

## Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2013

### ECUMENICAL WORSHIP SERVICE

*What does God require of us?  
(cf. Micah 6: 6-8)*

#### *Introduction to the Worship Service*

This year's worship reflects the youthful character of the Student Christian Movement of India (SCMI). It takes into account the Dalit reality and offers an opportunity to share in their spirituality. Particular elements of the service come from the Indian Dalit context, which include the use of drums, and the bhajan, which is a local way of singing the lyrics affirming their faith in God. A third element, which is particular, is the sharing of the faith testimony that illustrates the Dalit spirituality of striving for justice, loving kindness and walking in dignity with God (cf. Micah 6:6-8). The service concludes with the sign of sharing, which is common in Dalit communities – in this case with the sharing of sprouting seeds or a small sapling symbolising our call to hope and transformation.

Throughout the Week of Prayer, Christians all over the world explore in ecumenical fellowship what it means to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with God. This theme is developed over the eight days by the metaphor of walking. For Dalit communities, the walk towards liberation is inseparable from the walk towards unity. And so our walk with Dalits this week, and with all who yearn for justice, is an integral part of prayer for Christian unity.

Christians in India should reject caste divisions, just as Christians worldwide should not accept the divisions among them: "Is Christ divided?" (1 Cor 1:13). For this reason we gather in worship to pray for that unity which Christ wills for his Church, and we are called to break down such walls of divisions among and between us.

#### **Structure of the Service**

The order of worship contains six elements: opening, praise and thanksgiving, confession of sin and assurance, Liturgy of the Word and testimony of faith, intercessory prayers, benediction and dismissal.

The organisers suggest that the celebration begin with a prelude of the beating of drums to symbolise both the celebration of life and of resistance by the Dalit peoples who are the most oppressed of all communities in India. The sound of clap sticks or the didgeridoo could replace the drums in our Australian celebrations. Or perhaps the Dalit Drums could sound at the beginning of the ceremony and segue into the didgeridoo and clap sticks.

**ORDER OF SERVICE**  
**For an Ecumenical Act of Worship**

What does God require of us?  
*(cf. Micah 6: 6-8)*



**The image** The use of the driftwood and the arrangement of native flowers on the altar to me help strengthen the question for this year's WPCU theme – What Does God Require of Us? For us as Australians the theme of Reconciliation is one of the paths that culminate in Christian Unity. Artist: Raymond Trevaiks Photo: Michael Stephenson.

- L: Leader  
R: Reader  
A: Assembly

## I. Prelude

*Music that marks the resilience of all communities struggling for justice and liberation all over the world.*

### *Call to Worship*

L: Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them". Let us in silence acknowledge the presence of the triune God in our midst.

*Silence*

## II. Praise and thanksgiving

- L: We praise you our God for creating us in all our diversity. For the gift of our many cultures, languages, diverse expressions of belief, customs, traditions, and ethnicities we thank you! For the many church traditions which have kept our communities strong and active even in places where they are a minority we thank you. Teach us to celebrate our different identities and traditions, to forge bonds of friendship and fellowship that will lead us to greater unity.
- A: How very good and pleasant it is when sisters and brothers live together in unity!
- L: We praise you Jesus Christ for teaching us to respect the dignity and value of all human beings and reconciling us with God and with one another through your death and resurrection. We thank you for breaking into our lives everyday, inviting us to stand in solidarity with those whose dignity is undermined by political, social and economic structures. Teach us to celebrate the message of hope that in you we can overcome all that is evil in our world.
- A: How very good and pleasant it is when sisters and brothers live together in unity!
- L: We praise you Holy Spirit for the gift of mutual interdependence and solidarity that has been our heritage as peoples and churches. Teach us to treasure the bonds of unity we enjoy as we beseech your continuing presence with us. Inspire us on our journey towards full visible unity as we seek to engage with each other and all those peoples and movements that struggle for life.
- A: How very good and pleasant it is when sisters and brothers live together in unity!

## III. Confession of Sin, Assurance of pardon

L: We know that in Christ we are already one. In spite of this, our human weakness does not always witness this reality. Let us now confess our sins of disunity and seek the Lord's healing.

## *Silence*

**A:** We stand before you our God with humility as we remember our sinfulness and the disunity for which we continue to be responsible. We confess that we often preserve the inherited human barriers of race, ethnicity, power and all things that keep Christians apart. We recognise that each of our church traditions has often used our history and our past to discriminate against one another and hinder the unity to which Christ has called us. Forgive us when we've failed, and inspire us to continue to strive for unity, in the name of Jesus your Son. Amen.

## *Supplication*

**A:** Come now Jesus into our midst and make us one in your name. Lead us into the paths of righteousness so that all can find life.

Come now Jesus into our midst and teach us to listen to the cries of those who are pushed into the margins, especially our aboriginal and Torres Strait people, and those seeking asylum in our country.

Come now Jesus into our midst and inspire us to work together with all those who strive for liberation so that your broken body will be whole again. Amen.

## *Assurance of pardon*

**L:** If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

**L:** Let us offer each other a sign of that peace and unity.

*This may be accompanied by instrumental music.*

## **IV. Liturgy of the Word**

### *First Reading*

Micah 6: 6-8

### *A testimony of faith*

When they came for Sarah Digal, she wasn't there. She had fled, five children and mother-in-law in tow, to the safety of the jungles a kilometre away. So, they set ablaze all that she had left behind, a framed picture of Jesus, a Bible in Oriya, utensils in the kitchen, some clothes, mats and linen. By the time Sarah tiptoed back, when she saw it was safe, her home was gone. What was left was burning embers, ashes and smoke. The neighbours came to commiserate with her. Sarah took a good look, stood erect, and pulled her sari firmly over her head. She began to pray. "Lord, forgive us our sins. Jesus, you are the only one. Save us from our misfortune. Free us, Lord." The words were tumbling out. Sarah's children slowly joined her. She was weeping as she pleaded with God for deliverance. Her neighbours and others around her joined her. It is a simple bond of human compassion and a strong reminder that nothing can sever a woman from her God. "I will die. But I will not stop being a Christian," Sarah said through her tears." A staunch and brave Dalit Christian woman!

*And another testimony of faith: organisers could find a local example of an exemplary witness to faith in action.*

**L:** Let us in silence meditate on these testimonies of faith and courage. As we commend the faith of our sister Sarah and others, let us be challenged in our own journeys of faith.

*Silence*

**Psalm** Psalm 86: 11-16 (*or another that might be sung*)

**R:** Teach me your way, O Lord,  
that I may walk in your truth;  
give me an undivided heart to revere your name.

**A:** In the path of righteousness there is life.

**R:** I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,  
and I will glorify your name for ever.  
For great is your steadfast love towards me;  
you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

**A:** In the path of righteousness there is life.

**R:** O God, the insolent rise up against me;  
a band of ruffians seeks my life,  
and they do not set you before them.

**A:** In the path of righteousness there is life.

**R:** But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.  
Turn to me and be gracious to me;  
give your strength to your servant;  
save the child of your serving-maid.

**A:** In the path of righteousness there is life.

**Second Reading** Galatians 3: 26-28

*A Gospel Acclamation may be sung.*

**Gospel** Luke 24: 13-35

**Sermon/Homily**

*An appropriate hymn can be sung.*

## V. Prayers of Intercession

**L:** Walking in conversation, let us recognise all the efforts of the ecumenical movement towards the realisation of the unity willed by Christ for the Church.

**A:** *Send your Spirit to strengthen our resolve and deepen our conversations to realise Jesus' prayer through us.*

**L:** Walking with the broken body of Christ, we are painfully aware that we are still unable to join in the breaking of bread together. Hasten the day when we can realise the fullness of fellowship at the Lord's table.

**A:** *Inflame in our hearts the desire to overcome all that divides us so that we can recognise one Christ in our brokenness.*

- L:** Walking towards freedom, let us remember along with Dalit communities other people facing similar kinds of discriminations, including aboriginals and people seeking asylum, and may the unity of the Churches be a sign of hope in situations of injustice.
- A:** *Strengthen our churches' commitment to create spaces in our society and communities, to enable them the oppressed to live in dignity and freedom. Allow us to be transformed by their gifts and presence.*
- L:** Walking as children of earth, we realise that we are pilgrims in relationship with the wonderful gift of creation that surrounds us. Let us respect the earth as your creation and make us sensitive to the care of it.
- A:** *Let your Spirit renew creation and make us attentive to the suffering of landless peoples who are often the bearers of a tradition of prudent care of the earth and its resources.*
- L:** Walking as friends of Jesus, let us accompany marginalised communities all over the world. As Jesus chose to identify with those without freedom and dignity, so may we befriend those friends of Christ, like the Dalit Christians, who are often persecuted for choosing Christ.
- A:** *Enlarge and deepen our fellowship and friendship with you and with each other so that we will remain faithful and truthful to your calling.*
- L:** Walking beyond barriers, let us build communities of unity and equality.
- A:** *Grant us courage so that we can overcome structures that hinder us from recognising the presence of God in each other.*
- L:** Walking in solidarity with women like Sarah and other victims of discrimination and injustice, let us be shaken out of our apathy.
- A:** *Encircle us with your love, as we affirm the image of God in each person we encounter.*
- L:** Walking in celebration, we come to see that the unity we share within our communities is a profound witness to the gospel of faith and hope. As we celebrate that unity, let us also rejoice in our rich diversities that reflect the life of the Trinity.
- A:** *May we celebrate the wonderful diversity in human life, born from the struggles for dignity and survival amid oppression, and see in it a sign of your abiding faithfulness to your people.*
- L:** In Christ's name we raise all these prayers, O God as we pray in the words Jesus taught us:

### ***The Lord's Prayer***

*In our own languages and with hands joined to express our unity in Christ*

## **VI. Blessing and Dismissal**

- L:** Be present to us, Triune God who nurtures us to remind us of the purpose you have for each one of us and our churches.
- A:** *Amen.*
- L:** Walk before us, Triune God who strengthens us, and lead us on the path to unity.

**A:** *Amen.*

**L:** Call us into abundant life, Triune God who sustains us as we stand together and call upon God.

**A:** *Amen.*

**L:** Go out into the world to heal and to be healed.

**A:** *Thanks be to God.*

### ***A closing hymn***

*As a sign of unity in Christ it is suggested that a meal is shared.*

**Acknowledgement :** This resource for Christian unity is based on the international material for the 2013 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which originated with the Student Christian Movement in India. and was agreed by the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity. It has been adapted for use in Australia by the Faith and Unity Commission of the National Council of Churches in Australia.

**Donation:** If you have found this service useful, any donations to help cover the cost of producing the resource will be gratefully received by NCCA Faith and Unity. Locked Bag 199, QVB NSW 1230. Many thanks.

**For more information:** ph. (02) 9299 2215 or visit [www.churchestogetherinprayer.org.au](http://www.churchestogetherinprayer.org.au)