

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

**THEME:
Justice and only justice you shall pursue
(Deut 16:18-20)**

2019
January 18 - 25

Jointly Prepared and Published by:
The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
The Commission on Faith and Order of the
World Council of Churches

Adapted for India by:
National Council of Churches in India

CONTENTS

To Those Organizing The Week Of Prayer For Christian Unity	1
Biblical Text for 2019	3
Introduction to the Theme for 2019	4
Ecumenical Worship Service: Introduction to the Worship Order of Service	08
Biblical Reflections and Prayers for the Eight Days	18
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: Themes 1968-2018	34

Scripture quotations: The scripture quotations contained herein are from The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright©1989, 1995, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and are used with permission. All rights reserved

TO THOSE ORGANIZING THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

The search for unity: throughout the year

The traditional period in the northern hemisphere for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is 18-25 January. Those dates were proposed in 1908 by Paul Wattson to cover the days between the feasts of St Peter and St Paul, and therefore have a symbolic significance. In the southern hemisphere where January is a vacation time churches often find other days to celebrate the Week of Prayer, for example around Pentecost (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 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 FOR 2019

(Deuteronomy 16:11-20)

Rejoice before the Lord your God you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites resident in your towns, as well as the strangers, the orphans, and the widows who are among you at the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and diligently observe these statutes.

You shall keep the festival of booths for seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing-floor and your wine press. Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns. For seven days you shall keep the festival to the Lord your God at the place that the Lord will choose; for the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all your undertakings, and you shall surely celebrate. Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose: at the festival of unleavened bread, at the festival of weeks, and at the festival of booths. They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed; all shall give as they are able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God that he has given you.

You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall render just decisions for the people. You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME FOR THE YEAR 2019

Justice and only justice you shall pursue

(Deuteronomy 16:18-20)

Every year Christians across the world gather in prayer for growth in unity. We do this in a world where corruption, greed and injustice bring about inequality and division. Ours is a united prayer in a fractured world: this is powerful. However, as individual Christians and communities, we are often complicit with injustice, and yet we are called together to form a united witness for justice and to be a means of Christ's healing grace for the brokenness of the world.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2019 has been prepared by Christians from Indonesia. With a population of 265 million, 86% of whom are reckoned to be Muslim, Indonesia is well known as having the largest Muslim population of any country. However, about 10% of Indonesians are Christian from various traditions. In terms of both population and the vast extension of the country Indonesia is the biggest nation in South East Asia. It has more than 17,000 islands, 1,340 different ethnic groups and over 740 local languages and yet is united in its plurality by one national language Bahasa Indonesia.

The nation is founded on five principles called *Pancasila*, with the motto *Bhineka Tunggal Ika (Unity in Diversity)*. Across the diversity of ethnicity, language and religion, Indonesians have lived by the principle of *gotong royong* which is to live in solidarity and by collaboration. This means sharing in all aspects of life, work, grief and festivities, and regarding all Indonesians as brothers and sisters.

This always fragile harmony is today threatened in new ways. Much of the economic growth that Indonesia has experienced in recent decades has been built on a system that has competition at its heart. This is in stark contrast to the collaboration of *gotong royong*. Corruption is experienced in many forms. It infects politics and business, often with devastating consequences for the environment. In particular, corruption undermines justice and the implementation of law. Too often those who are supposed to promote justice and protect the weak do the opposite. As a consequence, the gap between the rich and the poor has widened; and so a country rich in resources has the scandal of many people living in poverty. As a traditional Indonesian saying goes, "A mouse dies of hunger in the barn full of rice." Meanwhile particular ethnic and religious groups are often associated with wealth in ways that have fed tensions. Radicalization that pits one community against another has grown and is exacerbated by the misuse of social media that demonizes particular communities.

Christian communities in such an environment become newly aware of their unity as they join in a common concern and a common response to an unjust reality. At the same time, confronted by these injustices, we are obliged, as Christians, to examine the ways in which we are complicit. Only by heeding Jesus's prayer "that they all may be one" can we witness to living unity in diversity. It is through our unity in Christ that we will be able to combat injustice and serve the needs of its victims.

Moved by these concerns, the Christians of Indonesia found that the words of Deuteronomy, "Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue ..." (see Deut. 16:18-20) spoke powerfully to their situation and needs. Before the people of God enter the land God has

promised them they renew their commitment to the Covenant God established with them. The pericope comes in a chapter whose central theme is the festivities to be celebrated by the Covenant people. After each festival the people are instructed, “Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns” (Deut. 16:14, see also 16:11). Indonesian Christians look to recover this same spirit of inclusive festivities across communities, which they previously enjoyed. At the end of this long chapter it may seem strange to have two verses about appointing judges, but in this Indonesian context the links between festivities for all and justice become alive. As people of the Covenant established in Jesus, we know that the delights of the heavenly banquet will be given to those who hunger and thirst and are persecuted for justice “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:6, 10).

Christ's Church is called to be a foretaste of this kingdom. However, in our disunity we fall short. We fail to be the sign of God's love for his people. Just as injustice has widened the divisions that have riven Indonesian society, so injustice has also fed the divisions of the Church. We repent of the injustice that causes division, but as Christians we also believe in the power of Christ to forgive us and heal. And so, we find ourselves united under the cross of Christ, calling both for his grace to end injustice and for his mercy for the sins which have caused our division.

The reflections for the eight days and the worship service will be focused on the chosen theme. To deepen our reflection on unity and justice, the topic of each day has been carefully chosen to present struggles that result from injustice. The themes are:

Day 1: Let justice roll down like water (Amos 5: 24)

Day 2: Let your word be 'Yes, Yes,' or 'No, No' (Matthew 5:37)

Day 3: The Lord is gracious and merciful to all (Psalm 145: 8)

Day 4: Be content with what you have (Hebrews 13:5)

Day 5: To bring good news to the poor (Luke 4: 18)

Day 6: The Lord of hosts is his name (Jeremiah 10:16)

Day 7: Woman, great is your faith! (Matthew 15:28)

Day 8: The Lord is my light and my salvation (Psalm 27: 1)



ECUMENICAL WORSHIP SERVICE

Introduction

This worship service emphasizes the importance of moving from our discourses about unity, justice and mercy to action and concrete commitment, and to acts of unity, justice and mercy in our personal lives and in the life of our Christian communities.

Two particular elements of the worship need to be noted in the preparation of the celebration.

The first concerns the choice of readers in the **Prayer of Repentance**. It is important that the first reader (R1) be either an ordained minister or congregational leader while the other two readers may be members of the congregation.

The second element concerns the liturgical symbolic action which takes place after the **Commitment to Unity through Justice and Mercy**. It will be necessary to prepare two cards or tags for each person. During the service, participants are called to reflect on how they might commit to a particular act of justice, mercy, or unity. They will then be invited to write on each of the two cards what their own concrete commitment is. Each person attaches one of these cards to their own shirt. The second cards will be gathered up at the offering and will be put at the foot of the cross. At the conclusion of the worship, these cards will be distributed to each one as they leave the church, so that each may pray for another's commitment.

Order of the Service

Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue
(Deuteronomy 16:18-20)

- L** Leader
C Congregation
R Reader

Song (A suitable opening song may be announced for people to sing)

During the singing of the song, those leading the celebration enter. They should be led by an assistant carrying the Bible. The Bible is placed in a place of honour in the centre of the worship space. The Scripture readings during the service should be proclaimed from this Bible.

Words of Welcome

L The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all
C And also with you.

L Dear friends in Christ, as we gather for this service of prayer for unity, we thank God for our Christian heritage, and for his liberating and saving action in human history.
C. Amen!

Call to worship

L Let us worship the Triune God. God, our Father, you crown your creation with justice and mercy,
C we come to worship you.

L Jesus Christ, your cross brings new life and justice,
C we come to worship you.

L Holy Spirit, you inspire our hearts to act justly,
C we come to worship you.

L May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C And also with you.

Gathering Hymn (*will be chosen locally*)

Introductory words

L As Christians from separated communities, we gather here to pray for unity. This year, the theme of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity chosen by the churches in Indonesia is “Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue.” This theme is imperative due to the recurring situations that bring divisions and conflicts. As we pray together, we are reminded that our calling as members of the body of Christ is to pursue and embody justice. Our unity in Christ empowers us to take part in the wider struggle for justice and to promote the dignity of life.

Invocation of the Holy Spirit

(The response to the invocation may be sung).

L Let us call upon the Holy Spirit to set our hearts on fire as we pray for the unity of the Church. Unite your servants in the bond of unity.

C Come, Holy Spirit!

L Teach us to pray.

C Come, Holy Spirit!

L Liberate us from the slavery of sin

C Come, Holy Spirit!

L Help us in our weakness.

C Come, Holy Spirit!

L Restore us as your children.

C *Come, Holy Spirit!*

Hymn of Praise

Prayer of Repentance

L Beloved sisters and brothers, let us confess before the Lord that we have sinned and ask for forgiveness so that our worship will be pleasing to God.

R1 *(read by an ordained minister or a leader of the congregation)*

Compassionate God,

you have chosen us to shepherd your flock. Jesus, your Son, taught us to act justly. We are aware that in our ministry, we sometimes behave unjustly towards the people whom you have entrusted to us by: prioritizing those who are close to us or those who have higher social status; ignoring strangers, the poor and the least in society; fearing to defend the oppressed; misusing church resources. These deeds have caused some people to turn away from your church.

Lord, have mercy.

C Lord, have mercy. *(This response may be sung.)*

R2 *(read by a member of the congregation)*

Loving God,

you have gathered us as members of your flock. Jesus, your Son, taught us to love one another as a sign of being his disciples. We confess that we have failed to live his commandment of love by: regarding those of other churches as rivals; being hostile to each other and slow to forgive; focusing only on our personal interest; ignoring

the needs of sisters and brothers; excluding those who do not share our point of view. In these ways, our attitudes strengthen the dividing walls between us.

Lord, have mercy.

C Lord, have mercy.

R3 (*read by a different person*)

Gracious God,

You have commissioned us to make our common home a place of justice for all. In your generous love, you send rain on the righteous and the unrighteous and, in Jesus, teach us to love without discrimination. We confess that we have failed to follow this teaching by: disrespecting our neighbours; spreading falsehoods through various social media; participating in the disruption of social harmony. Our conduct risks making the world a barren field that no longer brings forth your justice for all of creation.

Lord, have mercy.

C Lord, have mercy.

L May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive our sins and lead us to eternal life.

C Amen.

Hymn/Song/Meditative music

Proclamation of the Word of God

First reading: Deuteronomy 16:11-20

Responsorial Psalm: 82:1-8 (*read or sung*)

L. God has taken his place in the divine council;
in the midst of the gods he holds judgement:

'How long will you judge unjustly

and show partiality to the wicked?

Response: Rise up, O God, judge the earth.

L. Give justice to the weak and the orphan;
maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.

Rescue the weak and the needy;

deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

Response: Rise up, O God, judge the earth.

L. They have neither knowledge nor understanding,
they walk around in darkness;

all the foundations of the earth are shaken.

Response: Rise up, O God, judge the earth.

L. I say, 'You are gods,

children of the Most High, all of you;

nevertheless, you shall die like mortals,

and fall like any prince.

Rise up, O God, judge the earth;

for all the nations belong to you!

Response: Rise up, O God, judge the earth.

Second reading: Romans 12:1-13

Alleluia (3-fold alleluia may be sung)

Gospel reading: Luke 4:14-21

Alleluia (3-fold alleluia may be sung)

Homily/Sermon

Commitment to Justice, Mercy and Unity

L Jesus Christ prays for the unity of his disciples. The gift of his life is justice for the world.

R1 As members of the body of Christ, we are called to walk together in his path.

R2 Let us hear his calling.

C Holy Spirit, unite us in action.

R1 As members of the body of Christ, we are called to keep our lives free from the love of money, and be content with what we have.

R2 Let us break the cycle of greed and live in simplicity.

C Holy Spirit, unite us in action.

R1 As members of the body of Christ, we are called to proclaim release to captives and victims of all forms of violence.

R2 Let us help them to live in dignity.

C Holy Spirit, unite us in action.

R1 As members of the body of Christ, we are called to extend hospitality to strangers.

R2 Let us outdo one another in showing honour.

C Holy Spirit, unite us in action.

R1 As members of the body of Christ, we are called to proclaim the good news to the whole creation.

R2 Let us protect the life and beauty of God's creation

C Holy Spirit, unite us in action.

L To make concrete our individual commitment to work together for justice, you are invited to write your commitment on two separate cards. We invite you to keep one of these cards close to your heart. The second one will be collected and brought forward as an offering.

(A song for unity and/or justice may be sung as the congregants write their commitments.)

Offering

L What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8) We commit ourselves to acts of justice.

(At this point the ushers collect the second card and bring them forward to be put at the foot of the cross.)

L Gracious God,
you have shown us your compassion and care for all creation. Your love inspires us to offer these commitments to act justly by loving others wholeheartedly regardless of their cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Accept now our offerings and transform them into action for the unity of your Church. We ask this through your Son Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, who live with you as one God forever and ever.

C Amen.

Sharing Peace *(The leader invites the assembly to exchange a sign of peace, so that together we can proclaim our faith.)*

The Nicene Creed (to be said together)

Prayers of the People

L Let us raise to the Lord our common prayer for the Church and for the needs of all humanity.

R From the islands and the oceans,
we worship you, O God, the Creator of life.
Throughout the mountains and the valleys,
we praise you, O God, the Saviour of the world.
With the tongues of all nations,
we thank you, O God, the Comforter of bodies and souls.
We come before you bearing our burdens and hopes.
Today we ask you:

C: O God, hear our prayer and grant us your love.

R We pray for those who live in the midst of injustice.
Encourage us to lift up their voices and strengthen their hope.
We pray for those who continue to perpetuate injustice.
May your kindness fill our hearts and make us agents of freedom and peace.

We pray for every institution and person who stands for justice.

Let us act justly according to your words.

Today we ask you:

C: O God, hear our prayer and grant us your justice.

R We pray for the visible unity of the Church.
Lead us to fulfil Jesus' prayer that we may be one
and work together to manifest your Kingdom.

Today we ask you:

C: O God, hear our prayer and grant us passion for unity.

R We thank you for the many colours, cultures, and customs
that we share in this world.

In our differences, unite us by your love.

Enable us to act together to uphold life

and to make this world a just and peaceful household for all
humanity. Today we ask you:

C: O God, hear our prayer and grant us your peace.

The Lord's Prayer

L Let us join our hands, bound not by chains but by the love of Christ that has been poured into our hearts, and pray to the Father in the words that Jesus taught us.

The Lord's Prayer may be sung.

Our Father.....

After the Lord's Prayer, still holding hands, the assembly may sing a familiar song that celebrates their unity.

After the song, the Sign of Peace may be exchanged.

Blessing

L: May God embrace you with love
and make kindness flow out from you.

May God ignite courage within you
and transform you into agents of his justice and peace.

May God grant you humility
and give you perseverance to nurture unity.

C: Amen!

Recessional Hymn/Song (A suitable song to be selected)

(At the conclusion of the worship, the cards kept at the altar will be distributed to each one as they leave the church, so that each may pray for another's commitment)

BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS FOR THE EIGHT DAYS

Day 1

Let justice roll down like waters
(*Amos 5:24*)

Amos 5:22-25

Luke 11:37-44

Reflection

What a paradox! Many a time, we as Christians seem to be proactive about justice through their prayers and other forms of faith expressions, but procrastinate about practicing justice in our individual and community lives! We publically speak against injustice in the society while we oppress our fellow workers knowingly and unknowingly. We join earth-justice campaigns but we still use plastics. We stand against Hindutva fundamentalism but we staunchly uphold Christian Zionism. We raise our voices when Christians or Churches are attacked but remain silent when a child or a woman is raped, when holy shrines of our religious neighbours are desecrated, and when marginalised communities like Dalits, Adivasis and minorities are oppressed.

In the name of development, several thousand hectares of land are forcefully taken away to construct express ways. Rivers are sold or privatised to the benefit of transnational beverage, mining and steel industries. Lands are acquired from Adivasis and Farmers for the trans-national corporations, but we remain silent because our lands are not acquired. When our lands are acquired, we then fight for our rights as minorities. Several farmers are committing suicide as there is no one to take up their cause for justice. The poor are

forced to leave their lands and migrate not only because of political and economic pressures but also because of ecological reasons: toxic industries which adversely affect earth communities.

The Gospel values of Justice, Peace and Love are to be affirmed in all our life and deeds. There is no Gospel without affirming human rights and social justice. In the prophecy of Amos, God rejects the worship offered by those who neglect justice. God calls, "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (5:24). The prophet insists on the absolute link between worship and acts of justice. When we responsibly take up the cause of the poor, vulnerable and the oppressed, then we practice authentic spirituality.

Prayer:

God of the widow, the orphan and the stranger,
You have shown us the path of justice.
Help us to follow your way by doing justice as our worship of you.

As Christians together, may we worship you not only with our hearts and minds, but also by our deeds.

May the Holy Spirit help and guide us to work for justice wherever we are,

so that many people may be strengthened through our works.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

(Reflection contributed by Rev. R. Christopher Rajkumar,
Executive Secretary- Unity and Mission)

Day 2
Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'
(Matthew 5:37)

Ephesians 4:22-25

Matthew 5:33-37

Reflection

In India, as everywhere, violence is found in many forms. There is violence with acts of physical atrocities that have recognizable and conspicuous indicators. There is also violence against individuals and institutions in seemingly innocuous ways the damage of which may not at once be visible, but have worse ramifications. While 'sticks and stones can certainly break bones', words can do as much damage, may be far more. In this age of 'untruths', 'post-truths' Goebbelsian rhetoric, propaganda and outright lies, all of which are rendered and blown around more easily by tools of social media and the psychology that powers them, it becomes a challenge to be aware of the changing framework of communication dynamics and try to ensure that our words are contained within the bounds of our intent.

Christians are called to be honest and accountable to each other. Vagueness, even inadvertently rendered, has done as much harm as conniving people with intent to beguile do. Mutual trust is an essential component of growth and strength. Bereft of values, principles and trust, institutions and communities have crumbled. The admonition of Jesus, "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil." (Mt. 5:37), calls us to have the kind of prophetic fervour and boldness that is unequivocal and unwavering. While we know that deceit and dishonesty are damaging to our witness and relationships in

Church and society, Jesus challenges us to have an even higher standard of accountability and fortitude in which conditional integrity, conditioned responses, even ambiguity in purpose or words, must be seen as indication of moral infirmity and spiritual decline. Can we step up to the next level of responsibility and integrity?

Prayer

God of Truth and Righteousness,
Give us the wisdom to distinguish right from wrong.
Let our hearts be guided by honesty and love.
Bless us with courage to speak the truth.
Give us the strength to stand against lies.
Keep us from spreading deceit;
Make us, rather, agents of unity and peace,
spreading good news for all people.
Keep us steadfast in our thoughts and words.
We pray in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

(Reflection and Prayer modified by Rev. Caesar David,
Executive Secretary - Communications)

Day 3
The Lord is gracious and merciful to all
(*Psalm 145:8*)

Psalm 145:8-13

Matthew 1:1-17

Reflection

'The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made', said the psalmist, proclaiming that the love of God is beyond

boundaries of ethnicity, culture, race, and even religion. The account of the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew's gospel reflects this expansive vision. While ancient cultures often saw women as inferior, or as the property of their fathers or husbands, Matthew names four women among the ancestors of Jesus, two of whom, Ruth and Rahab, were Gentiles. Naming these in the genealogy of Jesus and making them part of God's human history, proclaims that God includes everyone, male and female, sinner and righteous, in his plan of salvation, regardless of their backgrounds. All human beings are created in God's own image.

Therefore, categorizing Dalits, Tribals and Adivasis as inferior and backward or outcaste, thus discriminating, marginalising, and alienating them is sin. They are entitled to fullness of life, dignified respect, and participatory inclusion in society. Caste discrimination and racial profiling are two major evils among several others in society. The injustices and violence suffered by Dalits, Tribals and Adivasis are unending.

The gospel of Jesus Christ calls for affirmative action towards the liberation of Dalits from caste related injustices within the church and in the society. Likewise Tribals/Adivasis should not be exploited and deprived of their land and livelihood in the name of development. Dalits and Tribals/Adivasis are all entitled to life, the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter, opportunities for education and employment in society, due space for participating in decision making and development of society, and respectful regard and protection of their culture. Therefore, systems and strategies of caste and globalization as well as legal systems have to be confronted and reformed.

Prayer

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

We give praise to you for your great glory made manifest in all of creation.

Give us an open heart to embrace all who experience discrimination.

Help us to grow in love beyond prejudice and injustice.

Grant us the grace to respect the uniqueness of each person, so that in our diversity we may experience unity.

We ask this prayer in your Holy name. Amen.

(Reflection modified by Mr. Pradip Bansrior, Executive Secretary- Dalit and Tribal/ Adivasi Concerns)

Day 4

Be content with what you have

(Hebrews 13:5)

Hebrews 13:1-5

Matthew 6:25-34

Reflection

Since the time India opened her doors to globalization, there has been a huge influx of investments from all over the world introducing its various innovations and glamour. This so-called development has nurtured a culture of consumerism, capitalizing on the vulnerability of unending human wants. When wants become needs and demands, especially in a relatively poor country like India, where a significant section of the population is struggling to get their basic needs fulfilled, the attractions of the consumer culture is adversely affecting the values and priorities of the citizens. Subsequently, the economically weaker sections of the society, and youth in particular, are being swayed away by artificially created wants and desires.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews warns against excessive love of money and material things. In the face of our tendency to think we never have enough, the text reminds us of God's providence and assures us that God will never forsake creation. Through the fruitfulness of earth, rivers and seas, God's goodness has provided ample food and fresh water to sustain all living beings, and yet many people lack these basic necessities. Human weakness and greed frequently lead to corruption, injustice, poverty and hunger. It can be tempting, instead of caring about others and sharing our goods with them, to gather and accumulate money, food and natural resources for ourselves, or our own nation or ethnic group.

Yet, Jesus teaches us that material things should not be our main concern. Rather, we should strive first for the reign of God and its values, trusting that our heavenly Father will provide for us. Living more simply, not preoccupied with earning money beyond our needs or with hoarding resources for the future, can enable us to make the earth, our common home, a more just place.

Prayer

Compassionate God,
we thank you for your bountiful gifts.
Give us the grace to accept all blessings
in simplicity and with humble gratitude.

Enable us to be content and ready to share with others who are
in need,
so that all may experience unity in the love that flows from you,
our Triune God,
who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.
*(Reflection modified by Mr. Jianthaolung Gonmei, Executive Secretary
Youth Concerns)*

Day 5
To bring good news to the poor
(Luke 4:18)

Amos 8:4-8

Luke 4:16-21

Reflection

The Holy Bible brings to us, different images of the 'poor', from the Old Testament to the New Testament. In all these, one thing that stands out is the fact that the God of the Bible is the God of the poor. While the Prophets remind the biblical communities from time to time that they are going away from God's purposes, whenever they neglected the poor, Jesus in the New Testament, centers His public ministry with the poor, starting from the Nazareth Manifesto (Luke 4: 16-21), announcing the purpose of His ministry till His last breath on the Cross. Being in tune with the mind and heart of God of the Bible essentially means, to stand by the poor and serve them.

In our times, our sensitivity to the 'poor' is often limited to the works of charity, either through the Mission Board of our Church or through someone in our Church requesting for extending a helping hand to someone else. It is very rare that one comes across or engages in a direct personal involvement with the poor. Our understanding of the 'poor' is also limited to those we usually find or are visible on the streets, by their appearance, which these days, calls for caution for various obvious reasons we are aware of. We have comfortably placed the poor outside our boundaries of home, church and society, in the margins, ensuring that they are the least to disturb us.

Unless we personally engage with the life and the issues of the 'poor', and understand the real issues that the 'poor' face in their lives, how can we truly engage ourselves in bringing the “good news to the poor”? Ensuring the dignity of the poor, empowering them with life skills, making basic amenities of life accessible to them, being their voice for justice, giving them equal space within our home, our church and our society, valuing their journey of faith and thereby tuning our value systems that govern our life, our family, church, workplace etc., will ultimately enable us to truly engage our poor brothers and sisters. May the Holy Spirit, guide us, in tuning ourselves to the mind and heart of the God of the Bible.

Prayer

O God, keep us in your will,
Enable us to discern your will, your mind and your heart.
May we never walk away from your narrow ways, of truth, life
and justice.

Open our hearts, our minds, our homes and our churches,
Making them your dwelling places,
Where the poor find love, solace, hope and strength.
Keep us in your will, O Lord!

(Reflection and Prayer contributed by Fr. Thomas Ninan,
General Coordinator, ESHA)

Day 6
The Lord of hosts is his name
(Jeremiah 10:16)

Jeremiah 10:12-16

Mark 16:14-15

Reflection

“Host” could refer to either an army or a great number or multitude. The first time it appears in the Bible is right at the beginning, in the creation account: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the HOST of them.” (Genesis 2:1). Here it is the host both of heaven and earth, and signifies the multitudes of living creatures which populate the land, and seas, and air in the order of their nature and the progressive discharge of their functions. This could mean that all of the atoms, all of the molecules, the vast array of them, were working together... all assembled and acting towards a purpose. Thus God as the “Lord of Hosts”, God could be pictured as the conductor of the beautiful orchestra that is the entirety of all creation. Every atom, every molecule, moves in accordance with God's purposes and at God's command.

Today, however, we are facing a serious global ecological crisis, which threatens the survival of the natural world. Instead of the Lord of Hosts we are worshipping Mammon. Many people have been driven by greed to exploit creation beyond its capacity. In the name of development, forests are cleared and pollution destroys land, air, rivers and seas, rendering agriculture impossible, making fresh water unobtainable and causing animals to die. In this context it is useful to remember that after his resurrection,

Jesus commissioned the disciples to proclaim the good news 'to the *whole* creation'. No part of creation is outside God's plan to make all things new. And so conversion is needed from a tendency to exploit to an attitude that values and reconciles us with creation.

As Christians we need to promote eco-friendly churches, and to take a stand against environmental abuses. This unites Christians in bearing witness to their Creator, 'for he is the one who formed all things'. When we join with other Christians in defence of our common earthly home, we are not just engaging in activism, but are fulfilling the Lord's command to proclaim the good news of God's healing and restoring love to *all* of creation.

Prayer

Loving God,
By your word all things came to be.
We thank you for the universe
which manifests your glory, beauty and kindness.
Grant us the wisdom to walk gently upon the earth
and together to be prophets of your good news to all creation.
Amen.

(Reflection modified by Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad, General Secretary)

Day 7
Woman, great is your faith!
(*Matthew 15:28*)

1 Samuel 1:13-17

Matthew 15:21-28

Reflection

Eli misjudges Hannah's deep and fervent prayer and condemns her, dismissing her supplications as drunken ramblings. Yet the words of her reply, calling on him not to dismiss her as 'a worthless woman' softened his heart and he sent her away with a blessing. Likewise, when the Canaanite woman came to beg Jesus to heal her daughter, he initially dismissed her, saying that he had come only for his own people. Yet she persisted in her begging and challenging and eventually, recognising her great faith, Jesus granted her request. In both cases, a woman who was initially marginalised and judged unworthy of attention turned out to be speaking prophetic words that softened hearts and brought healing and wholeness.

The marginalization and dismissing of women's voices continues in our own times. Indeed even within our churches we are often complicit with cultures that devalue women. As Christians become aware of their own failings in this area, they come to recognize more clearly the horror of violence against women and children, snatched forcibly from their homes and trafficked to other lands. These and many other migrant workers are often treated as less than human, and are denied the most basic human rights.

As Christians unite in prayer and study of the Scriptures, truly listening for God's voice, they can discover that God also speaks today through the cries of the most abused in society. It is when they hear God's call together that they are inspired to join in common action against the scourge of human trafficking and of other evils.

Prayer

Gracious God,

You are the source of human dignity.

By your grace and power

the words of Hannah changed the heart of Eli the Priest;

by your grace and power

the words of the Canaanite woman moved Jesus to heal her daughter.

As we search to manifest the unity of the Church,

grant us the courage to reject all forms of violence against women

and to celebrate the gifts of the Spirit

that women bring to the service of the Church.

This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God forever and ever. Amen.

(Taken from the original Unity Octave Booklet)

Day 8
The Lord is my light and my salvation
(Psalm 27:1)

Psalm 27:1-4

John 8:12-20

Reflection

“Justice and only justice you shall pursue!” This is quite a challenging commission. We are living in a world which is troubled by many challenges, including greed, violence, exclusion, exploitation, poverty, pollution, hunger and trafficking. We recognise and confess that some of these sins have tainted the lives of our churches too, wounding our unity and diminishing our witness to the world. How can we address these evils? Is there any hope? The Psalmist confidently declares, “The Lord is my light and my salvation.”

In ancient times there were two kinds of light: the sun and the lamp. First, the sun: luminous, unable to be stared at, and, like God, the sun gives light, warmth, and life, and highlights beauty. God's character and power is light; there is no darkness in God. In other words God stands for justice, love and peace. Our fellowship with God should energize our lives with the qualities of justice, love and peace. In our world today we have discovered ways of harnessing solar energy. Yes, as Christians, we too can harness God's character and power through divine fellowship.

When it got dark in biblical times, they lit lamps -- not the brilliant LED lanterns you can purchase today, but simple pottery lamps, with a single wick and flame, casting just enough light to see a short

ways ahead. If we follow God's will, we do not know what the road will look like in a few miles or years. The forces of injustice and evil symbolically also threateningly darken our journeys. God gives us just a pottery lamp's worth of light, just enough to take a few more steps. You have to trust God with that kind of light as we move on to face obstacle and forces of darkness.

It is the context of facing the forces of darkness that the Psalmist asserts, "God is my salvation." God had rescued the Psalmist time and again, and would do so into eternity. The Hebrew word for salvation means 'deliverance.' Martin Luther's great hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is our God," is founded upon this passage.

Prayer

God our Sustainer,
we praise you for your loving kindness,
for upholding us in times of trial,
and showing us your light in times of darkness.
Transform our lives so that we may be a blessing for others.
Help us to live unity in diversity as a witness to your
communion,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
one God now and forever. Amen.

(Reflection contributed by Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad, General Secretary)



WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY
Themes 1968-2019

*Materials jointly prepared by the WCC Faith and Order Commission
and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
were first used in 1968*

- 1968** To the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:14)
- 1969** Called to freedom (Galatians 5:13)
(Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)
- 1970** We are fellow workers for God (1 Corinthians 3:9)
(Preparatory meeting held at the Monastery of
Niederaltaich, Federal Republic of Germany)
- 1971** ...and the communion of the Holy Spirit
(2 Corinthians 13:13) (Preparatory meeting in Bari, Italy)
- 1972** I give you a new commandment (John 13:34)
(Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1973** Lord, teach us to pray (Luke 11:1)
(Preparatory meeting held at the Abbey of Montserrat, Spain)
- 1974** That every tongue confess: Jesus Christ is Lord
(Philippians 2:1-13)
(Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1975** God's purpose: all things in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-10)
(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 (Material from Caribbean Conference of
Churches. Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)

- 1977** Enduring together in hope (Romans 5:1-5)
(Material from Lebanon, in the midst of a civil war.
Preparatory meeting held in Geneva)
- 1978** No longer strangers (Ephesians 2:13-22)
(Material from an ecumenical team in Manchester,
England)
- 1979** Serve one another to the glory of God (1 Peter 4:7-11)
(Material from Argentina Preparatory meeting held in
Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1980** Your kingdom come (Matthew 6:10)
(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)
(Material from Graymoor Fathers, USA Preparatory meeting
held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1982** May all find their home in you, O Lord (Psalm 84)
(Material from Kenya Preparatory meeting held in Milan,
Italy)
- 1983** Jesus Christ - the life of the world (1 John 1:1-4)
(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 Corinthians 2:2 and Colossians 1:20)
(Preparatory meeting held in Venice, Italy)
- 1985** From death to life with Christ (Ephesians 2:4-7)
(Material from Jamaica Preparatory meeting held in
Grandchamp, Switzerland)

- 1986** You shall be my witnesses (Acts 1:6-8)
(Material from Yugoslavia (Slovenia) Preparatory meeting held in Yugoslavia)
- 1987** United in Christ - a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17-6:4a)
(Material from England Preparatory meeting held in Taizé, France)
- 1988** The love of God casts out fear (1 John 4:18)
(Material from Italy Preparatory meeting held in Pinerolo, Italy)
- 1989** Building community: one body in Christ (Romans 12:5-6a)
(Material from Canada Preparatory meeting held in Whaley Bridge, England)
- 1990** That they all may be one...That the world may believe (John 17) (Material from Spain Preparatory meeting held in Madrid, Spain)
- 1991** Praise the Lord, all you nations! (Psalm 117 and Romans 15:5-13) (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)
(Material from Belgium Preparatory meeting held in Bruges, Belgium)
- 1993** Bearing the fruit of the Spirit for Christian unity (Galatians 5:22-23) (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) (Material from Ireland Preparatory meeting held in Dublin, Republic of Ireland)

- 1995** Koinonia: communion in God and with one another (John 15:1-17) (Material from Faith and Order Preparatory meeting held in Bristol, England)
- 1996** Behold, I stand at the door and knock (Revelation 3:14-22) (Material from Portugal Preparatory meeting held in Lisbon, Portugal)
- 1997** We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20) (Material from Nordic Ecumenical Council Preparatory meeting held in Stockholm, Sweden)
- 1998** The Spirit helps us in our weakness (Romans 8:14-27) (Material from France Preparatory meeting held in Paris, France)
- 1999** He will dwell with them as their God, they will be his peoples (Revelation 21:1-7) (Material from Malaysia Preparatory meeting held in Monastery of Bose, Italy)
- 2000** Blessed be God who has blessed us in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14) (Material from the Middle East Council of Churches Preparatory meeting held La Verna, Italy)
- 2001** I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (John 14:1-6) (Material from Romania Preparatory meeting held at Vulcan, Romania)
- 2002** For with you is the fountain of life (Psalm 36:5-9) (Material CEEC and CEC Preparatory meeting near Augsburg, Germany)
- 2003** We have this treasure in clay jars (2 Corinthians 4:4-18) (Material churches in Argentina Preparatory meeting at Los Rubios, Spain)

- 2004** My peace I give to you (John 14:23-31; John 14:27) (Material from Aleppo, Syria Preparatory meeting in Palermo, Sicily)
- 2005** Christ, the one foundation of the church (1 Corinthians 3:1-23) (Material from Slovakia Preparatory meeting in Piestaň, Slovakia)
- 2006** Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them (Matthew 18:18-20) (Material from Ireland Preparatory meeting held in Prosperous, Co. Kildare, Ireland)
- 2007** He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak (Mark 7:31-37) (Material from South Africa Preparatory meeting held in Faverges, France)
- 2008** Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:(12a) 13b-18) (Material from USA Preparatory meeting held in Graymoor, Garrison, USA)
- 2009** That they may become one in your hand (Ezekiel 37:15-28) (Material from Korea Preparatory meeting held in Marseilles, France)
- 2010** You are witnesses of these things (Luke 24:48) (Material from Scotland Preparatory meeting held in Glasgow, Scotland)
- 2011** One in the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer (cf. Acts 2:42) (Material from Jerusalem Preparatory meeting held in Saydnaya, Syria)
- 2012** We will all be changed by the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:51-58) (Material from Poland Preparatory meeting held in Warsaw, Poland)

- 2013** What does God require of us? (cf. Micah 6:6-8)
(Material from India Preparatory meeting held in Bangalore, India)
- 2014** Has Christ been divided? (1 Corinthians 1:1-17)
(Material from Canada Preparatory meeting held in Montréal, Canada)
- 2015** Jesus said to her: Give me to drink (John 4: 7)
(Material from Brazil Preparatory meeting held in São Paulo, Brazil)
- 2016** Called to proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord (cf. 1 Peter 2:9) (Material from Latvia Preparatory meeting held in Rīga, Latvia)
- 2017** Reconciliation - The love of Christ compels us (2 Cor 5:14-20) (Material from Germany Preparatory meeting held in Wittenberg, Germany)
- 2018** Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power (Ex 15:6)
(Material from the Caribbean Preparatory meeting held in Nassau, Bahamas)
- 2019** Justice and only justice you shall pursue (Deut 16:18-20)
(Material from Indonesia Preparatory meeting held in Jakarta, Indonesia)

