

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY

Resources for

**THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY
and throughout the year 2006**

**Where two or three are gathered in my name,
I am there among them (Mt 18 :20)**

Jointly prepared and published by
The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
The Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches

To those organizing the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

The search for unity: throughout the year

The traditional date 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 feast of St Peter and the feast of St Paul, and therefore have a symbolic meaning. 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 (which was suggested by the Faith and Order movement in 1926), which is also a symbolic date for the unity of the church.

Mindful of this flexibility concerning the date, we encourage you to understand the material presented here as an invitation to find opportunities throughout the whole year to express the degree of communion which the churches have already received, 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 at the local level. In doing this, account must be taken of local liturgical and devotional practice, and of the whole social and cultural context. Such adaptation should normally take place ecumenically. In some places ecumenical structures are already set up for adapting the material. In other places, we hope that the need to adapt it will be a stimulus to creating such structures.

Using the Week of Prayer material

- For churches and Christian communities which observe the week of prayer together through a single common service, an order for an ecumenical worship service is provided.

- Churches and Christian communities may also incorporate material from the week of prayer into their own services. Prayers from the ecumenical worship service, the “eight days”, and the selection of additional prayers can be used as appropriate in their own setting.
- Communities which observe the week of prayer in their worship for each day during the week may draw material for these services from the “eight days”.
- Those wishing to do bible studies on the week of prayer theme can use as a basis the biblical texts and reflections given in the “eight days”. Each day the discussions can lead to a closing period of intercessory prayer.
- Those who wish to pray privately may find the material helpful for focusing their prayer intentions. They can be mindful that they are in communion with others praying all around the world for the greater visible unity of Christ’s church.

Biblical Text

Matthew 18: 18-20

‘Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.’

Introduction to the theme

**“Where two or three are gathered in my name,
I am there among them” (Mt 18:20)**

There is more that unites us than divides us - this is the great discovery that lies behind the thrust of the ecumenical movement. The greatest uniting point of all is the presence of the Risen Christ who promised his disciples he would be with them till the end of time. At the end of Matthew’s gospel we see Jesus make this promise right after sending forth his followers with the task of making disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 28:19-20). He was aware that they would have to face difficulties of all sorts, and did not want to leave them as orphans on their mission (cf. Jn 14:18). He promised he would remain with them. He is ‘Emmanuel’, that is, ‘God is with us’ (Mt 1: 23).

The gospels tell us of diverse ways that Jesus, our risen Lord, is present in our midst: when his word is proclaimed and lived, and when the eucharistic bread and wine are presented in remembrance of him; in the presence of the little child, the hungry, the prisoner, the least in our midst; in each neighbour; in the presence of those who carry forth his mission and his ministry in the world. The theme of this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, from Mt 18: 20, sets before us a promise of Jesus which

finds its home within this context: “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them”.

Matthew situates this promise of Jesus within the framework of an instruction about the life and order of the church community, concerned with the care for the least, with how the church ministers to members who have gone astray, and with the tendency to place limits on forgiveness. Mt 18 contains strong texts of judgement. These texts are signposts to the Christian community, indicating where its members are falling short in their responsibility as disciples. They are balanced by texts which stress God’s concern for every member of the community and invite an unlimited willingness to forgive, reflecting God’s own boundless capacity for reconciliation. The chapter provided the early Christian community with clear instructions from Jesus that building up the community is not something about which they could be indifferent. The community which gathers around the person and words of Jesus must do all it can to ensure that it lives in harmony. It is in this context that the Lord invites his hearers to trust in the power of common prayer, and ultimately, in his abiding presence within the community who gathers in his name.

During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and indeed in prayer for unity throughout the year, we are invited to a profound awareness that unity is a grace and that we need continually to ask for this gift. Amidst our efforts to foster the unity of our own communities and of the unity of all Christians, we do well to be attentive to the importance of gathering ecumenically to pray in Jesus’ name. Whenever we do so, we are invited to trust in the power of prayer offered in the presence of Jesus, who promised his disciples: “Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven” (Mt 18:19). What matters is not so much a plurality of voices, but the fact that these voices are united in prayer. The still voice that speaks in each of our hearts is strengthened when we come together in his name. As we pray, let us remember and give thanks for much progress in recent decades towards unity among Christians; Jesus Christ has been present among us through the power of his Holy Spirit, praying with us to the Father.

The promise that Jesus will be in our midst is not to be limited to the community gathered in worship. Because the love of the triune God is made incarnate in Jesus Christ, we are enabled through Christ to live a life of communion rooted in the Trinity. Through the presence of his Holy Spirit, the risen Lord desires to be with us at all times and places, sharing our worries, advising us, journeying with us, entering our homes and workplaces, reviving our joy with his presence that leads us to the heart of the Father. He wants us to feel God’s nearness, God’s strength, God’s love. He wants to be among us so that he himself can witness, through us, to his love and life in our home and workplace, school and neighbourhood.

It is worth remembering that many things have been done throughout Christian history “in Jesus’ name”, things which resemble neither his teaching nor the way set forward in his living and dying. Our individual and communal histories provide us with many reasons for repentance. We do well to read Mt 18:20 in light of the primacy given to the commandment of love in John’s gospel: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12) and “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn

13:35). Jesus' presence where two or three gather in his name is closely linked to the love the 'two or three' have for one another.

To gather in the name of Jesus means to share in the love he brought on earth. This love is not reducible to philanthropy, solidarity or benevolence; it is more than friendship or affection. It is a self-giving, suffering love, one which "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:7). It is a love that demands prudence and patience as we discern the presence of the Lord and the direction in which he is leading us.

Being as receptive as possible to the presence of Jesus in our midst requires that Christians learn to live an 'ecumenism of life' together, accompanying our theological search for unity. This means sharing and learning from each other's spiritual traditions, customs and insights while working concretely together in the service of building up the kingdom of God on earth. It also means promoting a culture of interdependence as together we learn how to see the positive in the particularities of ecclesial belonging, ethnic community, history and jurisdiction that can so easily divide Christians. Being mindful of all we hold in common allows us to face more effectively those things which still divide us. An ecumenism of life entails common prayer, common witness, and common mission wherever possible, as we increasingly come to share in the life of the Holy Spirit together. It entails sharing the ordinary aspects of our lives with each other, so that we can increasingly recognize each other as sisters and brothers in Christ, welcoming in each other the very presence of Christ.

Nothing is small if done out of love. No act of love, no simple witnessing or cooperating in Jesus' name, no coming together in prayer is without its purpose and value in responding to the Lord's desire that his disciples be one. Each such simple action quietly expresses our willingness to seek to love one another with the measure of Jesus' love, and can also speak to a world often unable to see the presence of God or indifferent to God's designs.

The ecumenical group in Ireland responsible for preparing the first draft of this year's week of prayer materials were conscious of the rich spiritual heritage of Ireland with roots in ancient Christianity, and thus shared by all Christian traditions. They were equally conscious that the Christian churches have been caught up and ensnared in the conflicts and tensions which have shaped Irish life in past centuries. There are deep wounds that have been caused or made more painful by Christian divisions.

This is now the third time over the past 25 years that the draft texts for the week of prayer have been prepared in Ireland, against the backdrop of a decreasing level of violence and an increased hope for a Christ-filled peace. Conscious of Ireland's rich but complex history, this year's source group had several reasons for choosing Mt 18:20 as the central biblical text and theme for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2006.

Firstly, they wished to draw attention to Jesus as the source of our unity, emphasising that he has already shown us the way to be instruments of the unity which God desires for us.

Secondly, while hopes often rise and fall in relation to larger gestures and initiatives for peace, the members of the source group wished to draw attention to the simplicity of two or three coming together in Christian mutual love as a vital means of building up relations between divided peoples and communities. It is often the case that small gatherings, local relations and friendships, can have a powerful impetus in creating a spirit of peace and reconciliation. Many experiences in Ireland's recent history bear witness to this.

Thirdly, the drafters were mindful that hope for the future, and peace and reconciliation in the present, necessarily involve dealing with painful memories and hurtful grievances of the past. Christian discipleship compels us to assist in finding constructive ways of dealing with past wounds and giving common witness in seeking and choosing paths leading to reconciliation. It is in that spirit that all Christians who use these week of prayer resources are encouraged to come together in prayer, and in mutual love to seek to understand each other amidst differences. We can then become ever more powerful signs of reconciliation and witnesses to the healing presence of Christ's love.

The proposed biblical texts and commentaries for the eight days are intended to evoke a sustained reflection on Jesus' invitation to gather in his name. Day 1 develops the notion that since all Christians belong to Christ, we belong to one another, brought together in a common belonging which already shows forth in our common recognition of baptism. The second day offers a meditation on humble service (exemplified in the call to wash each other's feet) as an important means to build up the unity of the church. Day 3 reflects on the importance of praying together, raising the possibility that when Jesus prayed for his disciples to be one, it was because they were not yet united in his name; by Jesus' presence in our midst, we are bound to him and to one another. The theme of the fourth day is the healing of memories, the offering and receiving of forgiveness, as a constitutive element of rediscovering and reclaiming our unity in Christ.

The fifth day focuses on God's presence as a source of peace and stability, courage and strength, inspiring us in turn to seek the ways that make for peace. The theme of Day 6 affords us the opportunity to reflect on the dual movement of mission: of gathering in and of sending out. Both of these have the same goal of fulfilling the Father's will to strengthen the weak and to proclaim that God's kingdom has come near. The seventh day challenges us to see and welcome the neighbour and the stranger in all their otherness, seeing the presence of Christ within them as the basis for embracing and pursuing our ecumenical task. Day 8 looks forward to the end of our pilgrimage, to the fullness of Christ's presence. As we journey on, we are coming to discover fellow Christians no longer as strangers but as companions on the way, anticipating together the day when we stand side by side in the presence of Christ.

The preparation of the material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2006

The initial draft of this material was prepared by an ecumenical group in Dublin. We extend our sincere thanks to all who participated in the Irish drafting group:

Rev. Fr Irineu Ioan Craciun (The Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation in Dublin)

Rev. Fr Athanasius George (The Coptic Orthodox Church of Ireland)

Rev. Elizabeth Hewitt (The Methodist Church in Ireland)

Rev. Mary Hunter (The Presbyterian Church in Ireland)

Rev. Hugh Kennedy (The Roman Catholic Church)

Rev. Brendan Leahy (The Roman Catholic Church)

Rev. Pastor Fritz-Gert Mayer (The Lutheran Church in Ireland)

Rev. John McCann (The Roman Catholic Church)

Rev. Alan McCormack (The Church of Ireland)

Rev. Fr Godfrey O'Donnell (The Romanian Orthodox Church in Ireland)

The material reached its present form at a meeting of an international preparatory group appointed by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity of the Catholic Church. The international group met at the Focolare Centre near Prosperous in County Kildare, Ireland, with the generous sponsorship of the Irish Episcopal Conference. We wish to thank Archbishop Séan Brady, Bishop Anthony Farquhar and Fr Brendan Leahy, along with the entire staff of the Focolare Centre, for their gracious hospitality and the many ways in which they assisted the work of the international preparatory group.

Worship

“Where two or three are gathered in my name”

Introduction

There are two underlying themes in this worship service:

Theme A “Where two or three are gathered in my name”. The thinking behind this is to encourage and strengthen the fellowship of God’s people in small communities as well as in great gatherings, in daily life as well as in official, liturgical celebrations. Faithfulness to God’s call is not limited to large assemblies but involves coming together in love, prayer and bible study by “two or three” in the name of Jesus. In fact, it is the lives of individuals united in mutual love which brings about the kingdom of God on earth.

Theme B “Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy times seven”. We talk about forgiveness but we rarely seek forgiveness from one another. There is a strong undercurrent of repentance running through this service. It is indicated in the concluding prayer of penitence which specifically asks “forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us”.

Scripture readings

The readings have been chosen to reflect a consistent pattern of God’s presence with his people to be found throughout the Bible.

In the Old Testament, God brought his people out of slavery in Egypt and led them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He never abandoned his people.

The psalm recalls the wonders which God has done. It invites his people to remember his deeds and to pass on this memory to their descendants.

In the Revelation text, the author offers a glimpse of the kingdom of God where God’s people “will reign for ever”.

The gospel is placed after the other readings because the everlasting reign of God announced by the Revelation text is based on God’s presence with his people in the incarnation of Jesus his Son. Jesus announces the kingdom of God. In him is the realisation of this divine presence.

Thanksgiving and Intercession

These prayers seek to give thanks for what has already been accomplished by God’s merciful power at work among his people, while recognizing that there is still much to be done if we really wish to do God’s will in the world.

Symbolism

The use of various symbols and illustrations is a possibility: in particular, a Celtic cross carried into the assembly; the symbolism of the nails of the cross could perhaps be used during the act of repentance. Seven candles could symbolise the seven churches and the seven golden chandeliers of Revelation 1. However, since symbolism is so closely linked to culture, circumstance and to a community's sensibilities, we have preferred to omit any specific reference to the use of symbols in the course of the celebration. National groups are invited to find the symbols which best express the themes in their particular social and cultural context.

For the reading of the word of God, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is recommended. It is also preferable to use the ecumenical versions of the Nicene creed and the Lord's prayer, translated from the original texts.

Order of Service

Greeting

Leader Grace and peace be with you

Assembly Grace and peace be with you

L and A in the name of God our Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Opening

The liturgical welcome is followed by an introduction of the communities represented in the gathering and of their leaders. It is an opportunity, as worship begins, to introduce each other and to engage with one another in fellowship and mutual welcome.

Introduction *(could be based on the following)*

As in many countries, a strong spiritual and missionary culture developed in Ireland, but the country also has a long and painful history. Political and religious aims and ambitions have torn communities apart and caused hurt on all sides. God has been present in the midst of the pain and has brought healing to many of the physical and psychological wounds inflicted. In small groups of two or three people and in great gatherings of many hundreds, the comforting and gracious presence of God has been experienced. For all these reasons, the Christians of Ireland have been able to centre their Christian belief on these words of Jesus: "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am in the midst of them" (Mt 18: 20).

God calls Christians to come together and he shows that love and forgiveness go together. The experience of Christ on the cross calls Christians to reach out and to forgive. In the villages, in the towns and in the cities the people of God are called to find a way forward, while confessing and recognizing the hurt and pain inflicted on people. With this understanding they can seek forgiveness and wholeness in the new way of Christ.

Praise / Hymn / Music

Litany of the Presence of Christ

L. Jesus, Risen Lord

All We gather in your name.

L. Jesus, Good Shepherd

All We gather in your name.

L. Jesus, Word of life

All We gather in your name.

L. Jesus, friend of the poor

All We gather in your name.

L. Jesus, source of all forgiveness

All We gather in your name.

L. Jesus, Prince of peace

All We gather in your name.

All Lord Jesus Christ,
You call us together in faith and love.
Breathe again the new life of your Holy Spirit among us
That we may hear your holy word,
Pray in your name,
Seek unity among Christians
And live more fully the faith we profess.
All glory and honour be yours
With the Father, and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Praise / Hymn / Music

Proclamation of the Word

Exodus 40: 1-4 and 34-38

(reflection on the presence of God in the wilderness wanderings of his people)

Psalms 78 (77): 1-8

(remembering God's deeds and a call to fidelity)

(to be read antiphonally)

Revelation 22: 1-5

(reflection on the supreme glory of the presence of God in the midst of his people when his kingdom has come)

Matthew 18: 15-22

(reflection on the tensions which exist in reality and acknowledging the presence of God in the midst of his people, no matter how small the gathering)

Sermon / Meditation

Creed

Nicene Creed or Apostles Creed

(If using the Nicene Creed, an ecumenical translation should be followed)

Praise / Hymn / Music

Act of Repentance

(congregation facing frontwards)

L. There are many ways to be unfaithful to what we have become through baptism, to our commitment and our obedience to God. We offer him now our prayers of repentance.

All We confess to you, living God,
Our failure to live as brothers and sisters, and as your children.
We confess to you, loving God,
That we have not loved you as you have loved us.

Kyrie eleison

We confess to you, gracious God,
That we have doubted your word and failed to obey its teaching.
We confess to you, merciful God,
Our desire to own you and contain you within our doctrines and theologies.

Kyrie eleison

We confess to you, almighty God
That we do not acknowledge you as Lord of all the earth.
Forgive us and redeem us
For we have not allowed your presence to shine among us.

Kyrie eleison

L. There are many ways in which we have failed in our commitment and obedience to our fellow men and women. We turn towards our neighbours and our friends and offer them our prayers of repentance.

In some assemblies – even the larger ones – responses could be made by two groups facing each other, and alternately. Such an arrangement itself acknowledges that we are sinners before God and our neighbour. Further prayers of repentance may be formulated as appropriate to the local situation.

All Sisters and brothers in Christ, we confess to you
That we have not understood your way of life.
Sisters and brothers in Christ, we confess to you
Our shallow pride and self sufficiency.

Kyrie eleison

Sisters and brothers in Christ, we confess to you
That we have turned our backs on you in your need.
Sisters and brothers in Christ, we confess to you
That we have failed to see the risen Christ in the stranger in our midst.

Kyrie eleison

Sisters and brothers in Christ, we confess to you
Our desire for an easy life, a comfortable life, a life which makes no demands upon us.
Forgive us for failing to show forth the love of Christ
And for all that we have failed to do.
(*Turn to the front*)

L. May each of us hear the forgiving words of Jesus that we may turn from the *wrong* way and travel the path of friendship, love and unity shown by the Saviour. In harmony and peace we say the prayer he taught his followers:

All Our Father...

L. What we have confessed with our lips let us make real in our lives. By sharing in the sign of peace we renew our commitment to a new way of life which makes our confession to God and to one another a turning point in each of our lives.

The Sign of Peace

At this point in the celebration some assemblies could move to another part of the church either around the Bible, or the altar/communion table. This movement is an expression of the inner and community conversion in the name of Jesus and in his presence. A suggestion: a reproduction of a Celtic cross might be carried in from the entrance to the front of the assembly at this point. Other gestures could be proposed here – members of the assembly might exchange a verse of scripture, a word of peace or grace.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

(two worship leaders/readers and the congregation)

Remembering God's gifts we pray together:

L. 1 Lord of heaven and earth, we have begun to listen to your Holy Spirit, calling us to unity in Christ:

All We thank you, O Lord

L. 2 May we be more attentive to your inspiration and more ready to listen to one another:

All We ask you, O Lord.

L. 1 We have begun to dialogue with one another, celebrating our common faith and seeking to understand our difference:

All We thank you, O Lord

L. 2 May the patient work of pastors, theologians and Christian people continue to progress and bear lasting fruit:

All We ask you, O Lord.

L. 1 For the agreements reached on matters of theology and pastoral life:

All We thank you, O Lord

L. 2 That we may be able to face and resolve the difficult issues which still divide us:

All We ask you, O Lord.

L. 1 For our annual gatherings of prayer for unity among Christians:

All We thank you, O Lord.

L. 2 That prayer in common may become a normal feature of our local congregations:

All We ask you, O Lord.

L. 1 For common witness in Christ which we have given in times of crisis, for justice, peace and humanitarian aid:

All We thank you, O Lord

L. 2 That our unity may one day become such that the whole world may believe in the Christ you have sent:

All We ask you, O Lord.

L. 1 For progress in inter-religious dialogue throughout the world:

All We thank you, O Lord

L. 2 That engaged in this dialogue, we may henceforth sense the urgency of full communion among Christians as a witness to other believers:

All We ask you, O Lord.

L. 1 For all inter-confessional families: living witnesses of personal communion in the love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

All We thank you, O Lord

L. 2 May their family life contribute to the Christian joy of the members of their churches:

All We ask you, O Lord.

L. 1 For the immense progress made by our churches in their common realisation of God's word as the source of revelation, and for the progress already achieved towards a common celebration of the eucharist:

All We thank you, O Lord

L. 2 May this hope of one day sharing the same table and drinking from the same cup, increase our desire to do your will so as to receive from you this gift:

All We ask you, O Lord.

(Other prayers of intercession may be made as appropriate to the local context of the gathering.)

Praise / Hymn / Music

Sending Forth

All Open our eyes to your presence.

Open our ears to your call.

Open our hearts to your love.

May we open our arms to others.

May we open our hearts to strangers.

May we open our doors to callers.

That we may be open to you, Lord

Open this day and for evermore.

(Flame in my heart – St Aidan for Today, David Adams, SPCK[1])

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

The love of God

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit

Be with us all, now and forever. Amen.

Biblical reflections and prayers for the “eight days”

Day 1 United through the presence of Christ

‘One Lord, one faith, one baptism’ (Ephesians 4:5, 6)

Ezek 37:15-28	My dwelling place shall be with them
Ps 67 (66)	Let the peoples praise you, O God
Eph 4:1-6	One Lord, one faith, one baptism
Jn 14:23-27	We will come to them and make our home with them

Commentary

The scriptures stress that God’s will is for the unity of God’s people. Through Ezekiel the prophet, God affirms that Judah and Israel – two divided, often estranged kingdoms – will again be one. God’s cleansing presence will strengthen and bless them in a covenant of peace.

The natural response to God’s gift of unity is our gratitude and praise. The psalmist calls upon all the nations to unite in praise of God, whose saving power may be seen in all nations and throughout the whole earth.

Jesus taught his first followers that he, with the Father, would be present with them, “making a home” with each one who loved him. And he promised that this presence would not end with his death, that he would continue to be present with each one of his followers – and with us, today – through the Holy Spirit.

But the promise of Jesus’ presence is not limited to individual believers: for, as the evangelist Matthew affirms, wherever even two or three are gathered in Jesus’ name they form a community, a community in which Jesus has promised to be present, strengthening and accompanying them on their way.

This common belonging is shown powerfully in our common recognition of baptism. In baptism Christ calls each one of us, bringing us into his body, the church. Because we each belong to Christ, we all belong to one another. That common belonging – to Christ, and to one another – makes us one, despite all our differences of history, culture, and theological conviction: “for where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Mt 18:20).

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your presence among us, strengthening and encouraging us on our way. Make us aware of your presence in us and responsive to your promptings in all that we do. Grant us the wisdom and humility to recognize your presence in our brothers and sisters. Make us truly one, O Lord. Amen

Day 2 Building Christian unity with Jesus in our midst

- daily ecumenism

‘You also ought to wash one another’s feet’ (John 13: 14)

Deut 30: 15-20 Then you shall live and become numerous

Ps 133 (132) How good it is to be amongst kindred

1 Cor 12: 12-31 God arranged the members in the body

Jn 13: 1-15 You also ought to wash one another’s feet

Commentary

As the psalmist proclaims, unity is attractive. Because Christ is among us, all Christians have an obligation to harmonize the daily life of their communities more closely with the spirit of the gospel.

Washing the feet of his disciples on the evening before he died, Jesus left us a specific example of Christian behaviour towards our neighbour. In 1 Corinthians 12, Saint Paul, writing of the need to care for each other, adds the fact that in the Holy Spirit everyone is different, although part of the same body. The word of God invites us, as brothers and sisters in the church, to accept the concrete task of making the church grow, in order to be of service to the world.

Participation in the life of the Holy Trinity is not a simple affirmation of an article of faith. The gospel urges us to commit ourselves daily to the ecumenical task, so that the church better reflects the trinitarian communion. In the one God, whom we confess along with our sisters and brothers in other monotheistic faiths, is there not for us an example to follow in the love shared between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? Among the members of the church, moving forward with Christ implies recognizing that a positive action, however modest, accomplished in community has more value than one made in isolation.

To wash the feet of one’s sisters and brothers is more than a simple gesture, it is opening one’s heart in faithfulness to Jesus who bids us serve the one church, of which we desire to be both the living stones and the builders.

Prayer

Eternal Father, united in the name of your son, Jesus Christ and in the presence of your consoling Spirit, we commit ourselves to build a Christian community with heart and enthusiasm renewed in the fire of your love.

With those whom we encounter in daily life, may we live an ecumenism in the image of your Son, who washed the feet of his disciples, so that together we may enter into new life in his presence. Amen.

Day 3 Praying together in Jesus' name

'The Lord waits to be gracious to you...' (Isaiah 30:18)

Is 30:18-26	He will surely be gracious to you
Ps 136 (135)	His steadfast love endures forever
Acts 1:12-14	Together in prayer
Mt 18:18-20	Prayer in Jesus' name

Commentary

Gathering together for prayer, as a single worshipping community, despite differences on the human plane, is a consistent theme of the Bible. Communities gathered to worship and praise God, to seek God's forgiveness and to intercede for God's mercy and help. The graciousness of God is revealed even more in the fact that the Lord is a God of justice. Our prayers are responses to God's justice, to what God has first done for us, for "while we were still sinners Christ died for us". Throughout the Bible the character of God is revealed as gracious, patient, redeeming love.

The Psalms have been preserved as the hymns and prayers of God's people, recited when they met together to worship God. The shared words bound the people together and created a sense of belonging, which in turn gave them confidence and security.

It was natural that this tradition should continue in the early church. Didn't Jesus himself teach his disciples how to pray? In today's gospel reading, Jesus teaches about granting whatever we ask, if we are agreed. When we meet together, as Christians, to love and pray with one another, we can be assured of Christ's presence with us. Together, as we pray in Jesus' name, we are also bound by him to each other and to the object of our prayer. Therefore, united prayer is powerful prayer.

The disciples of Jesus devoted themselves to prayer and sought to be united. It is quite possible that Jesus' prayer for his disciples to be one, offered on the eve of his death, was made because they were not yet united in his name. Twenty centuries later, we need to ask ourselves, how much closer are we to being united in prayer, life and work? Our unity is indeed a gift that comes from God. Moreover, we realize that we must humbly and continually seek this gift. The apostle exhorts us to pray without ceasing that the Holy Spirit falls afresh upon us in our diversity but unites us through his prompting.

Prayer

Lord, teach us to pray as Jesus taught his disciples. As they were united in their hearts, so may we be one in our faith, love and service. May we celebrate difference, rejoice in diversity and willingly share the riches of our patterns of prayer. Allow our coming together in Jesus' name to transform us to be one in reality so that the world may believe in his abiding presence. Amen.

Day 4 From the past to the future – forgiveness and healing of memories

‘Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times’ (Matthew 18: 22)

Jon 3	The repentance of the great city of Nineveh
Ps 51 (50)	A plea for mercy
Col 3: 12-17	Above all, clothe yourselves with love
Jn 8: 1-11	Neither do I condemn you

Commentary

Acknowledgement of the sins of the past, the grace of forgiveness and reconciliation are the recurrent themes in these readings. In their mutual relations, our Christian communities still carry the traces of a past marked by human frailty and sin. Some wounds are healing, others are still the source of pain and division. Facing up to the past can be difficult and require sincere soul searching, both for individuals and communities. Yet this is what God asks of us if we are truly to live as his chosen people and to allow the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts and among us.

Jonah challenges the people of Nineveh to be honest in confessing their self-centredness, their disregard for goodness and their acts of violence. He addresses this call to the whole city and all its inhabitants. All must turn away from their evil ways and from the violence that is still part of them.

The psalmist pleads for God’s forgiveness as he, too, is deeply troubled by his past. He recognizes his failings and implores God not to abandon him. He also feels responsible for the people of Nineveh and wishes to show them the way of truth and an upright life so that they also might be reconciled with God.

The scribes and Pharisees see only failure and sin in the adulterous woman. They identify her with her past. At the same time, they refuse to recognize their own past and their own sins. Jesus invites us not to cast the first stone, not to condemn, and finally, to sin no more. Our search for unity is founded on this call.

Pardon cannot be measured. It is as inexhaustible as the love of God: as much as seventy times seven times. In their ecumenical journey our communities are called to witness to God’s mercy in its infinity.

Prayer

Reconciling God, help us to overcome the grievances and bitterness which the failings and sins of the past have built up in us. Teach us your forgiveness so that we may, in humility, seek reconciliation with you and with our neighbour. Strengthen in us the love of Christ, source and guarantee of the unity of your church. Amen.

Day 5 God's presence among us: a call to peace

'The Lord is with us' (Psalm 46)

1 Kings 19: 1-13a The sound of sheer silence (the whisper of a gentle breeze)

Ps 46 (45) The Lord is with us

Acts 10: 9-48 God shows no partiality

Lk 10: 25-37 Who is my neighbour?

Commentary

As we reflect on the biblical texts which speak of the presence of God among us, we are aware of substantial challenges on our ecumenical journeying.

As in Elijah's time, it is no use looking for God in a hurricane or an earthquake. Rather, his peaceful and comforting presence is to be found in the whisper of a gentle breeze or even in sheer silence.

We must make the psalmist's conviction our own: God is our only strength. Following the example of a God who destroys bows and breaks spears, we are invited to bring all conflict to an end.

The episode recorded in the Acts of the Apostles invites us to meditate on the spirit of the Risen Christ at work throughout the world. In the image of an impartial God, we must learn to go beyond all too human frontiers.

The parable of the Good Samaritan reminds us that we cannot look away when we come across a brother or sister in need. How can we *not* feel concerned when another ecclesial community is in difficulty?

Prayer

Gathered in the name of Christ Jesus, Father, we pray, make us attentive to your presence in this world and help us discern the ways along which you want to lead us in our ecumenical pilgrimage. All honour and glory be to you, for ever and ever. Amen.

Day 6 Mission in Jesus' name

'So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost' (Matthew 18:14)

Dan 3:19-30	Witnessing for faith
Ps 146 (145)	In praise of God the Saviour
Acts 8:26-40	Philip witnesses to the Ethiopian eunuch
Lk 10:1-12	Jesus sends out his disciples

Commentary

Today we meet people who are called by God to witness to their faith. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have a strong and firm belief in the One who saves them. Their fervour, courage and united witness, in the face of great personal danger, convince the king and his officials that their God is the one true God. However, their faith-witness served also to rally the fainthearted of Israel. In this way the people of God were strengthened and united once more around their God.

The psalmist sings the praises of the Lord who reaches out to the people in many different circumstances so that they may find safety and salvation. The definitive example of God's continuous care for his people may be seen in the sending of Jesus. He not only gathers in those who are weak and have gone astray, but also expects his disciples to be enthusiastic and committed in sharing the good news of the kingdom of God when sent on mission in his name.

Philip reflects the enthusiasm of the early church. He capitalises on every opportunity that presents itself to fulfil the mission of Jesus.

As Christ's followers to-day we are called to be a missionary people. Moreover, the message of the gospel is always stronger when Christians are united in offering a common witness to its truth. It is our turn to share the good news with all people. We are called:

- to have courage in the face of unbelief
- to move out from the security of our own culture and religious tradition
- to find new and innovative ways of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ
- to be inspired and excited by our common faith
- to be motivated by the compassion of Jesus to work together to alleviate suffering in our world
- to challenge the injustice in the world and stand alongside the poor

In the face of a rapidly evolving world, the united witness to the gospel that Christians give comes from both our activity of going out to the world, and our gathering in the weak so that not one of the little ones should be lost.

We have a double calling to fulfil!

Prayer

Living God, awaken in us the desire to be a missionary people. Help us to listen for your call and grant us the courage to follow the guidance of your Spirit. Through our common witness may we gather in the weak to be strengthened and go out to all the world to proclaim the good news of your kingdom. Amen.

Day 7 Recognizing and welcoming God's presence in the *other* in Jesus' name

‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me’ 18: 5)

Ex 3: 1-17	The burning bush
Ps 34	The Lord saves the crushed in spirit
Acts 9: 1-6	I am Jesus whom you are persecuting
Mt 25: 31-46	Jesus is present in our neighbour

Commentary

When God announced that he would liberate the people of Israel from slavery, leading them out of Egypt and into a land flowing with milk and honey, he made known his presence to Moses from within the burning bush which was never consumed by fire. Thus the people are assured of the presence of the God of their fathers: ‘I am who I am’. This is no distant, uncaring God but a presence and a person concerned with the fate of his chosen people.

God would later confirm the nature of his being in the person of his son, Jesus Christ, who reminds us that we must become like little children if we wish to enter the kingdom! It is not in the great of this world that we should first seek Christ but in the innocence of little children (and those who have become like them in innocence and humility). In welcoming them into our midst, we welcome the Christ. Jesus gives us further assurance of his presence with us when we keep his word; when two or three come together in his name; and with those who are persecuted for his sake. Above all, as Christians who obey Jesus’ command at the last supper to do this in remembrance of me and although we might not agree on the exact nature of Jesus’ presence, we believe (at the very least) that he is present in our hearts and minds.

As we feed the hungry, tend the sick, visit the prisoners, clothe the naked and welcome the stranger we also care for and welcome Jesus. The World Council of Churches was set up (in part) in 1948 in response to the urgent need for Christians to collaborate in the task of reconciliation and caring for those whose lives had been devastated by World War II. The diaconal and ecumenical task continues with as much urgency today. At the same time, theologians struggle to find the way towards greater unity within the church. Here too “stranger” is a key word. Jesus told us that we should love our neighbour in all his otherness. This clear instruction to recognize that the stranger, the other, belongs to Christ however different he or she may be is a fundamental clue as to how we can embrace and pursue the ecumenical task. If we recognize the presence of Christ in the stranger from another church tradition we need not fear him or his intentions. Instead we might learn from him and he, from us. In this way, we advance along the road to unity.

It is in our awareness of Jesus’ continuing presence in so many different ways that we recognize that he is indeed part of our lives. Not just a figure in history who taught us how we should live, but through the Holy Spirit he is present and active in the world today.

Prayer

Eternal Father, grant us so to recognize your presence among us in different ways that our desire for true community in our own churches and society may be increased, and our prayer for unity within the body of Christ, your church, may be ever more fervent. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Day 8 One in hope

‘On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you’ (John 14:20)

Ex 40:34-38	Throughout all their journeys the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle
Ps 42 (41)	Hope in God, for I shall again praise him
Rev 21:1-6	God himself will be with them
Jn 14:15-31	I will not leave you desolate

Commentary

The people of Israel were led by Moses through the desert. As they journeyed in the wilderness, God was present in a column of cloud by day and of fire by night.

The theme of the psalm is a vital longing and hoping for the community of God which will take away all doubts and sorrows.

The new people born out of the gospel is a pilgrim people, journeying towards the fullness of life in the new creation when God will dwell among us wiping away every tear from our eyes. Death will be no more. Pain and divisions are overcome. There will be one renewed and unified humanity in God.

Now, however, we are together on the way. We have the same hope and belong to the one God. On our pilgrim way we are not desolate. Jesus has not left us orphans because the Spirit has been given to us. It is the Spirit of hope and the Spirit of love. The peace of Christ has been given to us, encouraging and leading us to remain in love. If we love Christ, we will keep his word.

The theme of this week reminds us of Jesus’ promise: “where two or more are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst”. With Jesus, the eternal Word of God living among us, we travel together on a journey of hope. We can help one another to be faithful to this way. In the power of the Spirit, Jesus Christ will introduce us more and more into the Father’s will of renewal. The reconciled and reconciling community to which we are committed in our ecumenical movement is a sign and an anticipation of the coming new creation. With God’s grace, we are on a journey to live now already as much as possible “on earth as it is in heaven”.

Prayer

Eternal Father, united in the name of Jesus, give us the certainty that despite everything, death will not win out, that our divisions will cease, that we will not give way to discouragement and that we will attain in hope to that fullness of life, love and light that you promise to those who love you and keep your word. Amen.

Hymns and Blessings

(proposed by the ecumenical group in Ireland and published under their sole responsibility)

O King of the Friday (Ancient Irish Prayer)

Whose limbs were stretched on the Cross,
O Lord who did suffer
The bruises, the wounds, the loss,
We stretch ourselves
Beneath the shield of thy might,
Some fruit from the tree of thy pass
Fall on us this night!

Saint Patrick's Breastplate

I bind unto myself today
The strong name of the Trinity
By invocation of the same,
The Three in One and One in Three.

I bind this day to me forever,
By power of faith, Christ's incarnation,
His baptism in the Jordan River,
His cross of death for my salvation,
His bursting from the spiced tomb,
His riding up the heavenly way,
His coming at the day of doom,
I bind unto myself today.

I bind unto myself today the virtues of the starlit heaven,
the glorious sun's life-giving ray, the whiteness of the moon at even,
the flashing of the lightning free, the whirling wind's tempestuous shocks,
the stable earth, the deep salt sea, around the old eternal rocks.

I bind unto myself today
The power of God to hold and lead,
His eye to watch, his might to stay,
His ear to hearken to my need,
The wisdom of my God to teach,
His hand to guide, his shield to ward,
The Word of God to give me speech,
His heavenly host to be my guard.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.

Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

I bind unto myself the name,
The strong name of the Trinity
By invocation of the same,
The Three in One and One in Three,
Of whom all nature has creation,
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word.
Praise to the Lord of my salvation;
Salvation is of Christ the Lord!

Love Divine, all Loves Excelling (Charles Wesley, 1747)

Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven, to earth come down,
Fix in us Thy humble dwelling,
All Thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, Thou art all compassion,
Pure, unbounded love Thou art;
Visit us with Thy salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit
Into ev'ry troubled breast;
Let us all in Thee inherit,
Let us find Thy promised rest.
Take away the love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its beginning,
Set our hearts at liberty.

Come, almighty to deliver,
Let us all Thy life receive;
Suddenly return, and never,
Nevermore Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve Thee as Thy hosts above,
Pray, and praise Thee without ceasing,
Glory in Thy perfect love.

Finish then Thy new creation;
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in Thee:
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise

A 15th Century Gaelic Blessing

God be in my head and in my understanding:
God be in my eyes and in my looking:
God be in my mouth and in my speaking:
God be in my heart and in my thinking:
God be at mine end and at my departing.

An Old Irish Blessing

May the road rise up to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields,
And until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of his hand.

Amen.

Traditional Celtic hymn

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart
Naught be all else to me, save that thou art;
Thou my best thought in the day and the night,
Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
I ever with thee, and thou with me, Lord;
Thou my redeemer, my love thou hast won;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.

Riches I heed not, nor vain empty praise,
Thou mine inheritance through all my days;
Thou, and thou only the first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art!

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright sun,
Grant me its joys after vict'ry is won;
Christ of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

(words: Irish song (8th century), tr. Mary E. Byrne, 1905; versed by Eleanor H. Hull, 1912.)

Ecumenical Situation in Ireland

Saint Patrick's Breastplate is a well-known prayer that has echoed throughout many centuries of Ireland's history. It expresses the hope that Christ be "in the heart of everyone who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks to me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me". It was through the Irish Missionaries of the sixth century onwards that Jesus Christ re-emerged in the mouth, eyes, ears and mind of countless peoples throughout the continent of Europe. Contemporary Irish missionaries and volunteer workers of all denominations have

continued to bear eloquent witness to the Christian spirit of charitable outreach to one's neighbour.

However, although the roots of the problems are much more political, cultural, historical and social than religious, it is also true that in recent years media accounts throughout the world have reported on the tragic events that have become associated with Ireland. They speak of a struggle between Catholics and Protestants. Sadly, it is true that many who carried out acts of violence bore the name "Christian". It is also a sad fact that in part the conflicts were a sign of the tragic consequences of divisions between Christians.

Thankfully, the process of peace in the past decade in Northern Ireland continues to gather pace, although progress is always delicate. Tolerance, and harmony, forgiveness, reconciliation and mutual respect are attitudes and values that need to be re-established anew every day.

Despite, or maybe, in part, as a fruit of terrible suffering, relationships between Christians have been transformed in recent years. The current number of meetings and degree of co-operation and interaction between members and leaders of different churches would have been unimaginable forty years ago. It would be impossible to count the numerous seeds of peace sown at the individual and community levels.

Ecumenism in Ireland is, of course, more than about Northern Ireland. In fact there are two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland and this also impinges on ecumenical dialogue. And although the churches operate at an all-Island level, the different 'worlds' that arise from different jurisdictions can lead to different expectations, practices and experiences of ecumenical relations.

In the Republic of Ireland, Catholics are a very large majority and Protestants a minority. Consequently, often Protestants and Catholics simply might not meet! In Northern Ireland there is not such a large discrepancy between the numbers of Catholics and Protestants but the tensions of recent decades have led to a different ecumenical atmosphere.

There are many encouraging inter-church initiatives in Ireland. Services during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity are now commonplace. The Annual Women's World Day of Prayer has increasingly seen women of various denominations come together. Groups engage together in bible studies and discussion of church documents. Concrete projects become occasions for cooperation and friendship such as initiatives that foster education for mutual understanding, joint study of local history, the organising of conferences, and concrete social initiatives. Christmas carol services and other annual events are sometimes held jointly. Interchurch groups, church fora, clergy fellowships, education-for-peace projects, and fellowship meals are increasing particularly in Northern Ireland.

A major milestone in Ecumenism in Ireland was the inauguration of *The Irish School of Ecumenics* in 1970. Other noteworthy initiatives in Irish ecumenism include the annual Glenstal Ecumenical Conference held since 1964 and the Greenhills Conference (near Drogheda) which began in 1966. The Corymeela community is internationally recognised as a prophetic sign of reconciliation.

Unfortunately, violence and sectarianism have led to deep prejudices, hurt and painful memories that can easily block engagement in any outreach to or dialogue with members of another tradition. Sectarianism has been defined as “a complex of attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and structures in which religion is a significant component and which (i) directly, or indirectly, infringes the rights of individuals or groups, and/or (ii) influences or causes situations of destructive conflict”.^[2]

The issue of sectarianism is one that has received considerable attention in Ireland especially since the 1998 Good Friday Belfast Agreement. Striving to create a culture that moves beyond sectarianism, we need to recognise how much all Christians share together in the presence of the Risen Christ. A number of projects now exist that seek to uncover embedded negative attitudes towards one another and help people deal with the past in a way that is effective and real.

Adverse circumstances such as sectarian protests in Northern Ireland have sometimes become occasions for increased ecumenical efforts such as the issuing of an official statement of support by a kirk session of the Presbyterian Church to a Catholic parish after a destructive sectarian incident with the request that the statement be read at Masses celebrated within the parish.

The main official ecumenical meeting point in Ireland is *The Irish Inter-Church Meeting*, which first gathered at Ballymascanlon in September, 1973. The Inter-Church Committee, made up of leaders and representatives of the members of the Irish Council of Churches and of the Episcopal Conference of the Roman Catholic Church, meets several times a year. The Inter-Church Meeting has two departments – one that looks at theological issues and one that examines social questions. The coming together of leaders and representatives of churches has helped greatly in facing together issues of concern such as the delicate issue of inter-church marriages.

A listing of the membership of the Irish Council of Churches gives an idea of the wide range of churches to be found on the Island: The Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Ireland; The Church of Ireland (Anglican); The Coptic Orthodox Church in Ireland; The Greek Orthodox Church in Britain and Ireland; The Life Link Network of Churches; The Lutheran Church in Ireland; The Methodist Church in Ireland; The Irish District of the Moravian Church; The Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland; The Presbyterian Church in Ireland; The Salvation Army (Ireland Division); The Religious Society of Friends in Ireland; The Russian Orthodox Church in Ireland; the Romanian Orthodox Church in Ireland.

Until a few years ago, the main focus ecumenically was clearly on what were called the four “mainline” churches: Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church. A major shift in ecumenism is coming about, however, with the growth of Orthodox Churches, minority ethnic churches and other new communities in Ireland. These developments will alter considerably the ecumenical landscape.

Since 1996 up to 200,000 foreign immigrants have come into the Republic of Ireland, comprising 5% of its current population of four million. The Orthodox presence increased from 358 persons in 1991 to 10,437 in 2002 and continues to rise rapidly.

Many Black Majority Churches have been established and are developing at a fast rate all over the country.

Other faith communities are also growing and this too impacts on ecumenical relations as it invites Christians to reflect on their common witness and openness to other faith communities. The 2002 Census gave the number of Muslims in the Republic of Ireland as 19,100, up from 3,900 in 1991. The Buddhist community has risen from 986 to 3,894 during this same time period, while the Hindu community is now 3,099, up from 953. This upward trend of other faith communities continues.

Any overview of ecumenism in Ireland cannot but recall in gratitude the countless individuals, communities and movements that have sown so many seeds of reconciliation and dialogue amidst tears and much suffering during the past 40 years. There can be no doubt that many of the cross-community projects that have developed in Northern Ireland are Christian inspired.

It is in a renewed discovery of the presence of Jesus among us when we are gathered in his name that Christians in Ireland are rediscovering their deep Christian roots and specific contribution to evangelisation in the world today. Having passed through a dark night, involving clashes of culture and mentality as well as contentions about the interpretation of history and perspectives for the future, Christians in Ireland are engaging in the painful but healing work of reconciliation.

It is our hope that by witnessing to the deep experience of God that opens up in this reconciliation, Christians in Ireland may be able to share its many positive experiences in a world that is seeking how to live in multi-cultural, multi ethnic and multi religious circumstances.

The words of the breastplate of St Patrick, expressing a faith common to us all, gives articulate voice to the deepest prayer of Christians in Ireland.

Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me, Christ within me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left...

Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks to me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

I arise today, through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the threeness,
Through confession of the oneness of the Creator of Creation.

(This description of the local ecumenical situation was prepared by the local preparatory group and is published under its sole authority.)

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Themes 1968-2006

In 1968, materials officially prepared jointly by the WCC Faith and Order Commission and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity began to be used.

- 1968** To the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1: 14)
Pour la louange de sa gloire
- 1969** Called to freedom (Galatians 5: 13)
Appelés à la liberté
(Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)
- 1970** We are fellow workers for God (1 Corinthians 3: 9)
Nous sommes les coopérateurs de Dieu
(Preparatory meeting held at the Monastery of Niederaltaich, Federal Republic of Germany)
- 1971** ...and the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13: 13)
...et la communion du Saint-Esprit
- 1972** I give you a new commandment (John 13: 34)
Je vous donne un commandement nouveau
(Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1973** Lord, teach us to pray (Luke 11: 1)
Seigneur, apprends-nous à prier
(Preparatory meeting held at the Abbey of Montserrat, Spain)
- 1974** That every tongue confess: Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2: 1-13)
Que tous confessent: Jésus-Christ est Seigneur
(Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1975** God's purpose: all things in Christ (Ephesians 1: 3-10)
La volonté du Père: Tout réunir sous un seul chef, le Christ
(Material from an Australian group. Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1976** We shall be like him (1 John 3: 2) or, Called to become what we are
Appelés à devenir ce que nous sommes
(Material from Caribbean Conference of Churches. Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)
- 1977** Enduring together in hope (Romans 5: 1-5)
L'espérance ne déçoit pas
(Material from Lebanon, in the midst of a civil war. Preparatory meeting held in Geneva).
- 1978** No longer strangers (Ephesians 2: 13-22)
Vous n'êtes plus des étrangers
(Material from an ecumenical team in Manchester, England)

- 1979 Serve one another to the glory of God (1 Peter 4: 7-11)
Soyez au service les uns des autres pour la gloire de Dieu
(Material from Argentina - preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1980 Your kingdom come (Matthew 6: 10)
Que ton règne vienne!
(Material from an ecumenical group in Berlin, German Democratic Republic -preparatory meeting held in Milan)
- 1981 One Spirit - many gifts - one body (1 Corinthians 12: 3b-13)
Un seul esprit - des dons divers - un seul corps
(Material from Graymoor Fathers, USA - preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1982 May all find their home in you, O Lord (Psalm 84)
Que tous trouvent leur demeure en Toi, Seigneur
(Material from Kenya - preparatory meeting held in Milan, Italy)
- 1983 Jesus Christ - the Life of the World (1 John 1: 1-4)
Jesus Christ - La Vie du Monde
(Material from an ecumenical group in Ireland - preparatory meeting held in Céligny (Bossey), Switzerland)
- 1984 Called to be one through the cross of our Lord (1 Cor 2: 2 and Col 1: 20).
Appelés à l'unité par la croix de notre Seigneur
(Preparatory meeting held in Venice, Italy)
- 1985 From death to life with Christ (Ephesians 2: 4-7)
De la mort à la vie avec le Christ
(Material from Jamaica - preparatory meeting held in Grandchamp, Switzerland)
- 1986 You shall be my witnesses (Acts 1: 6-8)
Vous serez mes témoins
(Material from Yugoslavia (Slovenia), preparatory meeting held in Yugoslavia)
- 1987 United in Christ - a New Creation (2 Corinthians 5: 17-6: 4a)
Unis dans le Christ - une nouvelle création
(Material from England, preparatory meeting held in Taizé, France)
- 1988 The love of God casts out fear (1 John 4: 18)
L'Amour de Dieu bannit la Crainte
(Material from Italy - preparatory meeting held in Pinerolo, Italy)
- 1989 Building community: one body in Christ (Romans 12: 5-6a)
Bâtir la communauté: Un seul corps en Christ
(Material from Canada - preparatory meeting held in Whaley Bridge, England)
- 1990 That they all may be one...That the world may believe (John 17)
Que tous soient un...Afin que le monde croie
(Material from Spain - preparatory meeting held in Madrid, Spain)
- 1991 Praise the Lord, all you nations! (Psalm 117 and Romans 15: 5-13)
Nations, louez toutes le Seigneur
(Material from Germany - preparatory meeting held in Rotenburg an der Fulda, Federal Republic of Germany)

- 1992 I am with you always ... Go, therefore (Matthew 28: 16-20)
Je suis avec vous...allez donc
(Material from Belgium - preparatory meeting held in Bruges, Belgium)
- 1993 Bearing the fruit of the Spirit for Christian unity (Galatians 5: 22-23)
Pour l'unité: laisser mûrir en nous les fruits de l'Esprit
(Material from Zaire - preparatory meeting held near Zurich, Switzerland)
- 1994 The household of God: called to be one in heart and mind (Acts 4: 23-37)
La maison de Dieu: Appelés à être un dans le cœur et dans l'esprit
(Material from Ireland - preparatory meeting held in Dublin, Republic of Ireland)
- 1995 Koinonia: communion in God and with one another (John 15: 1-17)
La koinonia: communion en Dieu et les uns avec les autres
(Material from Faith and Order, preparatory meeting held in Bristol, England)
- 1996 Behold, I stand at the door and knock (Revelation 3: 14-22)
Je me tiens à la porte et je frappe
(Preparatory material from Portugal, meeting held in Lisbon, Portugal)
- 1997 We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5: 20)
Au nom du Christ, laissez-vous reconcilier avec Dieu
(Material from Nordic Ecumenical Council -preparatory meeting held in Stockholm, Sweden)
- 1998 The Spirit helps us in our weakness (Romans 8: 14-27)
L'Esprit aussi vient en aide à notre faiblesse
(Preparatory material from France, meeting held in Paris, France)
- 1999 He will dwell with them as their God, they will be his peoples (Revelation 21: 1-7)
Dieu demeurera avec eux. Ils seront ses peuples et lui sera le Dieu qui est avec eux
(Preparatory material from Malaysia - meeting held in Monastery of Bose, Italy)
- 2000 Blessed be God who has blessed us in Christ (Ephesians 1: 3-14)
Béni soit Dieu, qui nous a bénis en Christ
(Preparatory material from the Middle East Council of Churches -meeting held La Verna, Italy)
- 2001 I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (John 14: 1-6)
Je suis le chemin, et la vérité et la vie
(Preparatory material from Romania and meeting held at Vulcan, Romania)
- 2002 For with you is the fountain of life (Psalm 36: 5-9)
Car chez toi est la fontaine de la vie (Psalm 35, 6-10)
(Preparatory material CEEC and CEC, meeting near Augsburg, Germany)
- 2003 We have this treasure in clay jars (2 Corinthians 4: 4-18)
Car nous avons ce trésor dans des vases d'argile
(Preparatory material churches in Argentina, meeting at Los Rubios, Spain)

- 2004 My peace I give to you (John 14: 23-31; John 14: 27)
Je vous donne ma paix
(Preparatory material from Aleppo, Syria - meeting in Palermo, Sicily)
- 2005 Christ, the one foundation of the church (1 Corinthians 3 1-23)
Le Christ, unique fondement de l’Eglise
(Preparatory material from Slovakia - meeting in Piestaňy, Slovakia)
- 2006 Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them (Mt 18: 18-20)
Là où deux ou trois se trouvent réunis en mon nom, je suis au milieu d’eux.
(Preparatory material from Ireland - meeting held in Prosperous, Co. Kildare, Ireland)

Some key dates in the history of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

- ca. 1740** In Scotland a Pentecostal movement arose, with North American links, whose revivalist message included prayers for and with all churches.
- 1820** The Rev. James Haldane Stewart publishes “Hints for the General Union of Christians for the Outpouring of the Spirit”.
- 1840** The Rev. Ignatius Spencer, a convert to Roman Catholicism, suggests a “Union of Prayer for Unity”.
- 1867** The First Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops emphasizes prayer for unity in the Preamble to its Resolutions.
- 1894** Pope Leo XIII encourages the practice of a Prayer Octave for Unity in the context of Pentecost.
- 1908** The observance of the “Church Unity Octave” initiated by the Rev. Paul Wattson.
- 1926** The Faith and Order movement begins publishing “Suggestions for an Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity”.
- 1935** Abbé Paul Couturier of France advocates the “Universal Week of Prayer for Christian Unity” on the inclusive basis of prayer for “the unity Christ wills by the means he wills”.
- 1958** Unité Chrétienne (Lyon, France) and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches begin co-operative preparation of materials for the Week of Prayer.
- 1964** In Jerusalem, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I prayed together Jesus’ prayer “that they all may be one” (John 17).

1964 The “Decree on Ecumenism” of Vatican II emphasizes that prayer is the soul of the ecumenical movement and encourages observance of the Week of Prayer.

1965 The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity [now known as the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity] begin official joint preparation of the Week of Prayer material.

1968 First official use of Week of Prayer material prepared jointly by Faith and Order and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity [now known as the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity]

1975 First use of Week of Prayer material based on a draft text prepared by a local ecumenical group. An Australian group was the first to take up this plan in preparing the 1975 initial draft.

1988 Week of Prayer materials were used in the inaugural worship for The Christian Federation of Malaysia, linking the major Christian groupings in that country.

Text for 1996 prepared in collaboration with YMCA and YWCA.

2004 Agreement reached that resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity be *jointly published and produced in the same format* by Faith and Order (WCC) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Catholic Church).

[1] Copyright permission requested.

[2] Department of Social Issues of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, *Sectarianism: A Discussion Document* (Belfast, 1993), p. 8.