

PRAYERS FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY (January 18-25, 2014)

Has Christ been divided?
(1 Cor 1:1-17)



6 January, 2014

Dear Friends,

Season's greetings and best wishes for the New Year!

Every year from January 18 to 25, the Church celebrates 'Unity Octave'. During this time we pray very specially for ecumenical unity which is an integral component of the ecumenical movement.

In fact, the **ecumenical movement has its foundation in the prayer of Jesus**, who on the eve of his death prayed: "That they may be one" (Jn 17: 21). The Second Vatican Council perceived the promotion of Christian unity as inspired by the Holy Spirit as one of the principle aims of the Council. Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical on ecumenism entitled 'Ut Unum Sint' ('That they may be one'), reaffirmed the irreversible commitment of the Catholic Church to the cause of ecumenism ('Ut Unum Sint', UUS 3). Indeed, prayer has always been recognized as the soul of ecumenism, since the longed-for unity of the Churches will come only as a gift of God's grace.

During the past fifty years the most characteristic prayer for unity is the Christian Unity Week celebrated by many Churches during 18-25 January. The origins of this celebration are in the Anglican world, but it has been welcomed and adopted by the Catholic Church and many other Churches. It is indeed significant that it was at the end of the Week of Prayer, precisely on 25 January 1959, that John XXIII announced the Second Vatican Council which would officially open the Catholic Church to the ecumenical movement. The Unity Week could profitably be celebrated in all parishes and institutions. Where there are several organised Churches in a locality it is recommended that at least on one day during this week a common prayer service open to all Christians be organized.

The Pontifical Council for Promoting of Christian Unity and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches have taken charge of preparing prayer services every year. Each year this Committee seeks the assistance of representatives from different countries to do so. This year the Committee met with the Canadian representatives in September 2012 at the Villa Saint Martin, a Jesuit retreat centre at Pierrefonds, on the northwest of the island of Montreal. The Committee has offered us two formats:

1. **A Common Prayer Service for Christian Unity**
2. **Biblical Reflections and Prayers for the 'Unity Octave'**

I am including in this booklet both the formats. If you are able to organize a Common Ecumenical Prayer service, please do so. It will be, I am sure, a very enriching and motivational experience. Or else you could use the second format and incorporate some of the readings or the reflections and prayers in the daily Eucharist during the Unity Octave.

With God's grace, our efforts will most certainly bear abundant fruit!

Sincerely, and with kind regards,

Fr. Gilbert de Lima

Fr Gilbert de Lima
(Convener of the Archdiocesan Ecumenical Commission)

Theme: Has Christ been divided ?
(1 Cor 1:1-17)

1. Common Prayer Service for Christian Unity (2014)

How to Use this Prayer material: The **Church can invite members of the other mainline churches** (Christian Communities) for this common prayer service and pray together profitably for Christian unity. A certain number of texts of the Service need to be made available to the congregation. This prayer service can be organized on one day of the Unity Octave, perhaps after the evening mass. The congregation needs to be informed through the Sunday announcements of this prayer service.

L: Leader(s)

C: Congregation

I. We Gather in Hope and Unity

Processional Hymn: All over the world the Spirit is moving...

The worship leaders and others may enter in procession.

L: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:3).

L: This worship service was prepared in Canada. The word, "Canada," in the language of some of the country's first people, the Iroquois (pronounced: ear-uh-kwa), means "village". As members of the household of God Christians around the world indeed inhabit one "village." When Christians worship, they link themselves to this vast global village, so full of beauty, of struggle and of hope. Dear friends, we welcome you to join together in prayer through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen

L: Loving God, you call all of us: from our homes and from our offices, from our mines and from our factories, from our fields and from our shops, from our fishing boats and from our herds, from our schools and from our hospitals, from our prisons and from our detention centres, to be one in fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

C: Make us one in Christ.

L: The indigenous peoples of Canada honour an ancient ritual of praying while facing in different directions. With them, let us unite in prayer, facing each of the directions as indicated:

Facing East

L: From the East, the direction of the rising sun, we receive peace and light and wisdom and knowledge.

C: We are grateful for these gifts, O God.

Facing South

L: From the South comes warmth, guidance, and the beginning and the end of life.

C: We are grateful for these gifts, O God.

Facing West

L: From the West comes the rain, purifying waters, to sustain all living things.

C: We are grateful for these gifts, O God.

Facing North

L: From the North comes the cold and mighty wind and the white snows, giving us strength and endurance.

C: We are grateful for these gifts, O God.

Turning towards the front, and facing upward

L: From the heavens we receive darkness and light and the air of your breath.

C: We are grateful for these gifts, O God.

Facing downward

L: From the earth we come and to the earth we will return.

C: We are grateful, O God, for your good creation, our earthly home.

L: May we walk good paths, blessed God, living on this earth as brothers and sisters should; rejoicing in one another's blessing, sympathizing in one another's sorrows, and together with you, in the name of Jesus, and with the Spirit's awakening breath, renewing the face of the earth.

C: Amen.

Hymn of Praise: Be Exalted/Great indeed are your works O Lord

Prayers of Repentance

L: Inspired by Paul's appeal to the community of Corinth, let us confess our sins.

L: Gracious God, through our union with Christ Jesus you have made us rich in speech and in knowledge of every kind. In our pride, we attribute these gifts to ourselves and do not recognize their true source. Forgive us, Lord.

C: Lord, have mercy or Kyrie eleison (may be sung).

L: Gracious God, in Christ we are not lacking in any spiritual gift. Yet, often we are too timid or too self-absorbed to share the marvels of this life-giving message with those around us. Forgive us, Lord.

C: Lord, have mercy.

L: Gracious God, you call us to fellowship in your Son, Jesus Christ. For our lack of enthusiasm to be united in one mind and one purpose; for too readily allowing divisions and quarrels to persist among us, forgive us, Lord.

C: Lord, have mercy.

L: Gracious God, you remain faithful even while seeing our weakness. Forgive our sins of mediocrity and our too easy acceptance of divisions among us. By the grace of your Holy Spirit, rekindle our zeal to take concrete steps to honour our covenant of unity with you, with one another, and with all of creation.

C: Amen.

II. We Listen for the Word of God

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 57:14-19; Psalm 36:5-10; 1 Corinthians 1:1-17; Mark 9:33-41

Homily:

III. We Respond in Faith and Unity

Affirmation of Faith

(The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the Apostles' Creed or another affirmation of faith may be used.)

The Apostles' Creed: I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord. Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary. Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried: He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost. I believe in the holy catholic church: the communion of saints. The forgiveness of sins. The resurrection of the body. And the life everlasting. Amen.

Hymn of Faith and Commitment Ecumenical Exchange of Spiritual Gifts

Those preparing the service have gathered beforehand to reflect on the various gifts of the churches in the community. Either local gifts or gifts of their wider tradition may be selected. Representatives of the different churches bring objects representing the gifts that their tradition brings to the whole Christian community.

The gifts are brought forward and then placed on a table. A leader may announce the gifts using this or a similar format:

L: From the _____ church, we gratefully receive the gift of _____ represented here by _____.

C: We are grateful for these gifts, O God.

Collect

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles, "Peace I give to you; my own peace I leave with you". Regard not our sins, but the faith of your Church, and give to us the peace and unity of that heavenly city, where with the Father and the Holy Spirit you live and reign, now and forever. Amen.

Intercessory Prayers

Together, Canadian churches have embraced the United Nations' "Eight Millennium Goals." The following prayers lift up these goals.

L: We pray for all people who suffer day to day in *poverty and hunger*. Their precarious state often causes divisions; may Christ's love restore justice and peace. Gracious God, hear our prayer,

C: And in your love, answer.

L: We pray for all those striving for *universal education*. May their thirst for knowledge build bridges between our churches and restore respect in our differences. Gracious God, hear our prayer,

C: And in your love, answer.

L: We pray for those striving for *equal dignity and rights of man and woman*. May the image of God be honoured in all women and men. We remember especially the need for equal access to jobs, goods and services. As we become one in Christ Jesus, may we fully receive the gifts of both men and women. Gracious God, hear our prayer,

C: And in your love, answer.

L: We pray for the young who are sick and those who seek to improve *child health*. As we take care of children, may we welcome Jesus himself. Gracious God, hear our prayer,

L: We pray for women who bear children, and for their *maternal health*. May we take care of these mothers who carry new life and whose love for their children reminds us of God's uniting love for us. Gracious God, hear our prayer,

C: And in your love, answer.

L: We pray for those who “*combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases*”. May we hear the voices of those denied a life of dignity, and work to create a world in which all people are respected and cared for, and where no one is excluded.

Gracious God, hear our prayer,

C: And in your love, answer.

L: We pray for all who suffer the consequences of the poor stewardship of creation, and for all endangered species. Guide us to “*environmental sustainability*” so we can be reconciled with creation. Gracious God, hear our

prayer,

C: And in your love, answer.

L: We pray for those who practice international solidarity and *global partnership*. As we favour a fair trade of goods and we cancel debt in the poorest countries, may we also strive for justice. Gracious God, hear our prayer,

C: And in your love, answer.

L: As we strive to realize these goals, may we discern your voice, O Lord, and journey together towards the Kingdom for which you prayed. And so we pray:

The Lord’s Prayer (*said or sung*)

Sign of Peace

L: When the French came to Canada in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they found a land rich in resources, and were helped by its first Peoples. Their sense of gratitude led to the ship that brought the founder of Québec City being named “*Don de Dieu*”, which means “Gift of God”.

In many of the Eucharistic rites used in Canada, people are invited to holy communion with the words “The Gifts of God for the People of God.” The unity for which we pray is restored ecclesial communion with one another, and will be marked by receiving the Eucharistic gifts together. Yet even on the journey to visible unity, we give and receive other gifts from one another, gifts of God for the people of God.

In the French-speaking Province of Québec today, the expression *don de Dieu*-- “**gift of God**” - has a fresh vitality in the Christian community and in popular culture. It recalls a sense of gratitude for the gifts of God which comes from a time when their ancestors were able to share in thanksgiving with the First Nations of Canada. As a sign of our peace and a way to recognize the gifts we receive from one another, let us say to each other with French-Canadians, “*Don de Dieu*” .

The worshippers greet one another with an embrace, bow, or handshake as they say:

C: “Don de Dieu”

Offering Hymn (*a collection may be taken during this hymn*)

IV. We Go Forth Into the World

Commitment to Unity

L: Paul challenged the Christians in Corinth to know in their hearts and to show in their actions that Christ has not been divided. He challenges us, too, to realize more fully the unity we already have in Christ.

With all those in every place who call on the Lord Jesus Christ,

C: Together, we are called to be saints.

L: Graced by God in every way,

C: Together, we give thanks for one another.

L: Rich in the many blessings God has given us through our union in Christ,

C: Together, we are not lacking in any spiritual gift.

L: Sure in the God who strengthens us for love and service,

C: Together, we affirm that God is faithful.

L: Embraced by Jesus Christ,

C: Together, we are called into fellowship.

L: United in the same mind and the same purpose,

C: Together, we seek to be in agreement.

L: Overcoming our quarrels about the one who was crucified for us,

C: Together, we belong to Christ.

L: Has Christ, then, been divided?

C: No! Together, we go into the world to proclaim his good news!

Sending Hymn: We are one in the Spirit...

Blessing and Sending Forth

The blessing may be bestowed by several worship leaders in the form below or in another form.

L: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

L: May the love of the Lord Jesus draw you to himself, may the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen you in his service, may the joy of the Lord Jesus fill your spirit, and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you forever.

C: Amen

L: Go in peace, to love and to be loved, to welcome and to belong to serve and to be nourished.

C: Thanks be to God!

Concluding Hymn: Make me a servant...

2. BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS FOR THE ‘UNITY OCTAVE’

How to Use this Prayer material: Material presented here can be incorporated into the daily Eucharist or form part of a special prayer service.

DAY 1

Together... we are called to be saints

Suggested Readings:

Exodus 19: 3-8: You shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation

Psalm 95: 1-7: We are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand

1 Peter 2: 9-10: Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people

Matthew 12: 46-50: Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother

Points for Reflection

Together, we who call upon the name of the Lord are called to be saints “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:2). In Exodus, this gathering together of God’s people is described as a treasured possession, a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.

In 1 Peter, our membership in this communion of saints is understood to come as a result of God calling us together as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, God’s own people. With this calling comes a shared mandate to proclaim the mighty acts of God that drew us out of darkness and into God’s light. Furthermore, we discover in Matthew that as a communion of saints, our oneness in Jesus is to extend beyond our family, clan, or class as together we pray for unity and seek to do the will of God.

Prayer

Merciful God, together with all those who call on the name of the Lord, in our brokenness we hear your call to be saints. Yet you have made us a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. By the power of your Holy Spirit, draw us together in the communion of saints and strengthen us to do your will and to proclaim the mighty acts of Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

DAY 2

Together... we give thanks for God’s grace in one another

Suggested Readings:

Deuteronomy 26:1-11: The Lord brought us out of Egypt

Psalm 100: Give thanks to God, bless God’s name

Philippians 1:3-11: I thank God every time I remember you

John 1:1-18: Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ

Points for reflection

Gratitude, in Deuteronomy, is a way of living life with a deep awareness of God’s presence within us and around us. It is the ability to recognize God’s grace active and alive in one another and in all people everywhere and to give God thanks. The joy that flows from this grace is so great that it embraces even “the aliens who reside among you”.

Gratitude, in the ecumenical context, means being able to rejoice in the gifts of God’s grace present in other Christian communities, an attitude that opens the door to ecumenical sharing of gifts and to learning from one another.

All of life is a gift from God: from the moment of creation to the moment God became flesh in the life and work of Jesus, to this moment in which we are living. Let us thank God for the gifts of grace and truth given in Jesus Christ, and manifest in one another and our churches.

Prayer

Most loving and gracious God, we give thanks for the gifts of your grace that we experience in our own tradition and in the traditions of other churches. By the grace of your Holy Spirit, may our gratitude continue to grow as we encounter one another and experience your gift of unity in new ways. This we pray through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

DAY 3

Together... we are not lacking in any spiritual gifts

Suggested Readings:

Job 28:20-28: Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom

Psalm 145:10-21: You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing

Ephesians 4:7-13: Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift

Mark 8:14-21: Why are you talking about having no bread?

Points for Reflection

Job realizes that even though all has been taken away from him, the fear of the Lord remains – that is wisdom. As brothers and sisters in Christ, even though we are impoverished by our divisions, we have all been graced with an abundance of diverse gifts, both spiritual and material to build up his body.

Yet, despite God's promises and Jesus' generous life and love, we, like the disciples in Mark, sometimes forget our true wealth: we divide, we hoard; we speak and act as if we have "no bread". Christ has not been divided: together we have gifts enough to share with one another and "with every living thing".

Prayer

Faithful, open-handed God, we bless you that you have given us all the spiritual gifts we need to come to the measure of the full stature of Christ: for wisdom, for gifts of service and for bread. Help us to be signs of your abundance, gathered in unity to bring the gifts of your everlasting kingdom to every place of pain and lack.

Filled with the Spirit, we pray in the name of the One whose gift was the bread of his life broken for us, now and forever. Amen.

DAY 4

Together... we affirm that God is faithful

Suggested Readings:

Lamentations 3:19-26: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases

Psalm 57:7-11: God's faithfulness extends to the clouds

Hebrews 10:19-25: He who has promised is faithful

Luke 1:67-75: He has looked favourably on his people

Points for reflection

The eternal unity of Father, Son and Spirit draws us closer into the love of God, and calls us to participate in God's work in the world which is love, mercy and justice. Mercy and justice are not divided in God, but rather are joined together in the steadfast love manifested in God's covenant with us and with all of creation.

The new father Zechariah testifies to God's manifestation of mercy in keeping his promises to Abraham and his descendents. God is faithful to his holy covenant.

As we continue to pray for the unity of the church, we must not neglect to meet together and encourage one another, spurring each other on towards love and good deeds, saying: “God is faithful.”

Prayer

Faithful God, we give thanks for your steadfast love and your devotedness that extends to the clouds. As we wait in joyful hope, working and praying together for the full visible unity of your church, fill us with confidence in your promises . We make this prayer through Jesus Christ, our Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

DAY 5

Together... we are called into fellowship

Suggested Readings:

Isaiah 43:1-7: I will be with you

Psalm 133: How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

1 John 1:3-7: We have fellowship with one another”

John 15:12-17: I have called you friends”

Points for reflection

We are called into fellowship with God the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. As we draw closer to the Triune God, we are drawn closer to one another in Christian unity.

Christ has initiated a change in our relationship, calling us friends instead of servants. In response to this relationship of love, we are called out of relationships of power and domination into friendship and love of one another.

Called by Jesus, we witness to the gospel both to those who have not yet heard it and to those who have. This proclamation contains a call into fellowship with God, and establishes fellowship among those who respond.

Prayer

Father of love, you have called us into the fellowship of your Son and appointed us to bear fruit in our witness to the gospel. By the grace of your Spirit, enable us to love one another and to dwell together in unity so that our joy may be complete.

Amen.

DAY 6

Together... we seek to be in agreement

Suggested Readings:

Judges 4:1-9: If you go with me, I will go

Psalm 34:1-14: Seek peace, and pursue it

1 Corinthians 1:10-15: Be united in the same mind and the same purpose

Luke 22:24-30: A dispute also arose among them

Points for reflection

The disunity described in 1 Corinthians 1:12-13 reflects a distortion of the gospel, undermining the integrity of the message of Christ. To acknowledge conflict and division, as Chloe’s people did, is the first step to establishing unity.

Women like Deborah and Chloe raise a prophetic voice among God’s people in times of conflict and division, confronting us with the need to be reconciled. Such prophetic voices may enable people to gather in renewed unity for action.

As we strive to be united in the same mind and the same purpose, we are called to seek the Lord and his peace as the psalmist wrote.

Prayer

Loving God, you give us prophetic witnesses in times of conflict and division.

When we seek you, Lord, send us your Holy Spirit to make us artisans of reconciliation, united in the same mind and the same purpose. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.

DAY 7

Together... we belong to Christ

Suggested Readings:

Isaiah 19:19-25: God will send them a saviour

Psalm 139:1-12: Where can I go from your spirit?

1 Corinthians 12:12-26: If one member suffers... If one member is honoured...

Mark 9:38-41: Whoever is not against us is for us

Points for reflection

Isaiah envisioned a day when Egyptians and Assyrians would worship together with Israel as God's people. Christian unity belongs to the design of God for the unity of all humanity, and indeed of the cosmos itself. We pray for the day when we will worship together in one faith and one Eucharistic fellowship.

We are blessed by the gifts of various church traditions. Recognising those gifts in each other impels us towards visible unity.

Our baptism unites us as one body in Christ. While we value our particular churches, Paul reminds us that all who call on the name of the Lord are with us in Christ for we all belong to the one body. There is no other to whom we can say, "I have no need of you" (1 Cor 12:21).

Prayer

We give you thanks, O God, that you bless each and every member of the body of Christ with the gifts of your Spirit. Help us to be supportive of one another, to be respectful of our differences, and to work for the unity of all throughout the world who call upon Jesus as Lord. Amen.

DAY 8

Together... we proclaim the gospel

Suggested Readings:

Isaiah 61:1-4: The spirit of the Lord God has sent me to bring good news

Psalm 145:1-7: One generation shall laud your works to another

1 Corinthians 15:1-8: For I handed on to you what I in turn had received

Luke 4:14-21: Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing

Points for reflection

Together we proclaim anew the good news prophesied in Isaiah, fulfilled in our Lord Jesus, preached by the Apostle Paul, and received by the Church. Facing honestly the differences we have and the labels of denomination we embrace, we must never lose sight of the common mandate we have in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul is sent "to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power" (1 Cor 1:17). The path to unity is to be found in the power of the cross.

The Gospel we proclaim is made tangible and relevant to us as we bear witness to the work of Jesus Christ in our own lives and the life of the Christian community.

Prayer

Gracious God, you sent your son Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit to redeem your people. Unite us in our diversity, that we might affirm and proclaim together the good news of the life, death and resurrection of Christ for a world in need of his gospel. Amen.