**THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**

Ecumenical worship service

Order of worship

2023

*Do good; seek justice* (Isaiah 1:17)

Jointly prepared and published by the Holy See Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches

*Adapted for Aotearoa New Zealand by the*

*National Dialogue for Christian Unity*

## Instructions for those preparing the worship

The river/water motif in the Order of Service has theological and liturgical significance. Two symbols are used in the worship service: **water**, representing our baptism into new life and **stone** representing our personal and ancestral history.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU) in the Northern Hemisphere is observed in January, not long after many traditions commemorate the Baptism of the Lord. This belief that all belong and are members of this beloved community that both is and is becoming, fuels the work of social justice calling us to public witness and advocacy as co-creators with God in bringing into existence peace with justice in all creation.

In Aotearoa New Zealand the WPCU is observed around Pentecost, when we celebrate the genesis of the Church and we are built up in the Body of Christ as living stones. The Church is instituted by the Spirit in the midst of diversity and with the unifying and prophesying power of the Holy Spirit. Unity in the midst of diversity and this unifying and prophesying power fuels the work of justice, making plain our common humanity and giving us the ability to communicate, despite differences as well as the ability to bear witness to and through the power of God.

In the Order of Service, after greeting the assembly we pause for a moment of confession and forgiveness which incorporates the principal text for the Week of Prayer (*Is* 1:12-18). During the ritual action, as part of the penitential act, the presider pours a pitcher of water into the baptismal font (or a basin) during the reading of verses 16 and 17. It is important that this is done slowly and audibly so the congregation may meditate on the meaning of what is being said and what is being symbolically recalled. After the act of confession and pardon, there follows an opening prayer, hymn and liturgy of the Word.

Grounded in the text from Isaiah, the homily needs to link the issues of Christian unity and racial injustice which are both individual and systemic or institutional. The marginalization of people because of their “race”, culture or language tears apart the fabric of the human community and is the cause of disunity in our Christian community. Christian unity needs to be strong and visible so as to speak to how the same Spirit received in our baptism creates unity out of the rich diversity of God’s creation and is the plan of God for the unity of humanity.

The homily should also lead into the symbolic act which follows. All present should be given a stone as they arrive. The communities that plan the worship together could identify and invite two or three persons to tell stories about racial injustice and about how Christian unity can serve the overcoming of injustice. After each story, the speaker places his or her stone around a cross or lit candle, the symbol of Christ the corner stone. This ritual action should be planned to be about 15 minutes in duration. At the conclusion of this symbolic act, the presider can invite the congregation to continue the telling of their stories after the worship.

The liturgy concludes with the prayers of the people, the praying together of the Lord’s Prayer, the benediction and dismissal. There are indications for music at different points of the service and some suggested texts or hymns are found in the appendix.

This ecumenical worship service has a simple order that can be adapted for local situations and traditions to allow for diversity of expression and expansion of the celebration to include other elements of practice, such as local rituals and prayers.

Order of Worship

When promoting the combined service, consider asking participants to bring a small stone or rock from home. Have some spares available so that all present have a rock or stone. During the service there will be opportunity to place their rock or stone around a cross or lit candle. This in some ways emulates the pilgrimage to Santiago to Compostela, where pilgrims place a rock, stone or item from home at the Cruce Ferro.

**Prelude – instrumental**

**Words of Welcome**

The leader welcomes the congregation to the place of worship and the service. The leader briefly sets the scene by saying something like: this service is taking place around the world. The liturgy was prepared by an ecumenical group overseas and has been adapted for Aotearoa New Zealand by a working group from the National Dialogue for Christian Unity. The National Dialogue for Christian Unity is a gathering of Church leaders, supported by members of their congregations or leadership teams. It is primarily a forum for sharing as we move forward together on our faith journeys.

The major theme for this service, drawing on Isaiah (1: 17) is — Do good; seek justice.

The leader explains that people are being given a stone as they enter the church, or they may have brought their own from home (emulating in some way the stone that pilgrims leave at the Cruce Ferro on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela). The communities that plan the worship together could identify and invite two or three persons to tell stories about racial injustice and about how Christian unity can serve the overcoming of injustice. After each story, the speaker places his or her stone around a cross or lit candle, the symbol of Christ the corner stone. This ritual action should be planned to be about 15 minutes in duration. At the conclusion of this symbolic act, the presider can invite the congregation to continue the telling of their stories after the worship.

**Call to gather**

Sisters and brothers, we gather here in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

By the waters of baptism, we have become members of the Body of Chri**st.**

As we gather, let us reflect on our actions and inactions, our good choices and our poor choices and learn to do good and seek justice.

We need God’s grace to overcome our divisions and to uproot systems and structures that have contributed to the fracturing of our communities.

We gather to pray to reinforce the unity that we have as Christians to “open our hearts, that we may be bold in finding the riches of inclusion and the treasures of diversity among us. We pray in faith.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Hymn (worshipping our God who made heaven and earth)**

Local organising churches may decide to choose a hymn that their participating congregations know. The suggested hymn in the international text is:

Many and great, O God (Dakota Hymn) (p. 15-16)

Consideration might be given to **He Hōnore**, a commonly known hymn.

**He Hōnore**

He hōnore, he korōria

Maungārongo ki te whenua

Whakaaro pai(e) ki ngā tāngata katoa

Ake, ake Ake, ake, āmine,

Te Atua, Te piringa,

Toku oranga, Toku oranga.

(repeat, one suggestion is with the melody transposed up a tone)

*(Here is a translation of He hōnore, which you may wish to include in your order of service.)*

*Honour and glory to God*

*Peace on Earth*

*Goodwill to all people*

*Lord, develop a new heart*

*Inside all of us*

*Instil in us your sacred spirit*

*Help us, guide us*

*In all the things we need to learn today*

*Amen. All honour and glory to God*

**Invitation to Confession and Forgiveness**

*Confession and Forgiveness through the Reading of Isaiah 1:12-18*

Leader: Using the words of Isaiah (1: 12-18) we seek forgiveness for our wrongdoing.

Reader 1: “When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me” (12 – 13a).

Congregation: Forgive us Lord when we come to worship without walking humbly before you.

*Silence*

Reader 2: “New moon and Sabbath and calling of convocation – I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them” (13b – 14).

Congregation: We ask forgiveness for the timeswhen our churches contributed to the evils of colonialism felt around the world.

*Silence*

Reader 3: “When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.” (15)

Congregation: We ask forgiveness for our sins of injustice and oppression that supress the diverse harmony of your creation.

*Silence*

(As part of the penitential act, the presider pours a pitcher of water into the baptismal font (or a basin) during the reading of verses 16 and 17. It is important that this is done slowly and audibly so the congregation may meditate on the meaning of what is being said and what is being symbolically recalled.)

Reader 4: “Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” (16, 17)

Congregation: As we have been washed clean in the living waters of baptism, forgive us anew and reconcile us to one another and to creation.

*Silence*

Reader 5: “Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” (18)

Leader: May God in his mercy, free you from your sins so that you can do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.

*Silence*

Leader: Almighty God hears our prayers, has mercy on us and forgives our sins.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

**Prayer**

Leader: God of all, our hearts and bodies are thankful for this opportunity to come before you to confess our sins of injustice and divisiveness.

Together we come before you, a holy family, united in the beautiful diversity of your creation: some of us are Indigenous peoples, some of us are descendants of the enslaved, some of us are descendants of the enslavers, some of us are migrants, some of us are refugees, but all of us are part of the one Body of Christ.

We praise you that through the living waters of baptism our sins, red as scarlet, were washed away and we were healed, as we became part of the beloved community, the family of God. We offer our thanksgiving and praise to you, Creator God.

Together on this journey, we celebrate with our hearts and eyes open to understanding and growing in the sacred wisdom that is shared and passed amongst all people. Help us to embrace unity with each other and remind us that we are of one family gathered by your Holy Spirit, in the midst of your creation.

Congregation: Amen

**Hymn**

The theme of this hymn is water, and the biblical experiences of water – baptismal – cleansing. Local organising churches may decide to choose a hymn that their participating congregations know. The suggested hymn in the international text is:

Wade into the water (p. 17)

**Epistle Reading Ephesians 2:13-22**

While the suggested translation is from the NRSV, organising churches may wish to use the version in **The Message** – a lively Bible translation that assists congregations to re-engage with readings they have heard many times before. This alternative translation is provided as an appendix.

**Psalm 42 (in choir – left and right)**

Left: As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When shall I come and behold the face of God?

Right: My tears have been my food day and night,

while people say to me continually, “Where is your God?”

These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng,

and led them in procession to the house of God,

with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.

Left: Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?

Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

My soul is cast down within me;

Right: By day the Lord commands his steadfast love,

and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.

I say to God, my rock, “Why have you forgotten me?

Why must I walk about mournfully because the enemy oppresses me?”

Left: As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me,

while they say to me continually, “Where is your God?”

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?

All: Hope in God; for I shall again praise him.

**Gospel Reading Matthew 25: 31-40**

While the suggested translation is from the NRSV, organising churches may wish to use version in **The Message** – a lively Bible translation that assists congregations to re-engage with readings they have heard many times before. This alternative translation is provided as an appendix.

**Hymn**

The theme of this hymn is praise to God following forgiveness. Local organising churches may decide to choose a hymn that their participating congregations know. The suggested hymn in the international text is:

Come thou fount of every blessing (p. 18)

**Homily/Sermon**

Grounded in the text from Isaiah, the homily or sermon needs to link the issues of Christian unity and racial injustice which is both individual and systemic or institutional. The marginalization of people because of their “race”, culture, or language tears apart the fabric of the human community and is the cause of disunity in our Christian community. Christian unity needs to be strong and visible so as to speak to how the same Spirit received in our baptism creates unity out of the rich diversity of God’s creation and is the plan of God for the unity of humanity.

The homily should also lead into the symbolic act which follows. When promoting the combined service, consider asking participants to bring a small stone or rock from home. Have some spares available so that all present have a rock or stone. The communities that plan the worship together could identify and invite two or three persons to tell stories about racial injustice and about how Christian unity can serve the overcoming of injustice. After each story, the speaker places his or her stone around a cross or lit candle, the symbol of Christ the corner stone. This ritual action should be planned to be about 15 minutes in duration. At the conclusion of this symbolic act, the presider can invite the congregation to continue the telling of their stories after the worship.

*(Moment of silence or hymn)*

**Stones and Stories**

The two or three identified story tellers are invited to come forward.

Leader: Let us hear some stories. As living stones, we are bearing witness to the stories that will live on. With each story, the Body of Christ is being built up and edified. Our stories are intertwined with the story of Christ, the Corner Stone of our Christian unity. As God has created us to be in communion, so too our stories are connected. Let us reflect as we hear these stories, each holding our stone.

The story tellers give their testimonies. After each story, worshippers join in the response below:

Congregation: I commit myself to respond to the call of Isaiah to ‘do good and seek justice.’

After the stories have been told and the storytellers stones placed, consider inviting the congregation to place their stones around them.

**Hymn**

The theme of this hymn is trust in God, unity in God, and joyful participation in praise.Local organising churches may decide to choose a hymn that their participating congregations know. The suggested hymn in the international text is:

What a fellowship, what a joy divine (p. 19)

**Prayers of Intercession**

Leader: With faith and confidence, we come in prayer, before God:

Creator God, today we live with the consequences of actions that have made life unsustainable for some and overabundant for others. Teach us to know how to use responsibly the resources you have given to us for the benefit of all and the respect of your creation. The groaning creation cries out to you.

Congregation: Teach us and show us the way.

Leader: Compassionate God, help us repair the harm that we have inflicted upon each other and the divisions we have created among your people. Just as Christ Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit onto the disciples to birth the community of the new creation, send your grace to heal our divisions and gift us with the unity for which Jesus prayed.

Congregation: Teach us and show us the way.

Leader: Christ, the way, the truth and the life, you embodied justice in your ministry on earth by the good that you did, breaking down the walls that divide and the prejudices that imprison. Open our hearts and minds to recognize that though we are many, we are one in you.

Congregation: Teach us and show us the way.

Leader: Holy Spirit, you create anew the face of the earth. The summit of the mountains, the thunder of the sky, the rhythm of the lakes speak to us –

Congregation: Because we are connected.

Leader: The faintness of the stars, the freshness of the morning, the dewdrops on the flower speak to us –

Congregation: Because we are connected.

Leader: The voices of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized speak to us-

Congregation: Because we are connected.

Leader: But above all, our hearts soar to you for we cry out ‘Abba, Father’ as we pray the *Our Father*, our common family prayer:

Various versions are in use. Here we provide common text**s**, the English of which may be sung to the music in the NZ Supplement of With One Voice no. 676. The *Our Father* is offered in English or in Te Reo Māori.

Our Father in heaven

holy be your Name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Do not put us to the test,

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours now and for ever.  Amen.

The following Māori text may be spoken, sung or chanted – depending on local practice:

E tō mātou Matua i te rangi

Kia tapu tou Ingoa

Kia tae mai tou rangatira-tanga.

Kia meatia tau e pai ai

ki runga i te whenua,

kia rite ano ki to te rangi

Homai ki a mātou aianei

he taro mā mātou mo tēnei ra.

Murua o mātou hara

Me mātou hoki e muru nei

i o te hunga e hara ana ki a mātou.

Aua hoki mātou e kawea kia whaka-waia;

Engari whaka-orangia mātou, i te kino:

Nōu hoki to rangatiratanga,

te kaha, me te korōria

āke, āke, āke,

Amine

**Hymn**

The theme of this hymn is rejoicing and praise.Local organising churches may decide to choose a hymn that their participating congregations know. The suggested hymn in the international text is:

Lift every voice and sing (p. 20)

**Closing Prayer**

Leader: Everlasting God, look upon these faces gathered together in holy community and send them anywhere you would have them go.

Encourage them by your Holy Spirit to continue to tell their stories, to do good, and to seek justice for the sake of your Creation through their actions.

Sustain them that they may be one, so the world may believe that you sent your only Son Jesus for the life of the world.

**Sending Forth**

Leader: The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you.

And give you peace.

And, may the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all.

(in Te Reo)

*Kia tau ki a tātou katoa,*

*te atawhai o to tātou Ariki o Ihu Karaiti,*

*me te aroha o te Atua,*

*me te whiwhinga tahitanga*

*ki te Wairua Tapu.*

All: Amen/Amine

The leader(s) step down from the front and walk to the back of the church to greet people, while the organ / instrumental music is playing.

**APPENDICES**

**Ephesians (2: 13-22)**

**11-13**But don’t take any of this for granted. It was only yesterday that you outsiders to God’s ways had no idea of any of this, didn’t know the first thing about the way God works, hadn’t the faintest idea of Christ. You knew nothing of that rich history of God’s covenants and promises in Israel, hadn’t a clue about what God was doing in the world at large. Now because of Christ—dying that death, shedding that blood—you who were once out of it altogether are in on everything.

14-15 The Messiah has made things up between us so that we’re now together on this, both non-Jewish outsiders and Jewish insiders. He tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance. He repealed the law code that had become so clogged with fine print and footnotes that it hindered more than it helped. Then he started over. Instead of continuing with two groups of people separated by centuries of animosity and suspicion, he created a new kind of human being, a fresh start for everybody.

16-18 Christ brought us together through his death on the cross. The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility. Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders. He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father.

19-22 That’s plain enough, isn’t it? You’re no longer wandering exiles. This kingdom of faith is now your home country. You’re no longer strangers or outsiders. You belong here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone. God is building a home. He’s using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building. He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he’s using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day—a holy temple built by God, all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home.

**Matthew 25:31-40**

**The Sheep and the Goats**

31-33 “When he finally arrives, blazing in beauty and all his angels with him, the Son of Man will take his place on his glorious throne. Then all the nations will be arranged before him and he will sort the people out, much as a shepherd sorts out sheep and goats, putting sheep to his right and goats to his left.

34-36 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what’s coming to you in this kingdom. It’s been ready for you since the world’s foundation. And here’s why:

I was hungry and you fed me,

I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,

I was homeless and you gave me a room,

I was shivering and you gave me clothes,

I was sick and you stopped to visit,

I was in prison and you came to me.’

37-40 “Then those ‘sheep’ are going to say, ‘Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?’ Then the King will say, ‘I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.’

1. Revd Dr Martin Luther King Jr [↑](#footnote-ref-1)