

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

17 - 24 May 2015

*Jesus said to her, "Give me to drink."
John 4:7*

To Those Organising the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

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. Here 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 a symbolic date for the unity of the Church. In 2015 the Week of Prayer in Australia will be observed from 17-24 May in the week between Ascension and Pentecost.

Mindful though 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 that 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 own 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.

Introduction to the Ecumenical Worship Service

This outline for the ecumenical worship may be used for the opening of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity or for another appropriate moment chosen by the local communities. Jesus deliberately chose to cross Samaria on his way to Judea in Galilee. His route passed by the well of the Samaritan woman who came there to draw water. The Brazilian ecumenical group that prepared the celebration invites us to use these two symbols of the route and water as images of the visible Christian unity for which we pray. The local group invites us to reflect on these initial questions that give shape to the celebration:



Photo: Russell Falls, Tasmania
by Jen Tutin

Which is the path of unity, the route we should take, so that the world may drink from the source of life, Jesus Christ?

Which is the path of unity that gives proper respect to our diversity?

On this path of unity, there is a well filled with water: both the water sought by Jesus, tired on the way, and also the water given by him, springing up to eternal life. The water drawn by the Samaritan woman in her daily task is the water that quenches thirst, the water that makes the desert bloom. The water that Jesus gives is the water over which the Spirit of God hovered, the living water in which we were baptized.

The passage from John 4:1-42 is at the heart of this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This long Gospel passage may be read by several voices or by a dramatization.

For the meditation after the Gospel, there are several options depending on the size of the celebrating group:

- a sharing based on the initial questions in small groups, followed by returning to the assembly;
- a homily or sermon that will focus on the gospel and take into account the initial questions.

The path and the well

A path can be arranged with candles, flowers, colourful pieces of cloth... on the floor of the central aisle of the place of celebration, leading to the front of the assembly. In the centre of the path, a large basin is placed and jugs of water nearby. These pitchers could be different from one another to represent the diversity of the assembly.

The celebrants may enter in procession along this path. Passing near the “well”, each representative of a participating church will slowly pour the water from a jug into the bowl. This water, from different sources, is a symbol of our unity, already present though incomplete and hidden from our eyes. This gesture should be introduced at the beginning of the celebration and may be commented upon in the preaching.

The path may be used in the preparation of the confession of sins. People come from different parts of the assembly on the way to express petitions for forgiveness.

After the blessing, participants can exchange a sign of peace and fellowship, as they leave the assembly and move towards a convivial place to end the service in a communal way.

Structure of the Celebration

NB: Particular attention should be given to include those with impaired hearing and people with disabilities so that they can fully participate in the celebration.

The celebration has five parts.

- I. Prelude/Preparation
 - II. Opening
 - Welcome and Introduction to the Week of Prayer – Theme
 - Confession of Sins and Kyrie
 - III. Gospel Proclamation
 - IV. We Respond in Faith and Unity
 - Affirmation of Faith
(The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the Apostles' Creed or another affirmation of faith may be used, for example a renewal of baptismal promises.)
 - Intercessory Prayer
 - Offering
 - The Lord's Prayer *(said or sung)*
 - V. Benediction, Peace and Sending Forth
- Postlude

