

# **Resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and throughout the year 2007**

***He even makes the deaf to hear  
and the mute to speak  
(Mk 7:37)***

Jointly prepared and published by  
*The Pontifical Council for Christian Unity*  
*The Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches*

## **To those organizing 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 feast of St Peter and the feast of St Paul, and therefore have a symbolic meaning. *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 (which was suggested by the Faith and Order movement in 1926), which is also a symbolic date for the unity of the church.

*Mindful of this flexibility concerning the date, we encourage you to understand the material presented here as an invitation to find opportunities throughout the whole year to express the degree of communion which the churches have already received, 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 at the local level. In doing this, account must be taken of local liturgical and devotional practice, and of the whole social and cultural context. Such adaptation should normally 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**

### **Mark 7: 31-37**

*Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, ‘Ephphatha,’ that is, ‘Be opened.’ And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.’*

New Revised Standard Version

### **Introduction to the theme:**

“He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak” (Mk 7:37)

This year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity brings together two themes, two invitations extended to Christian churches and people: to pray and strive together for Christian unity, and to join together in responding to human suffering. These two responsibilities are deeply intertwined. Both relate to healing the body of Christ, hence the principal text chosen for this year’s week of prayer is a story of healing.

Mark 7: 31-37 relates how Jesus healed a man who was deaf and could not speak properly. Jesus led the man away from the crowd, in order to attend to him in private. He put his fingers into the man’s ears, took spittle and touched the man’s tongue, and “said to him, ‘Ephphatha’, that is, ‘be opened’” - a word sometimes used in Christian baptism. The good news here proclaimed has many dimensions. As in many other gospel accounts, in this story of healing we hear of the Lord’s compassionate response to suffering and need; it is an eloquent testimony to the mercy of God. In restoring the man’s hearing and his ability to speak, Jesus manifests God’s power and desire to bring human beings to wholeness, fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy” (35:5-6). The restoration of the man’s hearing allowed him to hear the good news proclaimed

by Jesus; the restoration of his speech allowed him to proclaim what he had seen and heard to others. All of these dimensions are reflected in the response of those who witnessed the healing and were “astounded beyond measure”: “he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak” (v.37).

Like the man healed by Jesus, all who have been baptized in Christ have had their ears opened to the gospel. In his first letter, Saint John speaks of the fellowship of those who have received this good news of “what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life” (1:1). It was the Lord’s desire (John 17) that those who were his disciples, who had received his message, would be one, united with one another in a unity grounded in his communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. As the body of Christ, the church is called to be one, the community which has heard and seen the marvels which God has done, and has been sent forth to proclaim them to the ends of the earth. As Christ’s body, we are called to be united in carrying out his mission. A part of that mission is to attend to those who are suffering and in need. As God heard the cry and knew the sufferings of his people in Egypt (cf. Exodus 3:7-9), as Jesus responded with compassion to those who cried out to him, so too the church is to hear the voice of all who suffer, to respond with compassion, to give voice to the voiceless.

Drawing together two strands of the church’s life and mission, this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is intent on emphasizing that there is an essential connection between efforts to pray for and seek unity among Christians and initiatives to respond to human need and suffering. The same Spirit which makes us brothers and sisters in Christ also empowers us to reach out to every human being in need. The same Spirit which is at work in all efforts to make visible the unity of Christians also gives strength to every movement towards renewing the face of the earth. Every easing of human suffering makes our oneness more visible; every step towards unity strengthens the whole body of Christ.

### **The Origins of this year’s Week of Prayer Material: Umlazi**

This year’s theme for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity has its origins in the experience of Christian communities in the South African region of Umlazi, near Durban. Each year, a first draft of the materials for the week of prayer is prepared in a particular local setting, then adapted for international usage before being distributed worldwide to be adapted for local use. This year’s materials reflect the concerns and experience of a people who have undergone great suffering.

Umlazi was originally established under the apartheid regime as a ‘township’ for the majority black population. A legacy of racism, unemployment and poverty continues to raise formidable challenges for its people, where there is still a shortage of schools, medical clinics and adequate housing. This context of poverty and unemployment gives rise to a high crime rate and problems of abuse within families and communities. But the biggest current challenge faced by people in the informal settlements and townships is that of HIV/AIDS. It is estimated that 50% of the residents of Umlazi are infected with the virus.

When leaders of the various Christian communities in Umlazi met recently to ask what they could do together to address the overwhelming challenges faced by their people, they realized that one factor which aggravated their present situation was the stigma which keeps people who are suffering abuse, victims of rape, or infected with HIV/AIDS, from speaking openly about their problems. There is a cultural norm which suggests that matters relating to sexuality are not to be spoken of. In Zulu the term *ubunqunu*, literally ‘nakedness’, indicates

that these subjects are taboo. As a result, many people hesitate to seek the assistance available - often ecumenically funded through the local churches - in terms of counselling, pastoral care, home-based care-giving, communal support and health care centres.

In light of the spoken and unspoken ways in which people, especially the youth, are encouraged to keep silent about their problems, the local church leaders in Umlazi designed an ecumenical service which had as its central theme 'breaking the silence'. The worship service invited the young people of Umlazi to find the courage to speak about that which was 'unspeakable' and to seek assistance, mindful that keeping silence can mean death.

This invitation to break the silence also extends to churches outside South Africa and the many other regions severely affected by HIV/AIDS. No war in the history of the world has claimed more lives than AIDS. While many organizations, regions and churches have sought to respond to regions ravaged by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the responses have not been proportionate to the disaster being experienced.

In 1993, Bishop Desmond Tutu reminded the 5<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Faith and Order that during the apartheid era church leaders learned that "apartheid was too strong for a divided church". Today, faced with the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other dehumanizing forces, it is acknowledged that they also are too strong for a divided church. In Umlazi, there is one courthouse, one hospital, one post office, one clinic, one set of shops - and one cemetery reflecting one overwhelming challenge facing the people. In this same township, the people, almost all of whom are Christian, adhere to scriptures which profess that there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all (cf Eph. 4:4-6). Yet there are many churches, which are not in full communion with each other, and which remain a sign of a divided Christianity. In Umlazi, there is an impatience and frustration with inherited divisions generated many centuries ago in other lands. (See also the description of the South African situation provided by the local preparatory group.)

When a member from the preparatory group in Umlazi met with the international group responsible for preparation of week of prayer materials, they reflected on the search for full visible unity among Christian churches *in light of* the experience of Christians of Umlazi and their invitation to 'break the silence' which oppresses and isolates people in their suffering. Together, they selected Mark 7: 31-37 as a central biblical text for the week of prayer, and determined a biblical/theological framework, centred around hearing, speaking and silence, within which both the search for unity and the search for a Christian response to human suffering find a home. The decision was taken to maintain this twofold focus in the worship service and in the meditation for each of the eight days, intentionally addressing *both* the reality of human suffering and the search for the visible unity of all Christians in each text.

### **The Eight Days**

The Book of Genesis begins with God's creative word being spoken. Out of chaos, breaking the silence, God's word springs forth. It is an active word, a word which brings about that which it speaks; and what it speaks is *life*. God speaks and the creation comes into being. God speaks and human beings are formed in the image and likeness of God. God speaks in history, and human beings are invited into a covenant with God. John's gospel also begins with the word of God spoken in time, and proclaims the heart of New Testament faith in announcing that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, speaks God's very self. Through his ministry, Jesus speaks in many ways, even at times (before Pontius Pilate) through silence. Always, the word which Jesus speaks is

a word of mercy, a word which summons his hearers into a deeper life, life in communion with God and with each other. This good news is in turn to be proclaimed through word and deed by all who are baptized in the name of the Triune God. It is only in the power of the Spirit that Christians are able to hear and respond to God's call.

Days 1 to 3 set forth this trinitarian framework. Day 1 invites reflection on the creative word which God speaks in the beginning, and which God continues to speak; a word which those created in God's image are invited to echo in speaking an active and creative word amidst the chaos of our present day. The meditation for Day 2 ponders what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, who makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak. Day 3 reflects on the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians, empowering us both to proclaim the good news, and to be instruments of Christ's healing presence, listening and giving voice to those who have been silenced or have not been able to relate their experience.

The intrinsic relationship between fostering unity and responding to human suffering comes clearly to light in Paul's reflection on the church as the body of Christ. "By one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). Christ has made us one. Our divisions hamper and diminish this unity, but they do not destroy it. Because we all belong to Christ, each part of his body has need of the other, and must care for the other. "If one member suffers, all suffer together" (v.26). Day 4 asks what it means to be a community united in Christ, a community in full solidarity with its suffering members.

Days 5 and 6 develop more explicitly the theme set forth by the churches in Umlazi, that of breaking the silence which oppresses. Those who suffer are often left to suffer in silence, their hopes for compassion and justice going unheeded. There are times when Christians and Christian churches have remained silent when they should have spoken out, times when they have not empowered the voiceless to speak. There are times when the divisions of the churches have kept us from hearing the pain of others, or have left our response muffled, conflicted, ineffective and *unconsoling* (Day 5). This is a sin, not least because the church has been given a voice, has been given a message to proclaim, a mission to carry out; and it is not a divided message, a conflictive mission. Enlivened by the Holy Spirit, it is to be a single coherent utterance, the good news given to us by and in Christ himself. Through Christ, we have the grace to break the silence. In Christ, we are the community called to say 'be opened' to the deaf and the dumb. The path to faithfulness and integrity requires that Christians strive and pray for that unity for which Christ prayed, and that even amidst our divisions, we learn to speak with a single voice, to reach out as a single body with compassion, giving flesh to the good news which we proclaim (Day 6).

The saving death and resurrection of Christ stand at the heart of the word which God speaks to humanity. Day 7 ponders the cross of Christ in light of the experience of suffering and death in Umlazi and many other regions. Living in the valley of death, where suffering exceeds all measure, amidst cemeteries where the dead are often buried one atop the other, the people of Umlazi know and understand the desolation of the cross of Christ. In faith, they also know that Christ has not distanced himself from the burden of human suffering, and that the closer we come to his cross, the closer we come to each other. It is a particularly profound proclamation of resurrection which resounds from these same cemeteries, when during the earliest hours of Easter morning, Christians gather amidst the tombs of their loved ones with candles lit to proclaim that Christ has risen from the dead, and that in him, death has lost its power (Day 8). Amidst suffering and death, amidst division and adversity, the paschal

mystery sows seeds of hope that all oppressive silence will surely give way, that one day every tongue will be united in confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:11).

### **Conclusion**

Our central biblical text for this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Mk 7:31-37, notes that Jesus looked up to heaven and *sighed* before he healed the man. In Saint Paul's letter to the Romans, he writes that the Holy Spirit accompanies our prayers "with sighs too deep for words". Paul's phrase is suggestive of the longing which the Spirit is cultivating in our hearts and minds, a longing for full and visible unity among all Christian churches, a longing for an end to human suffering.

In the worship service and in each of the eight days, we have made it a structural principle to incorporate explicit references both to the need to continue to work and pray for unity among all our churches and to the voices of people in Umlazi and in other regions from which a cry extends to the heavens. We hope that this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity helps to break the silence which oppresses, and draws attention to the intrinsic relatedness between prayer and the search for Christian unity and the call for Christian peoples and churches to work together as instruments of God's compassion and justice in the world.

## **The preparation of the material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2007**

This material reached its present form at a meeting of the international preparatory group appointed by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The group met at the Château de Faverges, Haute-Savoie, France; we extend thanks to its staff for the professional and hospitable spirit with which they supported our work.

The initial draft of this material was prepared by an ecumenical group of lay persons, pastors and priests in Umlazi-Bhekithemba, South Africa. It was based on an ecumenical worship service which had been conducted at the Comprehensive Technical High School (COMTEC) in Umlazi. In the service (which was organized at the invitation of the school) clergy and lay persons from diverse traditions came together to make their unity in Christ visible, and to offer a common witness in face of the challenges facing the students and South African society as a whole today. The local group also provided a schema of biblical texts for use throughout the week.

The international preparatory group extends its thanks to the local group in South Africa, which included:

Canon L. L. Ngewu  
Rev. Fr Thamisanqua Shange OGS  
Rev Bruce Buthelezi  
B. Buthelezi  
  
Rev Fr Anton Mbili

Rev S. Mosia  
Mr W. L. Luthuli  
Mr R. Mauze  
Zamimpilo HIV/AIDS [professional  
nurses] project, St Philip, Enwabi  
Mrs G. Phungula

The international group is grateful to Father Thami Shange OGS who joined the international preparatory group and participated in its work, introducing the draft material and the preparations process and bringing the material, and the local situation in South Africa, to life. We wish also to thank Bishop David Beetge of The Highveld Diocese, Brakpan, and Canon Livingstone Ngewu, College of the Transfiguration, Grahamstown, South Africa who established contact with the group and acted as liaison persons as the material was being prepared.

## **Worship Service**

### **Introduction to the Worship Service**

*The proposed worship service is an adaptation of the service prepared by the local churches in Umlazi, and intended for young people. It begins with an invitation to silence, not the silence which oppresses, but that which allows us, in stillness, to hear the voice of God, and to hear the pain of the world and its peoples. The liturgy of the word is intended to evoke the principal topics developed in the Introduction to the Theme, revolving around St Paul's meditation on the body of Christ in 1 Cor 12 and the healing recorded in Mark 7:31-37. Reflecting a South African style of worship, the outline presents the possibility of symbolic actions, testimonies and prayers for healing which could be carried out during the celebration, thus offering different ways of drawing into the assembly's prayer those persons in the local community whose voices are not being heard or who are suffering. The intercessions flow out of a trinitarian framework, drawing together prayers for Christian unity and prayers for those both on a local and an international level who are in greatest need.*

*For the reading of the word of God, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is recommended.*

### **Order of Worship**

He makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak (Mk 7: 37)

Leader: L  
Reader: R  
All: A

### **Welcome and presentation of the worship service**

L: Dear friends in Christ, we are gathered here together, members of the one body, to listen to what God wants to say to us not only through his word but also through our sisters and brothers, silent in their suffering.

This year, Christians in South Africa, living in a particularly difficult local situation, have felt a compelling need to call us in the name of Christ to break silence – all forms of silence complicit in the suffering of human beings.

Will this message not be even more powerful and prophetic if it comes from Christians of different confessions speaking and acting together?

Christians of various churches who have come together for this worship service, let us hear the call of the Lord:

To be conscious of our guilty silence faced with extreme suffering, and together, to repent;

To pray for God's blessing on all and in particular upon those who share in the suffering and rejection of Christ;

To raise our voices together, for and with those who have no voice, that we may witness together to Christ, who made the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.

## Hymn/Chant

*From the beginning of the hymn or chant, sung in the manner of Taizé or Iona, it is suggested that in order to create the appropriate atmosphere for the moment of silence which follows, a large cross should be carried in by four young persons and laid on the floor, whereupon they would stand around it, praying silently. The singing will give way to the following introduction to the moment of silence. It would also be possible to lead the congregation into the moment's silence with a few bars of music.*

## Introduction to the moment of silence

L: Let us keep silence before God...silent within ourselves...opening our hearts to the silence of our sisters and brothers living in suffering: "if one member suffers, all suffer together" (1 Cor 12: 26).

May our ears be opened by this silence in communion with those whose voice we do not hear, either because they keep silent or they are silenced. Let us hear the call of Christ rather than remain deaf. He teaches that we should allow ourselves, like him, to feel the suffering of others, placing us firmly as Christians of all confessions before our common responsibilities.

*Three minutes of silence.*

## Song/chant/hymn

*The hymn of introduction to the moment of silence is taken up again by a soloist, singing gradually louder. Then the whole congregation joins in.*

## Prayer:

L: O God who reigns in heavenly splendour, you have broken the silence through the revelation of your Word, Jesus Christ, who came forth from the heart of your silence and was hidden from the Prince of this world.

Open our eyes that we may see Jesus, the star who dispels our shadows;

Open our ears that we might hear the voices muffled in the silence of millions, those voices muffled by the trials and suffering of this transient world.

Open our hearts that we may know how to respond to the pain of those who suffer among us, as the woman of Bethany pouring perfume on Jesus' head, and like Simon of Cyrene who without complaint carried your Son's cross, reduced to silence by those who attacked him.

Assembled here together, we shatter the silence with the words of the prayer which Jesus taught us.

A. Our Father *(each in his or her own language)*

## **The Word Of God**

1 Samuel 1: 1-18. *Hannah, a surfeit of sorrow*  
*(Read by four people; one reads the narrative, another the words of Elkanah, a third the words of Hannah and a fourth, the words of Eli.)*

Psalms 28: 1-2 ; 6-9. Lord, ...my rock, do not refuse to hear me  
*(read by a young person)*

1 Corinthians 12: 12-29. If one member suffers, all suffer.  
*(Alleluia: sung)*

Mark 7: 31-37. Christ makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.  
*(Children and young people present could mime the passage from Mark 7: 31-37. This healing incident could also be interpreted by dance.)*

## **Sermon**

**Confession of Faith:** *Nicene or Apostles creed*

## **Confession of Sins – Forgiveness – Sign of Peace**

L: God is more ready to forgive our sins than we are to confess them.

Let us come then before God to acknowledge the weight of our sins. Has Jesus not promised to give rest to those who are heavy laden? May we also make known to him our suffering at seeing the sin of the churches, still too divided to come with any force to the aid of the weak, the little ones, and those without voice who are so dear to the heart of your son, Jesus:

“ ...for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, I was naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” (Mt 25: 42-43)

*One after the other, groups of people could bring forward objects, pictures, photographs or drawings which evoke situations where members of the local Christian churches stayed silent – indifferent, or unable to speak with one voice and act together - for example in the case of battered women, abused children, Aids orphans, etc (as the ecumenical group from South Africa which proposes the theme for this year emphasizes in its own context).*

- *Each group of people comes forward in silence and places before the congregation and at the foot of the cross previously brought in, objects, pictures or photographs;*

- *One person testifies to silence kept too long and/or the share of responsibility in this situation of suffering caused by sin;*

- *Then another of the same group says aloud:*

“Lord we have not seen you in the suffering of our brothers and sisters.”

*(Appropriate moment of silence between each group.)*

L: God of mercy, in your Son you offer us unconditional forgiveness for the sins we truly confess. Grant us your pardon for those sins which we acknowledge and those we do not have the courage to confront:

When, by our actions we have impeded your will;

When, through our indifference to others we have taken away their hope;

When, through indifference to the obedience of your laws and through weakness we have not responded in the way you wished, either personally or as communities.

Come to us in your mercy, to repair our broken lives and to hasten the hour of full communion among us, in the name of the love of Jesus Christ. Amen.

L. “If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn 2: 2) *and* “Your sins are forgiven on account of his name” (1 Jn 2:12).

L: We have opened our hearts to that pardon for our sins which gives us peace, so let us now give to each other the peace of Christ.

*The peace of Christ be with you.*

*And also with you.*

*Music might be played or a choir sing while the members of the congregation exchange the sign of peace.*

## **Intercessions**

L: God of grace, our creator, God of mercy, our saviour, merciful God, our help, who knows what we need before we ask it, we praise you for your creation, for salvation and your unceasing compassion for us.

Heal us, heal our churches of their deafness, that together we may more clearly hear the sound of your voice in the silence of the poor and suffering.

We pray for your still-divided church spread through all the world and charged with the proclamation of the Christ, Light of the Nations.

Breathe into us the desire to work without ceasing for that Christian unity which is your desire and grant that nothing will overcome our search for that unity for which Jesus prayed.

In the same way that he did not consider himself the equal of God the Father, but denied his true nature, let us not cling to that which obstructs us on our common pilgrimage towards full communion.

R. 1: Creator God, in your love you created us for yourself, and our hearts will have no respite until they find their rest in you.

All: *Give us your assurance that nothing will separate us from your love.*

R. 2: God our shepherd, you called us from the shadows into your marvellous light. Make us to shine as children of light.

All: *Shine, Lord, shine. Shine in our lives.*

- R. 3: God our Father, who takes infinite care of each of us, make us attentive to the needs of others.  
 All: *In your loving kindness teach us to take others into our arms, as you have taken us into your arms in Jesus Christ, and strengthen our common witness as Christians in favour of justice, compassion and pardon.*
- R. 4: Jesus, Word of the Father, you have striven to break all forms of guilty silence.  
 All: *Give us the courage to uphold all those who in our assembled communities and in your name make heard the voices of those without voice; that a real ecumenism of life might provide relief for those in distress and comfort for those who grieve the premature death of loved ones.*
- R. 5: Jesus, friend of the poor and of strangers, you have held out your hand to lead all who were far away to your grace and salvation.  
 All: *May those who feel like strangers find comfort and signs of your presence in our communities of faith.*
- R. 6: Jesus, sent by the Father, you have called your disciples to announce the gospel and to be instruments of transformation in this world *together*.  
 All: *Help us - that the vision of a world transformed may fire the imagination of all believers!*
- R. 7: Holy Spirit, giver of life, may we continually be nourished by your life giving power.  
 All: *Through your presence among us, give power to those who are powerless and help us to give a voice to those who are voiceless.*
- R. 8: Holy Spirit, who leads us to unity, give to the leaders of our faith communities unshakeable zeal in their efforts towards unity.  
 All: *Hear our prayers, open new ways for your church to be united.*
- R. 9: Holy Spirit, who leads us to the whole truth and makes straight that which is crooked, inspire all those who exercise a role in government.  
 All: *Grant them the desire to ensure that the needs of the poor, the humble and the weak without voice are a priority; and guard them from all temptation so that their integrity is preserved from all corruption.*
- R. 10: O God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one in three persons.  
 All: *Be with us and break down the walls which separate us. Bring us together in Christ through your Spirit.*
- L: Merciful God of love, who sees all things, and whose kindness is beyond all measure; who in breaking the silence approached us before we approached you, so proving your love for us in Jesus Christ your only son, born of the Virgin Mary: We lift up our prayers to you! Be with all humanity. Look kindly upon our churches whom you call to join together in reflecting in everyday life the merciful and kindly love of your son Jesus Christ, God with us for ever and ever. Amen.

**Chant:** *Preferably the Magnificat or the Beatitudes for their appropriateness to the theme. God uplifts and blesses the humble and silent.*

## **Witness, Blessing and Words of Consolation**

*At this point people or groups - particularly ecumenical groups - engaged in the fight against the Aids pandemic, or violence against women and children, malnutrition, etc. could testify to their acts of solidarity.*

**L:** “As you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Mt 25: 40  
“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” Mt 11: 28

Dear friends, these words of Christ apply to each and every one of us. Christ is close to us in the heart of our actions, including our ecumenical actions, as well as in the suffering of the sick, the solitude and discouragement of many of us. He supports us in our weakness. He is our consolation and blessing.

*The ministers and representatives of the churches present come forward before the assembly for the prayer and act of benediction.*

**L.** Blessed be the Lord our God for the love which you have shown us through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
In him who loved us we are conquerors over hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril and the sword.

In the silence of abandonment and solitude,  
of sickness and death,  
pour out the riches of your blessing,  
that we may be ever more faithful to serve you  
in our sisters and brothers,  
and that our joy to do your will be ever greater.

We bless you and glorify you,  
for you listen to the silence of our hearts.  
You act within us with power, healing us and leading us  
to speak in the name of Jesus, your Son.

Send us into the world to carry out your will  
and to break down the walls of silence which separate us.  
May we witness to you, our only Saviour,  
being ever more united by “one faith and one baptism”.

And may we grow in grace  
and in the peace of God which passes all understanding,  
that your name may be glorified.  
Amen.

*(See Alternative Order on following page)*

**Final blessing:**

L. May the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord,  
The love of God the Father  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit  
be with you/us always.

(Response to “with you”: *and with your spirit.*)

**Words and act of dismissal:**

*As a sign of God’s blessing, of the consolation of his word and his presence, as the congregation disperses, each person might receive a drop of perfume into his or her hands to pass this to others - a tradition in Orthodox churches.*

*(The offering can be taken as the congregation leaves. It might be used to respond to the particular needs of those who are reduced to silence.)*

**Alternative order:**

*Instead of this time of witnessing, of blessing and consolation, congregations might prefer the following proposal which consists of praying over each person who comes forward personally.*

*The worship leader invites representatives of the churches present (chosen before the worship service and to whom this has been suggested) to come to his/her side to pray for those who desire the prayers of his/her brothers and sisters in the faith.*

*Reading of Romans 8: 31-39 from “If God is for us...”*

L: Sisters and brothers, truly “nothing can separate us from the love of God manifest in Jesus Christ” so that if there are any among us who suffer particularly from the burden of sickness, the feeling of being abandoned or misunderstood in suffering or solitude to the point of being unable to find peace, they should not hesitate to come forward to confide their suffering and so that we can pray for and with them, if they so wish.

We can also pray for friends and people known to us, afflicted by suffering, sickness or discouragement.

During this time, let us pray together that the consolation of Christ is made known to all of these sisters and brothers.

*The people come forward – background music plays.*

*Those who have been designated welcome them, listen to them and pray over them and with them, making – for example – the gesture of putting a hand on their shoulder.*

## Biblical reflections and Prayers for the “eight days”

### Day 1                      In the beginning was the Word

*‘And God said...’ (Gen 1)*

Gen 1: 2 – 2: 4	By his word, God created the universe
Ps 104: 1-9	The Lord of all creation
Rev 21: 1-5a	God makes all things new
Jn 1: 1-5	In the beginning was the Word

#### Commentary

In the beginning was the Word...on this first day of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we want to contemplate the work of the Creator. In the silence of the void – the book of Genesis recounts – God created the world through his Word. “And God said...” In the very beginning, when there was nothing but chaos and confusion, the Word of God came to break through the silence to assign to each being its proper place. At the summit of creation it is one humanity which God creates, in the image of his *oneness*.

The group which inspired this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity comes from South Africa. Its members have recounted how much the Aids epidemic can throw human lives into distress. Often, we also have the impression that our world is in chaos: when the elements engulf us, when war plunges us into terror, when sickness or grief overcomes us...

“And God said...” Confronted with so much suffering, all Christians want to believe that the work of the Creator continues. Despite their divisions, it is the same hope which fills the hearts of all Christ’s disciples: the Word of God continues to create today’s world by snatching it back from the void, in keeping humanity united. More than ever, Christians of all confessions need to hear this promise: *See, I am making all things new, there will be no more mourning and no more pain.*

The chaos in which we live can be paralysing. However, the men and women of our world do not want to resign themselves to despair. Thus in South Africa a group of women (*Kopanang*) who have a family member infected with Aids, come together to weave magnificent cloth. Their creations allow them to provide for their families. Created in the image of God, we too – in our own way – can bring beauty out of chaos.

#### Prayer

God our Creator, we gaze at the splendour of your creation. It is your Word which created the universe. When our lives fall into ruin, we beg you to renew your marvellous works. Despite the scandal of our divisions, we can pray with one voice: that your Word never ceases to make all things new in the heart of our broken lives. Give us courage to be artisans of creation too. We pray that the unity we seek for our churches may be truly at the service of the unity of the whole human family. Amen.

## Day 2

## The Saving Word of Christ

*'He makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak' (Mk 7, 31-37)*

Is 50: 4-5	God has given me a tongue ... that I may know how to sustain the weary
Ps 34 (33): 1-16	I will bless the Lord at all times
Col 1: 11-20	Jesus is the image of the invisible God
Mk 7: 31-37	Jesus makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak

### Commentary

Isaiah realizes the cost of the gift that the Lord God has given. He has received the power of a word which can sustain the weary and broken hearted. For this to happen he needs ears with which to listen and learn as a disciple. Since the Lord God has called him, he cannot turn back.

Saint Paul understood that the definitive Word has been spoken in Jesus Christ. Paul portrays for us humanity in the unity of its relations with the Son of God, image of the invisible God in whose likeness we have been created. God has rescued us from the power of darkness and taken us into the kingdom of his Son in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins. We are one through our baptism in Christ, for we are united to him and Jesus reconciles all things to God. Through the blood of his cross Jesus has given us lasting peace.

The gospel passage illustrates how the power of Jesus enables the deaf to hear his saving word and then to proclaim it to others. Curiously, Jesus commanded those present to remain silent about what they had seen but, like all good news, this could not be contained. Those present became witnesses to the saving power of God's chosen one. It is not only the healed person who proclaims the goodness of the Lord but all those who have witnessed it.

In the South African context as in the gospel, someone will be touched by the Lord and be freed to speak about his or her condition. In turn, this will allow the church to minister to him or to her. As a result others will be able to do the same. This leads to many tongues being loosened and ears being unstopped. Many people living under the conspiracy of silence surrounding such taboo issues as the abuse of women and children, crime in society and HIV/AIDS will step forward to break the silence which in turn will enable others to minister to those most in need. In this context we can see how God continues to open ears and free tongues to hear and then proclaim the saving Word of Christ. It is our common faith celebrated in baptism that enables us to proclaim together the compassion of Christ. In spite of suffering, we become one as we come nearer to Christ by recognizing that in Christ all things are reconciled and held together. This is rooted in the oneness of baptism and the subsequent obligation to glorify God in his work.

### Prayer

God of compassion, you have spoken your saving Word in Jesus. Through his intercession, we pray that our ears may be open to the cry of people caught in the conspiracy of silence. May Jesus loosen our tongues, that together we may proclaim his healing love for those who suffer in silence. Strengthen us by the grace of our common baptism, that the unity we have in Christ may be our strength in bringing hope to those who despair. And together let us proclaim our deliverance through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Day 3

## The Holy Spirit gives us the Word

*'The Spirit ...will testify on my behalf' (Jn 15: 26)*

Joel 2: 26-29            I will pour out my spirit on all flesh  
Ps 104 (103)            You renew the face of the earth  
1 Cor 12: 1-4, 12-13    No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit  
Jn 15: 26-27; *and*      The Spirit of truth will testify on my behalf  
16: 12-13

### Commentary

We are one in the Spirit. All have been nourished by the one Spirit. Is it in the same Spirit that we have been baptized into one body? It is the Holy Spirit who speaks and who gives us the crucial energy, the inner power to speak, to announce and proclaim together the good news of the kingdom of God.

Our desire is to live in the Spirit, as a community on the pilgrimage towards unity. If we live according to the Spirit, we desire that which is of the Spirit. And the desire of the Spirit is life and peace.

The Holy Spirit impels us to act. We must break the different forms of silence which get in our way and hold us back: chaotic situations, human division, all those things which offend the dignity of persons and of peoples. How can the word be freed? Where can we find the strength to sow a seed of life, of hope, of openness? How can we break away from all that closes us in and immobilises us?

The Spirit which is poured out upon all flesh drives us to prophesy. It is the Spirit which recreates us in renewing the face of the earth. It is the Spirit which makes us cry 'Jesus is Lord'. It is the Spirit which witnesses to the Lord and enables us to become courageous witnesses. It is the Spirit whom God sends into our hearts, who makes us proclaim 'Abba, Father' and who thus reveals to us our true identity: we are no longer slaves but sons and daughters of God.

When the children and young people of the secondary school COMTEC of Umlazi, South Africa, *come together for an ecumenical celebration* (cf. Introduction to the Theme), when *together* they call upon the Holy Spirit, new hope is born for the whole world. It is the Spirit who encourages these young people not to cover up their great problems - family life, unemployment, crime, sickness – in silence and despair...Instead, they praise Christ and start to follow him. They commit themselves with generosity to the service of their brothers and sisters. They bear joy, peace and unity in the Spirit. On our ecumenical journeying, these young people of Umlazi are signs of hope and unity in the Holy Spirit.

### Prayer

Come Holy Spirit - may we know the gift of your presence on our pilgrimage towards unity. Give us the inner strength to become instruments of joy and hope in the world. May your spirit make us one. May your voice give us the appropriate words to confess together our God and Lord and to break the silence which destroys. Spirit of life and of love, renew us in unity. Amen.

## Day 4      **The silence of the forgotten and the cries of the suffering**

*'If one member suffers all suffer together' (1 Cor 12 : 26)*

Ex 3: 7-10	God heard the cry of the oppressed
Ps 28: 1-8	O Lord be not silent
1 Cor 12: 19-26	Many members yet one body in Christ
Mk 15: 33-41	Jesus cried aloud: My God why have you forsaken me?

### **Commentary**

The world in which we live is one in which many people are suffering. Almost everyday we see dramatic pictures in the media and read news about the great catastrophes people have experienced. But the suffering of many people is not acknowledged. They are forgotten. It seems that they suffer silently, but this is a fiction; the silence is more a sign of our ignorance and our egoism.

God hears what we often do not want to hear. He hears the cries of the suffering and he sees their oppression. He does not ignore it (Ex 3). When the people in South Africa read the story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt they remember their own way out of apartheid. Although the people were systematically silenced, their cries for freedom and justice were loud; the pain was deep, and it took a long time for their longing for liberation to be fulfilled.

Nowadays many people in Africa are victims of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. No war in the world has ever taken more lives than Aids. But the interest – especially in the western world – is not very great. A wall of silence divides the world. Psalm 28 shows us a suffering person, who is crying to God. It is to God that he addresses his misery and his hope. He prays in the trust that God will take notice of him because others do not see his pain.

Together we believe that God shares the trouble and the apprehension of the suffering. Christ crying out on the cross is the clearest sign of this (Mk 15). God is not far away, but in the midst of our suffering.

We are one body in this compassionate Christ. The misery of some members is not their trouble alone but is the responsibility of all. The cries of the infected cannot be ignored or hushed by saying that they are judged by God. If Paul is right when he said: "If one member suffers all suffer together" (1 Cor 12) then we could say that "the whole church has Aids". We are bound together as one body in Christ. Together, we must take care of the marginalized and ignored.

The great challenge of HIV/AIDS needs a united not a divided or segregated church. It needs a church which cooperates and builds a community of compassion and faith as the one body of Christ, a community where the silence of the forgotten is broken and the cries of the suffering are heard.

### **Prayer**

Eternal God, you are the hope of those who have been omitted from the agenda of our world. You hear the cries of the wounded hearts and the voices of the despairing souls. Teach us in the power of your Spirit to hear with your ears and reach out through the silence to hear the voices of suffering and longing. As one body in Christ, make us more and more a communion of compassion and a prophetic sign of your incarnate grace and justice. Amen.

## Day 5

## God's judgement on our silence

*'Just as you did not do it to one of the least of these..' (Mt 25: 45)*

Mic 6: 6-8	What does the Lord require of us?
Ps 31 (30): 1-5	God, the refuge and faithful redeemer
1 Pet 4: 17	Judgement begins with the household of God
Mt 25: 31-46 (41-46)	You did not do it to me

### Commentary

Those who suffer in silence – who have lost their voice, or had it taken from them – have their refuge and hope in God, who is faithful to redeem them. Yet they rightfully look for help, not only to God but to God's servants, and not least to Christians and the churches. These are called to speak on behalf of those who cannot, or will not, lift their own voices; and to empower the powerless to speak for themselves: the Lord requires us to do justice first of all.

Yet too often the hopes of those who suffer are met with silence. Christians and the churches do not always speak out when they should or work to empower the voiceless to find their own voice. Called to serve others, to do it unto the least of these; too often we do not. Even knowing that Jesus is present in the least of these, we do not always serve them as we ought.

We know that it is time for judgement to begin with the household of God. What we do is set alongside what we are called to do, any difference is made plain: insofar as we are silent and do not empower the powerless to speak, we are judged. Yet the purpose of God's judgement is not to condemn, but to bring us to new life. Confession leads to liberation: recognizing that our silence makes us complicit in the suffering of others, we may yet speak on their behalf, and empower them to speak for themselves.

As Christians and churches – wherever we are – we must ask ourselves whether we are sometimes too silent, with questions such as these:

- Are we speaking out on behalf of others as best we can, and empowering them to speak for themselves?
- If not, is it a question of being able to hear the cries of those who suffer? Or have we become numb in the face of so many cries of grief, of (for example) the constant burials in the townships, informal settlements, and rural areas?
- Are individual churches sometimes so concerned with internal matters, that they are unable to hear the cries of those outside their own walls?
- Are the churches hampered by their divisions from hearing the cries of those who suffer?

These are difficult questions, but by asking them together we may be able to break the silence and thus show our unity in service to those who suffer.

### Prayer

God our refuge and redeemer,  
Hear the voices of those who have no voice;  
Open their mouths to speak, and grant them justice and healing, joy and peace at last.  
Open our ears to hear the cries of those who suffer;  
Open our mouths to speak out on their behalf; and  
Open our hearts that we may work to empower others to speak. Amen.

## Day 6

## Empowered to speak out

*'But the woman...came in fear and trembling...and told him the whole truth' (Mk 5: 33)*

Judg 6: 11-16	I will be with you
Ps 50: 1-15	Call on me
Acts 5: 26-32	Obedying God
Mk 5: 24-34	Telling the whole truth

### Commentary

There are topics one is not supposed to talk about : notably, sex, money and religion. And for Jesus to deal with a woman with a haemorrhage was both amazing and groundbreaking. It was faith and confidence in Jesus which encouraged her to reach out to him knowing that healing would flow from him. Being touched, Jesus realised that power had gone out from him while the woman experienced healing and empowerment - the empowerment to speak out and to tell how her whole story of long silent suffering had come to an end. And it was only after she had told her story that Jesus could say: Be healed.

This parallels the situation of many pastors in South Africa, longing to minister to those suffering from HIV/AIDS, but hampered by a conspiracy of silence and shame. Only when those infected and affected are prepared to tell their stories can the words and acts of healing happen and people be ministered to. There is a Zulu saying that keeping silence about a great secret is like sitting on a scorpion. Churches have the task and challenge of providing safe space for those infected to speak out.

The churches themselves need to be outspoken about issues that, for whatever reason, are difficult to talk about. These may include, beyond South Africa, issues of war and peace, the life-destroying effects of global capitalism, the tragedy of asylum seekers, or hidden child abuse. This is not a choice for the church but it points to the very centre and reason for its existence. God has called the church to proclaim his Word to the world, to bring good news to those in need, and churches cannot remain silent when external forces hinder the ongoing incarnation of this Word. But at times, the churches themselves are an obstacle to this incarnation because of their divisions and disunity. The Word given to the church is one, and it is only when churches speak with one voice and act with a single compassion that they become true and credible witnesses to this Word. Therefore the churches have also to be prepared to speak about the shame of their own disunity. Only if we tell the painful truth of our disunity is our healing possible.

### Prayer

Creator God, you spoke and made the world to be good; your risen Son intercedes on our behalf; your Spirit guides us into all truth. Forgive us for those times when our silence has damaged your world, hindered the ongoing work of Christ and muffled the truth. Give us courage, as individuals and as churches, to speak the truth in love with one voice, to embody your compassion for all who suffer, and to send out the good news of the gospel to all the world; in the name of him in whom the Word took flesh among us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Day 7

## Forsakenness

*'Why are you so far from helping me?' (Ps 22: 1)*

Is 53: 1-5	Bearing our infirmities and carrying our diseases
Ps 22: 1-5	Abandonment
Rom 8: 35-36	Separated from the love of Christ?
Mt 27: 57-61	Love entombed

### Commentary

Jesus' cry of abandonment on the cross echoes the words of the psalmist and asks: 'Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?' Here the suffering servant bears the stigma of a common criminal's execution. Then follows the total silence of death and of the tomb, closed by a great stone, with the two Marys sitting opposite, speechless.

There are times in our lives when suffering exceeds all measures, when there are no words to express our grief, no cries, no tears, no gestures. We are there with the women at the tomb watching everything we had loved and hoped for being buried.

The cemeteries in the townships and rural areas of South Africa are filled with dashed hopes and unspeakable pain. Families that used to have a single grave now have nine. Because of a shortage of cemetery space people are buried on top of relatives, and clergy frequently conduct multiple funerals. It used to be that parents planned their future around a growing family. Now in countless cases children look to a future without parents. Death can silence whole communities.

Yet Christ's suffering was redemptive. He bore the sorrows of all people and by his death redeemed us all. He was lifted up on the cross to draw all people to himself. In his suffering and desperation on the cross he shared and truly participated in the darkest and most fearful experience of pain that humankind can have. The closer we come to the cross of Christ, the closer we come to each other. Christ gave his life for all people and we discover an inherent, given unity when we acknowledge that we all depend equally on this one saving work. The life of the church must express this unity of indebtedness.

### Prayer

Giver and sustainer of life, we thank you that you know and understand when we suffer. In Christ you have even taken our infirmities on yourself and by his wounds we are healed. Grant us faith and courage when we are overwhelmed. In the face of great suffering such as HIV/AIDS, cancer, malaria and traumas of war, remove from us a sense of hopelessness. When life's meaning disappears behind the cloud of suffering, may we focus our attention on Christ, who suffered and yet conquered and made us one redeemed people. In his name we pray. Amen.

## Day 8

## Resurrection - glorification

*'Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord' (Phil 2:11)*

Ezek 37: 1-14	The Lord will bring you up from your graves
Ps 150	Let every thing that breathes praise the Lord
Rom 8: 31-39	It is Christ Jesus, who died, who was raised, who intercedes for us!
Lk 24: 44-52	The apostles were constantly in the temple praising God

### Commentary

South Africa is in torment, the victim of violence and disease. Unjust death knocks at the door of the poverty-stricken inhabitants of the townships and rural areas. Despite this, every Sunday people proclaim the Lord's resurrection with confidence, often following upon funerals the day before.

This determination to celebrate the Lord's resurrection brings all grief and sorrow into a context of hope. Christ was raised from a *tomb*, revealing God's glorious victory over death on a cross. With faith in God's power to bring life from death, churches in Umlazi begin their Easter celebration with a night vigil where they process to the cemetery with lit candles, proclaiming that 'Christ has risen' amidst the tombs of their loved ones. This echoes Ezekiel's vision of a new earth, wherein the Spirit of God breathes life into dry bones and they are brought back to life. Christians celebrate God's power to transform death into life.

Saint Paul's letter to the Romans speaks of the risen Christ seated at the right hand of God from where Christ announces that every human being has his or her place next to God; evidence of God's reaching out to the world with an offer of reconciliation, consolation and mercy. Trust in the power of God's love gives us confidence to face death and seemingly overwhelming situations. We can also be confident that if nothing can separate us from the love of God, then through the grace of God, nothing can ultimately separate us from one another.

God brings life out of death. God whispers a word of hope in the ears of those in agony, in the ears of those who yearn for unity. It is a hope in that which God is bringing about, of which believers are barely conscious and which remains mysterious: the coming of the kingdom of God. It is the hope that all despairing silence and relentless division will one day give way, so that every tongue might declare with one voice the glory of God the Father. What God whispers in our ears as a foretaste of the kingdom remains a mystery, but it demands our engagement even now. The hope which sustains the believers of South Africa and prevents them from surrendering to despair, should empower all believers to stand in solidarity with those who suffer. All must be willing instruments in God's mission to bring life and light to those who dwell in the darkness of suffering and injustice. This same hope must inspire Christians to seek unity through an ecumenism of daily life, ever receptive to new ways to give expression *together* to the faith we hold in common.

### Prayer

Lord God, whom we love, before the cross of your Son we contemplate the suffering of a world which longs for your saving help. Raise up in us a hymn of victory which proclaims that he has conquered death 'by death' and that the risen life which was made known on Easter morning offers us life and victory over death and the forces of evil. Amen.

## **Additional Prayers**

*(published under the sole responsibility of the local ecumenical team from South Africa)*

### **Intercession for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS**

L : O God our Father, creator of heaven and earth

C: *Have mercy upon us.*

L : O God the Son, redeemer of the world

C: *Have mercy upon us.*

L : O Holy Spirit of God, advocate, guide and comforter

C: *Have mercy upon us.*

L : O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity  
Three Persons in one God

C: *Have mercy upon us.*

L : Father God, hear us as we pray for those who are infected by AIDS,  
those who are in danger of death.  
Give them the comfort of your presence, Let them seek your face,  
and draw strength from You, the source of life

C: *Have mercy, hear our prayer.*

L : Lord Jesus, hear us as we pray for those who have just heard  
that they are infected by the HIV virus, but who are not yet ill.  
Remind them that they still have a life to live:  
Let them find in You the Life, the Way and the Truth.

C: *Jesus, Lord of life, hear our prayer*

L : Holy Spirit of God, hear us as we pray for those  
who nurse people infected by AIDS -  
Give them the assurance of the Father's presence and the love of Jesus.  
Give them your comfort, give them your peace.

C: *Spirit of holiness, hear our prayer.*

L : Father, we pray that we all would hear your call in these events,  
a call to repentance and a call to help.

We pray that people would repent from immorality and  
fashion their lives upon the guidelines from your Word;  
Help us so that we may live responsible lives,  
not only thinking of ourselves - but also of the others around us.

We pray for those scientists and doctors who are engaged in  
research in order to find a cure for AIDS.

We pray for your church -  
Guide us, so that we can comfort those who need  
comfort with your comfort.

Fill our hearts with your compassion, so that those infected by AIDS would not doubt that they will be helped by the church; Guide us, so that we will know how to help those who need help.

We ask this is because of your great mercy given to us.

C: *Lord of mercy, hear our prayer. Amen*

## **The Ecumenical Situation in South Africa<sup>1</sup>**

This introduction to the local ecumenical context is divided into three sections. It begins with a reflection on ecumenical relations in South Africa. The second section focuses on the township of Umlazi, near Durban, where this year's Week of Prayer material originated, presenting the overwhelming challenges faced by people there; the text concludes with a more personal account from church leaders in Umlazi of the ecumenical cooperation and vitality which is found there.

### **The Churches in South Africa**

In contemporary discussions on anything from the state of the economy to education and theology, it has become almost *de rigueur* to talk about "before 1994" and "since 1994". This pre- and post- 1994 divide is not only a matter of etiquette. It is a deep reality that touches all of life in South Africa. Discussion of ecclesiology is no exception. Prior to 1994 the South African churches had their mission defined for them. The struggle to end unjust rule, discriminatory legislation and practices of apartheid left little time for any other concerns. With the *unbanning* of the liberation movements, the release from prison of our political leaders and the election of a democratic government, the churches suddenly found themselves without a defining goal. Ever since, they have been struggling to find a common voice.

In broad terms, the churches in South Africa form two major groupings – those of European initiation (mostly Protestant churches, but also the Roman Catholic Church, and, numerically much smaller, the Orthodox and Coptic Churches) and those initiated from the African continent. In addition to these two major groups there is a small, but significant cluster of churches more Pentecostal in nature and which were initiated in the United States of America. With the exception of the Church of England in South Africa, the German Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Baptist Union, the European initiated churches are all members of the South African Council of Churches (SACC). In 2004 the Dutch Reformed Church, which lent both moral and theological support to the apartheid government, sought public forgiveness and applied for admission to the SACC. Since the advent of democracy in 1994 a number of the African Initiated churches have also become members of the SACC (with the notable exceptions of the Zionist Christian Church and the Shembe Church, both of which have large membership.)

A number of the member churches of the SACC (Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican and United Congregational churches) are also part of the Church Unity Commission. This Commission has brokered covenants which include the full recognition of baptism and eucharistic practice, and full recognition of one another's ministries. Episcopal oversight is still under discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> The texts on the churches in South Africa and the ecumenical situation in that country are published under the local authors' sole responsibility.

It is ironic that as more churches have formally joined the ecumenical movement in South Africa, the unity of purpose on a national level has become more elusive. This is not to suggest that there are no issues clamouring for attention. HIV/AIDS is everyone's issue and has touched every person's life in South Africa. However, there is no unity of purpose in how to address the pandemic. Unemployment has reached crisis proportions, but within the churches (as within the ruling party) there is no agreement as to how the crisis is most directly addressed. Violence on all levels of life, most especially against women and against female children, is an ongoing problem which needs to be addressed by the churches.

If this were the whole picture, it would be a gloomy one indeed. Fortunately there is another side to this story. Unlike many places in the over-developed world, most churches in South Africa have large and lively membership. At the local level, much is being done to address issues of poverty, sickness (especially AIDS-related illnesses) and education. Inspiring and heart-warming stories abound of a local congregation which has established a ministry to house-bound AIDS patients, a small group of women who give after-school care to orphans, women who have established vegetable garden projects or bead-working craft centres. Perhaps this is the way for the churches for now – not national projects, but small-scale local initiatives, often ecumenical, which make the kingdom of God a reality, and which break through the silence of poverty, illness, violence and hopelessness.

This year's Week of Prayer material originated in a local situation which is marked both by the intensity of the crisis identified above, and by tremendous courage and ecumenical cooperation in responding to it.

### **Umlazi, Bhekithemba and the Surroundings**

In 1950, the apartheid government in South Africa passed the Group Areas Act, which forced physical separation between peoples by creating different residential areas for different races. Over 3 million people were relocated through forced removal, and 'townships' were established, confining the majority black population in overcrowded areas with poor housing, inadequate medical and educational facilities, and limited employment opportunities. Umlazi was originally established as such a township.

In the aftermath of apartheid, the legacy of racism, unemployment and poverty continues to raise formidable challenges for the people of Umlazi. With over 40% of its people unemployed and most others able to earn only enough to feed their families, there is little opportunity to leave the township. Umlazi and the surrounding region has a population of 750,000, yet there is very little infrastructure; there are no recreational facilities - not even a field to play soccer, no cinema; and there is still a shortage of schools, medical clinics and adequate housing. It should be noted that the former 'townships' are not the poorest areas of South Africa; these tend to be the rural areas where there is very little development, and the informal settlements - formerly referred to as 'squatter camps' - found on the edges of most of the nation's large cities and towns.

This context of poverty and unemployment gives rise to a high crime rate and problems of abuse within families and communities. But the biggest current challenge faced by the people of Umlazi is the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It is estimated that over 50% of its residents may be infected with the virus. Since many have not been tested, it is difficult to know the exact extent to which the pandemic has spread; but it is an overwhelming part of their present reality. No one in these areas is unaffected by AIDS. Over 10% of babies born in the region are born with the virus; many die in their first years of life. The population between the ages

of 14 and 40 has been decimated, leaving many children to live on the streets or on their own, while others live with grandparents.

No individual person, family, church or community can face the problems of unemployment, poverty, crime, abuse of women and children and AIDS single handedly. These problems are too enormous for a divided church. Therefore the situation provides the agenda for ecumenism. The Zulus say “You do not pass by when somebody is building a house without helping!” Apartheid managed to break the barriers between churches, now on a local level, AIDS is doing the same.

The churches in Umlazi and in other townships have worked for the establishment of clinics and have initiated home-based care programmes, through which volunteer caregivers are trained to care for the sick and the dying in their homes, undertaking work that is physically, emotionally and spiritually taxing, in order to make a difference in the lives of people who are suffering. Other projects are directed towards care of orphans and other vulnerable children, or towards educating youths, such as the initiative to ‘break the silence’ mentioned in the introduction to this year’s materials. The cooperation of churches also extends beyond outreach programmes and includes joint prayer, common witness, and other examples of an ecumenism of life, as is evident in the reflection of local church leaders which follows.

### **Witness to ecumenical cooperation from the church leaders in Umlazi**

The truth of the matter is that we different churches and clergy are servicing the people of God who are 1) blood relatives; 2) friends and colleagues; 3) one community and 4) receive their daily services from one town hall and one hospital, and share one cemetery. Therefore every party/celebration, wedding, baptism, confirmation and funeral/requiem mass is inevitably ecumenical. For many, they only realize that they belong to different churches for two hours on a Sunday.

At funeral services, of which there are many nowadays, when you see different coloured uniforms (church uniforms) you see the beauty of the rainbow people of God. You will also pick up the fact that most people on the ground do not know the difference between different understandings of eucharist and eucharistic sharing in the various Christian churches. They do understand that there is much that binds them together. At times the laity in Africa seem to understand the theology of baptism as a family bond better than their clergy and churches.

Lay people interact and meet on many occasions. In listening to the media, they pick up the gifts of clergy from different denominations. When they organize retreats for themselves, they are not reliant on anybody to choose a retreat director for them. They see it as permissible to choose any clergy from any denomination to lead their retreats. For instance, a local Anglican parish recently invited a local Catholic priest to conduct their retreat; shortly thereafter, the Anglican priest of this parish was asked to lead the retreat in the Catholic parish. In this instance, the laity took the lead and the pastors followed. It is fitting. The people slaughter beasts together, they feast together, they cry together and they rejoice together. It is only right that the gifts of one church or parish are shared with others.

Among the churches in Umlazi, there is a lot of ecumenical pulpit/altar exchange traffic in particular among churches who are part of the Church Unity Commission. There are many other examples of one church helping another in their ministry. For example, in terms of stewardship and churches striving to be self-reliant, an Anglican lay minister/sub-deacon recently became an ecumenical stewardship teacher. He visited several neighbouring

Christian communities in the region, sharing what he had learnt. Furthermore, there are gatherings of people who share in similar ministries; for instance, altar servers from different churches meet once a year, with one of the local churches providing the venue and catering for the event.

It is becoming a tradition that Good Friday worship has an ecumenical component. Often there is a procession with a cross from one church to another. In other places there is an ecumenical service; after it is finished, people go back to their respective churches.

We feel that the time when our brothers and sisters who adopted Dr Verwoerd's apartheid and baptized it into Christianity has gone. There is no us and them. Years ago, Roman Catholics were accusing Anglicans of heresy; Anglicans were criticising the Methodists; Methodists criticised the Pentecostals; and Pentecostals were accusing the Roman Catholics and the Anglicans of idolatry. Satan rejoiced and God grieved. There was a cycle of accusation. Those days are gone!

In a recent sermon in an ecumenical celebration, one of our members said "I am an Anglican priest, I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. I don't know King Henry VIII. I only heard about him in theological college. We can't be divided by European history which we inherited. Pardon me – I know Jesus ... he died for me." Thanks be to God we crossed the barriers of apartheid and the Berlin wall fell down. We are now gradually growing together as churches, trying to follow Jesus, who prayed "that they may be one".

### **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Themes 1968-2007**

In 1968, materials officially prepared jointly by the WCC Faith and Order Commission and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity began to be used.

- 1968 To the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1: 14)  
Pour la louange de sa gloire
- 1969 Called to freedom (Galatians 5: 13)  
Appelés à la liberté  
*(Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)*
- 1970 We are fellow workers for God (1 Corinthians 3: 9)  
Nous sommes les coopérateurs de Dieu  
*(Preparatory meeting held at the Monastery of Niederaltaich,  
Federal Republic of Germany)*
- 1971 ...and the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13: 13)  
...et la communion du Saint-Esprit
- 1972 I give you a new commandment (John 13: 34)  
Je vous donne un commandement nouveau  
*(Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)*

- 1973 Lord, teach us to pray (Luke 11: 1)  
Seigneur, apprends-nous à prier  
*(Preparatory meeting held at the Abbey of Montserrat, Spain)*
- 1974 That every tongue confess: Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2: 1-13)  
Que tous confessent: Jésus-Christ est Seigneur  
*(Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)*
- 1975 God's purpose: all things in Christ (Ephesians 1: 3-10)  
La volonté du Père: Tout réunir sous un seul chef, le Christ  
*(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  
Appelés à devenir ce que nous sommes  
*(Material from Caribbean Conference of Churches. Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)*
- 1977 Enduring together in hope (Romans 5: 1-5)  
L'espérance ne déçoit pas  
*(Material from Lebanon, in the midst of a civil war. Preparatory meeting held in Geneva)*
- 1978 No longer strangers (Ephesians 2: 13-22)  
Vous n'êtes plus des étrangers  
*(Material from an ecumenical team in Manchester, England)*
- 1979 Serve one another to the glory of God (1 Peter 4: 7-11)  
Soyez au service les uns des autres pour la gloire de Dieu  
*(Material from Argentina - preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)*
- 1980 Your kingdom come (Matthew 6: 10)  
Que ton règne vienne!  
*(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)  
Un seul esprit - des dons divers - un seul corps  
*(Material from Graymoor Fathers, USA - preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)*
- 1982 May all find their home in you, O Lord (Psalm 84)  
Que tous trouvent leur demeure en Toi, Seigneur  
*(Material from Kenya - preparatory meeting held in Milan, Italy)*
- 1983 Jesus Christ - the Life of the World (1 John 1: 1-4)  
Jesus Christ - La Vie du Monde  
*(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 Cor 2: 2 and Col 1: 20)  
Appelés à l'unité par la croix de notre Seigneur  
*(Preparatory meeting held in Venice, Italy)*
- 1985 From death to life with Christ (Ephesians 2: 4-7)  
De la mort à la vie avec le Christ  
*(Material from Jamaica - preparatory meeting held in Grandchamp, Switzerland)*
- 1986 You shall be my witnesses (Acts 1: 6-8)  
Vous serez mes témoins  
*(Material from Yugoslavia (Slovenia), preparatory meeting held in Yugoslavia)*
- 1987 United in Christ - a New Creation (2 Corinthians 5: 17-6: 4a)  
Unis dans le Christ - une nouvelle création  
*(Material from England, preparatory meeting held in Taizé, France)*
- 1988 The love of God casts out fear (1 John 4: 18)  
L'Amour de Dieu bannit la Crainte  
*(Material from Italy - preparatory meeting held in Pinerolo, Italy)*
- 1989 Building community: one body in Christ (Romans 12: 5-6a)  
Bâtir la communauté: Un seul corps en Christ  
*(Material from Canada - preparatory meeting held in Whaley Bridge, England)*
- 1990 That they all may be one...That the world may believe (John 17)  
Que tous soient un...Afin que le monde croie  
*(Material from Spain - preparatory meeting held in Madrid, Spain)*
- 1991 Praise the Lord, all you nations! (Psalm 117 and Romans 15: 5-13)  
Nations, louez toutes le Seigneur  
*(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)  
Pour l'unité: laisser mûrir en nous les fruits de l'Esprit  
*(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)  
La maison de Dieu: Appelés à être un dans le cœur et dans l'esprit  
*(Material from Ireland - preparatory meeting held in Dublin, Republic of Ireland)*
- 1995 Koinonia: communion in God and with one another (John 15: 1-17)  
La koinonia: communion en Dieu et les uns avec les autres  
*(Material from Faith and Order, preparatory meeting held in Bristol, England)*

- 1996 Behold, I stand at the door and knock (Revelation 3: 14-22)  
Je me tiens à la porte et je frappe  
*(Preparatory material from Portugal, meeting held in Lisbon, Portugal)*
- 1997 We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5: 20)  
Au nom du Christ, laissez-vous reconcilier avec Dieu  
*(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  
*(Preparatory material from France, meeting held in Paris, France)*
- 1999 He will dwell with them as their God, they will be his peoples  
(Revelation 21: 1-7)  
Dieu demeurera avec eux. Ils seront ses peuples  
et lui sera le Dieu qui est avec eux  
*(Preparatory material from Malaysia, meeting held in Monastery of Bose, Italy)*
- 2000 Blessed be God who has blessed us in Christ (Ephesians 1: 3-14)  
Béni soit Dieu, qui nous a bénis en Christ  
*(Preparatory material from the Middle East Council of Churches, meeting held La Verna, Italy)*
- 2001 I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (John 14: 1-6)  
Je suis le chemin, et la vérité et la vie  
*(Preparatory material from Romania and meeting held at Vulcan, Romania)*
- 2002 For with you is the fountain of life (Psalm 36: 5-9)  
Car chez toi est la fontaine de la vie (Psalm 35, 6-10)  
*(Preparatory material CEEC and CEC, meeting near Augsburg, Germany)*
- 2003 We have this treasure in clay jars (2 Corinthians 4: 4-18)  
Car nous avons ce trésor dans des vases d'argile  
*(Preparatory material churches in Argentina, meeting at Los Rubios, Spain)*
- 2004 My peace I give to you (John 14: 23-31; John 14: 27)  
Je vous donne ma paix  
*(Preparatory material from Aleppo, Syria - meeting in Palermo, Sicily)*
- 2005 Christ, the one foundation of the church (1 Corinthians 3 1-23)  
Le Christ, unique fondement de l'Eglise  
*(Preparatory material from Slovakia - meeting in Piestaňy, Slovakia)*
- 2006 Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them (Mt 18: 18-20)  
Là où deux ou trois se trouvent réunis en mon nom, je suis au milieu d'eux.  
*(Preparatory material from Ireland - meeting held in Prosperous, Co. Kildare, Ireland)*
- 2007 He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak (Mk 7: 31-37)

Il fait entendre les sourds et parler les muets  
*(Preparatory material from South Africa – meeting held in Faverges, France)*

### **Some key dates in the history of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**

- ca. 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 The 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 (Lyon, 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).
- 1965 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, linking the major Christian groupings in that country.
- 1994 Text for 1996 prepared in collaboration with 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).