



WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2015

“Jesus said to her: *‘Give me a drink.’*” (John 4:7)

INTRODUCTION TO THE LITURGY

For reflection:

Jesus deliberately chose to cross Samaria on his way to Judea in Galilee. His route passed by the well that the Samaritan woman used to draw water. The Brazilian ecumenical group that prepared the worship service invites us to use these two symbols – the route and water – as images of the Christian unity that we pray for. The local group invites us to reflect on these initial questions that give shape to the worship:

- **On which path of unity are we to walk so that the world may drink from the source of life, Jesus Christ?**
- **On which path of unity are we to go forward, respecting our diversity?**

On this path of unity, there is a well filled with water: the water sought by Jesus, tired and thirsty on the way. The water drawn by the Samaritan woman in her daily task becomes the water that quenches thirst, the water that makes the desert bloom, the water in which we were baptized, the water over which the Spirit of God was hovering, the water given by Jesus springing up to eternal life.

Preparation for the worship

The outline for the ecumenical worship service may be used for the opening of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity or for another appropriate moment chosen by the local churches.

The worship service has only one Bible reading, John 4:1-42, which is at the heart of this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This long gospel passage may be proclaimed by several voices or presented as a dramatization or liturgical dance.

For the meditation after the gospel, there are several options, depending on the size of the worshipping group:

- A sharing based on the initial questions in small groups, followed by a return to the assembly;
- A homily or sermon that focuses on the gospel and takes into account the initial questions.

Arrange a path with candles, flowers, colourful pieces of cloth, etc. on the central aisle leading to the front of the assembly. In the centre of the path, place a large empty basin with jugs filled with water nearby. These pitchers could be different from one another to represent the diversity of the assembly.

The celebrants may enter in procession along this path. Passing near the “well,” each representative of a participating church will slowly pour the water from a different jug into the bowl. This water, from different sources, is a symbol of our unity. This gesture will be introduced at the beginning of the worship service and commented on in preaching.

This path may also be used in the preparation of the confession of sins. People come from different parts of the assembly on the way to express petitions for forgiveness.

After the blessing, participants can exchange a sign of peace and fellowship as they leave the assembly.

GATHERING

L: Please stand and join in singing the opening hymn, as the celebrants pour water that comes from their church into the “well.” This water, from different sources, is a symbol of our unity already present but needing to be made more visible.

Opening Hymn

You might want to choose a hymn from Latin America to start this service. (See hymn suggestions.)

Invitation to prayer¹:

One: Breathe into us the wind of unity that recognizes our diversity;

All: **Breathe into us tolerance that welcomes and makes us community,**

One: Breathe into us fire that unites what is torn apart and heals what is ill;

All: **Breathe into us grace that overcomes hatred and frees us from violence,**

One: Breathe into us life that faces and defeats death;

All: **Blessed be the mercy of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and blows where it wills, and makes all things new. Amen!**

Confession of Sins and *Kyrie*

One: In humility, as children of God and sisters and brothers of the world, we receive God’s mercy and respond to God’s call to make new all relationships.

All: **Kyrie eleison (said or sung)**

One: Merciful God, you hovered over the waters where diversity sprouted and flourished. We confess our difficulty in living with differences and we pray for forgiveness for our mindsets, words and actions that do violence to diversity.

All: **Kyrie eleison**

One: Christ, grace and joy among the multitude, listener and teacher who gives birth to visions of hope and heals wounds in body and mind, we confess that we have failed to listen to voices different from our own, and often we omit to say words that bring healing and hope.

All: **Kyrie eleison**

One: God of pilgrims, you accompanied us on our way through the desert and you are always present and acting in our churches. We confess that we are not always open to supporting those who cry out for solidarity and fellowship; we perpetuate individualism and excluding attitudes.

All: **Kyrie eleison**

One: Christ, creating Word, we confess that we do not listen to your creation, which groans and cries out for liberation and renewal. Help us to walk together and to hear your voice in all living things who suffer and yearn for healing and care.

All: **Kyrie eleison**

One: O God, fountain of mercy and grace, pour over us your pardon. May your love transform us into a source of living waters to restore the strength of your people.

All: **Amen.**

WORD

Hymn (see hymn suggestion)

Alleluia (such as an Alleluia about water)

Proclamation or dramatization or liturgical dance of the Gospel of John 4:1-42

Message / Homily / Sermon

RESPONSE

Affirmation of Faith

(The Apostles’ Creed or another affirmation of faith, such as the renewal of baptismal promises, may be used.)

Intercessory Prayer

The Congregation’s response may be said or sung. (See hymn suggestions.)

One: Eternal God, your Son asked for water and the woman asked for the living water in return. You provide for us and we now ask you for the things we most need.

God of eternal compassion, as individuals and as community, we ask for light, so we may become more welcoming and understanding towards others and reduce suffering in our world.

All: God of love! Hear our prayer!

One: God of eternal compassion, teach your children that charity, hospitality and unity are expressions of your revelation and will for humanity.

All: God of love! Hear our prayer!

One: God of eternal compassion, we beseech you for your peace; teach us and guide us to be builders of a tolerant and non-violent world.

All: God of love! Hear our prayer!

One: God of eternal compassion, who spoke to us through creation, then through the prophets and at last through your Son Jesus Christ, grant us your wisdom to listen to your voice that resounds through our diversity and calls us to unity.

All: God of love! Hear our prayer!

One: God of eternal compassion, in the name of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who as a stranger asked for a drink from a Samaritan woman, give us living water, which will become a source of unity in us, springing up into eternal life through your Holy Spirit.

All: God of love! Hear our prayer!

Local community may add other prayers.

One: God, who is with us and walks in our midst, grant us this day the grace of your light and Spirit so that we may continue our mission and remain faithful to welcoming and listening to those who are different from us. Grant us your light so that we may change our violent actions and end all sorts of discrimination that hinder us from seeing the life that comes from you everywhere and in everybody. Grant us your light so that we may reform our attitudes and enable our churches to be welcoming spaces where feast and forgiveness, joy and tenderness, strength and faith become our daily practice, our daily food, our daily movement forward in Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray:

The Lord's Prayer (said or sung)

Offering

One: Jesus teaches us to offer our lives as a sign of love and compassion. We pray that we may become living offerings dedicated to the ministry of God's Word and grace as we present our gifts.

Note: Local communities are invited to organize the offering in support of the work of the Canadian Council of Churches. While the offering is being collected, there may be special music played or sung.

As the offering is processed to the front, the community stands and may sing the doxology or other hymns.

One: God of living water,
We bring our gifts to you,
Tokens of the work of our hands
And the love of our hearts.
Accept them and use them
Through the love of Christ. Amen.

Hymn

SENDING FORTH

Benediction

One: May God
bless you and protect you,
fill your feet with energy for dancing
and your arms with strength for embracing.

May God
fill your heart with tenderness and your eyes with joy, your ears with
music and your nostrils with perfume.

May God, Wisdom
flood your tongue with song and your soul with joy.

May God
give you the gifts of the desert:
Silence, trust, clean water,

infusing in you new energies,
giving face to hope.

May Jesus Christ, the living water, be
– behind you to protect you
– by your side to accompany you
– within you to console you
– in front of you to guide you
– above you to bless you.

May the Spirit, who transforms,
grant you the serenity of the mountains, the freshness of the waters, the
lightness of the breeze, the brightness of the sun, the luminosity of the
moon, the peace of the infinite.

All: Amen.

Sharing peace and blessing:

One: May God, who teaches us to welcome each other and calls us to practise
hospitality, grant us peace and serenity as we move forward in the path of
unity in diversity.

Let us share the sign of peace with each other as we gather at the water.

Note to Worship leader:

A symbolic gesture can be done at the end. Here are two ideas:

- *People bless one another by going to the water and making the sign of the cross on each other's forehead.*
- *Have a table with glasses of fresh water available; children could offer those glasses to participants.*

¹ Adapted from the prayer written by Inês de França Bento in Rubem Alves (Org), *CultoArte, Celebrando a Vida, Pentecostes, Ed. Vozes, Petrópolis, RJ 2002, p. 21.*