

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2013
Ecumenical Worship Service

[L: Leader R: Reader A: Assembly]

Prelude (With the beating of Dalit drums, or some appropriate music)

Words of Welcome

Call to Worship

L: Jesus said, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” Let us in silence acknowledge the presence of the triune God in our midst.

Silence

Opening Meditation by Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941)

R: Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action

A: Into that heaven of freedom, let my country awake.

Hymn/Song (or a Bhajan chant)

Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving:

L: We praise you, dear God, our loving parent, for creating us in all our diversity. For the gift of our many cultures, languages, religious beliefs, customs, traditions, and ethnicities, we thank you! We thank you for the many church traditions that have kept our churches strong and active, even in places where they are a minority. Teach us to celebrate our different identities and traditions in our communities, so as to forge bonds of friendship and fellowship, leading us to greater unity.

A: How very good and pleasant it is when sisters and brothers live together in unity!

L: We praise you, Jesus Christ, for reconciling us with God and with one another through your death and resurrection and for teaching us to respect the dignity and value of all human beings. We thank you for your in-breaking into our lives every day, calling on us to stand in solidarity with those whose dignity is broken by political, social, and economic structures. Teach us to celebrate the message of hope that in you, we can overcome all that is evil in our world.

A: How very good and pleasant it is when sisters and brothers live together in unity!

L: We praise you, Holy Spirit, for the gift of mutual interdependence and solidarity that has been our heritage as peoples and churches. Teach us to treasure the bonds of unity we enjoy as we beseech your continuing presence with us. Inspire us on our journey towards full visible unity among us, and with all those peoples and movements that engage in the struggles for life.

A: How very good and pleasant it is when sisters and brothers live together in unity!

Hymn/Song

Confession of Sin

L: We know that in Christ we are already one. In spite of this, our human weakness has not always led us to witness to this reality. Let us now confess our sins of disunity and seek the Lord’s healing.

L: Come now, Jesus, into our midst...

A: and heal us and our disunity. Lead us into the paths of righteousness so that all can find life.

L: Come now, Jesus, into our midst ...

A: and teach us how to listen to the cries of those who are pushed into the margins.

L: Come now, Jesus, into our midst ...

A: and inspire us to work together with all those who strive for liberation so as to build unity within your broken body.

L: In humility we come to your feet, dear God, as we remember our sinfulness and the disunity for which we have been responsible.

A: We confess that we are divided by human conditions and humanly constructed social barriers that keep us apart as churches. We confess that we have often used our history as churches to discriminate against each other. Forgive us for hurting the unity to which Christ calls us, for it is in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

L: If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Passing of the Peace

Old Testament Reading: Micah 6:6-8

Testimony of Faith: Sarah, the Dalit

Psalms Reading: Psalm 86:11-16

Gospel Reading: Luke 24:13-35

Hymn/Song

Homily

Hymn/Song [a collection may be taken up to support the Canadian Council of Churches]

Confession of Faith: The Apostles' Creed or First Corinthians 15:1-8

Prayers for Unity

L: Walking in conversation, let us recognize all the efforts of the ecumenical movement towards the realization of the unity willed by Christ for the Church.

A: Send your Spirit to strengthen our resolve and deepen our conversations to realize Jesus' prayer in us.

L: Walking with the broken body of Christ, we are painfully aware that we are still unable to join in the breaking of the bread together. Hasten the day when we can realize the fullness of fellowship at the Lord's Table.

A: In flame in our hearts the desire to overcome all that divides us, so that we can see one Christ in our brokenness.

L: Walking towards freedom, let us remember, along with Dalit communities, other people facing similar kinds of discrimination.

May the unity of the churches be a sign of hope in situations of injustice.

A: Strengthen our churches' commitment to create spaces in our society and our communities, welcoming them in our midst and ensuring that they could live in dignity and freedom. Allow us to be transformed by their gifts and presence.

L: Walking as children of earth, we realize that we are pilgrims in the wonderful gift of creation given to us. Let us respect the earth as your creation and make us sensitive to the care of it.

A: Let your Spirit renew life in creation and make us attentive to the suffering of the landless people who are often the bearers of a tradition of prudent care of the earth and its resources.

L: Walking as friends of Jesus, let us accompany the oppressed communities all over the world, in overcoming centuries of shame to find freedom and dignity.

A: Enlarge and deepen our fellowship and friendship with you and with each other so that we will remain faithful and truthful to your calling.

L: Walking beyond barriers, let us build communities of unity and equality.

A: Grant us courage so we can overcome cultures and structures that hinder us from recognizing the presence of God in each other!

L: Walking in solidarity with women like Sarah and other victims of discrimination and injustice, let us be shaken out of our apathy.

A: Encircle us with your love, as we affirm the image of God in each one we encounter. Enable us to do justice by breaking through social structures of inequity.

L: Walking in celebration, we come to recognize the unity we share at different levels in our communities as a profound testimony to a gospel of faith and hope. Let the unity of our Churches be celebrated, respecting the diversities as a richness that derives from the life of the Trinity.

A: Allow us to recognize and celebrate with joy the rich diversity of human life born out of the struggles for the dignity and survival of all people in the midst of oppression as a sign of your abiding

faithfulness to people. In Christ's name we raise all these prayers, O God. Amen.

Lord's Prayer (in our own languages)

Commission

L: Stand before us, gentle God, as a reminder of the purpose you have for each one of us and for our churches. Walk before us, brave Christ, and lead us on the path to unity. Call us into abundant life, Holy Spirit, as we turn to each other and to God.

A: Send us into the world to heal and to be healed. Amen.

Final Blessing & Hymn/Song

Introduction to the Ecumenical Worship Service

What does God require of us?

(cf. Micah 6: 6-8)

This year's liturgy reflects the youthful character of the Student Christian Movement of India (SCMI). It takes into account the Dalit reality and offers an opportunity to share in their spirituality in this liturgy. Particular elements of the liturgy come from the Indian Dalit context, which include the use of drums and the bhajan, which is a local way of singing the lyrics, affirming the Dalits' faith in God. A third element, which is particular, is the sharing of the Testimony of Faith: Sarah, the Dalit that illustrates the Dalit spirituality of striving for justice, loving kindness, and walking in dignity with God (cf. Micah 6:6-8).

Christians in India should reject caste divisions, just as Christians worldwide should not accept the divisions among them: "Is Christ divided?" (1 Cor 1:13). For this reason, we gather in worship to pray for the unity that Christ wills for his Church, and we are called to break down the walls of divisions among and between us.

Order of Worship

The order of worship contains six elements: Opening, Praise & Thanksgiving, Confession of Sin & Assurance of Pardon, Liturgy of the Word & Testimony of Faith, Prayers for Unity, Commission & Final Blessing.

I. Opening: The celebration may begin with a prelude of the beating of drums, which symbolizes both the celebration of life and of resistance to oppression for the Dalit communities in India. It marks the resilience of all communities struggling for justice and liberation all over the world. Those faith communities that do not have drums may find an appropriate action or instrument that expresses the same intention. The text for the Opening Meditation is taken from the writings of the famous Indian Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore.

II. Praise & Thanksgiving

III. Confession of Sin & Assurance of Pardon: As a sign of assurance, the assembly is invited to walk around during this part of the

liturgy to share a sign of peace, during which time instrumental music may be played.

IV. Liturgy of the Word and Testimony of Faith: The Liturgy of the Word begins with the reading of the text for the Week of Prayer (Micah 6:6-8). This is followed by a testimony of faith from a real-life situation experience by a woman called Sarah, from the Dalit community. This incident took place in 2008 in Khandamal, in Orissa State in central India, where, for a month, violence erupted when Christians (largely Dalits) were attacked by Hindu extremists. Orissa is one of the poorest parts of India, and is traditionally associated with the most discriminated sections of society (four fifths of the population are Dalits, referring to people who are outside the caste system). The toll of the violence was momentous: 59 people died, 115 Christian churches were destroyed, many homes were damaged, and 50,000 homeless Christians sought refuge in the forests and later in refugee camps set up by the Indian government. Some 80 to 90 percent of Christians in India are Dalit converts. Sarah, like the majority of Dalits, was not given any inducement to become Christian, as is sometimes claimed – there were mass conversions when Dalits came to the missions, seeking refuge from the oppressive caste system of Hinduism and asking for the freedom they believed they could enjoy under the healing power of a liberator God.

V. Prayers for Unity

VI. Commission & Final Blessing: A typical custom within Dalit communities is the sharing of food. We suggest that there be a common meal at the end of the liturgy.

Liturgical Resources for the Ecumenical Worship Service

Testimony of Faith: Sarah, the Dalit (to be read following the Old Testament Reading)

The year was 2008.

The place was Khandamal, in Orissa State, located in central India. Now Orissa is one of the poorest parts of India, where 80 percent of the population are known as “Dalits,” “untouchables,” those considered outside of the caste system.

When violence broke out in 2008, inflamed by religious and social prejudice, angry mobs came looking for the Dalit Sarah Digal. She wasn’t there. She had fled, five children and mother-in-law in tow, to the safety of the jungle a kilometre away. So, they set ablaze all that she had left behind: a framed picture of Jesus, a Bible in Oriya, utensils in the kitchen, some clothes, mats and linen. By the time Sarah tiptoed back, when she saw it was safe, her home was gone. All that was left were burning embers, ashes and smoke. The neighbours came to commiserate with her. Sarah took a good look, stood erect, and pulled her sari firmly over her head. She began to pray. “Lord, forgive us our sins. Jesus, you are the only one. Save us from our misfortune. Free us, Lord.” The words were tumbling out. Sarah’s children slowly joined her. She was weeping as she pleaded with God for deliverance. Her neighbours and others around her joined her. It was a simple bond of human compassion and a strong reminder that nothing can sever a woman from her God. “I will die. But I will not stop being a Christian,” Sarah said through her tears. A staunch and brave Dalit Christian woman!