

*Resources for*  
**THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**  
*and throughout the year*

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

2013

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# **TO THOSE ORGANIZING THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**

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## **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 (suggested by the Faith and Order movement in 1926), which is also a symbolic date for the unity of the church.

Mindful of the need for flexibility, we invite you to use this material throughout the whole year to express the degree of communion which the churches have already reached, and to pray together for that full unity which is Christ's will.

## **Adapting the text**

This material is offered with the understanding that, whenever possible, it will be adapted for use in local situations. Account should be taken of local liturgical and devotional practice, and of the whole social and cultural context. Such adaptation should ideally take place ecumenically. In some places ecumenical structures are already set up for adapting the material; in other places, we hope that the need to adapt it will be a stimulus to creating such structures.

## **Using the Week of Prayer material**

- For churches and Christian communities which observe the week of prayer together through a single common service, an order for an ecumenical worship service is provided.
- Churches and Christian communities may also incorporate material from the week of prayer into their own services. Prayers from the ecumenical worship service, the 'eight days', and the selection of additional prayers can be used as appropriate in their own setting.
- Communities which observe the week of prayer in their 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**

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(Micah 6: 6-8)

‘With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?’ He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME FOR THE YEAR 2013**

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What does God require of us?

(*cf.* Micah 6:6-8)

To mark its centenary, the Student Christian Movement of India (SCMI) was invited to prepare the resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU) 2013 and they involved the All India Catholic University Federation and the National Council of Churches in India. In the preparatory process while reflecting on the significance of the WPCU, it was decided that in a context of great injustice to Dalits in India and in the Church, the search for visible unity cannot be disassociated from the dismantling of casteism and the lifting up of contributions to unity by the poorest of the poor.

The Dalits in the Indian context are the communities which are considered 'out-castes'. They are the people worst affected by the caste-system, which is a rigid form of social stratification based on notions of ritual purity and pollution. Under the caste-system, the castes are considered to be 'higher' or 'lower'. The Dalit communities are considered to be the most polluted and polluting and thus placed outside the caste-system and were previously even called 'untouchable'. Because of casteism the Dalits are socially marginalized, politically under-represented, economically exploited and culturally subjugated. Almost 80% of Indian Christians have a Dalit background.

Despite outstanding progress in the twentieth century, the churches in India remain divided along the doctrinal divisions inherited from Europe and elsewhere. Christian disunity in India within churches and between them is further accentuated by the caste system. Casteism, like apartheid, racism and nationalism poses severe challenges for the unity of Christians in India and therefore, for the moral and ecclesial witness of the Church as the one body of Christ. As a church-dividing issue, casteism is consequently an acute doctrinal issue. It is in this context that this year's WPCU invites us to explore the well known biblical text of Micah 6:6-8, focusing upon the question 'what does God require of us' as the main theme. The Dalit experience serves as the crucible from within which theological reflections on the biblical theme emerge.

Micah was one of the twelve minor prophets of the Old Testament who prophesied from approximately 737-690 BC in Judah. He came from Moresheth, southwest of Jerusalem, and prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of

Judah (Micah 1:1). He lived in the same political, economic, moral, and religious conditions as his contemporary Isaiah and with him witnessed the destruction of Samaria, and the invasion of the Southern Kingdom by the King of Assyria in the year 701 BC. His grief as he wept over the plight of his people informs the tone of his book, and he turns his anger upon the leaders (2:1-5) and priests who had betrayed his people.

The Book of Micah belongs to the literary tradition of Prophecy. At the heart of its message is the oracle of judgment. The book unfolds in three sections demonstrating a journey from judgment in general (ch.1-3), to the proclamation of salvation (ch. 4-5), to the word of judgment and the celebration of salvation (ch.6-7). In the first part, Micah harshly criticizes those in authority, both political and religious, for abusing their power and stealing from the poor: They “tear the skin off my people” (3:2), and “give judgment for a bribe” (3:11). In the second part of the book Micah exhorts the people to walk in pilgrimage “up to the mountain of the Lord... that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his path” (4:2). God’s judgment is revealed in the third part to be accompanied by a call to await in hope for salvation, with faith in God who “pardons iniquities and passes over transgression” (7:18). This hope focuses upon the Messiah, who will be “peace” (5:4), and who will come forth from Bethlehem (5:1) bringing salvation “to the ends of the earth” (5:4). Micah ultimately calls upon all nations of the world to walk in this pilgrimage, to share in the justice and peace which is their salvation.

Micah’s strong call to justice and peace is concentrated in chapters 6:1 – 7:7, part of which forms the theme of this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU). He sets justice and peace within the history of the relationship between God and humanity but insists that this history necessitates and demands a strong ethical reference. Like other prophets who lived in the period of the Israel monarchy, Micah reminds the people that God has saved them from slavery in Egypt and called them through the covenant to live in a society built on dignity, equality and justice. Thus, true faith in God is inseparable from personal holiness and the search for social justice. More than just worship, sacrifices and burnt offerings (6:7), God’s salvation from slavery and daily humiliation rather demands that we should “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God” (cf. 6:8).

In many ways, the situation facing the people of God in the time of Micah can be compared to the situation of the Dalit community in India. Dalits also face oppression and injustice from those who wish to deny them their rights and dignity. Micah compared the greed of those who exploited the poor to those who “eat the flesh of my people, flay the skin off them, break their bones in pieces” (3:3). Micah’s rejection of rituals and sacrifices which were impoverished by a lack of concern for justice, speaks of God’s expectation that justice ought to be at the core

of our religion and rituals. His message is prophetic in a context where discrimination against the Dalits is legitimized on the basis of religion and notions of ritual purity and pollution. Faith gains or loses its meaning in relation to justice. In the contemporary Dalit situation Micah's insistence on the moral element of our faith requires us to ask ourselves what God truly requires of us; mere sacrifices, or to walk with God in justice and peace.

The path of Christian discipleship involves walking the path of justice, mercy and humility. The metaphor of 'walking' has been chosen to link together the 8 days of prayer because, as an active, intentional and ongoing act, the metaphor of walking communicates the dynamism which characterizes Christian discipleship. Further, the theme of the tenth assembly of the WCC to be held in Busan, Korea, in 2013 - 'God of life lead us to Justice and Peace' resonates with the image of the Trinitarian God who accompanies humanity and walks into human history while inviting all people to walk in partnership.

The 8 subthemes for the week, related to different modes of walking, enable us to focus on various dimensions of an authentic Christian discipleship which walks the path of righteousness that leads to life (Prov 12:28a).

Day 1: *walking in conversation*. We reflect on the importance of the practices of dialogue and conversation, as a means of overcoming barriers. Both in ecumenism, and in the struggles for liberation of people across the globe, the skills of speaking and listening are recognised as essential. In such authentic conversation we can come to recognise Christ more clearly.

Day 2: *walking with the broken body of Christ*. Recognising the solidarity between Christ crucified, and the "broken peoples" of the world, such as the Dalits, we seek as Christians together to learn to be more deeply a part of this solidarity ourselves. In particular, the relation of eucharist and justice is opened up, and Christians invited to discover practical ways of eucharistic living in the world.

Day 3: *walking towards freedom*. Today we are invited to celebrate the efforts of communities across our world that are oppressed, like the Dalits in India, as they protest against all that enslaves human beings. As Christians committed to greater unity, we learn that the removal of all that separates people from one another is an essential part of fullness of life, freedom in the Spirit.

Day 4: *walking as children of the earth*. Awareness of our place in God's creation draws us together, as we realize our interdependence upon one another and the earth. Contemplating the urgent calls to environmental care, and to proper sharing and justice with regard to the fruits of the earth, Christians are called into lives of active witness, in the spirit of the year of Jubilee.

Day 5: *walking as the friends of Jesus*. Today we reflect on the biblical images of human friendship and love as models for God's love for every human being. Understanding ourselves as beloved friends of God has consequences for relationships within the community of Jesus. Within the Church, all barriers of exclusion are inconsistent within a community in which all are equally the beloved friends of Jesus.

Day 6: *walking beyond barriers*. Walking with God means walking beyond barriers that divide and damage the children of God. The biblical readings on this day look at various ways in which human barriers are overcome, culminating in St Paul's teaching that "As many of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Day 7: *walking in solidarity*. To walk humbly with God means walking in solidarity with all who struggle for justice and peace. Walking in solidarity has implications not just for individual believers, but for the very nature and mission of the whole Christian community. The Church is called and empowered to share the suffering of all by advocacy and care for the poor, the needy and the marginalised. Such is implicit in our prayer for Christian unity this week.

Day 8: *walking in celebration*. The biblical texts on this day speak about celebration, not in the sense of celebrating a successful completion, but celebration as a sign of hope in God and in God's justice. Similarly, the celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is our sign of hope that our unity will be achieved according to God's time and God's means.

What God requires of us today is to walk the path of justice, mercy and humility. This path of discipleship involves walking the narrow path of God's reign and not the highway of today's empires. Walking this path of righteousness involves the hardships of struggle, the isolation which accompanies protest and the risk associated with resisting "the powers and principalities" (Ep 6:12). This is especially so when those who speak out for justice are treated as trouble makers and disrupters of peace. In this context we need to understand that peace and unity are complete only if founded on justice.

Given the focus of the WPCU on the Dalit communities in India, this walk of discipleship is metaphorically speaking 'a walk which is accompanied by the beat of the Dalit drum'. Several Dalit communities have been associated with professional ritual drumming in Indian villages. Dalit drumming not only invokes the presence of the divine but also enables the safe passage of the community during times of transition by warding off what is considered to be evil. Today Dalit drumming has been recovered as a celebration of Dalit culture and identity. Therefore, when we speak of 'a walk of discipleship accompanied by the Dalit



drum' we are referring to a form of discipleship which is constantly reminded of God's abiding presence with the most marginalized. It also recalls a form of discipleship which recognizes the resilient strength of the Dalits in confronting evil and contributing to the well-being of the wider community. We are reminded of a form of discipleship which affirms Dalit culture and identity as being unexpected spaces of the experience of Christ's presence (cf. Mt 25:40). Such discipleship will lead to true solidarity as well as forms of Christian unity which are free from unjust discrimination and exclusion.

One of the professions associated with certain Dalit communities in India is 'sewing sandals'. As one of the means of survival for Dalit communities it symbolizes their experience of forging together a meaningful existence of resilience and hope in degrading and dehumanizing conditions. It is the hope of the daily reflections that the gifts of the Dalit experience of survival amidst struggle may become for us the sandals which we put on as we seek to walk the path of righteousness in our own contexts by doing what God requires of us. 'Any semblance of a caste-based prejudice in relations between Christians,' says the late Pope John Paul II<sup>1</sup>, 'is a countersign to authentic human solidarity, a threat to genuine spirituality and a serious hindrance to the Church's mission of evangelization'. May our God of justice, unity and peace enable us to be authentic signs of human solidarity by strengthening us to do what God requires of us.

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<sup>1</sup> Papal address to Bishops of Madras-Mylapore, Madurai and Pondicherry-Cuddalore, 17 November 2003.

## **THE PREPARATION OF THE MATERIAL FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2013**

The original draft of this year's Week of Prayer material was prepared by the Student Christian Movement of India (SCMI), in consultation with the All India Catholic University Federation (AICUF) and the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). We wish to thank all of those who contributed, particularly:

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Ms. Chrisida Nithyakalyani, SCMI (Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church)

Rev. Raj Bharath Patta, SCMI (Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church).

The texts prepared by this group were finalized by members of the International Committee nominated by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The International Committee met with members of the Student Christian Movement of India, and their associates, in September 2011 at Bangalore, India, and wishes to record its thanks to the SCMI for generously hosting the meeting.

# **ECUMENICAL WORSHIP SERVICE**

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## **Introduction to the Worship Service**

*What does God require of us?*

*(cf. Micah 6: 6-8)*

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

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

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

### **Structure of the Service**

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

- I. The celebration begins with a prelude of the beating of drums, which symbolises both the celebration of life and of resistance to oppression for the Dalit communities in India. It marks the resilience of all communities struggling for justice and liberation all over the world. An example of Dalit

drums can be found on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7HDt7OmzUdw&feature=related>. Those communities which do not have drums may find an appropriate action or instrument that expresses the same intention. The resource for the invocation has been taken from the writings of the famous Indian Noble laureate Rabindranath Tagore. The opening concludes with a Bhajan, a prayer chant led by a leader and repeated prayerfully by the assembly (Telugu language). Examples of Bhajan chants may be found on the internet.

## II. Praise and Thanksgiving

III. Confession of sin, Assurance of pardon: As a sign of assurance, the assembly is invited to walk to share a sign of peace during which instrumental music can be played.

IV. The Liturgy of the Word begins with the reading of the text for the Week of Prayer Micah 6:6-8. This is followed by a testimony of faith from a real life situation of a woman called Sarah from the Dalit community. This incident took place in 2008 in Khandamal, in Orissa State in central India where for a month, violence erupted when Christians (largely Dalits) were attacked by Hindu extremists. Christian places of worship and homes were destroyed. Orissa is one of the poorest parts of India, traditionally associated with the most discriminated sections of society. The toll of the violence was 59 deaths, 115 Christian churches were destroyed, homes damaged, and 50 thousand homeless Christians sought refuge in the forests and later in refugee camps set up by the Indian government. Some 80-90% of Christians in India are Dalit converts. Like Sarah, in the story, the majority of Dalits were not given inducements to become Christian, as is sometimes claimed; large numbers of Dalits converted when they came to the missions to seek refuge from the oppressive caste system. They asked for the freedom they believed they could enjoy under the healing power of God who liberates.

A similar testimony of faith from your context can be offered at this time.

The congregation is then called on to meditate in silence on these testimonies of faith as we continue to listen to God's Word.

## V. Prayers of Intercession

VI. Blessing and Dismissal: A typical custom within Dalit communities is the sharing of food, and so we suggest that there be a common meal at the end of the worship service.

# Order of the Service

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

**L** : Leader  
**R** : Reader  
**A** : Assembly

## I. Opening

**1. Prelude** (*With the beating of Dalit Drums or some appropriate music.*)  
*(The Leader offers words of welcome to the assembly.)*

### 2. Call to Worship

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

*Silence*

### 3. Invocation

**R** : Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high  
Where knowledge is free  
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments  
By narrow domestic walls  
Where words come out from the depth of truth  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way  
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit  
Where the mind is led forward by thee  
Into ever-widening thought and action

**A** : Into that heaven of freedom, let my country awake.  
(Rabindranath Tagore)

### 4. Bhajan

*(A prayer chant. Sitting or kneeling. Or another appropriate hymn  
or chant could be sung)*

Saranam (4)  
Divya jyotiye, saranam  
Shanthi dathane, saranam  
Karuna murthiye, saranam  
Saranam, saranam

*Meaning:*  
*You are our refuge*  
*Divine light, you are our refuge*  
*Giver of peace, you are our refuge*  
*Lord of mercy, you are our refuge*

## **II. Praise and thanksgiving**

*(The leader invites people gathered to hold hands to form a human chain of unity and solidarity as they say these prayers.)*

**L:** We praise you dear God for creating us in all our diversity. For the gift of our many cultures, languages, diverse expressions of belief, customs, traditions, and ethnicities we thank you! We thank you for the many church traditions which have kept our communities strong and active even in places where they are a minority. Teach us to celebrate our different identities and traditions, so as to forge bonds of friendship and fellowship leading us to greater unity.

**A:** ***How very good and pleasant it is when sisters and brothers live together in unity!***

**L:** We praise you Jesus Christ for reconciling us with God and with one another through your death and resurrection and teaching us to respect the dignity and value of all human beings. We thank you for your in-breaking into our lives everyday calling on us to stand in solidarity with those whose dignity is broken by political, social and economic structures. Teach us to celebrate the message of hope that in you we can overcome all that is evil in our world.

**A:** ***How very good and pleasant it is when sisters and brothers live together in unity!***

**L:** We praise you Holy Spirit for the gift of mutual interdependence and solidarity that has been our heritage as peoples and churches. Teach us to treasure the bonds of unity we enjoy as we beseech your continuing presence with us. Inspire us on our journey towards full visible unity among us, and with all those peoples and movements that engage in the struggles for life.

**A:** ***How very good and pleasant it is when sisters and brothers live together in unity!***

## **III. Confession of Sin, Assurance of pardon**

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

*Silence*

**A:** In humility we come to your feet, dear God as we remember our sinfulness and the disunity for which we have been responsible. We confess that we preserve the inherited human barriers of caste, class, ethnicity, power and all things that keep Christians apart. We ask for your forgiveness that we have often used our history and our past as churches to discriminate against one another and hurt the unity to which Christ has called us. Forgive us our disunity and help us to continue to strive for unity, in the precious name of Jesus your Son. *Amen.*

### **Supplication**

**A:** Come now Jesus into our midst and heal us and our disunity. Lead us into the paths of righteousness so that all can find life.

Come now Jesus into our midst and teach us how to listen to the cries of those who are pushed into the margins.

Come now Jesus into our midst and inspire us to work together with all those who strive for liberation so as to build unity within your broken body. *Amen.*

### **Assurance of pardon**

**L:** If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

*(The leader invites the assembly to share this assurance of pardon by walking towards each other and sharing the peace. This may be accompanied by instrumental music.)*

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

### **First Reading: Micah 6: 6-8**

#### **A testimony of faith**

When they came for Sarah Dugal, she wasn't there. She had fled, five children and mother-in-law in tow, to the safety of the jungles a kilometre away. So, they set ablaze all that she had left behind, a framed picture of Jesus, a Bible in Oriya, utensils in the kitchen, some clothes, mats and linen. By the time Sarah tiptoed back, when she saw it was safe, her home was gone. What was left was burning embers, ashes and smoke. The neighbours came to commiserate with her. Sarah took a good look, stood erect, and pulled her sari firmly over her head. She began to pray. "Lord, forgive us our sins. Jesus, you are the only one. Save us from our misfortune. Free us, Lord." The words were tumbling out. Sarah's children slowly joined her. She was weeping as she pleaded with God for deliverance. Her neighbours and others around her joined her. It is a simple bond of human

compassion and a strong reminder that nothing can sever a woman from her God. "I will die. But I will not stop being a Christian," Sarah said through her tears." A staunch and brave Dalit Christian woman!

*(And another testimony of faith)*

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

*(Silence)*

**Psalm 86: 11-16**

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

*In the path of righteousness there is life.*

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

*In the path of righteousness there is life.*

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

*In the path of righteousness there is life.*

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

*In the path of righteousness there is life.*

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

*A Gospel Acclamation may be sung.*

**Gospel: Luke 24: 13-35**

*An appropriate hymn can be sung.*

**Homily**



## **Prayers of Intercession**

- L:** Walking in conversation, let us recognise all the efforts of the ecumenical movement towards the realisation of the unity willed by Christ for the Church.
- A:** *Send your Spirit to strengthen our resolve and deepen our conversations to realise Jesus' prayer in us.*
- L:** Walking with the broken body of Christ, we are painfully aware that we are still unable to join in the breaking of bread together. Hasten the day when we can realise the fullness of fellowship at the Lord's table.
- A:** *Inflame in our hearts the desire to overcome all that divides us so that we can see one Christ in our brokenness.*
- L:** Walking towards freedom, let us remember along with Dalit communities other people facing similar kinds of discriminations and may the unity of the Churches be a sign of hope in situations of injustice.
- A:** *Strengthen our churches' commitment to create spaces in our society and communities, to enable them to live in dignity and freedom. Allow us to be transformed by their gifts and presence.*
- L:** Walking as children of earth, we realise that we are pilgrims in the wonderful gift of creation given to us. Let us respect the earth as your creation and make us sensitive to the care of it.
- A:** *Let your Spirit renew creation and make us attentive to the suffering of the landless people who are often the bearers of a tradition of prudent care of the earth and its resources.*
- L:** Walking as friends of Jesus, let us accompany marginalised communities all over the world that Jesus chooses to identify with in overcoming centuries of shame to find freedom and dignity. Let us befriend those friends of Christ, like the Dalit Christians, who are often persecuted for choosing Christ and rejecting caste.
- A:** *Enlarge and deepen our fellowship and friendship with you and with each other so that we will remain faithful and truthful to your calling.*
- L:** Walking beyond barriers, let us build communities of unity and equality.
- A:** *Grant us courage so that we can overcome cultures and structures that hinder us from recognising the presence of God in each other.*
- L:** Walking in solidarity with women like Sarah and other victims of discrimination and injustice, let us be shaken out of our apathy.

**A:** *Encircle us with your love, as we affirm the image of God in each person we encounter. Enable us to do justice by breaking through social structures of inequality.*

**L:** Walking in celebration, we come to see that the unity we share within our communities is a profound witness to the gospel of faith and hope. As we celebrate that unity, let us also rejoice in our rich diversities that reflect the life of the Trinity.

**A:** *May we celebrate the wonderful diversity in human life, born from the struggles for dignity and survival amid oppression, and see in it a sign of your abiding faithfulness to your people.*

In Christ's name we raise all these prayers, O God. *Amen.*

**The Lord's Prayer** *(in our own languages)*

### **Blessing and Dismissal**

**L:** Be present to us, Triune God who nurtures us, to remind us of the purpose you have for each one of us and our churches.

**A:** *Amen.*

**L:** Walk before us, Triune God who strengthens us, and lead us on the path to unity.

**A:** *Amen.*

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

**A:** *Amen.*

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

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

### **A closing hymn**

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

# **BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS FOR THE ‘EIGHT DAYS’**

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## **DAY 1                      Walking in conversation**

### **Readings**

Genesis 11: 1-9	The story of Babel and legacy of our diversity
Psalms 34:11-18	“Come...listen”. God’s invitation to conversation
Acts 2: 1-12	The outpouring of the Spirit, the gift of understanding
Luke 24: 13-25	Conversation with the Risen Jesus on the road

### **Commentary**

To walk humbly with God means to walk as people speaking with one another and with the Lord, always attentive to what we hear. And so we begin our celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity by reflecting on scripture passages which speak of the essential practice of conversation. Conversation has been central to the ecumenical movement, as it opens up spaces for learning from one another, sharing what we have in common, and for differences to be heard and attended to. In this way mutual understanding is developed. These gifts from the search for unity are part of our basic call to respond to what God requires of us: through true conversation justice is done, and kindness learnt. Experiences of practical liberation from all over the world make clear that the isolation of people who are made to live with poverty is forcefully overcome by practices of dialogue.

Today’s Genesis reading, and the story of Pentecost, both reflect something of this human action, and its place in God’s liberating plan for people. The story of the tower of Babel first describes how, where there is no language barrier great things are possible. However, the story tells how this potential is grasped as a basis for self-promotion: “let us make a name for ourselves”, is the motivation for the building of the great city. In the end this project leads to a confusion of speech; from now on we must learn our proper humanity through patient attentiveness to the other who is strange to us. It is with the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost that understanding across differences is made possible in a new way, through the power of Jesus’ resurrection. Now we are invited to share the gift of speech and listening orientated toward the Lord, and towards freedom. We are called to walk in the Spirit.

The experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus is a conversation taking place in a context of travel together, but also of loss and disappointed hope. As churches living with levels of disunity, and as societies divided by prejudices and

fear of the other we can recognise ourselves here. Yet it is precisely here that Jesus chooses to join the conversation - not presuming the superior role of teacher, but walking alongside his disciples. It is his desire to be a part of our conversations, and our response of wanting him to stay and speak more with us, that enables a living encounter with the Risen Lord.

All Christians know something of this meeting with Jesus, and the power of his word “burning within us”; this resurrection experience calls us into a deeper unity in Christ. Constant conversation with each other and with Jesus - even in our own disorientation - keeps us walking together towards unity.

## **Prayer**

Jesus Christ, we proclaim with joy our common identity in you, and we thank you for inviting us into a dialogue of love with you. Open our hearts to share more perfectly in your prayer to the Father that we may be one, so that as we journey together we may draw closer to each other. Give us the courage to bear witness to the truth together, and may our conversations embrace those who perpetuate disunity. Send your Spirit to empower us to challenge situations where dignity and compassion are lacking in our societies, nations, and the world.

God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen

## **Questions**

- Where do we practice true conversation, across the various differences that separate us?
- Is our conversation orientated towards some grand project of our own, or towards new life which brings hope of resurrection?
- What people do we converse with, and who is not included in our conversations? Why?

## **DAY 2**

## **Walking with the broken body of Christ**

### **Readings**

Ezekiel 37:1-14	“Shall these dry bones live?”
Psalms 22: 1-8	God’s servant, mocked and insulted, cries out to God
Hebrews 13: 12-16	The call to go to Jesus “outside the camp”
Luke 22: 14-23	Jesus breaks the bread, giving the gift of himself before his suffering

### **Commentary**

To walk humbly with God means hearing the call us to walk out of the places of our own comfort, and accompany the other, especially the suffering other.

“Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.” These words from Ezekiel give voice to the experience of many people across the globe today. In India, it is the “broken people” of the Dalit communities whose lives speak vividly of this suffering - a suffering in which Christ, the crucified one, shares. With injured people of every time and place, Jesus cries out to the Father: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Christians are called into this way of the cross. The Epistle to the Hebrews makes clear not only the saving reality of Jesus’ suffering, in the place of the margins, but also the need for his disciples to go “outside the camp” to join him there. When we meet those who have been excluded, like the Dalits, and we recognise the crucified one in their sufferings, the direction we should be going is clear: to be with Christ, means to be in solidarity with those on the margins whose wounds he shares.

The body of Christ, broken on the cross, is “broken for you”. The story of Christ’s suffering and death is prefaced by the story of the last supper: it is then celebrated as victory over death in every eucharist. In this Christian celebration, Christ’s broken body is his risen and glorious body; his body is broken so that we can share his life, and, in him, be one body.

As Christians on the way to unity we can often see the eucharist as a place where the scandal of our disunity is painfully real, knowing that, as yet, we cannot fully share this sacrament together as we should. This situation calls us to renewed efforts towards deeper communion with one another.

Today’s readings might open up another line of reflection. Walking with Christ’s broken body opens up a way to be eucharistic together: to share our bread with the hungry, to break down the barriers of poverty and inequality - these, too, are

“eucharistic acts”, in which all Christians are called to work together. Pope Benedict XVI frames his reflections on eucharist for the church in just this way: that it is a sacrament not only to be believed in and celebrated, but also to be lived (*Sacramentum caritatis*). In keeping with the Orthodox understanding of “the liturgy after the liturgy”, here it is recognised that there is “nothing authentically human” that does not find its pattern and life in the eucharist. (SC 71)

## **Prayer**

God of compassion, your Son died on the Cross so that by his broken body our divisions might be destroyed. Yet we have crucified him again and again with our disunity, and with systems and practices which obstruct your loving care and undermine your justice towards those who have been excluded from the gifts of your creation. Send us your Spirit to breathe life and healing into our brokenness that we may witness together to the justice and love of Christ. Walk with us towards that day when we can share in the one bread and the one cup at the common table. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.

## **Questions**

- In light of that prophetic tradition in which God desires justice, rather than ritual without righteousness, we need to ask: how is the eucharist, the mystery of Christ’s brokenness and new life, celebrated in all the places where we walk?
- What might we do, as Christians together, better to witness to our unity in Christ in places of brokenness and marginality?

## **DAY 3**

## **Walking towards freedom**

Exodus 1: 15-22

The Hebrew midwives obey God’s law over the command of Pharaoh

Psalms 17: 1-6

The confident prayer of one open to God’s gaze

2 Cor. 3: 17-18

The glorious freedom of God’s children in Christ

John 4: 4-26

Conversation with Jesus leads the Samaritan woman into freer living

## **Commentary**

Walking humbly with the Lord is always a walk into receiving the freedom he opens up before all people. With this in mind we celebrate. We celebrate the mystery of the struggle for freedom, which takes place even in the places where

oppression, prejudice and poverty seem to be impossible burdens. The resolute refusal to accept inhuman commands and conditions - like those given by Pharaoh to the midwives of the enslaved Hebrew people - can seem like small actions; but these are often the kinds of actions towards freedom going on in local communities everywhere. So we celebrate the determination for freedom—in dignity, social inclusion, and a proper share in all that is good—such as that seen in the Dalit communities. Such determined journeying towards fuller living presents a gift of Gospel hope to all people, caught up, in our different ways, within the patterns of inequality across the globe.

The step by step journey into freedom from unjust discrimination and practices of prejudice is brought home to us by the story of Jesus' meeting at the well with the woman of Samaria. Here is a woman who seeks, first of all, to question the prejudices which confront her, as well as to seek ways of alleviating the practical burdens of her life. These concerns are the starting place for her conversation with Jesus. Jesus himself engages in conversation with her on the bases both of his need for her practical help (he is thirsty) and in a mutual exploration of the social prejudices which make this help seem problematic. Bit by bit the way of a freer life is opened up before the woman, as the reality of the complexities of her life are seen more clearly in the light of Jesus' words. In the end these personal insights return the conversation to a place where what divides these two groups of people - where they should worship - is transcended. "Worship in spirit and in truth" is what is required; and here we learn to be free from all that holds us back from life together, life in its fullness.

To be called into greater freedom in Christ, is a calling to deeper communion. Those things which separate us - both as Christians searching for unity, and as people kept apart by unjust traditions and inequalities - keep us captives, and hidden from one another. Our freedom in Christ is, rather, characterised by that new life in the Spirit, which enables us, together, to stand before the glories of God "with unveiled faces". It is in this glorious light that we learn to see each other more truly, as we grow in Christ's likeness towards the fullness of Christian unity.

## **Prayer**

Liberating God, we thank you for the resilience and hopeful faith of those who struggle for dignity and fullness of life. We know that you raise up those who are cast down, and free those who are bound. Your Son Jesus walks with us to show us the path to authentic freedom. May we appreciate what has been given to us, and be strengthened to overcome all within us that enslaves. Send us your Spirit so that the truth shall set us free, so that with voices united we can proclaim your love to the world. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.

## Questions

- Are there times, even in our own Christian communities, when the prejudices and judgments of the world, - with regard to caste, age, gender, race, educational background - stop us seeing each other clearly in the light of God's glory?
- What small, practical steps can we take, as Christians together, towards the freedom of the Children of God (Romans 8.21) for our churches, and for wider society?

## DAY 4

## Walking as children of the earth

Leviticus 25: 8-17

Psalms 65: 5b-13

Romans 8: 18-25

John 9: 1-11

The land is for the common good, not personal gain

The fruitful outpouring of God's grace on the earth

The longing of all creation for redemption

Jesus' healing, mud, bodies and water

## Commentary

If we are to walk in humility with God, we will need always to be aware of ourselves as part of creation, and recipients of God's gifts. There is a growing recognition in today's world that better understanding of our authentic place in creation must become a priority for us. Among Christians, especially, there is a growing awareness of the ways in which ecological concern is a part of "walking humbly with God", the creator; for all we have is given by God in his creation, and so is not "ours" to do with as we wish. It is for this reason that from 1 September to 4 October Christians are called to observe the Time for Creation—a practice increasingly observed by many churches. In 1989 the Ecumenical Patriarch, Dimitrios I, proclaimed 1 September as a day of prayer for the environment. The Orthodox Church's liturgical year starts on that day with a commemoration of God's creation of the world. On 4 October, many churches from the Western traditions commemorate Francis of Assisi, the author of the "Canticle of Creation". The beginning and closing of the Time for Creation are thus linked with the concern for creation in the Eastern and the Western traditions of Christianity, respectively.

The Christian story is one of redemption for all creation; it is creation's own story. The belief that, in Jesus, God becomes a human person, in a particular place and time is a central belief around which all Christians gather. It is a shared belief in the Incarnation which carries with it a profound recognition of the importance of creation - of bodies, food, earth, water, and all that feeds our life as people on the planet. Jesus is fully part of this world. It may be slightly shocking to hear how



Jesus heals using his spittle and the dust from the earth; but it is true to this real sense of the created world as integral to God's bringing us to new life.

Across the world the earth is often worked by the poorest people, who frequently do not themselves share in the fruitfulness that results; such is the experience of many Dalits in India. At the same time it is the Dalit communities who have a particular care for the earth, as the practical wisdom of working the land is shown forth in their labours.

Care of the earth includes basic questions of how human beings are to live within creation, in ways which are more fully human for all. That the earth - its working and ownership - should so often be a source of economic inequalities, and degrading work practices is a cause for great concern and action for Christians together. The covenantal recognition of these dangers of exploitation with regard to the earth is spoken about in Leviticus' instructions concerning the Year of Jubilee: the land and its fruits are not given to be an opportunity for "taking advantage of one another", rather the working of the land is for the benefit of all. This is not just a "religious idea"; it is tied to very real economic and business practices concerning how the land is managed, bought and sold.

## **Prayer**

God of life, we thank you for the earth, and for those who care for it and bring forth its fruits. May the Spirit, the giver of life, help us to recognise that we are part of creation's web of relationships. May we learn to cherish the earth and listen to creation's groaning. May we truly walk together in the steps of Christ, bringing healing to all that wounds this earth, and ensuring a just sharing of the things that it brings forth.

God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.

## **Questions**

- Today's readings invite Christians into a deep unity of action in common concern for the earth. Where do we practice the spirit of the year of Jubilee in our life as Christians together?
- Where, in our Christian communities, are we complicit with things that degrade and exploit the earth? Where can we work more together in learning and teaching reverence for God's creation?

## DAY 5

## Walking as the friends of Jesus

### Readings

Song of Solomon 1.5-8	Love and the beloved
Psalms 139.1-6	You have searched me out and known me
3 John 2-8	Hospitality to friends in Christ
John 15.12-17	I call you friends

### Commentary

To walk humbly with God does not mean walking alone. It means walking with those who are those vital signs of God's presence among us, our friends. "But I have called you friends" says Jesus in John's Gospel. Within the freedom of love, we are able to choose our friends, and to be chosen as a friend. "You did not choose me, but I chose you" Jesus says to each of us. Jesus' friendship with each of us transfigures and transcends our relationships with family and society. It speaks of God's deep and abiding love for us all.

The Bible's love poem, the Song of Solomon, has been interpreted in various ways such as the love of God for Israel, or the love of Christ for the Church. It remains the testimony of passion between lovers which transcends the imposed boundaries of society. While the lover says to her beloved "I am black and beautiful", her words come with the plea "do not gaze at me because I am dark." But the lover does gaze, and chooses love, as does God in Christ. Dalits know that when God gazes upon them it is with this same passionate love. When Christ says to Dalits "I have called you friends" it is a form of liberation from the inhumanity and injustice inflicted upon them by the caste system. In India today, it is a costly response for a Dalit to become a friend of Jesus.

What does the Lord require of those called to walk with Jesus and his friends? In India it is a call to the churches to embrace the Dalits as equal friends of their common friend. Such a call to be friends with the friends of Jesus is another way of understanding the unity of Christians for which we pray this week. Christians around the world are called to be friends with all those who struggle against discrimination and injustice. The walk towards Christian unity requires that we walk humbly with God with—and as—the friends of Jesus.

### Prayer

Jesus, from the first moment of our being you offered us your friendship. Your love embraces all peoples, especially those who are excluded or rejected because of human constructions of caste, race or colour. Filled with the confidence and assurance of our dignity in you, may we walk in solidarity towards each other, and

embrace each other in the Spirit, as children of God. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.

### **Questions**

- Who are those in your communities whom Christ calls into your friendship?
- What prevents the friends of Jesus from being friends with one another?
- How does being the friends of the same Jesus challenge the divided churches?

## **DAY 6                      Walking beyond barriers**

### **Readings**

Ruth 4.13-18	The offspring of Ruth and Boaz
Psalms 113	God the helper of the needy
Ephesians 2.13-16	Christ has broken down the dividing wall between us
Matthew 15.21-28	Jesus and the Canaanite woman

### **Commentary**

To walk humbly with God means walking beyond barriers that divide and damage the children of God. Christians in India are aware of the divisions among themselves. The treatment of Dalits within the churches and between them is a church-dividing issue that betrays the biblical vision of that unity for which we pray this week. St Paul lived with the devastating divisions in the earliest Christian community between Gentile and Jewish Christians. To this barrier and to every subsequent one, Paul proclaims that Christ “is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall between us.” Elsewhere Paul writes, “As many of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3.27-28). In Christ, all the deep barriers of the ancient world—and their modern successors—have been removed because on the Cross Jesus created in himself one new humanity.

In a world in which religious barriers are often difficult to cross, Christians who are a tiny minority in the multi-religious context of India remind us of the importance of interreligious dialogue and cooperation. Matthew’s Gospel tells of the difficult journey for Jesus—and his disciples—to cross the barriers of religion, culture and gender when he is confronted by a Canaanite woman who pleads with Jesus to cure her daughter. The disciples’ visceral instinct to send her away and

Jesus' own hesitation are overcome by her faith, and by her need. From hence Jesus and his disciples were able to cross the imposed human barriers and boundaries of the ancient world. Such is already present in the Hebrew Bible. The book of Ruth, the Moabite woman of a different culture and religion, concludes with a list of her offspring with the Israelite Boaz. Their child Obed was the father of Jesse, the father of David. The ancestry of the hero-King of ancient Israel reflects the fact that God's will may be fulfilled when people cross the barriers of religion and culture. The walk with God today requires that we cross the barriers that separate Christians from one another and from people of other faiths. The walk towards Christian unity requires walking humbly with God beyond the barriers that separate us from one another.

### **Prayer**

Father, forgive us for the barriers of greed, prejudice, and contempt that we continually build which separate us within and between churches, from people of other faiths, and from those we consider to be less important than us. May your Spirit give us courage to cross these boundaries, and to tear down the walls that disconnect us from each other. Then with Christ may we step forth into unknown terrain, to carry his message of loving acceptance and unity to all the world. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.

### **Questions**

- What are the barriers that separate Christians in your community?
- What are the barriers that separate Christians from other religious traditions in your community?
- What are the differences and similarities between walking beyond the barriers that separate Christians from one another, and walking beyond those between Christianity and other religions?

## DAY 7

## Walking in solidarity

### Readings

Numbers 27.1-11

The right of inheritance to daughters

Psalms 15

Who shall abide in God's sanctuary?

Acts 2.43-47

The disciples held all things in common

Luke 10.25-37

The Good Samaritan

### Commentary

To walk humbly with God means walking in solidarity with all who struggle for justice and peace. This poses a question for those who pray for the unity of Christians this week: what is the unity we seek? The Faith and Order Commission, which includes the members of the fellowship of the World Council of Churches as well as the Catholic Church, understands unity as "visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship." The ecumenical movement is dedicated to overcome the historic and current barriers that divide Christians, but it does so with a vision of visible unity that links the nature and mission of the Church in the service of the unity of humankind and the overcoming of all that harms the dignity of human beings and keeps us apart. As Faith and Order has said:

The Church is called and empowered to share the suffering of all by advocacy and care for the poor, the needy and the marginalised. This entails critically analysing and exposing unjust structures, and working for their transformation... This faithful witness may involve Christians themselves in suffering for the sake of the Gospel. The Church is called to heal and reconcile broken human relationships and to be God's instrument in the reconciliation of human division and hatred (*Nature and Mission of the Church*).

There are many examples of such acts of healing and reconciliation by the Indian churches. Dalit Christians remind us of other kinds of injustice and the ways in which they are overcome. Until very recently, Christian inheritance laws in India disempowered daughters. The churches supported the demand for a repeal of this archaic law. The story of the daughters of Zelophehad, in which Moses turned to God for justice in support of the rights of the daughters, was invoked to demand justice for women. Thus, Dalit Christians have been moved in their struggles for justice by such biblical witness. They have engaged with Dalits of other faiths and with secular networks and social movements in India and all over the world in their resistance to injustice. Dalits have been inspired in their struggle for justice by the examples of other movements for social reform.

A biblical image of Church united in solidarity with the oppressed is Jesus's parable of the Good Samaritan. Like the Dalits, the Good Samaritan is from a

despised and outcast community, who is the one in the story who cares for the man abandoned by the wayside, and who proclaims by his solidarity in action, the hope and comfort of the Gospel. The walk towards Christian unity is inseparable from walking humbly with God in solidarity with any and all in need of justice and kindness.

### **Prayer**

Triune God, in your very life you offer us a unique pattern of interdependence, loving relationships and solidarity. Unite us to live our lives in this way. Teach us to share the hope that we find in people who struggle for life all over the world. May their endurance inspire us to overcome our own divisions, to live in holy accord with one another, and to walk together in solidarity. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.

### **Questions**

- Who in your community stands in need of the solidarity of the Christian community?
- What churches are, or have been in solidarity with you?
- In what ways would more visible Christian unity enhance the Church's solidarity with those who stand in need of justice and kindness in your context?

## **DAY 8**

## **Walking in celebration**

### **Readings**

Habakkuk 3.17-19	Celebrating in a time of hardship
Psalms 100	The worship of God through all the earth
Philippians 4.4-9	Rejoice in the Lord always
Luke 1:46-55	The Song of Mary

### **Commentary**

To walk humbly with God means to walk in celebration. The visitor to India is struck by the hardships and struggles endured by Dalits, but at the same time by their sense of hope and celebration. There was a slum on railway land near Bangalore that was inhabited largely by Dalits and other “backward classes” who were migrant workers from Tamilnadu who came to build the original railways before Indian independence. After the community was threatened by expulsion by the railway company in the early 1980s, the community—through its women’s

leadership—organized itself in such a way that it was able to find new land, and build permanent housing for nearly a thousand people. The community of Dalits and others moved into their new homes in 2011, homes paid for by themselves. This is but one instance of struggle against injustice carried out with great hope, which calls forth celebration.

Hope and celebration occur together in today's biblical readings. The prophet Habakkuk rejoices in the Lord at a time of drought and crop failure. Such testimony that God will walk with his people in their difficulties is a celebration of hope. The Blessed Virgin Mary walks to her cousin Elizabeth in order to celebrate her pregnancy. She sings her *Magnificat* as a song of hope even before the birth of her child. And from prison, Paul exhorts the Christian community at Philippi to celebration: "Rejoice in the Lord always." In the Bible, celebration is linked to hope in God's faithfulness.

The celebratory aspects of Dalit culture bear similar testimony to a gospel of faith and hope, forged out of the crucible of the Dalit experience of struggle for dignity and resilient survival. As we pray for Christian unity this week, we turn to the celebration of life that we see in India with focus on the faithfulness of Dalits to their Christian identity in the context of their struggles for life. Our celebration for a unity among Christians which has yet to be achieved likewise occurs in hope and struggle. It is grounded in hope that Christ's prayer that we may be one will be achieved in God's time and through God's means. It is grounded in gratitude that unity is God's gift, and in recognition of the unity we already experience as the friends of Jesus, expressed in one baptism. It is grounded in the conviction that God calls each of us to work for that unity, and that all our efforts will be used by God, trusting with St Paul "in everything by prayer and thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." The walk towards Christian unity requires that we walk humbly with God in celebration, in prayer, and in hope.

## **Prayer**

Gracious God, may your Holy Spirit fill our communities with joy and celebration, so that we can cherish the unity we already share, and zealously continue in the search for visible unity. We rejoice in the faith and hope of peoples who refuse to allow their dignity to be diminished, seeing in them your wonderful grace and your promise of freedom. Teach us to share in their joy and learn from their faithful endurance. Rekindle our hope and sustain our resolve, that in Christ's name we may walk together in love, raising a united voice of praise, and singing together one prayer of adoration.

God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.

## Questions

- What are the struggles towards justice in your community? What are the causes for celebration on the way?
- What are the struggles towards Christian unity in your community? What are the causes for celebration along the way?

# **INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA: THE CONTEXT FOR THE CHURCHES<sup>2</sup>**

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The churches in India have had a complex and rich history. The Christian population continues to be significantly engaged in the life of the nation, especially in the areas of education and health care, a heritage from the Christian missionary movement which began in the 1500s. Through these services and through conversions to Christianity, the major contribution made by the missions was to empower the socially discriminated sections of Indian society to gain dignity and self respect. Christianity is India's third-largest religion with approximately 24 million followers, constituting roughly 2.3% of India's population of 1.2 billion people. These are the figures based on the 2001 census – the findings of the 2011 census which is ongoing suggests a marginal increase in the number of Christians in India. Of the Christian population the largest number adhere to the Roman Catholic Church. Churches in the Eastern tradition include the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, the Malabar Independent Syrian Church, the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Church, the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian, and the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church Church which are prominent in Kerala. Major Protestant denominations include the Church of South India (CSI), the Church of North India (CNI), Presbyterians, Baptists, Lutherans and evangelical communities.

There has been recent contestation of the way in which the history of the Indian churches has been depicted – as having their origins in the Western Missionary movements. Based on the assumption sometimes made that in recent years the centre of Christianity is “moving to the South”, Ninan Koshy writes: “Those who say that the ‘day of Southern Christianity is dawning’ are apparently oblivious of

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<sup>2</sup> This text is reproduced under the sole authority and responsibility of the ecumenical group in India which came together to write the source texts for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2013.



the fact that *the dawn of Christianity was in the South*... What is happening is not the extension of a Western religion but the renaissance of a religion that is Asian in its origin and early history.”<sup>3</sup>

According to the tradition of the *Mar Thoma* or “Church of Thomas,” St Thomas evangelized along the Malabar Coast of Kerala State in southwest India. He reputedly preached to all classes of people and had about seventeen thousand converts, including members of the four principal castes. According to legend, St Thomas was martyred at Chennai, and his tomb is now the site of San Thome Cathedral. Koshy quotes the renowned Asian historian K.M. Panikkar who had said that, “Christianity has existed in different parts of Persia, India and China from the earliest times. The Church in Malabar claims apostolic origin from St. Thomas, and in any case its existence is attested by outside authority as early as AD 182”.

Those early Indian Christians who came in contact with that East Syrian (Persian) tradition are today called the Church of the East or the Chaldean Church. There is later evidence that Nestorian Christians, who flourished in Persia, reached China in the seventh century.<sup>4</sup> From this it can be deduced that Nestorian merchants and missionaries, and others from Syria, came to India in those early centuries. This is the origin of the Orthodox churches in India, which have remained a strong and faithful presence in India. In the centuries that followed, other groups from Syria, Persia and Babylonia increased the Christian presence, while the first Roman Catholic missionary, Jordanus Catalani, established a diocese in the early fourteenth century.

### **Mission history and the anticipation of the ecumenical movement**

As mentioned above, the other significant stream of Indian Christianity is connected with missionary activity that coincided with the colonization project and the establishment of European powers in India. Roman Catholic Missionary activity began under the Portuguese colonists in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, and continued under figures such as St Francis Xavier and his fellow Jesuits. While the first Protestant mission came to India at Tranquebar in 1706, the nineteenth century saw the significant development of Protestant missions. It is generally agreed that the Western missionary movement made a significant contribution to the growth of Christianity in India.

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<sup>3</sup> Ninan Koshy, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia, Volume I*, (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, Asia-Pacific WSCF, 2004). p.6

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p.10

Mission history in India is a complex mosaic – not least because of the vastness of the country and the multiplicity of mission agencies who tried to establish themselves here. Each came with their preconceptions and doctrinal differences, as well their own relationships with colonizing powers. However, having started with a single minded intention to evangelize, the missions soon recognized that they also needed to transmit education and skills to local populations as well as engage in the development of the people who sought conversion to the Christian faith. The early efforts of the missionary movement to deliver health to the people became the model for the country's health care systems after India gained independence in 1948.

Through its support of the missionaries' educational programmes, the colonial government sought to create orderly and disciplined citizens who could staff its administrative apparatus. However, the cultural and social effects of missionary preaching and community building, included an emphasis on human rights, sometimes aided by the missionaries themselves. These efforts contributed to the formation of an Indian people who felt themselves able to criticize existing systems and to protest against the injustice of colonial rule, culminating in a freedom struggle from colonialism.

It is important to mention, in addition, the phenomenal growth of Christianity and the establishment of churches in North East India which covers seven states to the north and east of Bangladesh and is linked to the rest of India through the state of West Bengal. In these states 90 percent of the population of Nagaland, 87 percent of Mizoram and 71 per cent of Meghalaya is Christian. With the support and backing of the colonial rulers, the American Baptist Mission and the Welsh Presbyterian Mission began their work in around 1816 among the predominantly tribal (or indigenous) populations who live in this region. Today two thirds of the Christians in these states trace their origins to these two missions. Roman Catholic missionaries arrived there in 1850, and over the centuries have contributed to the development of the educational infrastructure of the region. In the period after the Second World War, Pentecostals and similar groups and missions arrived in the region influencing forms of worship and spirituality in these states. The development of indigenous ecclesiastical structures in this region with the exclusion of foreign missionaries by the Indian government in this politically sensitive region has ensured the development of a Christianity rooted in the culture of the Indigenous peoples. The North East India Christian Council and the National Council of Churches in India have contributed to ecumenical efforts in this region.

Another state where the Christian population is strong is Kerala, where roughly twenty per cent of the people are Christian. Among them, up to three million believers are Orthodox Christians. From the fourth century onwards, these Christians had links with the Syrian Patriarchate of Antioch, from which the West

Syriac liturgical and ecclesial order of the Syrian Orthodox tradition came into being in India. Those who maintain this link belong to the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church. Other Orthodox Christians maintain that the Antiochian connection began only in the sixteenth century; those who hold this position form the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, (also known as the Indian Orthodox Church) which became an autocephalous church with the establishment of an Indian Catholicate in 1912. In the sixteenth century Roman Catholic missionaries reached Kerala, and established the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church. Under the influence of Protestant missionaries working among the Syrian Christians, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar emerged as a distinct community in the early nineteenth century.

### **The ecumenical movement in India**

The missionary movement in India can be said to have impacted the ecumenical movement in two ways with very different outcomes. Firstly, it gave rise to the longing for unity and joint action among the churches. The growth of the worldwide ecumenical movement led to important ecumenical developments in India too, notable among which was the birth of the Church of South India in 1947 – the first expression of organic union of churches anywhere in the world – and some years later the formation of the Church of North India. It also introduced other important ecumenical instruments – the Young Men’s Christian Association, the Young Women’s Christian Association, the National Council of Churches in India and the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India, as well as the Student Christian Movement and the All India Catholic University Federation. But secondly, it also brought to India inherited denominational identities. “The sad thing is that, before becoming first a confessing Church in the missionary situation, the younger churches were prematurely projected into a “confessional” situation which was not their own, before they became a Community of Christ they were told to become a Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist or Anglican church.”<sup>5</sup>

In 1965, the Second Vatican Council ushered in a new spirit of dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the other churches that increased cooperation between them in India too. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference in India works closely with the National Council of Churches, particularly in relating with the government. Today, they lobby for government intervention when Christians are

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<sup>5</sup> Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Out of all Continents and Nations: A Review of Regional Developments in the Ecumenical Movement, A History of the Ecumenical Movement Volume 2, 1948-1968*, Ed. Harold C.Fey (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1970). p.72-73

targeted in communal riots; they work together on legislation to protect minority rights, which include the rights of Dalit Christians, and freedom of religion.

As churches around the world prepare for the celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2013, the churches in India mark two important ecumenical milestones of their own. One hundred years ago in 1912, the Student Christian Movement of India (SCMI), the oldest youth ecumenical organization of university students in India, began when a group of university students gathered for an All India Students Conference arranged by the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) at the Serampore College in West Bengal. Members of the Indian YMCA decided to create a separate unit for university students. Following discussions at the Serampore meeting, an organization for Indian university students, independent of the YMCA was born. For the past hundred years the SCM India has served a fellowship of students, teachers and senior friends with a commitment to translate Christian faith into action. Spread across thirteen geographical regions of the country, SCMI has throughout its existence inspired students to participate in the transformation of church and society. The SCMI has nurtured values of ecumenism, unity, justice and peace. It has shaped young leaders with the qualities of integrity and commitment. The SCMI encourages partnership with all church traditions, people of all faiths, and with other youth ecumenical organizations such as the YWCA, the YMCA, and the All India Catholic University Federation (AICUF). It is affiliated to the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF).

In preparing the materials for the 2013 WPCU, the youth department of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) was an important partner. The NCCI is the united expression of the Protestant and Orthodox churches in India and represents 13 million Christians throughout the country. It provides a platform for thought and action by bringing together the Churches and other Christian organizations for mutual consultation, assistance and action in all matters related to Christian life and witness in India. Orthodox Christians have played a pivotal role in the ecumenical movement in India. Significantly, the NCCI also celebrates its centenary in 2014. The Council and its members have been actively engaged in nation building over these 100 years. It is an autonomous Council which embraces, promotes and coordinates the various ministries of the churches. The NCCI Youth Commission promotes the ecumenical and interreligious activities at a national level.

The third partner in the preparation of the WPCU materials is the All India Catholic University Federation which is a movement of Catholic students with a vision of a new and just society. Founded in 1915 as the Catholic Young Men's Guild (CYMG), it became the AICUF in 1949 as a national student movement. It is recognised by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and is affiliated to the Pax Romana, the International Movement of Catholic Students. Over the years the AICUF has gone through a history of constant rediscovery and re-creation, as it

seeks to address the emerging needs and realities of university, church and the wider Indian society. AICUF has also worked with the SCM and other youth movements in India on issues that affect the life of the nation.

## **Becoming the Church in India**

There are two critical issues facing the Christianity in India: casteism and identity.

Casteism, both within and between the churches poses severe challenges for the unity of Christians in India and therefore, for the moral and ecclesial witness of the Church as the one body of Christ. As a church-dividing issue, casteism is consequently an acute doctrinal issue. Accordingly, this issue has been chosen to highlight the ways in which the quest for justice and peace is intrinsic to prayer for Christian unity.

The Indian churches of mission origin have struggled to break away from their missionary past and assert their own identity and calling as an Indian church. The Indian Ecumenist M.M. Thomas, recognizing the inevitable link with western culture because of the years of colonial rule, affirms that as Christians in India we are called to critical engagement with the national aspirations of our nation, as churches together: “Christians need not be apologetic about their connection with western culture. But Christians have to be apologetic about their uncritical approach to western culture. Today, when our national goals are western, we are not able to evaluate them critically in the name of Christ. Our contribution to “secular” ecumenism thus depends on our having a “Christian” ecumenism ourselves.<sup>6</sup>

The churches in India have attempted to define what this means to their life and witness in a multi religious context where, Christians are a very small minority. Situated in the midst of great living faiths, Christians in India have contributed significantly by providing skilled leadership and theological freshness to ecumenical discussions on dialogue and cooperation with people of other faiths.

## **Reading church history from the view of the majority in the Church**

The most significant contribution of the missionary movement in terms of conversions to Christianity was the way in which many of the poor and outcaste in India experienced conversion to Christ as freedom from religious and ritual discrimination. At a recent international colloquium, Prof. Dr. Susie Tharu, an eminent writer, and social scientist declared that “the genius of the Indian church is

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<sup>6</sup> MM Thomas, *The Common Evangelistic Task of the Churches in Asia*, Papers and Minutes of the EACC. Prapat, Indonesia, 1957, Quoted by Koshy, op cit. p. 28

its Dalitness”.<sup>7</sup> It is said that 80-90% of the Indian church are of Dalit origin. In some parts of India 100% Christians are Dalit converts.

On the one hand, the issue of conversion is a challenge in the global arena, where inter-religious relations must be balanced with the call to proclaim the Gospel. Dalits in India, on the other hand, would claim that Dalit conversion from Hinduism has been an important form of Dalit dissent. At the outset of World War I approximately one million of the Christians in India were Dalits, today it is approximately twenty-four million. Conversions to Christianity, often done at the behest of oppressed outcaste groups themselves, challenged not just the upper caste Hindus, but also upper caste converts to Christianity, and even the missionaries themselves.<sup>8</sup> Unhappily, this history has received little attention: “Dalit Christian history was only a very minor sub-plot in the much larger stories of either missions or churches...”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Susie Tharu in her valedictory address at a International Colloquium on Caste, Religion and Culture, organized by the World Council of Churches, the Centre for Social Studies and Culture, the National Council of Churches in India and the Student Christian Movement of India in Cochin, Kerala from 1-4 May 2011. It is important to briefly define who a Dalit is in India. The caste structure of Hinduism is four tiered and hierarchical – the Brahmins or priestly caste; the Kshatriyas or rules and warriors; the Vaishyas or the merchants; and the Shudras or the labourers. The first three are the ritually pure and socio-economically dominant or the twice born. The fourth are ritually suspect and socio-economically dominated and are the once born. Outside this structure are the 160-180 million in India alone, who are branded as the “Outcastes”, the “Untouchables”, the “Exterior caste”, the “Depressed caste” or the “Pariah” – or the Dalits or “broken people”. The term Dalits, is used not to signify another caste identity but rather aspires to name an anti-caste collective movement. For this explanation see the article by Sathianathan Clarke, “Dalit theology: An Introductory and Interpretive Theological Exposition, in *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first Century, Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*. Ed. Sathianathan Clarke, Deenabandhu Manchala and Philip Vinod Peacock, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 4-5

<sup>8</sup> See for instance Stanley, Brian, 2009, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, 1910*, Studies in the History of Christian Missions, William B. Eerdmann’s Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK. p.153-154

<sup>9</sup> Webster John C.B., “Dalit Christian History: Themes And Trends”, Paper presented at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Department of History, February 2011, New Delhi. Manuscript. John Webster has written extensively on Dalit

Dalits continue to experience oppression and exclusion, to the extent where they can recognize a greater sense of identity and common struggle with Dalits of other faiths than within the Christian community. Like the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, this scandal must challenge all Christians to ask themselves about the limits and integrity of their commitment to Christian unity.

### **The churches stay committed**

In the midst of the many challenges, the churches in India have tried to stay true to their course and are slowly growing – as they continue to strengthen ecumenical partnerships and forge new areas of ministry. To be a minority has sometimes pushed the churches into a survival mode rather than to conscious and bold affirmations of their witness in India. Christian presence in India has to be built as “the future of the hopeless... The Cross of Christ, the community of the suffering Christ and the sign of the oppressed creation show us the place of Christian presence.”<sup>10</sup>

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Christian history including a path breaking book *The Dalit Christians: A History*, 1992, (which has gone into a third edition). Edwin Ellen Press, San Francisco.

<sup>10</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology Today*, Vol 28 No. 1, April 1971, 6-23. Princeton Theological Seminary, Westminster John Knox Press, USA

# WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

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## Themes 1968-2013

*In 1968, materials jointly prepared by the WCC Faith and Order Commission and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity were first 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 coeur 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 Piestaň, Slovakia)
- 2006 Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them  
(Matthew 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 (Mark 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 Thessalonians 5:(12a) 13b-18)  
Priez sans cesse  
(Preparatory material from USA – meeting held in Graymoor, Garrison, USA)
- 2009 That they may become one in your hand (Ezekiel 37:15-28)  
Ils seront unis dans ta main  
(Preparatory material from Korea – meeting held in Marseilles, France)
- 2010 You are witnesses of these things (Luke 24:48)  
...de tout cela, c'est vous qui êtes les témoins  
(Preparatory material from Scotland – meeting held in Glasgow, Scotland)
- 2011 One in the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer  
(cf. Acts 2:42)  
Unis dans l'enseignement des apôtres, la communion fraternelle, la fraction du pain et la prière  
(Preparatory material from Jerusalem – meeting held in Saydnaya, Syria)

- 2012 We will all be Changed by the Victory of our Lord Jesus Christ  
(cf. 1 Cor 15:51-58)  
Tous, nous serons transformés par la victoire de notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ  
(Preparatory material from Poland – meeting held in Warsaw, Poland)
- 2013 What does God require of us? (cf. Mi 6, 6-8)  
Que nous demande le Seigneur ?  
(Preparatory material from India – meeting held in Bangalore, India)

## **KEY DATES IN THE HISTORY OF THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**

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- 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, which links 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).
- 2008      Commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. (Its predecessor, the Church Unity Octave, was first observed in 1908).