

Resources for  
**THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR  
CHRISTIAN UNITY**  
And  
Throughout the year

**THEME:**  
**Reconciliation -  
The Love of Christ Compels Us**  
(cf. 2 Corinthians 5: 14-20)

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**JANUARY 18-25**

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## FOREWORD

The week of prayer for Christian Unity January 18-25 is an annual celebration observed by Christian churches all over the world. It is symbolic of the visionary prayer of Jesus that Christian disciples may all be one. The sad reality is that we are divided on the basis of religious matters such as traditions, doctrines, practices, and governance, and also on social and political issues as well as economic considerations. In this context it is quite significant that the prayer booklet for this year is prepared by churches in Germany, where 500 years ago there was the beginning of a great divide in the church, when Martin Luther and those who subscribed to his views were termed as "Protestants." We have come a long way since then. The Protestants are now respected as being Reformers, calling the Church in the world to re-examine itself time and again to see whether there is anything in the life and work of the Church which needs reform. Therefore such reformers should not be regarded as opponents who should be ex-communicated and defeated through competition and conflict; rather we should seek reconciliation in Christ. The love of Christ moves, indeed compels, Christians to love one another! As the song goes,

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,  
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,  
And they'll know we are Christians  
By our love, by our love,  
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love!

At the global level, we have the Global Christian Forum. All the traditions in the global Christian family are present within the GCF, including: African Instituted, Anglican, Catholic, Charismatic, Evangelical, Orthodox, Pentecostal and Protestant Churches as well as mega churches, migrant churches, and contemplative communities. Similarly in India, we have the National United Christian Forum which has the Catholic, Orthodox, Reformation and Evangelical traditions coming together.

While we are seeking this inter-denominational unity or togetherness, we have to realize that there are deeper issues in the world where life itself is at peril, and therefore Christians and all human communities need to come together to address

them: poverty and economic injustice, caste and religio-political fundamentalism, violence and war, climate change, threats to health and well-being, and so on. The sin of injustice has to be addressed and endeavours for repentance, restitution and reconciliation have to be pursued. Hence the greater importance of this year's theme: Reconciliation - The Love of Christ compels us.

**Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad**

General Secretary

**National Council of Churches in india**

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



### **The search for unity: throughout the year**

The traditional period in the northern hemisphere for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is 18-25 January. Those dates were proposed in 1908 by Paul Wattson to cover the days between the feasts of St. Peter and St. Paul, and therefore have a symbolic significance. In the southern hemisphere where January is 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 undertake 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 reflections 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 FOR 2017**

### **2 Corinthians 5:14-20**

For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

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*The text used above is from the New Revised Standard Version which is the agreed English translational ways used for our materials. However, the writers felt that "the love of Christ compels us," the rendering of verse 14 from the New International Version made a stronger title, and therefore we use this title and phrase in these materials.*

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME FOR THE YEAR 2017**



### **Reconciliation: The Love of Christ Compels Us (cf. 2 Corinthians 5: 14-20)**

#### **Germany: The Land of the Lutheran Reformation**

In 1517 Martin Luther raised concerns about what he saw as abuses in the Church of his time by making public his 95 theses. 2017 is the 500th anniversary of this key event in the reformation movements that marked the life of the Western Church over several centuries. This event has been a controversial theme in the history of inter-church relations in Germany, not least over the last few years. The Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) has been building up to this anniversary since 2008, by focusing each year on one particular aspect of the Reformation, for example: the Reformation and Politics, or the Reformation and Education. The EKD also invited its ecumenical partners at various levels to help commemorate the events of 1517.

After extensive, and sometimes difficult, discussions, the churches in Germany agreed that the way to commemorate ecumenically this Reformation event should be with a Christus fest- a Celebration of Christ. If the emphasis were to be placed on Jesus Christ and his work of reconciliation as the center of Christian faith, then all the ecumenical partners of the EKD (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Baptist, Methodist, Mennonite and others) could participate in the anniversary festivities.

Given the fact that the history of the Reformation was marked by painful division, this is a very remarkable achievement. The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity has worked hard to produce a shared understanding of the commemoration. It's important report, *From Conflict to Communion*, recognizes that both traditions approach this anniversary in an ecumenical age, with the achievements of fifty years of dialogue behind them, and with new understandings of their own history and theology. Separating that which is polemical from the theological insights of the Reformation, Catholics are now able to hear Luther's challenge for the Church of today, recognizing him as a "witness to the gospel" (*From Conflict to Communion* 29). And so after

centuries of mutual condemnations and vilification, in 2017 Lutheran and Catholic Christians will for the first time commemorate together the beginning of the Reformation.

From this agreement and the wider ecumenical context emerges the strong theme of this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: "Reconciliation- The Love of Christ Compels Us" (cf. 2 Cor. 5: 14-20).

### **The Council of Churches in Germany (ACK) and the Reformation Anniversary 2017**

The Council of Churches in Germany launched several projects to commemorate 1517. One was entitled "Discover Anew the Bible's Treasures". Here, in a manner reminiscent of the importance Martin Luther placed on the meaning of the Bible, all ACK member churches wrote texts describing their approach to the Bible. These were later published in a brochure. In addition, the ACK conducted a symbolic "pilgrimage" to various member churches in Wittenberg. Each community visited, expressed and celebrated its own unique relationship to the Bible. In April 2015, the ACK also organized a conference entitled: "Irreparably Divided? Blessed Renewal? - 500 Years of Reformation in Various Ecumenical Perspectives", the proceedings of which have been published.

It was in the context of the anniversary that the Council of Churches in Germany (ACK), invited by the World Council of Churches, took up the work of creating the resources for this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. A committee comprised of ten members representing different churches met three times in 2014/2015 to develop the necessary texts. A particular emphasis was placed on the preparation of the ecumenical worship service for the Week (see pp. 10 to 17). These sources should serve the general purpose of the Week of Prayer, while at the same time commemorating the Lutheran Reformation.

### **The Theme of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2017**

When the German national planning committee met in the autumn of 2014, it quickly became clear that the materials for this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity would need to have two accents: on the one hand, there should be a celebration of God's love and grace, the "justification of humanity through grace



alone", reflecting the main concern of the churches marked by Martin Luther's Reformation. On the other hand, the materials should also recognize the pain of the subsequent deep divisions which afflicted the Church, openly name the guilt, and offer an opportunity to take steps toward reconciliation.

Ultimately it was Pope Francis '2013 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangetii Gaudium*' ( The Joy of the Gospel ) which provided the theme for this year, when it used the quote: "The Love of Christ Compels Us" (Paragraph 9). With this scripture verse (2 Cor. 5:14), taken in the context of the entire fifth chapter of the second letter to the Corinthians, the German committee formulated the theme for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2017.

### **The Biblical Text: 2 Cor. 5 : 14 - 20**

This biblical text emphasizes that reconciliation is a gift from God, intended for the entire creation. "God was reconciling the world (*kosmos*) to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (v.19). As a result of God's action, the person who has been reconciled in Christ is called in turn to proclaim this reconciliation in word and deed: "The love of Christ compels us" (v.14, NIV)." So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (v.20). The text stresses that this reconciliation is not without sacrifice. Jesus gives his life; he died for all. The ambassadors of reconciliation are called, in his name, to give their lives similarly. They no longer live for themselves; they live for him who died for them.

### **The Eight Days and the Worship Service**

The text, 2 Cor. 5: 14-20, shapes the reflections of the eight days, which develop some of the theological insights of the individual verses, as follows:

**Day 1:** One has died for all

**Day 2:** Live no longer for themselves

**Day 3:** We regard no one from a human point of view

**Day 4:** Everything old has passed away

**Day 5:** Everything has become new

**Day 6:** God reconciled us to himself

**Day 7:** The ministry of reconciliation

**Day 8:** Reconciled to God

In the Ecumenical Worship Service, the fact that God in Christ has reconciled the world to himself is a reason to celebrate. But this must also include our confession of sin before we hear the Word proclaimed and draw from the deep wellspring of God's forgiveness. Only then are we able to testify to the world that reconciliation is possible.

### **Compelled to Witness**

The love of Christ compels us to pray, but also to move beyond our prayers for unity among Christians. Congregations and churches need the gift of God's reconciliation as a wellspring of life. But above all, they need it for their common witness to the world: "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17: 21).

The world needs ministers of reconciliation, who will break down barriers, build bridges, make peace, and open doors to new ways of life in the name of the one who reconciled us to God, Jesus Christ. His Holy Spirit leads the way on the path to reconciliation in his name.

As this text was being written in 2015, many people and churches in Germany were practicing reconciliation by offering hospitality to the numerous refugees arriving from Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, as well as countries of the Western Balkans, in search of protection and a new life. The practical help and powerful actions against hatred for the foreigner were a clear witness to reconciliation for the German population. As ministers of reconciliation, the churches actively assisted the refugees in finding new homes, while at the same time trying to improve the living conditions in the countries they had left behind. Concrete acts of help are just as necessary as praying together for reconciliation and peace, if those who are fleeing their terrible situations are to know some hope and consolation.

May the wellspring of God's gracious reconciliation overflow in this year's Week of Prayer, so that many people may find peace, and so that bridges may be built. May people and churches be compelled by the love of Christ to live reconciled lives and to break down the walls that divide!

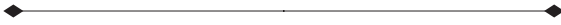
## **THE PREPARATION OF THE MATERIAL FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2017**

The preparatory work on the theme for this year's week of prayer material was undertaken by a group of representatives of different Christian communities in Germany. This National Committee was brought together by the working group of Christian Churches in Germany (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen/ ACK), led by Dr. Elisabeth Dieckmann.

Gratitude is extended in particular to the leaders of ACK, the members of its National Committee, and those who contributed to these resources:

- Revd. Dr. Eberhard Amon (Prelate, German Bishops Conference)
- Pastor Bernd Densky (Baptist Pastor, Consultant of ACK)
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- Revd. Scott Morrison (Pastor, Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church)
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- Mr. Marc Witznbacher (Consultant of the Evangelical Church of Germany/ EKD)

## **ECUMENICAL WORSHIP SERVICE**



### **INTRODUCTION TO THE WORSHIP**

#### **Reconciliation - The Love of Christ Compels Us (cf 2 Corinthians 5: 14-20)**

##### **Commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation**

The churches in Germany decided to commemorate this anniversary as a *Christus fest* (an ecumenical celebration of Christ). The Reformation was the occasion of a renewed focus on salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We rejoice in God's salvation centered on the cross of Christ, who overcomes division and draws us together. This worship openly confesses and asks forgiveness for the sins of division which followed the Reformation. The service will celebrate Christ and his act of reconciliation, which moves the hearts of divided Christians to become ambassadors for Christ as ministers of reconciliation.

##### **The Contents of the Worship Service**

The theme, "Reconciliation - The Love of Christ Compels Us" celebrates their revocable reconciliation that we have received through faith in Jesus Christ. Christ's love becomes the driving force that moves us beyond our division toward acts of reconciliation.

Through psalms and songs we gather in Jesus' name in praise of God's wondrous deeds. We confess our sins of division and make our plea for forgiveness. The proclamation of the Word highlights the reconciling action of Christ as "One who died for all" (v.14). The faithful respond to this good news by accepting the call to be ministers of reconciliation.

##### **Symbolic Actions in the Service**

###### **The Wall**

1989 saw the fall of the Berlin Wall. Thus the construction of a symbolic wall at the confession of sin, the visible presence of this wall during the proclamation of the Word, and finally the dismantling of this wall to form a cross as a sign of hope, give us courage to name these terrible divisions and to overcome them with the help of God.

## **Directions/Material: Building up and tearing down the Wall**

"Division due to our sin": after a brief introduction some members of the congregation will construct a wall of separation representing the sins and division that we confess. The wall remains standing during the service until the section headed "Respond in faith- live in reconciliation." At this point the stones will be removed from the wall and placed in the shape of a cross.

Depending on the size of the worship space, the following materials will be necessary for this symbolic action: 12 boxes of the same size (i.e. shoe boxes, transport boxes) covered in packing paper to make the "stones." On the front side of each box a key term will be noted (lack of love, hate and contempt, false accusation, discrimination, persecution, broken communion, intolerance, religious wars, division, abuse of power, isolation, and pride). As each sin is named the stone is brought forward to build the wall. Following a moment of silence, the stone bearer makes the plea for forgiveness, to which the congregation responds "forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us."

After the proclamation of God's word which concludes with the sermon, a prayer for reconciliation follows. As the wall is dismantled and the stones are laid in the form of the cross, a song of reconciliation or a hymn of the glory of the cross is sung.

For worship services in small groups, an alternative liturgical action could be either to expand upon or to replace the wall with personal testimonies. These testimonies in the first part should name situations which have been hurtful to others. In the second part concerning the faith response, stories about reconciliation and acts of healing could be told.

## **Candles**

Following the creed, four intercessory prayers are offered. After each petition, three people light their candles from a central source of light (for example a Paschal candle) and remain standing around the cross until the section headed "Christ's commission." After the commission, the twelve pass the light throughout the congregation until each person has a lighted candle. The service concludes with a blessing and sending out.

## ORDER OF SERVICE



### **Reconciliation - The Love of Christ Compels Us (cf. 2 Corinthians 5: 14- 20)**

- L** Leader
- C** Congregation
- R** Reader

#### **I. GATHERED IN JESUS' NAME**

**Hymns for Gathering** (will be chosen locally)  
Procession with Bible/ Lectionary

#### **Opening**

- L** In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- C** **Amen.**
- L** Grace and peace from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ, be with you all. (2 Cor. 5:18)
- C** **And also with you.**

#### **Introductory Words**

- L** Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this year many Christians and churches will be commemorating the anniversary of the Reformation. Saint Paul reminds us that God has reconciled us through Jesus Christ and that the love of Christ compels us to be ministers of reconciliation. Let us worship and praise God together in the unity of the Holy Spirit!

**Psalm 98** (sung) or a **hymn of praise**

#### **II. DIVIDED BY OUR SINS (CONFESSION)**

#### **Invitation to confession**

- L** In the course of history, there have been many renewal movements in the Church, which is always in need of deeper conversion to her head, Jesus Christ. Sometimes these movements have led to unintended divisions. This fact contradicts what Jesus asks the Father in John 17:23:

"That they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." Let us confess our sins and pray for forgiveness and healing for the wounds which have resulted from our divisions. As we name these sins we will see how they become a wall which divides us.

## Silence

**L Let us pray:** God and Father in heaven, we come to you in Jesus' name. We experience renewal through your Holy Spirit, and yet we still construct walls that divide us, walls which hinder community and unity. We bring before you now the stones with which we erect our walls and pray for your forgiveness and healing.

## C Amen.

(As each sin is named the corresponding stone is brought forward to build the wall. Following a moment of silence, the stone bearer [R] makes the plea for forgiveness as the congregation responds "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.")

**L** One stone in our wall is "**lack of love**".

(The stone with the key term "lack of love" is placed.)

**R1** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for whenever we have failed to love. We humbly pray:

**C** Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

**L** One stone in our wall is "**hate and contempt**".

(The stone with the key term "hate and contempt" is placed.)

**R2** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for our hate and contempt for one another. We humbly pray:

**C** Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

**L** One stone in our wall is "**false accusation**".

(The stone with the key term "false accusation" is placed.)

**R3** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for denouncing and falsely accusing one another. We humbly pray:

**C** Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

**L** One stone in our wall is "**discrimination**".  
(The stone with the key term "**discrimination**" is placed.)

**R4** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for all forms of prejudice and discrimination against one another. We humbly pray:

**C** Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

**L** One stone in our wall is "**persecution**".  
(The stone with the key term "**persecution**" is placed.)

**R5** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for persecuting and torturing one another. We humbly pray:

**C** Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

**L** One stone in our wall is "**broken communion**".  
(The stone with the key term "**broken communion**" is placed.)

**R6** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for perpetuating broken communion among our churches. We humbly pray:

**C** Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

**L** One stone in our wall is "**intolerance**".  
(The stone with the key term "**intolerance**" is placed.)

**R7** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for banishing our brothers and sisters from our common homeland in the past and for acts of religious intolerance today. We humbly pray:

**C** Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

**L** One stone in our wall is "**religious wars**".  
(The stone with the key term "**religious wars**" is placed.)



**R8** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for all wars that we have waged against one another in your name. We humbly pray:

**C** Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

**L** One stone in our wall is "**division**."

(The stone with the key term "**division**" is placed.)

**R9** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for living our Christian lives divided from one another and astray from our common calling for the healing of all creation. We humbly pray:

**C** Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

**L** One stone in our wall is "**abuse of power**".

(The stone with the key term "**abuse of power**" is placed.)

**R10** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for our abuse of power. We humbly pray:

**C** Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

**L** One stone in our wall is "**isolation**".

(The stone with the key term "**isolation**" is placed.)

**R11** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for the times when we have isolated ourselves from our Christian sisters and brothers and from the communities in which we live. We humbly pray:

**C** Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

**L** One stone in our wall is "**pride**".

(The stone with the key term "**pride**" is placed.)

**R12** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for our pride. We humbly pray:

**C** Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

**L** **Let us pray:** Lord, our God, look upon this wall that we have built, which separates us from you and from one another. Forgive us our sins. Heal us. Help us to overcome all walls of division and make us one in you.

**C. Amen.**

## **Hymn/ Song/ Meditative music**

### **III. BE RECONCILED TO GOD- HEAR GOD'S WORD**

**First Reading: Ezekiel 36: 25-27**

**Responsorial Psalm: 18: 25-32(could be sung)**

**Response: I love you, O Lord, my strength.**

With the loyal you show yourself loyal;  
with the blameless you show yourself blameless;  
with the pure you show yourself pure;  
and with the crooked you show yourself perverse.  
for you deliver a humble people,  
but the haughty eyes you bring down.

**Response: I love you, O Lord, my strength.**

It is you who light my lamp;  
The LORD, my God, lights up my darkness.  
By you I can crush a troop, and  
by my God I can leap over a wall.  
This God - his way is perfect;  
The promise of the LORD proves true;  
He is a shield for all who take refuge in him.  
For who is God except the LORD?  
And who is a rock besides our God? -  
the God who girded me with strength,  
and made my way safe.

**Response: I love you, O Lord, my strength.**

**Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5: 14-20**

**Alleluia** (could be sung)

**Gospel Reading: Luke 15: 11-24**

**Alleluia** (could be sung)

**Sermon**

#### **IV. RESPOND IN FAITH- LIVE RECONCILED**

(As the wall is dismantled and the stones are laid in the form of a cross, a song of reconciliation or a hymn of the glory of the cross is sung)

- L** Let us pray: Gracious God and Father in Heaven, we have heard your word that you have reconciled us to yourself through your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord. By the power of the Holy Spirit transform our hearts of stone. Help us to become ministers of reconciliation and heal our churches' divisions so that we may better serve as instruments of your peace in the world.
- C** Amen.

#### **The Peace**

- L** The peace of the Lord be with you always.

Let us give one another a sign of peace.

#### **Hymn/Song**

(Collection/ Offering)

#### **V. RESPOND IN FAITH - PROCLAIM RECONCILIATION**

##### **Creed**

##### **Intercessory Prayers**

(After each petition, three people light their candles from a central source of light (for example a Paschal candle) and remain standing around the cross until the section headed "Christ's commission.")

- R1** Almighty God, you sent your Son Jesus Christ to reconcile the world to yourself. We praise you for those whom you sent in the power of the Spirit to preach the Gospel to all nations. We thank you that in all parts of the earth a community of love has been gathered together by their prayers and labours, and that in every place your servants call upon your name. May your Spirit awaken in every community a hunger and thirst for unity in you. Let us pray to the Lord:

**Spoken / Sung response:** Lord, hear our prayer.

(Allow enough time for the assistants to light their candles from the Paschal candle.)

**R2** Gracious God, we pray for our churches. Fill them with all truth and peace. Where faith is corrupted, purify it; where people go astray, redirect them; where they fail to proclaim your Gospel, reform them; where they witness to what is right, strengthen them; where they are in need, provide for them; and where they are divided, reunite them. Let us pray to the Lord:

**Spoken/ Sung response:** Lord, hear our prayer.

(Allow enough time for the assistants to Light their candles from the Paschal candle.)

**R3** Creator God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus Christ, your Son. Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred that infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love. And even in our weaknesses, work to accomplish your purposes on earth, so that every people and nation may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne. Let us pray to the Lord:

**Spoken/ Sung response:** Lord, hear our prayer.

(Allow enough time for the assistants to Light their candles from the Paschal candle.)

**R4** Holy Spirit, Giver of Life, we are created to become whole in you and to share this life on earth with our brothers and sisters. Awaken in each of us your compassion and love. Give us strength and courage to work for justice in our neighborhoods, to create peace within our families, to comfort the sick and the dying, and to share all we have with those who are in need. For the transformation of every human heart, let us pray to the Lord:

**Spoken/Sung response:** Lord, hear our prayer.

(Allow enough time for the assistants to light their candles from the Paschal candle.)

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come, Your will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread,  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,  
Now and forever. Amen.

## **VI. AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST - MINISTERS OF RECONCILIATION**

### **Christ's Commission**

(The twelve pass the candle light throughout the congregation until each person has a lighted candle.)

**L** A lighted candle is a deeply human symbol: it enlightens the darkness, creates warmth, security and community. It symbolizes Christ, the light of the world. As ambassadors for Christ we will carry this light into the world, into the dark places where fighting, discord and division impede our united witness. May Christ's light effect reconciliation in our thoughts, words and deeds.

Receive the Light of Christ and carry it into the dark places of our world! Be ministers of reconciliation! Be ambassadors for Christ!

### **Blessing and Sending**

**L** We call out to you, most merciful God:  
Let all who seek reconciliation experience your help so they may proclaim your mighty deeds of Love!  
We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**C Amen.**

**L** May the blessing of Almighty God, The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit come upon you and remain with you forever.

**C Amen.**

**L** Go in God's Peace.

**C** Thanks be to God.

Concluding/ Recessional Hymn/ Song (suitable hymn/ song to be selected)

## BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS FOR THE EIGHT DAYS



### Day 1 ONE HAS DIED FOR ALL (2 Cor. 5: 14)

**Theme:** God so loved all of creation ... (cf. John 3: 16)

In Christ God was reconciling all creation to himself ...  
(Cf. 2 Cor. 5:19)

**Readings:**

Isaiah 53: 4-12	He gave his life as an atoning sacrifice
Psalms 118:1, 14-29	God did not abandon me to death
1 John 2: 1-2	Christ died for all
John 15: 13-17	Giving his life for his friends

**Meditation:**

Divine love leading to reconciliation has no limits. Persons usually hate their enemies. But Jesus says. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. For if you love only those who love you, what more are you doing than others? God makes the sun rise on the evil and the good." (cf. Matt. 5: 43- 48).

Indeed divine love embraces all: the oppressed and the oppressor, the poor and the rich, the dalit and the Brahmin; not only humans but also animals and birds, be they serpents or vultures, be they thorny plants or wild grass.

However this does not mean that God approves of the oppressive and unjust ways of oppressors and exploiters. The transformation of the oppressors and the reconciliation of all creation require God to bear the cost of reconciliation.

As humans we often say that the greatest expression of friendship love is when we offer our lives for our friends (cf. Jn.15: 13). Some humans may even dare to die for a good person. However in divine love, God's life is offered to all, including the enemies of God's good purposes (cf. Rom. 5: 6-11).

In Christ, God offers God's self so that all evil could be transformed. God gifts God's own being so that all creation could regain responsibly just and lovingly inclusive divinity. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."(2 Cor. 5: 21)

The irony of it is that though Christ facilitated our reconciliation, we consider him stricken and afflicted by God (cf. Isa.53:4). Though Christ had to bear the pain and death of the cross, we have converted the cross into a ritualistic symbol of religious comfort.

### **Thought for the Day:**

Christ's reconciliation is not for my church denomination alone, but for all Christians!

Christ's reconciliation is not for Christians alone, but for all humans!

Christ's reconciliation is not for humans alone, but for all creation!

### **Prayer:**

O Reconciling God,

Forgive us for being denominational; help us to embrace all Christians!

Forgive us for being communal; help us to love all humans!

Forgive us for being human centric; help us to integrate with all creation!

In the name of the crucified-resurrected Christ we pray. Amen.

## **Day 2 LIVE NO LONGER FOR THEMSELVES (2 Cor. 5: 15)**

### **Theme: Grassroots Ecumenical Diaconia**

#### **Readings:**

Micah 6: 6 - 8

God has told you what is good

Psalms 25: 1- 5

God of my Salvation, show me your ways

1 John 4: 19 - 21

We love because God first loved us

Mathew 16: 24 -26

Those who lose their life for 'My' sake will find it

#### **Meditation**

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has significance 'for all living and non-living creatures in the cosmos.' It seeks to liberate 'all' from their economic, socio-political and religious inhuman practices and injustices.

Working towards the realization of the reign of God in the cosmos, the Churches today are adopting and adapting relevant missional, ministerial and diaconal interventions.

- Religious people asked the prophet, "What is the responsible way to live?" Micah responded: Do justice and love kindness and

walk humbly with your God.” This spirituality of relationships needs to be facilitated ecumenically at the grassroots level.

- In the midst of challenges Psalm 25 observes that we often feel vulnerable, but illustrates the use of 'prayer' as an advocacy tool to gain strength and wisdom from God to face and overcome social injustices and hostility. The just and loving God will surely respond to our prayers. It is therefore important to cultivate grassroots ecumenical prayer services.
- The Gospel of Christ emphasizes that the disciples of Christ are called to establish inclusive communities on the basis of Love, Justice and Peace. In Christ's death we see a model of life being selflessly offered for the sake of others. Christians are called to develop new forms of community in which we share our means of livelihood with others. In other words we are called to give expressions to ecumenical service (diakonia) at the local level, at the grass roots.
- At the grassroots we are called to be communities of love. If we say we love God, then we should also love all our community members. Communities of grassroots ecumenical diaconia should be communities of love.

### **Thought for the Day:**

- Is our traditional faith influencing us to live only for ourselves based on concepts such as 'personal saviour', 'personal salvation', 'my God', 'my church', 'my mission', and so on...?
- In what ways can we live for others in our daily life, mission, ministry and service?
- How can we give ecumenical expression to the call to live no longer for ourselves?

### **Prayer:**

God 'OF' all 'God 'FOR' all, we thank you for having shown your love and care for 'us', the entire cosmos, through your Son Christ Jesus. May the person and work of Jesus influence us to live as Sisters and Brothers of all and for our entire neighbourhood through our words and deeds. May the Spirit of God strengthen our togetherness in mission and witness. In Jesus' name we pray.

**Amen.**



**Day 3 WE REGARD NO ONE FROM A HUMAN POINT OF VIEW (2 Cor. 5 : 16)**

**Theme: Faith Affirmation: Dalits and Tribals/ Adivasis are Human**

**Readings:**

- I Sam. 16:1, 6-7      The Lord looks not at outward appearances but at the heart
- Psalms 19:7-13      The commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes
- Acts 9 :1-19          Saul becomes Paul
- Matthew 5:1-12      The Beatitudes

**Meditation:**

The problem of oppression, justice and liberation is a constant concern of the Church. In the midst of untold pain and misery as a result of oppression and violence we, as Christians and ethnic communities need to look for alternative ways to find justice. The Church has to re-define her concept of mission, which has largely been limited to soul-saving and charity. Her mission has to be holistic in nature, which will also help the poor and historically oppressed people in safeguarding their civil liberties as well as provide them help for their social and economic upliftment.

In Genesis chapter One we find God created human beings in God's own image. Therefore, categorizing dalits, tribals and adivasis as inferior and backward, alienating, marginalising and discriminating on any ground is a sin before the creator God. We need a new paradigm shift in our understanding of the Mission of God for all people since we all are created in the image of God. We must try to be a channel of God's self revelation by doing good deeds and accomplish what God would want us to be in our relation with God and in our relationship with our fellow human beings, remembering at all times that everyone has an equal standing in the eyes of the creator and also that we are meant to treat everyone with equal respect.

The call to all of us as Christians or Church is to take up the challenge of poverty and oppressive systems like caste as an expression of love and solidarity with the historical victims, which means that we become a part of their struggle against the poverty or dalitness or tribalness or backwardness. Sadly, in our

country, every third person continues to live below the poverty line, which means he or she is denied the basic means of life. This poverty in our country, now, is on the increase through the process of globalization. To deal with this situation, the Church has to stand with Dalits/ Tribals/ Adivasis in their struggle for the removal of poverty and get them out of oppressive situations, if she wants to become the bearer of good news or to become a partner in the establishment of a 'just society' in the world.

### **Thought for the day:**

The purpose and rationale of the Church's mission is to be light, leaven and salt of the earth towards making the earth a place where the God of love, justice and peace will be at home with His people and His whole creation.

### **Prayer:**

Triune God, You are the origin and goal of all living things.

Forgive us when we think only of ourselves  
and are blinded by our own standards.

Open our hearts and eyes.

Teach us to be loving, accepting and gracious,  
so that we may grow into the unity which is your gift.

To you be honour and praise, now and forever.

**Amen.**

## **Day 4    EVERYTHING OLD HAS PASSED AWAY (2 Cor. 5 : 17)**

**Theme:** **Women overcoming bitter memories for better days**

### **Readings:**

Genesis 19:15-26

Don't look back

Psalms 77: 5-15

God is always faithful

Philippians 3: 7-14

Forgetting what lies behind

Luke 9:57-62

Keep your hand on the plough

### **Meditation:**

Is it really possible to wipe away memories of past, memories of pain, and betrayal? Can a Dalit woman assaulted and humiliated by high caste land lords forget the memories of past horror and humiliation? Can a mother whose child had been wounded and killed in war wipe away her tears and her memories of pain and

betrayal? Can a Bangladeshi refugee and illegal migrant living in India who was forced to leave her country during partition forget the memories of pain of fleeing from her own homeland?

We often live out of the past and it is very difficult to heal memories of pain and past. Our memories of past can often paralyze us from living the present. Paul's message here in this is liberating: "Everything old has passed away." At the same time the same memories of pain can transform our lives and make us wounded healers and agents of transformation.

The Bible encourages us to keep the past in mind to draw strength from our past memories and remember how God has sustained us in midst of crisis and given us hope to rebuild our life or transform society. For us hope is not merely the suffering and agony of the wounded bleeding Christ on the Cross but it is the empty tomb, the resurrection of Christ, and the new life and hope that he gives us heralding a new beginning .

### **Thought for the day:**

How can the Church help in healing memories of the past and the pain of individuals, and heal wounded communities?

### **Prayer :**

(Adapted from the Song- One Day at a Time Sweet Jesus)

One day at a time sweet Jesus  
That's all I'm asking of you  
Just give me the strength  
To do every day what I have to do  
Yesterday's gone sweet Jesus  
And tomorrow may never be mine  
Lord, help me today, show me the way  
One day at a time.

**Amen**

## **Day 5 EVERYTHING HAS BECOME NEW (2 Cor. 5: 17)**

**Theme: Children and Youth Hope in the midst of turmoil**

### **Readings:**

Ezekiel 36:25-27	Receiving a new heart from God
Psalms 126	Being filled with joy
Col. 3:9-17	Being renewed in Christ
John 3:1-8	Being born in the Spirit

**Meditation:** "Everything has become new!"

That's the expression of Paul after he met Jesus. He had been persecuting Christians trying to protect the Jewish faith. But on that day he discovered that he had really been torturing Jesus himself. His old apologetic view was changed. He then regarded no one from a human point of view.

The Greek word *pas* which is used here for 'everything' can be translated as 'whole'. Paul is mentioning the whole newness for those who became the followers of Jesus Christ. After that encounter, Paul was not simply mended, but he was made anew: a new creation. Formerly, the world inside him was all in a socio-religiously shaped order of the Jewish traditional society and religion. But now he was a new creation, viewing and approaching things from the perspective of God's order of a world of love and justice, based on the principle of Jesus' grace, creativity and edifying relationships.

It is clear that Paul's understanding of new creation is essentially inclusive. It includes the whole human, inner and outer, and the socio-economic, political and religious life and view as well. That wholistic change made him realize that it was not 'one religion' or 'one culture' that reconciles humans, but it was God in Christ who reconciled human beings. As a new creation, God has entrusted to us that ministry of reconciliation.

Children in a sense symbolize this new creation. Therefore Jesus says, "Unless you turn and become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." So also youth represent to us a generation which challenges the traditional status quo and has visions of a new world order. Children and youth are our hope in the midst of turmoil. Therefore in a special way, in children and in youth, we see everything becoming new.

**Thought for the Day:**

Newness is not making changes in our on-going structure; newness is a change in the structure itself.

**Prayer:**

Triune God you reveal yourself to us as Parent and Creator,  
As Son and Saviour, and as Spirit and Giver of Life,  
and yet you are one.

Break through our human systems, structures and boundaries  
and renew us.

Give us a new heart to remove all that endangers our oneness  
and recreate us as citizens of your reign of love justice and peace.

**Amen.**

## Day 6 GOD RECONCILED US TO HIMSELF (2 Cor. 5:18)

### **Theme: Mission: Heart of the Church**

#### **Readings:**

Genesis :17:1-8	God makes a covenant with Abraham
Psalms :98	The world has seen the victory of God
Romans :5:6-11	God reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ
Luke :2:8-14	Proclamation of the good news

#### **Meditation:**

The Church is called to give expression to and embody its calling as an agent of God's Grace and Peace offered to all creation. When human need is addressed in a way that credits God's Redemptive initiative and work, then the Church's essence, missiological import and *raison d'être* are revealed with the greatest clarity.

As Paul puts it, the initiative for ushering in a new creation comes from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and has given us (the body of disciples - the church) the ministry of reconciliation. Indeed as Emil Brunner has said, "The church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning".

In 'doing mission' then, as the Church seeks to engage in the mandated *Kerygma* (proclamation) or communication of the Good News, it is the ecumenical scope and relate-ability of the conveyed message that determines its meaning to the receiver. This communication, which also includes the dynamism of the Message, is a process that is administered by the Holy Spirit in a participatory manner to ensure the preparedness of the receiver.

Where a culture of fractionalization is on the rise, the message of reconciliation and love, stemming from, and expected as a response to, God's initiative in reconciling us to Himself becomes the remedy to pernicious divisiveness based on regions, caste and other differences.

#### **Thought for the day:**

The Church is locked in a covenant relationship with God to be His Channel of Grace sufficient to communicate and manifest His reconciling plan to all creation whereby the salvific Mission of God is consummated in a divinely orchestrated harmony of various denominational, regional, linguistic and creedal melodies.

**Prayer:**

Merciful God, out of love  
 you made a covenant with your people.  
 Empower us to resist  
 all forms of discrimination.  
 Let the gift of your loving covenant  
 fill us with joy and inspire us to greater unity.  
 Through Jesus Christ, our risen Lord,  
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit  
 now and forever.

**Amen.**
**Day 7 THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION  
 (2 Cor. 5: 18-19)**
**Theme: Relations: Building Communities of Peace**
**Readings:**

Genesis 50: 15- 21 Joseph is reconciled with his brother  
 Psalm : 72 God's kingdom brings righteousness and  
 peace  
 1 John 3 : 16b- 21 God's love compels us to love one another  
 John 17: 20- 26 Jesus prays for the unity of his church

**Meditation:**

We live in a context where polarization of all sorts has not only challenged life but has also ruined it so much so that we have lost our relationship with each other. It has led us to a state of conflict and violence and deviated us from the will of God to live in peace with each other. We live in a pluralistic society where differences are bound to occur and they are inevitable. But those differences reflect the diverse nature of our society, which need to be appreciated. It shouldn't be a basis of our judgmental attitude towards others.

It is our sinfulness to judge our brothers and sisters who have a different opinion about us and what we do. It gives birth to mutual hostility and suspicion, separating us from each other as God's people. Therefore, the fundamental requirement of ministry of reconciliation is love Agape. Christ loved us and reconciled us to God. It is our turn to exhibit the love of God and reconcile ourselves to our fellow brothers and sisters so that together we can build communities of peace.

Peace is possible when communities come together because with their united strength and concerted effort they can remove evil and injustice. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand (Mark 3:25). Therefore, Jesus prayed for the unity of the church in his priestly prayer in John 17. A united church can only do the ministry of reconciliation effectively. Therefore it should be our prayer during this Unity Octave to unite the church body of Christ so that we can be real peacemakers and reconcilers.

**Thought for the day:**

- God has called the church to engage in the ministry of reconciliation by defending justice and seeking peace
- Ministry of reconciliation is all about loving our neighbours as ourselves
- Unity of the churches is crucial for ministry of reconciliation

**Prayer:**

Reconciling God,  
Thank you for reconciling us and the whole world to yourself in Christ. Forgive us for not being able to love those who do not love us. Give us a loving and forgiving heart so that we can be reconciled with our fellow beings and thereby experience deeper reconciliation in you. In the name of Jesus the reconciler we pray.

**Amen.**

**Day 8: RECONCILED TO GOD (2 Cor. 5: 20)**

**Theme: Blessed are the Peace Makers**

**Readings:**

Micah 4 :1-5	In the last days justice will reign
Psalms :87	Glorious things are spoken of God
Revelation 21:1-5a	God will make a new heaven and a new earth
John 20 :11-18	Meeting the risen Christ leads to personal mission

**Meditation:**

Christians are 27.8 million out of 1.21 billion people in India. The Christian identity is a difficult one to live with, in the present circumstances in India. The popular perception about the Christian faith is that it has come from outside. The Christian faith is considered in India as non-Indic religion. The history of

Christianity in India has been interpreted as being an expression of colonial western rule in India. Christians have also been accused of engaging in proselytism.

Nevertheless, the Christian faith compels us to serve the community and be the ambassadors of Peace. Through our educational institutions, hospitals, orphanages, and specialized ministries (NGOs), we have cultivated values of love, justice and peace. We have reached out to the marginalized and oppressed be they women, youth, children, dalits/ tribals/ adivasis, the disabled, people infected and affected by HIV and AIDS . . . the list is long.

As disciples of Christ we are to preach and practice the message of forgiveness and new life not only for individuals but for entire communities. We are to strive to do away with the evils of patriarchy, caste, racism, communalism, globalization, and militarization/nuclearization, and bring in justice and peace. Even though there is wrong perception about us in the community, we are to pursue to be justice and peace activists.

**Thought for the day:**

We are called to love God and neighbor. Do people in our community consider us to be God-lovers and good neighbors? How can we facilitate peace without compromising our values?

**Prayer:**

God of justice and peace, we are thankful to you that we are called to be the followers of Jesus Christ. Help us to follow you truly and witness to you in this world.

We thank you for this week of prayer, for being together as Christians, and for the different ways in which we have experienced your presence.

May we be reconciled and reconciling!

May we be united and uniting!

**Amen.**



## **ECUMENICAL CHALLENGES IN GERMANY**

One of the main ecumenical challenges Germany faces is maintaining a platform on which churches that are smaller in number can meet with the two large churches face to face. The Roman Catholic Church and the EKD are about the same size and have the same kinds of resources at their disposal. For that reason their cooperation comes naturally and covers a wide variety of topics everything from inter-church marriage to questions concerning the relationship between state and church. Many times however, they work together on a strictly bilateral basis, the result being that other churches and even the ACK itself often do not have their due say in ecumenical matters. Doing justice to the fact that there are more than two churches in Germany and encouraging and enabling multilateral discourse and cooperation are some of the ACK's central goals.

Another challenge is the frustration that many people feel, especially those who have labored for a long time at the grassroots level, when they cannot see any progress in ecumenical matters. This frustration is felt most sharply when it comes to sharing the Lord's Supper across confessional boundaries, known as Eucharistic sharing. In Germany there are vast numbers of couples who belong to different churches. They not only yearn to be able to take communion together, but many also feel deeply that the ecumenical movement should be bearing more fruit than it is, and are dissatisfied when they see stagnation instead of bold steps forward.

Many people in Germany today have no real knowledge of the Christian faith, and they do not seem interested in understanding, let alone embracing it. If the churches take their mission seriously to "go to all nations and make them my disciples" (Mt 28:19) it should be a priority for them to engage these people in dialogue. Instead of dealing with this challenge individually, the churches should face it together, learning from each other's experience and encouraging each other. Focusing on their common faith can only strengthen the bond among the churches. Also, trying together to communicate the Christian faith in an understandable way can lead the churches themselves

to have a deeper understanding of their own faith. The 500th anniversary of the Reformation can be seen as an opportunity to remind the public- Christians and non-believers alike- of what the Christian faith is all about: God's love in Christ for us humans and for all creation. That is why the churches in Germany have decided to make the anniversary a celebration of Jesus Christ ("*Christus fest*").

## **WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**

### **Themes 2000 - 2017**

In 1968, materials jointly prepared by the WCC Faith and Order Commission and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity were first used.

- 2000 Blessed be God who has blessed us in Christ  
(Ephesians 1: 3-14)
- 2001 I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (John 14:1-6)
- 2002 For with you is the fountain of life (Psalm 36: 5- 9)
- 2003 We have this treasure in clay jars (2 Corinthians 4: 4-18)
- 2004 My peace I give to you (John 14: 23- 31; John 14: 27)
- 2005 Christ, the one foundation of the church  
(1 Corinthians 3: 1-23)
- 2006 Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am  
among them (Matthew 18: 18-20)
- 2007 He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak  
(Mark 7: 31- 37)
- 2008 Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5: (12a) 13b- 18)
- 2009 That they may become one in your hand  
(Ezekiel 37: 15- 28)
- 2010 You are witnesses of these things (Luke 24: 48)
- 2011 One in the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of  
bread and prayer (cf. Acts 2: 42)
- 2012 We will all be changed by the Victory of our Lord Jesus  
Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 51-58)
- 2013 What does God require of us? (cf. Micah 6, 6- 8)
- 2014 Has Christ been divided? (1 Corinthians 1: 1- 17)
- 2015 Jesus said to her: Give me to drink (John 4,7)
- 2016 Called to proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord  
(Cf. 1 Peter 2:9)
- 2017 Reconciliation- The Love of Christ Compels Us  
(2 Cor 5:14-20)