

**RESOURCES FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY
AND THROUGHOUT THE YEAR 2008**

Pray without ceasing
(Thess. 1:5,17)

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Scripture quotations:

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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 feasts of St Peter and St Paul, and therefore have a symbolic significance. *In the southern hemisphere* where January is a vacation time churches often find other days to celebrate the week of prayer, for example around Pentecost (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.

1 Thessalonians 5: 12a, 13b-18

But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters... Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, beloved to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Introduction to the Theme of the Week of Prayer for 2008

The 'Week of Prayer for Christian Unity' for 2008 celebrates the 100th anniversary of the inauguration of the 'Church Unity Octave'. Behind this shift in terminology lies a history of developments in prayer for Christian unity, an overview of which is given in the opening section of this Introduction to the Theme. A second section introduces the biblical text and theme chosen for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 2008. This is followed by a brief reflection on 'spiritual ecumenism' as a framework within which prayer for Christian unity can be helpfully understood. The introduction concludes with an outline of the structure for the eight days of the unity octave for this year.

An important anniversary

One hundred years ago, Father Paul Wattson, Episcopal (Anglican) priest and co-founder of the Society of the Atonement at Graymoor (Garrison, New York), introduced a Prayer Octave for Christian Unity that was first celebrated from 18 to 25 January 1908. Exactly sixty years later, in 1968, churches and parishes around the world received for the first time material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which had been jointly prepared by Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (Catholic Church).

Today the cooperation between Anglican, Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic churches, parishes and communities in preparing for and celebrating the week of prayer has become a familiar practice. This simple fact is in itself a strong evidence for the effectiveness of prayer for unity. It gives us every right to speak about the history of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity as one of success, and a reason for great joy and gratitude.

Antecedents of the Week of Prayer

Taking the occasion of these two anniversaries to look at the history of the week of prayer, it is of course evident that praying for unity is not an invention of the last century. Jesus himself prayed to the Father "that they all may be one"; Christians have made this prayer their own in myriad ways ever since. In the midst of our divisions, Christians of all traditions have prayed with an awareness of their union with the prayer of Christ for the unity of all his disciples. The ancient daily liturgy of the Orthodox churches, for example, invites the faithful to pray for peace and for the unity of all.

The antecedents of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity date back to the middle of the 19th century. The importance and the need of prayer, and not least, of prayer for unity among divided Christians, was emphasized in a number of different church movements and circles – among them the Oxford Movement, the Evangelical Alliance and various women's prayer initiatives. In his Irenic Letter to all local Orthodox churches in 1902 the Ecumenical Patriarch Joachim III emphasized that the unity of all Christians is a "subject of constant prayer and supplication".

Paul Wattson and Paul Couturier

When Father Paul Wattson conceived and implemented the octave of prayer - which is regarded as the beginning of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity as it is currently celebrated - he saw unity as the return of the different churches to the Roman Catholic Church. This influenced his choice of dates for the octave, from 18 January, which was at that time in the Roman Catholic calendar the 'Feast of the Chair of Peter', up to 25 January, the Feast of the Conversion of Paul. After the Society of the Atonement had been corporately

received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1909, Pope St Pius X gave the octave for unity his official blessing.

In the mid-1930's, Abbé Paul Couturier of Lyons, France, gave a new orientation to the church unity octave. By this time, the observance of the octave had started to spread throughout the Catholic Church and in a small number of Anglican communities sympathetic to reunion with the bishop of Rome; but this approach was rejected on theological grounds by many Christians outside the Roman Catholic Church. Abbé Paul maintained the dates of 18–25 January, but changed the terminology; the 'Universal Week of Prayer for Christian Unity' which he promoted was to pray for the unity of the church "as Christ wills it".

Faith and Order

We can also identify another stream of initiatives of prayer for Christian unity as part of the week of prayer's origins. In 1915, *A Manual of Prayer for Christian Unity* was printed for 'The Commission of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America on the World Conference on Faith and Order'. The short introduction emphasized the hope that different communions each prayed for unity, but not necessarily that they physically prayed together. Neither was there an expectation that "liturgical churches like the Roman Catholic and the Holy Eastern Orthodox Church" would make use of their material, but rather, that they would draw on their own rich heritage and resources of prayers for Christian unity.

From 1921 onwards the Continuation Committee for the World Conference on Faith and Order published material for an Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity and suggested that it be held during the eight days ending with Pentecost. In 1941 the Commission on Faith and Order moved these dates to January to coincide with the Catholic initiative so that both streams would invite Christians to pray at the same time. From 1958 onwards the material prepared by Faith and Order was in large part coordinated with the Roman Catholic material prepared in Lyons, and from 1960 the material was discussed together in detail, albeit in a discreet manner, since these ecumenical endeavours were not yet officially encouraged by the Catholic Church.

Towards a common celebration of the Week of Prayer

It was on 25 January, 1959, at the conclusion of the prayer for unity octave, that Pope John XXIII called for the Second Vatican Council, which brought the Catholic Church energetically into the ecumenical movement. The Council also finally opened the door for official cooperation between the World Council of Churches' Secretariat on Faith and Order and the Vatican's Secretariat for Promoting Unity. A joint consultation on the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was held in 1966 resulting in the establishment of a joint working group on the material for the week of prayer. In 1968 the first product of that group was ready for use. Beginning in 1973, each year an ecumenical group from a different part of the world has been invited to prepare a first draft of week of prayer materials, which the international joint preparatory group then revises. To travel in this way around the globe underlines the truly ecumenical character of the week of prayer. This long history of joint preparation and celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity finally led in 2004 to the full joint publication of the material by Faith and Order and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

The biblical text and theme chosen for 2008

The biblical text for this centennial Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is taken from 1 Thessalonians. The text "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5: 17) stresses the essential role of

prayer within the life of the Christian community as its members grow in their relationship to Christ and to one another. This text is one in a series of ‘imperatives’, statements in which Paul encourages the community to live out its God-given unity in Christ, to *be* in practice what it is in principle: the one body of Christ, visibly one in that place.

The letter to the Thessalonians, dating from 50 or 51 AD and considered by most exegetes to be the earliest of Paul’s known letters, reflects Paul’s intense relationship with the Christian community in Thessalonica. Fresh from persecution in Philippi – where Paul and his companions Silvanus and Timothy had been attacked by a mob, beaten at the command of the town magistrates, and thrown into prison (Acts 17: 1-9) – Paul had established the church in Thessalonica in a few weeks of concentrated work before fresh attacks drove him on to Berea and from there, to Athens (17: 10-15). Paul had high hopes for the church in Thessalonica; its growth in faith, hope and love, its reception of the word despite suffering, and its joy in the Holy Spirit all drew his admiration and praise (1 Thess 1: 2-10). Yet he was concerned. His hasty departure had not left him time to consolidate the work he had begun, and he had received disturbing reports. Some challenges were external, notably, persecution of the community and its members (1 Thess 2: 14). Others were internal: some were behaving in ways typical of the culture around them rather than of the new life in Christ (4: 1-8); some in the community had raised questions about those in positions of leadership and authority, including Paul himself (cf. 2: 3-7, 10); and some despaired at the fate of those who were dying before the return of Christ. Would they be denied a place in God’s kingdom? Was the promise of salvation, for them and perhaps for others, empty and void (cf. 4: 13)?

Fearing that his work had been in vain and “able to bear it no longer” (3:1) Paul, unable himself to return, had sent Timothy to Thessalonica. Timothy had returned with news of the community’s strong faith and love, and its continued loyalty to Paul himself. 1 Thessalonians was Paul’s response to this good news – but also to the challenges facing the growing church. He wrote first to thank the community for its strength in the face of persecution. Second, for all his relief and joy at Timothy’s report, he recognized in it the seeds of division within the church, and thus hastened to address the diverse questions raised within the community about personal behaviour (4: 9-12), leadership (5: 12-13a) and the hope of eternal life in Christ (4: 14-5: 11).

One of Paul’s central aims was to build up the community in its unity. Even death does not break the bonds which unite it as the one body of Christ; Christ has died and risen for all, so that at Christ’s coming both those who have already fallen asleep, and those still living “may live with him” (5: 10). This brought Paul to the imperatives in the text (1 Thessalonians 5: 13b-18), which have been chosen from a slightly longer list of exhortations to form the basis for this year’s week of prayer. The passage begins with Paul’s plea that the members of the community “be at peace among yourselves” (5: 13b) – a peace which is not simply the absence of conflict but a state of harmony in which the gifts of all within the community contribute to its thriving and growth.

Strikingly, Paul did not offer abstract theological teaching nor did he speak about emotions or feelings. Just as in the famous text on love from 1 Corinthians 13, he called rather for specific actions, actual ways of behaving, through which members of the community reveal their commitment and accountability to one another within the one body of Christ. Love is to be put into practice and made visible.

The imperatives themselves, the ‘things that make for peace’, he lists as follows: ensuring the contribution of all and encouraging the fainthearted, helping the weak, being patient with all, not repaying evil for evil but doing good to one another and to all, rejoicing always, praying without ceasing, giving thanks in all circumstances (5: 14-18a). The section chosen then concludes with the affirmation that, in doing these things, the community is living out “the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (5: 18b).

The appeal to “pray without ceasing” (5: 17) is embedded within this list of imperatives. This emphasizes that life in Christian community is possible only through a life of prayer. Further, it shows that prayer is an integral part of the life of Christians precisely as they seek to manifest the unity which is given them in Christ – a unity which is not limited to doctrinal agreements and formal statements, but finds expression in the things that make for peace, in concrete actions which express and build up their unity in Christ and with one another.

Christ’s prayer – and Christian unity

In our baptism we commit ourselves to the following of Christ and the fulfilment of his will. This will for his followers was expressed in a prayer for unity so that others would come to believe in him as the one sent by God. Prayer that joins Jesus’ prayer for unity has come to be referred to by some churches as an expression of ‘spiritual ecumenism’. This prayer is most intense during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity but needs to flow out of this observance into our daily lives. We realize that Christian unity cannot be solely the fruit of human efforts, but is always the work of the Holy Spirit. We cannot as humans make or organize it. We can only receive it as a gift of the Spirit when we ourselves are prepared to receive it.

Spiritual ecumenism calls forth an exchange of spiritual gifts so that what is lacking in each of our traditions finds its needed complement; this enables us to go beyond denominational labels to the Giver of all gifts. The surprising thing about prayer is that its first effect is in us. Our own minds and hearts are shaped by prayer as we seek opportunities to translate that prayer into practice, the true test of its authenticity. Spiritual ecumenism leads us to a healing of our memories. We face those difficult events of the past that give rise to competing interpretations of what happened and why. As a result, we can go beyond those things which have kept us divided. In other words, the goal of spiritual ecumenism is Christian unity that leads us into mission for the glory of God.

If believers are to follow Jesus, they must work and pray for Christian unity. However, the churches have differing visions of the *visible unity* for which we are praying. For some, full visible unity is the goal, bringing churches together in common confession, worship and sacraments, witness, decision-making and structured life. Others look to a ‘reconciled diversity’, with the present churches working together to present a coherent witness to the world. For still others unity is found rather in the invisible bonds linking us to Christ and with one another, with an emphasis on personal ways of living one’s faith in the world.

In this context, prayer for Christian unity is a challenging prayer. It is prayer that effects change in our own personal identity as well as in our confessional identity. Ultimately it means that we will give up our way of seeing unity in favour of concentrating on seeing what God wants for his people. However this does not mean that we will divest ourselves of our uniqueness, for unity naturally expresses itself in diversity. It is unity in diversity which reflects the mystery of communion in love, as seen in God’s own being.

The eight days

The meditations for the eight days in this year's material for the week of prayer build on the notion that prayer for Christian unity, spiritual ecumenism, is foundational to all other aspects of the search for unity among Christians. They offer a sustained reflection on the theme of prayer for unity, each drawing attention to one aspect or concern of such prayer, and making a connection to one of the imperatives which St Paul addresses to the Christian community in Thessalonica. The opening meditation presents unity as a gift and a call to the church, and ponders what it means to "pray without ceasing" for unity. Day 2 invites Christians to trust in God and to give thanks as we work and pray for unity, mindful that it is the Holy Spirit who is directing our ecumenical pilgrimage. The need for an ongoing conversion of our hearts, both as individuals and as churches, is the focus of the third reflection. Day 4 is entitled 'Pray always for justice', and challenges Christians to a Christ-centred prayer which leads us to work together in responding to injustice and to the needs of suffering humanity.

Patience and perseverance go hand in hand in Christian life, and Day 5 invites a prayerful attentiveness to the different paces and rhythms of our sisters and brothers as we strive for the unity Christ desires for his disciples. The meditation for Day 6 encourages prayer for the grace to be willing instruments of God in this reconciling work. Day 7 suggests that as we have learned to work together in responding to others in their distress, so too we might learn how to walk together in prayer, learning to appreciate the many different ways in which Christians turn to God in their need. The final meditation of the eight days takes stock of where we are on the Spirit-led journey to unity, calling us and our churches to recommit ourselves to pray and strive with our whole being for the unity and peace willed by God.

The Preparation of Material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2008

The initial draft of material was prepared by the Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute, New York, New York, USA, Father James Loughran, SA, Director, in consultation with Dr Ann Riggs, Executive Director of the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches of Christ USA; Dr Keelan Downton, Doctoral Fellow; the Reverend James Massa, Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; and Ms Susan Dennis, President and Executive Director of the Interchurch Center, New York, NY, USA.

It represents the working relationship between the Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute, the NCCCUSA, the USCCB and the Interchurch Center in their annual efforts in the United States to promote the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. All those involved have taken special note of the 100th anniversary of the Church Unity Octave first observed at Graymoor, in Garrison, New York from 18-25 January 1908. The preparation of the theme and texts celebrate the history of 100 years of prayer while calling for a reinvigoration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, hence the theme, 'Pray without ceasing'.

The material was adapted to 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 international group met at Graymoor, NY, in September 2006, and its members wish to extend their thanks to the Franciscan Friars and Sisters of the Atonement for their gracious hospitality, and to all who were involved in preparing the initial draft.

Introduction to the Worship Service

The proposed worship service recalls the deep-rooted American religious belief in the power of prayer. It includes elements of Roman Catholic liturgy and features drawn from liturgies of other mainline Christian traditions, with particular contributions from Protestant pietism and American pentecostalism. Spirituals inspired by the gospel are recommended for the sung parts. The service comprises three distinct parts in relation with the themes of the eight days.

The order of service

The first part begins with a litany of prayers to the Holy Spirit, asking for the gift of unity among Christians and for those gifts which lead to unity. The central element in this first part is the word of God; the general theme of the readings is the call to search for the will of God, accompanied by constant prayer (Is 55: 6-9 ; 1 Thess 5: 13b-18), in particular, prayer united to Christ's own prayer that his disciples be one (Jn 17: 6-21). The sermon is followed by a moment of silence and then thanksgiving, gratefully acknowledging the work of the Spirit in the hearts and lives of those who contributed to the birth and development of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (see introduction).

In the second part of the worship service all join together to share prayer requests and exchange a sign of peace, and a collection is taken up. The sign of peace and the collection are placed here in order to underline their value as signs of already existing communion and solidarity. Hymns and songs might strengthen the expression of 'active faith' and the hope signified by these acts and intercessions.

The third part comprises the confession of faith, the blessing and the prayer of sending. The symbol of light is proposed. This concluding section celebrates the joy of confessing together our faith in the risen Christ, light of our lives (Col 1: 12-20), leading to a renewed commitment – personal and in community – to pray without ceasing and to work for Christian unity. We are sent forth with God's blessing. The members of the congregation then leave the worship space each holding a lighted candle/taper, symbolising the fact that Christians are called to be constant both in prayer for unity, of which Christ is the source, and in ecumenical action in the presence of the risen Christ.

Order of Service

Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5 : 17)

L *Worship Leader*
R *Readers*
A *All*

Opening hymn and procession

The worship leaders and participants in the service can enter in procession during the singing of the hymn. It is suggested that one of them carry either an oil lamp or a lighted candle which will be placed in view of the congregation, for example on the altar/communion table bearing the Bible. Those present will already have received an unlit candle/taper on entering the church.

I. Welcome, invocation of the Holy Spirit and proclamation of the word of God

Word of welcome:

The worship leader or the pastor of the host congregation welcomes the assembly in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, then says:

L Together let us call upon the Holy Spirit, light of our hearts, breath of life and power of the Father made manifest in the death and resurrection of Jesus. May he continue today his work of reconciliation and communion as it began with the preaching of the apostles. Do we not recognise this work of the Spirit in every step towards fuller communion in love, towards reconciliation and justice, in the ecumenical movement and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity over this last one hundred years?

One of the leaders briefly introduces the 2008 celebration, placing it within the framework of the centenary of the establishment by Paul Wattson, in 1908, of the prayer for unity octave, forerunner of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

L We start our prayer by invoking the triune unity of our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Let us welcome God into our hearts, as God welcomes us into his own through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

A *Amen*

L Let us pray to the Father to send us the gifts of his Holy Spirit: that our hearts may open to his presence, that he may be present in our prayers and lead us into his communion. The unity of the church is the work of the Holy Spirit. We can never succeed by our own means. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit may descend upon each of us, that he may bless the church of God with his grace and unite us in Christ.

L Come, Holy Spirit!

A *Fill our hearts with grace!*

L Come, Holy Spirit!

A *Free us from doubt and mistrust!*

L Come, Holy Spirit!

A *Give us faith to go forward!*

L Come, Holy Spirit!

A *Transform our hearts of stone!*

L Come, Holy Spirit!

A *Bring God's justice to our world!*

L Come, Holy Spirit

A *Help us to understand that we are sisters and brothers!*

L Come, Holy Spirit !

A *Break down the walls between us!*

L Come, Holy Spirit!

A *Give us your gifts that we may share them!*

L Come, Holy Spirit !

A *Intercede for us, Spirit of the Father, whose profound sighs go further than our words!*

L Come, Holy Spirit!

A *Unite all Christians in Christ our Lord!*

A hymn to the Holy Spirit is sung: e.g. 'Veni Creator Spiritus', 'Veni Sancte Spiritus' (Taizé), 'Come Holy Ghost', or the American spiritual, 'Come Holy Spirit'.

L May there be a new and ongoing Pentecost. May our churches commit themselves once more to pray for the full unity of all Christians, and our prayers be added to a century of prayers "that all may be one". We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

A *Amen*

The word of God

R Is 55: 6-9 *Seek the Lord while he may be found*

*Psalm 34, sung or read responsively.
This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord*

R 1 Thess 5: (12a) 13b-18 *Pray without ceasing*

Sung Alleluia

R John 17: 6-21 *That all may be one*

Sermon

(Silence)

Thanksgiving

For gifts received within the ecumenical movement and through the faithfulness of Christians praying for unity in Christ. According to the context the congregation might evoke more explicitly the fruits of the ecumenical movement and the prayer for unity at a local or global level.

All *Truly our God is great,
Our hearts are filled with wonder!*

L We give thanks to you for Jesus your Servant whose name is called
Upon by the multitude among the 'nations';

R1 We give thanks to you for the Christ, your envoy,
he who gathers your scattered children;

R2 We give thanks to you for your Holy Spirit;
he is our communion and leads us into the unity of one faith;

R1 We give thanks to you for all who were pioneers in the search for
Christian unity, be they well known like Father Paul Wattson
and the Abbé Couturier or quite unknown -
faithful lay people, monks and nuns, all the servants of Christian unity
who have responded to your call.

- R2 We give thanks for the abundant fruits of this unceasing prayer for unity in Christ, rising up from all the continents.
- R1 During one whole century you have heard this constant prayer which has brought forth so much fruit.
- R2 May your Spirit encourage us to persevere in prayer and may we ever keep alive the memory of active faith of all the ‘saints’ – pioneers, theologians and those who have been faithful in prayer for the ecumenical movement, in their love of the gospel and of the church.
- L Now, O God our Father, from the depth of our memory and of our hearts we turn towards you and praise you with all those whom your Word has illumined and called, that your Holy Spirit might move us: those whom you desire to bring together in one baptism, one faith and one communion, in praise of your glorious name.

The opening line of praise could be inserted between each verse of thanksgiving.

Song expressing praise, thanksgiving, glorification of God. For example, the Trisagion, Gloria. Some psalms would be suitable accompanied by a brief introduction : Ps 33, Ps 34, Ps 36 (English, NRSV)

II. Prayers of intercession and symbolic gestures of unity

Intercessions

- L Let us pray to the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, for the needs of our churches, our world and ourselves.
- L We pray without ceasing for the unity of all Christians.
- A Lord, have mercy on us and hear us!*
- L We pray without ceasing for the leaders of our churches and faith communities, that they may persevere in the task of pursuing Christian unity.
- A Christ, have mercy on us and hear us!*
- L We pray for all the baptized, that they may ever pray that “all may be one...so that the world may believe”.
- A Lord, have mercy on us and hear us!*
- L For the churches and faith communities which risk further division and schisms, that their unity might be preserved.
- A Christ, have mercy on us and hear us!*

L For the councils of churches throughout the world at national and local level, and that the work which they accomplish together might be a witness to the gospel in the world.

A *Lord, have mercy on us and hear us!*

L For the ecumenical dialogues between and among our churches, communions and faith communities, so that whatever divides us might be overcome through wisdom, love and truth.

A *Christ, have mercy on us and hear us!*

L That all Christians might witness to the gospel, turning away from all that is destructive, to embrace justice, peace and solidarity. For the poor, the oppressed, victims of war and of violence. For the broken hearted and for those who are hated and maltreated.

A *Lord, have mercy on us and hear us!*

L We pray that the Lord may hear and respond to our constant prayers, through Christ our Lord.

A *Amen*

The sign of peace

L Peace be with you.

A And also with you.

L Having prayed to God for the forgiveness of our sins, and as we ourselves forgive each other, let us now exchange a sign of peace and seal our unity in prayer, in faith, love and in the hope of full communion.

Participants exchange a sign of peace. A hymn is sung while the participants afterwards return to their places.

Collection

III. Commitment to constant prayer and ecumenical action, blessing and prayer of dismissal

Lighting of candles

(Instrumental music during the lighting of the candles/tapers)

From the worship space, the candles or tapers of the people in the first row of the congregation are lit. From there the light will be spread all over the church. When all the candles are lit, all proclaim the confession of faith together. (The Nicene or Apostles' Creed could be used instead.)

Confession of faith in the Risen Christ, our unity and the light of our lives

A May we joyfully give thanks to the Father who has enabled us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers of powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col 1 : 12-20)

Our Father

For the Lord's prayer, members of the congregation are invited to leave their places and to either come to the front of the church or into the worship space. If possible, one or more concentric circles can be formed. If this conforms to local custom, the participants could hold hands while praying.

L Let us join our minds, hearts and voices with all Christians throughout the world, as we pray together in the words Jesus gave us:

A Our Father...

Ecumenical commitment *(lighted candle in hand)*

A Lord we have glorified you for the grace you have given us in the ecumenical movement. In the joy of being called to serve you in the one search for Christian unity, we acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit and the admirable diversity of gifts and talents of the Spirit destined to be shared. We commit ourselves to persevere in constant prayer for Christian unity, and through concrete gestures of reconciliation, to seek to bring forth perfect unity in your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Blessing

L Let us leave this place glad to have worshiped together and been called to pray without ceasing while we wait for that great day when we shall all be perfectly united in Christ.

L The Lord Jesus Christ be with you

A And with your spirit

L *(The worship leaders can say these words together).*
May the Lord bless you/us and keep you/us. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you/us and keep you/us. May the Lord be gracious unto you/us and give you/us his peace.

A *Amen*

L May the Lord bless us in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

A *Amen*

L Let us go in peace, praying constantly and rejoicing in hope, while never ceasing to thank God

A *Let us give thanks to God*

(Final procession, lit candle/taper in hand)

The leaders of the local churches, pastors, ministers, readers and other participants in the worship process out of the church with the lit candles. A hymn or song may be sung during this concluding/retiring procession, underlining the commitment of Christians in the mission of unity; for example, 'Lord you give the great commission' or 'The church's one foundation' or the spiritual 'There'll be peace in the valley' would be appropriate.

Significance of this symbolic act within the framework of the worship service:

Like a watchman awaiting the return of Christ, each member of the congregation holds the lit candle/taper, sign of his or her commitment to pray without ceasing for Christian unity, in hope and in the light of our paschal faith. This symbol underlines our desire to hasten the coming of the Lord (a major theme of the letters to the Thessalonians) and to pray and work for unity.

The symbolism of the light recalls the celebration of Easter: Christ, our Passover, present and working through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, is the light of the dawning of a new day for the world, a world henceforth called to renounce the shadows of sin, division and hatred. Is it not in the power of the Risen Christ, and at the prompting of the Spirit of the Father, light of our hearts and inspiration of our lives, that we are called to cooperate with other Christians in making visible the unity of the church of Christ?

Day 1

Pray always

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5: 17)

Is 55:6-9	Seek the Lord while he may be found
Ps 34	I sought the Lord, and he answered me
1 Thess 5: (12a) 13b-18	Pray without ceasing
Lk 18:1-8	To pray always and not to lose heart

Commentary

Paul writes “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”. His epistle is written to a faithful community that is anxious about death. Many good and believing brothers and sisters have “fallen asleep” before the Lord’s return to bring all into his resurrection. What will happen to these faithful dead? What will happen to the living? Paul assures them that the dead shall be raised with the living and exhorts them to “pray without ceasing”. What does it mean to pray without ceasing? We find insights to answer this question in today’s readings. Our whole lives are to be a seeking of the Lord, convinced that in seeking, we shall find.

In the midst of the Exile, when all seemed hopeless and dry, the prophet Isaiah proclaims, “Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near”. Even in exile, the Lord is near and urging his people to turn to him in prayer and to follow his commandments so that they may know his mercy and pardon. Psalm 34 affirms the prophetic conviction that the Lord will answer those who call upon him, and adds praise to the call to pray without ceasing.

In Luke’s gospel, Jesus teaches his disciples with the parable of the widow seeking justice from a judge who neither feared God nor respected people. The story serves as a reminder of the need for constancy in prayer - “to pray always and not to lose heart” - and for confidence that prayer is answered: “will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?”

As Christians in search of unity, we reflect on these readings to find “the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”. It is Christ who lives within us. Our call to pray without ceasing becomes part of his eternal intercession to the Father: “that all may be one, ... that the world may believe...”. The unity we seek is unity ‘as Christ wills’ and the ‘octave’ observance of Christian prayer for unity reflects the biblical notion of completion, that some day our prayer will be answered.

Unity is a God-given gift to the church. It is also a call of Christians to live out this gift. Prayer for Christian unity is the source from which flows all human endeavour to manifest full visible unity. Many are the fruits of one hundred years of an octave of prayer for Christian unity. Many are also the barriers which still divide Christians and their churches. If we are not to lose heart, we must be steadfast in prayer so that we may seek the Lord and his will in all we do and all we are.

Prayer

Lord of unity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we pray without ceasing that we may be one, as you are one. Father, hear us as we seek you. Christ, draw us to the unity which is your will for us. Spirit, may we never lose heart. Amen.

Day 2

Pray always, trusting God alone.

Give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thess 5: 18)

1 Kings 18:20-40	The Lord indeed is God
Ps 23	The Lord is my shepherd
1 Thess 5: (12a)13b-18	Give thanks in all circumstances
Jn 11:17-44	Father, I thank you for having heard me

Commentary

Praying is rooted in the trust that God is powerful and faithful. God alone is the one who holds all in his hands, the present and the future. His word is credible and truthful.

The story of Elijah in 1 Kings impressively demonstrates the oneness of God. Elijah berates the apostates who worship Baal, who is not answering their prayers. Yet when Elijah prays to the one God of Israel, the response is immediate and miraculous. Realizing this, the people turned their hearts back to God.

Psalm 23 is a profound confession of trust. It depicts a person who believes that God guides him and stays with him also in the darkness of life and in situations of desolation and oppression.

We may find circumstances that may be difficult, even turbulent. We may have moments of despair and resignation. Sometimes we feel that God is hidden. But he is not absent. He will manifest his power to liberate in the midst of human struggle. Thus we give thanks to him in all circumstances.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is one of the most dramatic scenes recorded in John's gospel. It is a manifestation of Christ's power to break the bonds of death and an anticipation of the new creation. In the presence of the people Jesus prays aloud, thanking his Father for the mighty deeds he will do. God's saving work is accomplished through Christ so that all will come to believe.

The ecumenical pilgrimage is a way in which we realize the wondrous deeds of God. Christian communities which have been separated from each other come together. They discover their unity in Christ and come to understand that they are each part of one church and need one another.

The vision of unity can be darkened. It is sometimes threatened by frustrations and tensions. The question may arise whether we Christians are truly called to stay together. Our continuous praying sustains us as we look to God and trust in him. We are confident that he is still at work in us and will lead us to the light of his victory. His kingdom begins with our reconciliation and growing unity.

Prayer

God of all creation, hear your children as we pray. Help us keep our faith and trust in you. Teach us to give thanks in all circumstances, relying on your mercy. Give us truth and wisdom, that your church may arise to new life in one fellowship. You alone are our hope. Amen.

Day 3

Pray without ceasing for the conversion of hearts

Admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted (1Thess 5 : 14)

Jon 3: 1-10	The repentance of Nineveh
Ps 51: 8-15	Create a pure heart in me
1 Thess 5: (12a)13b-18	Encourage the faint-hearted
Mk 11: 15-17	A house of prayer

Commentary

In the beginning and at the heart of the ecumenical enterprise can be found a pressing call to repentance and to conversion. We sometimes need to know how to call each other to task within our Christian communities as Paul invites us to do in the first epistle to the Thessalonians. If one or the other causes division, he should be rebuked; if some are afraid of all that a difficult reconciliation could imply, they should be encouraged.

Why hide the fact? If divisions between Christians exist, it is also through a lack of will to be committed to ecumenical dialogue and even, simply, to prayer for unity.

The Bible tells us how God sent Jonah to rebuke Nineveh and how the whole city repented. In the same way, Christian communities must listen to the Word of God and repent. In the course of the last century, we have not been lacking in prophets of unity who have made Christians aware of the unfaithfulness manifest in our divisions and reminding them of the urgency of reconciliation.

In the image of the vigorous intervention of Jesus in the temple, the call to Christian reconciliation can seriously call into question our narrow self-understanding. We too have a great need of purification. We need to know how to rid our hearts of all that prevents them from being a true house of prayer, concerned for the unity of all peoples.

Prayer

Lord you desire truth deep-down within us: in the secret of our hearts, you teach us wisdom. Teach us to encourage each other along the road to unity. Show us the conversion necessary for reconciliation. Give to each of us a new, truly ecumenical heart, we pray you. Amen.

Day 4

Pray always for justice

See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all (1 Thess 5: 15)

Ex 3: 1-12	God hears the cry of the Israelites
Ps 146	The Lord...secures justice for the oppressed
1 Thess 5: (12a) 13b-18	See that none of you repays evil for evil
Mt 5: 38-42	Offer no resistance to one who is evil

Commentary

Together as God's people, we are called to pray for justice. God hears the cry of the oppressed, the needy, the orphan and the widow. God is a God of justice and answers with his Son, Jesus Christ, who commands us to work together in unity through peace and not through violence. Paul also emphasizes this in the words "see that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all".

Christians pray without ceasing for justice, that every single human person will be treated with dignity and given a fair share in this world. In the United States of America, the injustice of the slavery of Africans ended only with a bloodletting civil war, followed by a century of state-sponsored racism. Even the churches were segregated according to colour. Sadly, racism and other forms of bigotry, such as fear of the alien, still linger in American life.

Yet it was through the efforts of the churches, particularly the African-American churches and their ecumenical partners, and most especially through the non-violent resistance of the Rev. Dr Martin Luther King, Jr, that civil rights for all were enshrined in American law. His deep-rooted conviction that only Christ-like love truly conquers hate and brings about the transformation of society continues to inspire Christians, drawing them together to work for justice. Dr King's birthday is a national holiday in the USA. Each year, it falls either just before or within the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

God heard and responded to the cries of the Israelites. God continues to hear and respond to the cries of all who are oppressed. Jesus reminds us that God's justice is embodied in his own willingness to sacrifice his own security, his own power and prestige and his very life to bring to our world the justice and reconciliation through which all human beings are treated as equal in worth and dignity.

It is only as we hear and respond to the cries of the oppressed that we can move forward together on the road to unity. This also applies to the ecumenical movement, where we may be required to "go the extra mile" in our willingness to listen to one another, reject vindictiveness and act in charity.

Prayer

Lord God, you created humanity, male and female, in the divine image. May we pray without ceasing and with one mind and heart that those who are hungry in our world will be nourished, that those who are oppressed will be freed, that all human persons will be treated with dignity; and may we be your instruments in making this yearning a reality. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Day 5

Pray constantly with a patient heart

Be patient with all of them (Thess 5: 14)

Ex 17: 1-4	Why?
Ps 1	Yield fruit in its season
1 Thess 5: (12a) 13b-18	Be patient with all of them
Lk 18: 9-14	A humble prayer

Commentary

We cannot be complacent about the divisions between Christians and we are rightly impatient for the day of our reconciliation to come about. But we must also be conscious that ecumenical effort is not sustained at the same rhythm everywhere. Some go forward in leaps and bounds, others are more prudent. As Paul exhorts, we must be patient with everybody.

Like the Pharisee in prayer, we can easily come before God with the arrogance of those who do all things well: "I am not like other people". If we are sometimes tempted to denounce the slowness or rashness of the members of our church or those of our ecumenical dialogue partners, the invitation to be patient sounds an important and timely warning.

Sometimes it is towards God that we show our impatience. Like the people in the desert, we sometimes question him : why do we have to continue this painful journey if it is all to no use? Let us stay confident. God responds to our prayers, in his own way and his own time. He will create new ways, to meet today's needs, of bringing Christians together.

Prayer

Lord, make us your disciples, attentive to your Word, day and night. On our journey towards unity, give us hope for fruit in due season. When prejudices and suspicion seem to dominate, we pray you, give us the humble patience necessary for reconciliation. Amen.

Day 6

Pray always for grace to work with God

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5: 16)

2 Sam 7: 18-29	David's prayer of praise and rejoicing
Ps 86	Incline your ear, O Lord
1 Thess 5:(12a) 13b-18	Rejoice always
Lk 10: 1-24	The sending of the seventy-two

Commentary

In prayer we are aligning our wills to the will of God and so participating in the fulfilment of his purpose. We need the Holy Spirit to change the hearts of believers, so that we have the grace to work with God and become part of his mission and his goal of unity. As we pray for this without ceasing we are aware that "more workers are needed for the harvest". At many ecumenical gatherings, and particularly at the annual National Workshop on Christian Unity in the USA, it is recognized that if the ecumenical movement is to prosper today and in the next generation, more young people need to be drawn into it. We need more workers to experience the joy of praying to be part of the work of God.

The readings for Day 6 give us insight into what it means to work for the sake of the gospel. David, amazed that he might be part of the plan to build a magnificent temple for the Lord, asks, "Can God indeed dwell on earth?" then concludes, "Now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you".

The psalmist prays, "Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name. I will give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever".

In the sending of the seventy-two, Jesus confirms that through his disciples, and those who would come to believe in him through their word, his peace and the news that "the kingdom of God has come near to you" would be proclaimed to the world. At their joyful return, despite rejection, Jesus rejoices at their success in the submission of the evil spirits in his name: the message is never to cease, never to give up.

God's will is for his people to be one. Like the Christians in Thessalonika, we are urged to "rejoice always" and "pray without ceasing", trusting that as we commit ourselves wholly to working with God, his purpose of unity will finally be fulfilled.

Prayer

Lord God, in the perfect unity of your being, keep our hearts so burning with the desire and hope for unity that we will never stop working for the sake of your gospel. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Day 7

Pray for what we need

...help the weak (1 Thess 5: 14)

1 Sam 1: 9-20	Hannah prays for a son
Ps 86	Listen to my cry of supplication
1 Thess 5: (12a)13b-18	We urge you...to help the weak
Lk 11: 5-13	Ask and it will be given you

Commentary

Unable to bear a child and in great distress, Hannah prayed to God for a son and in due time, her prayers were answered and Samuel (which means *I have asked him of the Lord*) was born. In Luke's gospel, we read that Jesus himself tells us to "ask and it shall be given" and in our need, we turn to God in prayer. The response may not be what we expect but God always responds.

The power of prayer is immense, especially when linked to service. From the gospels, we know that Christ wants us to love and serve one another. In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, the theme of service is taken up in the imperative: "help the weak". We do not find it impossible to respond ecumenically in a practical way to people's weakness or distress; churches of different traditions often work hand in hand. But their witness in some situations is seriously weakened by their division, and when we want to pray together, we are sometimes deeply suspicious of the different prayer forms we encounter in Christian traditions other than our own: Roman Catholic prayers which are addressed to God through the saints or Mary the mother of Jesus; Orthodox liturgical prayers; Pentecostal prayers; the spontaneous, Protestant prayers which address God in direct, everyday language.

There are signs however of a new consideration of different forms of prayer. Within American churches, the experience of Pentecostal renewal has also led to a greater appreciation of the power of prayer and Pentecostals have begun to feel more comfortable in the ecumenical movement. Discussions with the Orthodox churches in the World Council of Churches have led to greater appreciation of each other's prayer forms.

Without doubt, confidence in the power of prayer is common to all our traditions and has rich potential to further the cause of Christian unity – once we can understand and overcome our differences. We should give prayerful support to the dialogues which seek to address those differences among our churches and which prevent us from coming together at the Lord's table. Praying *together* that prayer of remembrance and thanksgiving would allow a great stride to be taken along the road to unity.

Prayer

Help us, Lord, to be truly one in praying for the healing of our world, for the mending of divisions in our churches, and of ourselves. May we not doubt that you hear and will answer us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 8

Pray always that they all may be one.

Be at peace (1 Thess 5:13b)

Is 11: 6-13 The wolf shall live with the lamb
Ps 122 Peace be within your walls
1 Thess 5: (12a) 13b-18 Be at peace among yourselves
Jn 17: 6-24 That they all may be one

Commentary

God's desire for human beings is that we live in peace with one another. This peace is not only an absence of war or conflict; the *shalom* desired by God is that which arises from a reconciled humanity, a human family which participates in and embodies the peace which God alone can give. Isaiah's image of the wolf living with the lamb, the leopard lying down with the kid, offers an imaginative glimpse of the future God desires for us. While this *shalom* is not something that we can create on our own, we are called to be instruments of the Lord's peace, artisans of God's reconciling work. Peace, like unity, is a gift and a calling.

Jesus' plea for the unity of his disciples did not take the form of a commandment or a request. It took the form of a prayer, words lifted up before the Father on the night before Jesus was put to death. It is a prayer which rises from the depths of his heart and of his mission, as he prepares his disciples for all that is to come: Father, may they all be one.

As we mark the 100th anniversary of the Octave/Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, celebrating it within the context of the yearnings, prayers and initiatives for the unity of Christians through the centuries, we do well to take stock of where we are on this Spirit-led journey. It is a time to give thanks for the many fruits of prayer for unity. In many places, animosity and misunderstanding have given way to respect and friendship between Christians and Christian communities. Christians who have gathered together to pray for unity have often joined together in acts of common witness to the gospel, and worked side by side in serving those in great need. Dialogue has assisted in building bridges of understanding, and has led to the resolution of some of the doctrinal differences which have separated us.

Yet it is also a time to repent, for in our divisions we continue to stand under the judgement of Jesus' prayer for unity and Paul's imperative that we be at peace among ourselves. In the present day, Christians are publicly divided on many issues: in addition to our ongoing doctrinal differences, we are often at odds with each other on moral and ethical questions, on matters of war and peace, on current issues where common witness is called for. Internally divided and in conflict with each other, we fall short of the lofty calling to be signs and instruments of the unity and peace willed by God.

What then shall we say? There is reason to rejoice, and cause for sorrow. It is a moment to give thanks for those of past generations who have spent themselves generously at the service of reconciliation, and a time to recommit ourselves to be artisans of the unity and peace which Christ desires. And it is a time to ponder again what it means to pray always, through our words and deeds, through the lives of our churches.

Prayer

Lord, make us one: one in our words, that a single reverent prayer might rise before you; one in our yearning and pursuit of justice; one in love, serving you by serving the least of our sisters and brothers; one in longing for your face. Lord, make us one in you. Amen

Additional Resources

(These prayers and other resources are offered by the group which prepared the source material and are published under their entire responsibility.)

Prayers

Lord, take me where You want me to go;
Let me meet who You want me to meet;
Tell me what You want me to say, and
Keep me out of Your way.
(Father Mychal Judge, OFM, September 11, 2001)

“After the call, (**Rev. Dr Martin Luther King, Jr**) got up from bed and made himself some coffee. He began to worry about his family, and all of the burdens that came with our movement weighed heavily on his soul. With his head in his hands, Martin bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud to God: *‘Lord, I am taking a stand for what I believe is right. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I have nothing left. I have come to the point where I can't face it alone.’*

Later he told me, ‘At that moment, I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced Him before. It seemed as though I could hear a voice saying: *Stand up for righteousness; stand up for truth; and God will be at our side forever.*’ When Martin stood up from the table, he was imbued with a new sense of confidence, and he was ready to face anything.” (Coretta Scott King, *Standing in the Need of Prayer*)

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; Enjoying one moment at a time; Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; That I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen.

(Reinhold Niebuhr)

H.M. Queen Liliuokalani of Hawai'i, during imprisonment, 1893

O! kou aloha no, Aiakia lani, Ao kou oiaia He hemolele hoi.	Lord, thy loving mercy Is high in the heavens, It tells us of thy truth, And 'tis filled with holiness.
Kou noho mihi ana A paahao ia Ooe kuu lama Kou nani kou koo.	Whilst humbly meditating Within these walls imprisoned Thou art my light, my haven Thy glory my support.
Mai nana ino ino Na hewa o kanaka Aka e huikala A maemae no.	Oh! Look not on their failings Nor on the sins of men Forgive with loving kindness That we may be made pure.

No laila e ka Haku	For thy grace I beseech thee
Malalao kou eheu	Bring us 'neath thy protection
Ko makou maluhia	And peace will be our portion
A mau loa aku no. Amene.	Now and forever more. Amen.

Show me the suffering of the most miserable;

So I will know my people's plight,
Free me to pray for others;
For you are present in every person.
Help me to take responsibility for my own life;
So that I can be free at last.
Give me honesty and patience:
So that I can work with other workers.
Bring forth song and celebration;
So that the Spirit will be alive among us.
Let the Spirit flourish and grow;
So that we will never tire of the struggle.
Let us remember those who have died for justice;
For they have given us life.
Help us love even those who hate us;
So we can change the world. (Cesar Chavez)

Hymns

American standard hymns:

In Christ There is No East or West
William A Dunkerley, Music by Harry T. Burleigh

Amazing Grace
John Newton, Virginia melody

Simple Gifts
Joseph Brackett, Jr., A Shaker hymn

Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine!
Fanny Jane Crosby, Music by Phoebe Palmer Knapp

Gospel Music: *There's a Sweet, Sweet Spirit*
Doris Akers

From the Pentecostal tradition: *Spirit of the Living God*
Daniel Iverson

Charismatic chorus: *He is Lord*

Civil Rights: *Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing*
James Weldon Johnson, music by J. Rosamond Johnson

Ecumenical Situation in the USA¹

Diverse communities of Christians have been part of the American cultural experience since the arrival of Spanish missions in the sixteenth century, and the British, Dutch and Swedish colonization of the east coast of North America in the seventeenth century: there were early settlements of Anglicans in Virginia, Puritan Congregationalists in Massachusetts, Dutch Reform congregations in New Amsterdam (New York), the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Pennsylvania, Presbyterians in New Jersey, and Roman Catholics in Maryland, in what would become the original United States of America. Diversity of Christian expression increased as the United States expanded across the continent. This diversity is enshrined as a human right and part of the American national identity.

Yet Americans also recall a sad lack of tolerance of persons within their original colonies/states who did not share the identity of the majority. Baptists were driven out of Massachusetts. Catholics were not welcomed in many places due to an assumption that they were more loyal to Rome than to America.

Slaves from Africa and freed black men and women were not welcomed to worship with white church members in most of the churches. The Society of Friends, the American Baptists, the Mennonites and the Moravians were notable exceptions in working to abolish slavery and to assist in building communities of African-American Christian worship. From this mixed atmosphere of racism countered with a faith in the freedom offered by the gospel, African-American churches began to emerge: the African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and the National Baptist Church. From these communities, as well as Wesleyan Methodism, the late nineteenth century Holiness tradition developed. This tradition indirectly gave root to the Pentecostal tradition in the twentieth century.

At the turn of the nineteenth century there was an evangelistic zeal throughout the young United States. Methodism valiantly brought the gospel to the rural areas of the new nation. A spiritual “Great Awakening” took place near the same time, supported by theologians and preachers associated with divinity schools such as Yale (Connecticut) and Princeton (New Jersey). This revival of Reform Christianity had a uniquely American orientation: to revive the faith at the beginning of the industrial revolution in the cities and in the growing migration of Americans settling the middle and west of the continent. In the Ohio River Valley this would lead to the development of a new type of evangelical Christianity among American Protestants. It would have a congregational-based ecclesial polity, and would emphasize human independence and self reliance, hard work, personal conversion and salvation. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the Baptists of Southern and rural America emerged out of this movement, along with other communities of what would be called ‘Evangelical’ Christians. They would be the forbears of the early twentieth century Fundamentalists.

The small original Catholic community grew exponentially in the middle of the nineteenth century with immigration from Europe, especially from Germany and Ireland, which was then suffering a famine. Likewise, German and Scandinavian immigrant Lutherans arrived at this time, as well as other Reformed and Anabaptist communities, seeking land and opportunities that were unavailable in Europe due to war or poverty. For many Protestant Americans, the

¹ This text is published under the entire responsibility of its US authors.

increase in Catholic population was seen as a threat to the uniquely American kind of Christianity that had been developing. But as immigration continued from Italy and Eastern Europe, and as French and Spanish areas of North America were either conquered or annexed by the United States, the Catholic community became a part, albeit 'separate' part, of the American Christian religious scene. Orthodox immigration followed at the turn of the twentieth century, after the devastating American Civil War brought an end to slavery and a more progressive self-reflection in the United States as a "melting pot" for all peoples.

By the twentieth century, ecumenical movements were beginning to take shape in the United States, as they were in Europe. American Protestants gathered to explore working together in mission and evangelization, resulting in the creation of common Christian social institutions for aiding the poor, educating the young and caring for the sick. New social organizations, such as the YMCA and the Salvation Army, contributed to this stream. The Church Unity Octave was initiated in 1908 by an Episcopal religious order of Franciscans, the Society of the Atonement, at Graymoor in Garrison, New York.

About 1910, the Episcopal bishop Charles Brent and Peter Ainsley of the Disciples of Christ began a concerted effort to address issues of Faith and Order among the churches in the United States. The Disciples had always professed Christian Unity as one of their primary goals; while the Episcopal Church, led by William Reed Huntington of New York, had co-authored the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral (1886-1888) over twenty years earlier as a standard confession of faith uniting the Anglican Communion, which also served to identify their minimum requirements in pursuing unity with other Christian communities.

Two world wars and an economic depression intervened, before the first (and only) North American Conference on Faith and Order was held at Oberlin College, Ohio in 1957. This led to the establishment of a permanent Faith and Order Commission within the National Council of Churches in the United States. After the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church in the United States joined the Faith and Order Commission; no longer standing as a 'church apart' within the American scene, it has become a very active and positive participant in the ecumenical movement.

Within the Christian communities in the United States, the first half of the twentieth century was characterized by efforts at reconciliation, new developments and new divisions. In the schools, seminaries and churches of 'mainline' Protestant and Episcopal communities, scholarly biblical criticism and new ways of thinking about human nature and sin, about social justice and equality, were beginning to be accepted. For many Southern and rural American Protestants, who either identified themselves as Evangelical or part of the new Pentecostal movements, there was a call to return to the 'fundamentals'. This included acceptance of the Book of Genesis as factual history. They were wary of an ecumenical movement that would include church bodies that went beyond the fundamentals in the development of doctrine.

While these divergent developments led to a growing division between theological and cultural 'conservatives' and 'progressives', there were also movements towards unity within certain American Christian communities. The United Church of Christ (1957), The United Methodist Church (1968), the Presbyterian Church USA (1983) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (1987) brought together previously divided communities within the same traditions. Meanwhile, the Catholic Church's ecumenical involvement contributed to the prolific amount of work carried out through bilateral dialogues within the United States, as

well as the conciliar dialogues of the Faith and Order Commission. The United States Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue produced a joint statement on Justification by Faith that became much of the basis for the International Lutheran Roman Catholic Joint Statement. Bilateral relations between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox bishops (SCOBA) in the United States have also enhanced international Orthodox-Catholic relations. Episcopal-Lutheran dialogue has led to full communion in celebration of the eucharist, joint recognition of orders and sharing of ministry between those churches (*Called to Common Mission*). The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) has similar full communion relations with the Moravians, the Reformed Church in America, the Presbyterian Church USA and the United Church of Christ, as a result of bilateral dialogue.

Bilateral and multilateral ecumenical work in the United States has led to convergence and even consensus on doctrinal matters which have been the cause of our separation; but issues of gender, and of social and sexual ethics remain divisive or have become divisive within Christian communities of faith and between the churches and communities. Differing judgements regarding the role of women in the church, and in particular, the ordination of women, have resulted in new obstacles between long-standing dialogue partners. In the area of human sexuality, especially concerning same-sex relations, there has been a polarizing of positions within society at large and within Christian churches. Churches have also responded divergently on questions of war and peace; and have fostered different approaches to interreligious relations. Churches united with ecumenical partners on one set of issues find themselves at odds on other emerging issues; churches with little ecclesiological common ground find themselves brought together in responding to highly emotive ethical questions.

There are other issues which do draw Christian churches together, and where there is a sensed need to work more closely in conjunction with each other. Racism, though no longer sanctioned by law or generally overt, nonetheless remains America's unhealed scar. The legacy of the enslavement of Africans in the United States for 250 years, ending only with a very bloody Civil War, did not free America of racism. Neither did the granting of full equal rights for all in 1965. The churches have ecumenically done much to combat racism within and outside of their structures, yet racial tensions linger. At the same time, the ethnic/racial groupings of American churches have contributed positively to the American Christian fabric of life and also contribute to the ecumenical movement with their diverse gifts and interpretations. It is also because of this history of pain and struggle that commemorating the Martin Luther King Holiday during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity takes on a special importance in the United States.

Fighting poverty has been one area in which the churches and communities in the United States seem to be coming to consensus for cooperation, joint action programmes and joint appeals to the political system. Christian Churches Together in the USA (CCT, 2006) is currently discussing poverty and ecumenical approaches for combating poverty.

Finally, while Americans are highly self-descriptive as Christians and/or people of faith, as the statistics demonstrate, there is also a growing cultural divide politically in the United States between secularism and religion. The churches see a growing need to work as one in holding back what is perceived to be a growing secularism, similar to that present now in Europe. This seems to be more of a mobilizing concern for Catholics, Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians, Orthodox and historically African-American churches than to mainline Protestant Christians; but most would agree that secularism has led to a faith crisis among many people.

Part of the ecumenical health among Christians in the United States is the proliferation of ecumenical organizations:

- Christian Churches Together in the USA (CCT) is the newest hope for a large, ecumenical consortium for all Christian churches and communities in the United States. It came into being on March 30, 2006. Its 36 member communities include groupings into five “families”: Evangelical/Pentecostal, Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Racial/Ethnic. The fifth family of Racial/Ethnic became necessary in the American context in the light of the history of racial inequality. CCT is engaged in “four tasks”: (1) to celebrate a common confession of faith in the Triune God, (2) to discern the guidance of the Holy Spirit through prayer and theological dialogue, (3) to provide fellowship and mutual support, and (4) to seek better understanding of each other by affirming our commonalities and understanding our differences.

- The National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, founded in 1950, states in the preamble to its constitution that it “is a community of Christian communions, which, in response to the gospel as revealed in the Scriptures, confess Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, as Saviour and Lord. These communions covenant with one another to manifest ever more fully the unity of the Church. Relying upon the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, the communions come together as the Council in common mission, serving in all creation to the glory of God.” The National Council counts 35 Christian communions as members. These represent a diverse group of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, Evangelical, historic African-American and Living Peace churches. Through Church World Service and a number of social justice and political concerns committees, the NCCCUSA has a strong and historic record in ecumenical efforts for the advancement of human rights.

- The Faith and Order Commission (USA), which began its work in 1960, is a commission of the National Council. Following the model offered by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council, this commission separately includes members who are not also members of the Council: Roman Catholics, some Evangelicals and some Pentecostal and Holiness Christians.

- Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC) was formed as the successor to the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) in 2002. The nine member churches that formed COCU in 1960 moved from an era of ‘consulting’ to ‘starting to live their unity in Christ more fully’ by a process of mutual growth by achieving eight ‘marks’ together: mutual recognition of each other as authentic expressions of the one church; mutual recognition of members in one baptism; mutual recognition that each affirms the apostolic faith; provision for the celebration of the eucharist together (sometimes called the ‘COCU’ or now ‘CUIC’ Liturgy); engagement together is mission, particularly in combating racism; an intentional commitment to promote unity in opposing all forms of marginalization or exclusions of any persons; a form of continuing mutual accountability and consultation on decision making; an ongoing process of theological dialogue. The nine member churches of CUIC are: the African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Episcopal Church, International Council of Community Churches, Presbyterian Church USA, United Church of Christ and The United Methodist Church.

- The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, beginning with the historic Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott of 1956, with the Reverend Dr Martin Luther King, Jr as its first President, has worked ecumenically among the historic African-American churches as well as the predominately white churches who have joined with one another in ecumenical efforts to rid American society of racism.

- The National Association of Evangelicals, founded in 1942 and numbering over 60 denominations and communities as diverse as the Mennonite Brethren Churches, the

Assemblies of God, the Salvation Army and the Church of God (Holiness), supports an ecumenical fellowship and voice for Christians in the United States who would describe themselves as believers in scriptural inerrancy, missionary zeal and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is the largest ecumenical body of Christians commonly called 'evangelicals and Pentecostals' in the United States. The NAE states as its mission: "to extend the kingdom of God through a fellowship of member denominations, churches, organizations, and individuals, demonstrating the unity of the body of Christ by standing for biblical truth, speaking with a representative voice, and serving the evangelical community through united action, cooperative ministry, and strategic planning".

Several churches or families of churches in the United States also have offices for coordinating ecumenical activities. An expanded version of this text on the 'ecumenical situation in the United States of America', including a more extensive listing of organizations fostering Christian unity and statistical information about churches in the United States is available on the internet at <http://www.wcc-coe.org> or <http://prounione.urbe.it>

Of note as well on the American scene, have been the valiant grassroots efforts of local, county, state and regional councils of churches. In many local communities across the United States, almost all the churches and their pastors or ministers participate in these councils: Protestants, Anglicans, Orthodox, historically African-American and Catholics. Closely related to the grassroots as well, are the men and women engaged by their local, state and national church communities as directors of ecumenical programming or 'ecumenical officers/staff'. They have formed vital networks within their national churches and between their churches to foster ecumenical dialogue. Every year, in a different city, they sponsor the National Workshop on Christian Unity and promote the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in their home localities.

Finally, there are consortia of seminaries and religiously-founded colleges and universities that promote, and sometimes require, cross-registration of students studying for ordained ministry as a way of supporting reception of the work of the ecumenical movement. Every major metropolitan area has such consortia. The work of faculty in universities must be acknowledged, particularly that of Temple University in Philadelphia, which publishes *The Journal of Ecumenical Studies*.

Among recent trends within Christianity in the United States is an 'Emergent Church Movement', which resists institutional forms of authority. Engaging in this movement are young persons, predominantly men between the ages of 25 to 35, who 'converse' about Christian faith and have created a network and community over the internet. Its reluctance to engage in systematic theology makes it a challenge to the visible unity of the church; but here too, a conversation on the value of the ecumenical movement has been initiated.

From very local to national levels, Christians in the United States appreciate the value of praying together for the needs of the poor, the sick, those struggling with faith and for the nation itself, including the safety of its armed forces. Aside from the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, many Christians gather ecumenically for prayer on Thanksgiving Day (November), Watch Night (New Year's Eve), Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, the World Day of Prayer (March) and the National Day of Prayer (May). There is a deep sense of fellowship at such moments, in which often the Holy Spirit helps all to set aside divisions and suspicions to create important moments of unity and trust.

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 réconcilier 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)
- 2008 Pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5: (12a) 13b-18)
 Priez sans cesse
(Preparatory material from USA – meeting held in Graymoor, Garrison, USA)

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

- c. 1740 In Scotland a Pentecostal movement arose, with North American links, whose revivalist message included prayers for and with all churches.
- 1820 The Rev. James Haldane Stewart publishes “Hints for the General Union of Christians for the Outpouring of the Spirit”.
- 1840 The Rev. Ignatius Spencer, a convert to Roman Catholicism, suggests a ‘Union of Prayer for Unity’.
- 1867 The First Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops emphasizes prayer for unity in the Preamble to its Resolutions.
- 1894 Pope Leo XIII encourages the practice of a Prayer Octave for Unity in the context of Pentecost.

- 1908 First observance of the 'Church Unity Octave' initiated by the Rev. Paul Wattson.
- 1926 The Faith and Order movement begins publishing "Suggestions for an Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity".
- 1935 Abbé Paul Couturier of France advocates the 'Universal Week of Prayer for Christian Unity' on the inclusive basis of prayer for "the unity Christ wills by the means he wills".
- 1958 Unité Chrétienne (Lyons, France) and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches begin co-operative preparation of materials for the Week of Prayer.
- 1964 In Jerusalem, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I prayed together Jesus' prayer "that they all may be one" (John 17).
- 1964 The Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II emphasizes that prayer is the soul of the ecumenical movement and encourages observance of the Week of Prayer.
- 1966 The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity [now known as the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity] begin official joint preparation of the Week of Prayer material.
- 1968 First official use of Week of Prayer material prepared jointly by Faith and Order and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity [now known as the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity]
- 1975 First use of Week of Prayer material based on a draft text prepared by a local ecumenical group. An Australian group was the first to take up this plan in preparing the 1975 initial draft.
- 1988 Week of Prayer materials were used in the inaugural worship for The Christian Federation of Malaysia, linking the major Christian groupings in that country.
- 1994 International group preparing text for 1996 included representatives from YMCA and YWCA.
- 2004 Agreement reached that resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity be *jointly published and produced in the same format* by Faith and Order (WCC) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Catholic Church).