

Introduction to the Ecumenical Worship Service

*“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you”
(John 14:27)*

The theme of the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* for 2004 and for this ecumenical worship service has been proposed by the Christian churches of the city of Aleppo in Syria. Ecumenical relations there are very much alive and occasions for celebrating together are frequent.

This celebration intentionally takes up the model of ecumenical celebration regularly used by the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches of Aleppo, and is characterized by a doxology of praise at the beginning, prayer of repentance, an importance given to biblical teaching, sung intercessory prayers and invocation of the Holy Spirit. In adapting the texts of these prayers, the Canadian *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* (WPCU) Writing Committee has endeavoured to be faithful to the sensibilities of the original context, while using language that is more accessible than that provided by direct translations. Several of the prayers used in the order of worship come from the Syriac liturgical tradition – for example, the Prayer of Praise that opens the worship service, and some sections of the Intercessions.

The desire of the Canadian WPCU writing group is to encourage local groups in Canada to enter into what, for some, might be a different worship language and form. The roots of the Syriac liturgy are ancient. The present-day context of the Syrian church commands our attention as Christians whose prayer is for peace in our world. The intent is not one of imposing the prayers of one liturgical tradition, but of permitting the assembly to enter with faith into the spiritual experience of our sisters and brothers of the East. Still, we encourage you to adapt the service to suit the needs of your local congregation. The spiritual unity of all Christians who wish to pray for peace in the world in this year 2004 and for their communion in faith in the Risen Christ, who is its source, will be clearly visible.

Here are some notes on the relationship between the diverse elements of the worship service with the theme.

Note: The Order of Worship uses the word “Leader”; however, it is appropriate for the leadership to be shared by different members of the Christian community, both lay and ordained.

A **procession** opens the service. A **symbol of peace** could be incorporated (such as palm branches, a dove, or

the lighting of candles), but a rainbow is preferable. This symbol could be emphasized from the beginning of the worship. It could be referred to in the sermon, made a central part of the celebration and taken up again in the dismissal.

The congregation sings a **hymn of thanksgiving from the Syriac Liturgy** and prepares with a prayer of repentance to listen to the word of God. To our hearts this prayer brings inner peace, fruit of God’s mercy, and attentiveness to God’s word.

The **liturgy of the word** is the largest part of the service. It is a proclamation of peace as God’s gift to humanity, as a promise from Jesus to his own disciples becomes reality in the mystery of his cross and resurrection and is consummated by the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church. According to the teaching of Paul to the Ephesians, and following the example of his pastoral care as an apostle towards the members of the newly established local churches, we are called upon to love each other in the communion of the Holy Spirit. This mutual love between Christians and between churches, of which ecumenism is an essential part, lends credibility to our witness and our specific engagement as Christians in seeking peace in the world.

The **Intercessions** include two voices. One is from the Syriac liturgy, with prayers for the world and the universal church and its unity; the other (“Voice 2”) is a place for the prayers of the local people to be offered.

You may also wish to **invite people to testify** as to how they or others in the local community are active or have been active in the service of peace. The positive ecumenical situation in Aleppo itself is a testimony to be heard in the course of the worship.

Opened with **thanksgiving** to the God of peace, the worship closes with **a prayer to the Holy Spirit**, precious treasure and source of peace.

The ministers present from the local churches, whether or not they have actively participated in the worship, could give the **final blessing** together. The dismissal could, among other things, emphasize the fact that common prayer finds its fulfillment at the very heart of life. Our ecumenical worship services and the benefits they bring in the life of the world increase the communion between Christians: they are a prophetic announcement of the Gift of Peace.

Ecumenical Worship Service

Gathering

The procession, led by those carrying symbols of peace, enters the sanctuary part-way. Those carrying symbols of peace continue ahead, lifting high their symbols and placing themselves around the sanctuary appropriately so that the congregation can see the symbols.

Leader: In your light, we shall see light;
in your promise, we shall find peace;
in your love, we shall have life!

In the name of the Holy Trinity,
we shall find eternal blessing.
Come, let us worship!

All: **Merciful God, in peace we pray
to you. Amen.**

Opening Hymn (Procession continues)

Prayer of Praise

(from the Syriac Liturgy)

Leader: In your light we shall see light, Jesus full of light; you are the true light which illumines the whole creation; enlighten us with your joyous light, splendour of the Father in heaven.

Pure and holy one who dwells in the habitations of light, keep us from evil passions and thoughts of hatred and grant that we may do deeds of justice with purity of heart.

On this holy day which has brought us together we implore you to grant unity to your church: keep us in the fullness of your peace.

All: **Amen.**

Leader: Let us thank God the Father, Lord of all, let us adore his only Son and glorify his Holy

Spirit in giving our life into his keeping and begging for his mercy.

All: **Have pity on us, O God, merciful and good.**

Prayer of Repentance

Leader: Let us thank God the Creator of the universe;
let us adore Jesus the Christ;
and let us glorify the Holy Spirit,
as we give our lives into God's hands,
trusting in God's mercy and forgiveness.

All: **Loving God, have mercy on us.**

Leader: Holy God, we praise you, we bless you, we adore you.

All: **Kyrie Eleison or Lord, have mercy**

Leader: We remember your death, Jesus, we proclaim your resurrection, we await your coming in glory.

All: **Kyrie Eleison or Lord, have mercy**

Leader: We have sinned against you and against each other, your creation.

The powers of jealousy, of greed,
destroy the world you love.

The powers of sin rage between nations,
between peoples and races,
and we fall time and again to their empty promises.

But you, O God, are merciful, just and loving,

and in your forgiveness we find freedom to serve you;

by the power of your love enmity is healed,
and hatred and warfare cease.

Deliver us from evil through your forgiveness,

and by your grace heal us,

that the light of your Son Jesus Christ
may shine forth in our lives

by the power of the Holy Spirit.

All: **Loving God, receive our repentance
and our prayer for pardon.**

Leader: May we receive from God
the forgiveness of our sins,
now and always and forever and ever.

All: **Amen.**

Prayer for Peace and Sharing of Peace

Voice 1: O God, refresh our souls and fill our hearts
with the new wine of your Holy Spirit.

All: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Voice 2: Awaken our hearts with the light of your
grace.

All: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Voice 3: Through your gift in Jesus,
you have reconciled us to you and to each
other.
Jesus said, "I leave you peace,
I give you my peace";
let us share a sign of that peace.

*All greet each other with an embrace, the kiss of peace,
or other signs of peace in the name of Christ.*

Hymn

Scripture Readings

Leader: Let us listen to God's wisdom with
open hearts.

(All are seated)

Genesis 9:8-17

Psalms 72:1-8

Ephesians 2:13-18

John 14:23-31

Sermon

Affirmation of Faith

*(One of the traditional creeds of the church may be
used here, in place of or in addition to the following)*

Leader: In faith, let us proclaim our love for God
and for one another:

All: **Hear, O Israel,
the Lord our God, the Lord is one.
Love the Lord your God
with all your heart,
with all your soul,
with all your mind,
with all your strength.
This is the first and great
commandment.
The second is like it:
love your neighbour as yourself.
There is no commandment greater
than these.**

Intercessions

(from the Syriac Liturgy)

Voice 1: Let us make our petitions to God Almighty,
Father of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ:
We pray you Lord, in your graciousness,
Friend of all,
remember your one, holy, universal and
apostolic church.

Voice 2: *(Prayers for the local church community
are offered)*

All: **We pray for the peace of the one, holy,
universal and apostolic church.**

Voice 1: Bless these creatures spread from one end of
the world to the other,
all peoples and herds.
May your peace come down from the
heavens into all hearts,
peace to this generation,
and fulfill us with your grace.
O King of Peace, clothe all with peace:
the governments, armies, leaders of nations,
our neighbours,
immigrants, refugees and expatriates.
Give us your Peace,
for from you come all things.
May we belong to you,
O God our Lord,
for we know only you.
We proclaim your Holy Name.
May our souls live in your Holy Spirit.
May the deathly power of sin
not prevail upon your servants,
nor upon any people of the earth.

Voice 2: *(Prayers for local concerns and peace are offered)*

All: **Kyrie Eleison** or **Lord, have mercy**

Voice 1: Let us pray to God Almighty,
Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
We beg your graciousness,
O Friend of all.
Remember our gatherings in the name of
your holy church,
bless them and let them spread throughout
all the earth.

Voice 2: *(Prayers for the unity of the local church
are offered)*

All: **We pray for this church.**

Voice 1: You have reconciled the creatures of
the earth
with those of heaven
and you have made them one.
You have accomplished your plan
in the flesh
and as your body rose into heaven,
you filled the universe with your holiness.
You said to your disciples and to the holy
apostles:
"I leave you peace, I give you my peace."
Now, Lord of peace, grant us these blessings,
purify us from all sin,
from all duplicity,
from all hypocrisy,
from all evil,
from all machinations
and the memory of evil hidden by death.
Clothe us with your perpetual peace
so that we may keep the trust
of the apostolic faith
and may live united by the ties of charity.

All: **Kyrie Eleison** or **Lord, have mercy**

Voice 2: Decree for us your peace,
that we may all become,
in the unity of the faith, a perfect being
measuring up to the fullness of Christ.

All: **Kyrie Eleison** or **Lord, have mercy**

Voice 1: Bless, O Lord, the peace of your church,
all your people and all your creatures.
Reconcile all enemies and belligerents,
that their swords may be transformed into
plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks,

that they may learn war no more.
And keep them all in your name.

All: **Kyrie Eleison** or **Lord, have mercy**

Voice 2: Lord save your people and bless your
inheritance,
watch over and keep it for ever.
Maintain it in the true faith in glory and
dignity all the days:
establish it in the love and peace which
surpasses all things.

All: **Kyrie Eleison** or **Lord, have mercy**

Voice 1: O Holy Spirit,
make us worthy of contributing
to the sanctification
of your heavenly treasures
and of offering a true adoration
in purity and holiness
here and in all places,
now and all the days of our lives,
that your good news may be proclaimed
unto the ends of the earth.

All: **Kyrie Eleison** or **Lord, have mercy**

The Lord's Prayer

(each in his or her own language)

Leader: *(the leader prays in a language other than the
dominant language of the community)*

Let us pray as Jesus taught...

Renewal of Commitment

Voice: Loving God, grant us that font of tears
which washes our hearts of all impurity,
that, in humility and patience,
we may support each other in love.

All: **Merciful and gracious Holy Spirit,
Grant us the gift of peace,
That we may become one
in body and spirit,
Following the call of Christ.**

Amen.

Offerings of Testimonies, Stories and Gifts

The symbols of peace may be brought forward or processed around the congregation so that they are visible. Additional candles may be lit at the time of the giving of testimonies.

Persons from the community may be invited to share brief testimonies of the work of others in the community towards peace, reconciliation, justice and service.

A hymn may be sung, with one verse between each testimony. An offering of money may be received from the congregation at this time.

Invocation to the Holy Spirit

Leader: God the comforter and Spirit of truth,
You are the source of life,
sharing gifts, granting grace.
Come, dwell in us; create in us a new heart.
Spirit of peace and of love,
of holiness and wisdom,
invest us with your counsel,
and sweep through us with your power,
to rekindle in us a fresh hope and charity,
that we may truly live in you
now and always, for ever and ever.

All: **Amen.**

Blessing

Leaders of several different Christian traditions are invited each to pronounce a blessing according to their tradition, to be concluded with:

May the peace of God,
which passes all understanding,
keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

All: **Amen.**

Hymn