stockholm, Sweden)
- 1998 The Spirit helps us in our weakness (Romans 8:14-27)  
*L'Esprit aussi vient en aide à notre faiblesse*  
(Material from France – Preparatory meeting held in Paris, France)
- 1999 He will dwell with them as their God, they will be his peoples  
(Revelation 21:1-7)  
(Material from Malaysia – Preparatory meeting held in Monastery of Bose, Italy)
- 2000 Blessed be God who has blessed us in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14)  
(Material from the Middle East Council of Churches – Preparatory meeting held La Verna, Italy)
- 2001 I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (John 14:1-6)  
(Material from Romania – Preparatory meeting held at Vulcan, Romania)
- 2002 For with you is the fountain of life (Psalm 36:5-9)  
(Material CEEC and CEC – Preparatory meeting near Augsburg, Germany)
- 2003 We have this treasure in clay jars (2 Corinthians 4:4-18)  
(Material churches in Argentina – Preparatory meeting at Los Rubios, Spain)
- 2004 My peace I give to you (John 14:23-31; John 14:27)  
(Material from Aleppo, Syria – Preparatory meeting in Palermo, Sicily)

- 2005 Christ, the one foundation of the church (1 Corinthians 3:1-23)  
(Material from Slovakia – Preparatory meeting in Piestaň, Slovakia)
- 2006 Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them  
(Matthew 18:18-20)  
(Material from Ireland – Preparatory meeting held in Prosperous, Co. Kildare, Ireland)
- 2007 He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak (Mark 7:31-37)  
(Material from South Africa – Preparatory meeting held in Faverges, France)
- 2008 Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:(12a) 13b-18)  
(Material from USA – Preparatory meeting held in Graymoor, Garrison, USA)
- 2009 That they may become one in your hand (Ezekiel 37:15-28)  
(Material from Korea – Preparatory meeting held in Marseilles, France)
- 2010 You are witnesses of these things (Luke 24:48)  
(Material from Scotland – Preparatory meeting held in Glasgow, Scotland)
- 2011 One in the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer (cf. Acts 2:42)  
(Material from Jerusalem – Preparatory meeting held in Saydnaya, Syria)
- 2012 We will all be Changed by the Victory of our Lord Jesus Christ  
(cf. 1 Corinthians 15:51-58)  
(Material from Poland – Preparatory meeting held in Warsaw, Poland)
- 2013 What does God require of us? (cf. Micah 6, 6-8)  
(Material from India – Preparatory meeting held in Bangalore, India)
- 2014 Has Christ been divided ? (1 Corinthians 1:1-17)  
(Material from Canada – Preparatory meeting held in Montréal, Canada)
- 2015 Jesus said to her: Give me to drink (John 4, 7)  
(Material from Brazil – Preparatory meeting held in São Paulo, Brazil)
- 2016 Called to proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord (cf. 1 Peter 2:9)  
(Material from Latvia – Preparatory meeting held in Rīga, Latvia)



## **KEY DATES IN THE HISTORY OF THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**

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- c. 1740 In Scotland a Pentecostal movement arose, with North American links, whose revivalist message included prayers for and with all churches.
- 1820 The Rev. James Haldane Stewart publishes “Hints for the General Union of Christians for the Outpouring of the Spirit”.
- 1840 The Rev. Ignatius Spencer, a convert to Roman Catholicism, suggests a “Union of Prayer for Unity”.
- 1867 The First Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops emphasizes prayer for unity in the Preamble to its Resolutions.
- 1894 Pope Leo XIII encourages the practice of a Prayer Octave for Unity in the context of Pentecost.
- 1908 First observance of the “Church Unity Octave” initiated by the Rev. Paul Wattson.
- 1926 The Faith and Order movement begins publishing “Suggestions for an Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity”.
- 1935 Abbé Paul Couturier of France advocates the “Universal Week of Prayer for Christian Unity” on the inclusive basis of prayer for “the unity Christ wills by the means he wills”.
- 1958 Unité Chrétienne (Lyons, France) and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches begin co-operative preparation of materials for the Week of Prayer.
- 1964 In Jerusalem, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I prayed together Jesus’ prayer “that they all may be one” (John 17).
- 1964 The Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II emphasizes that prayer is the soul of the ecumenical movement and encourages observance of the Week of Prayer.
- 1966 The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity [now known as the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity] begin official joint preparation of the Week of Prayer material.
- 1968 First official use of Week of Prayer material prepared jointly by Faith and Order and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (now known as the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity).

- 1975 First use of Week of Prayer material based on a draft text prepared by a local ecumenical group. An Australian group was the first to take up this plan in preparing the 1975 initial draft.
- 1988 Week of Prayer materials were used in the inaugural worship for The Christian Federation of Malaysia, which links the major Christian groupings in that country.
- 1994 International group preparing text for 1996 included representatives from YMCA and YWCA.
- 2004 Agreement reached that resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity be jointly published and produced in the same format by Faith and Order (WCC) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Catholic Church).
- 2008 Commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. (Its predecessor, the Church Unity Octave, was first observed in 1908).