

2024 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

*You shall love the Lord your God ...
and your neighbour as yourself (Luke 10:27)*

HOW TO ORGANIZE AN ECUMENICAL WORSHIP SERVICE OR EVENT

The 2024 WPCU international and Canadian resources are available to download at:

www.weekofprayer.ca (English)
www.semainedepriere.ca (French)

General Introduction

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU) is an annual ecumenical celebration which traditionally takes place between January 18th (the Feast of the Confession of Saint Peter) and January 25th (the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul) in the northern hemisphere. In celebrating the WPCU, Christians around the world are invited to pray for the unity of all Christians, to reflect on Scripture together, to participate in jointly-organized ecumenical services and events, and to share fellowship.

The purpose of the WPCU resources, and of the following suggestions, is to assist communities and parishes / congregations in creating inclusive, ecumenical celebrations for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. While the materials provided in this year's kit can be used to craft a WPCU-themed service or event in your own parish or congregation, that is not our goal. Our intention is that worship services and events for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity be truly ecumenical, promoted widely, and draw leaders and participants from a broad range of Christian traditions in your community.

We encourage you to be creative in your use of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity resources! For example, you may wish to alter the ecumenical worship service to better suit the context of your community, or you may draw inspiration from the WPCU materials to create something entirely new. Communities should also feel free to use the WPCU materials not only during the traditional Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (January 18-25 in the northern hemisphere), but throughout the year, to pray for Christian unity and to foster ecumenical fellowship and service.

PLEASE NOTE: All suggestions below can be adapted for in-person or online services / events. We encourage you, at the earliest planning stages, to reach out to members of your community, especially representatives from Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour communities, who have experience with organizing in-person or online ecumenical gatherings.

We also encourage you to inquire about copyright requirements for using texts, music, hymns, and videos / films during in-person and online events. You may wish to invite members of your local

organizing committee who have experience with copyright regulations to assist, and give them ample time to prepare and troubleshoot.

To assist with the goal of inclusive, ecumenical celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, here are some general suggestions, and a recommended timeline, to help you get started in organizing either in-person events or virtual gatherings. More detailed practical suggestions can be found in the *2024 Annotated Ecumenical Worship Service* resource.

General Suggestions:

- An ecumenical *Order of Worship* is available for churches and Christian communities that observe the WPCU together through a single common worship service.
- Communities that observe the WPCU in their worship daily during the WPCU ‘octave’ may draw material for these services from the *2024 Eight Days of Prayer* resource.
- Prayers from the Ecumenical Worship Service, the *Eight Days of Prayer* resource, and a selection of additional prayers can be used as appropriate in your context.
- Those wishing to undertake Bible studies on the 2024 WPCU theme can use the biblical texts, reflections, and discussion questions from the *Eight Days of Prayer* resource. Each day the discussions can lead to a closing intercessory prayer.
- Those who wish to pray privately may find the material in the *Eight Days of Prayer* resource helpful for focusing their prayer intentions. They can be mindful that they are in communion with others praying around the world.
- **The principal symbol** suggested for use in 2024 WPCU ecumenical worship services or events is a *calabash* (a dry, hollow gourd used as a vessel in West African communities) from which water is shared among the participants. At a time when safe drinking water is a grave concern in many parts of the world, this ancient symbolic act takes on an even more urgent significance. In the interests of public health, water from the calabash may be poured into individual drinking vessels or glasses.
- **How to make or buy a calabash for your 2024 WPCU ecumenical worship service or events:** The calabash (or ‘bottle gourd’) is a plant which grows in many parts of the world. It is used for food and for making containers, both practical and ceremonial. If you have a lot of time and are feeling adventurous, you might try making your own vessel for your WPCU worship service or event, using an actual calabash or a similar gourd. You can simply search on YouTube for “making a calabash” to find a variety of tutorials. Fortunately, it is also possible to buy finished calabash bowls. If you happen to have an international crafts import store near you, you can inquire there, but you can also order fair-trade calabash bowls online. The best place to start online is https://www.etsy.com/ca/market/ghana_calabash.

Recommended Timeline:

4-6 months prior

- Download the 2024 WPCU international and Canadian resources and read through the suggestions for organizing WPCU ecumenical worship services, Bible studies, and other events. You might also be inspired by the photos and stories from previous years’ WPCU events across Canada published online at weekofprayer.ca/wpcu-canada / semainedepriere.ca/fr/spuc-au-canada!

- Reach out to faith leaders in your neighbourhood by phone, email, or by visiting their place of worship; invite them (or their representatives) to participate in a 2024 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity planning meeting. If there are representatives of any West African communities in your area, make particular effort to invite them, as well as Black and Indigenous leaders, and People of Colour leaders.
- Because care and understanding across social and ethnic divides is a key theme of this year's WPCU Gospel reading, you may also wish to invite representatives of other faith traditions to participate in your WPCU worship service or event. How this might be done will be very specific to your local context, and should be discussed by organizers early in the planning process.
- Depending on your local context, appropriate hymns and songs that highlight this year's WPCU theme can be substituted for those suggested in the international and Canadian materials. Your community may also prefer to select additional music for the gathering / opening and closing times. Adapt the *Order of Worship* to your own situation. We also invite you to consult the *Canadian Hymn Suggestions 2024 WPCU* resource. You may also consider using pre-recorded hymns or music in both in-person and online WPCU events.
- Gather leaders interested in planning an event for a meeting and select the date / time and the venue for in-person events, or the platform / registration / login information for online events. At the meeting, divide tasks (for example, event promotion / communications, worship planning / bulletins, music / musicians, hospitality / refreshments, children's story time / activities).
- Craft a 'Save the Date' media release; decide how you will use social media to promote and report on your event(s). **For social media posts this year, use #WPCU or #weekofprayer (for posts in English) and #SPUC or #semainedepriere (for posts in French).**
- Print an appropriate number of posters for advertising your event(s) in your parishes / congregations and in your community.

2 months prior

- Hold a follow-up planning meeting; divide worship service or event leadership roles; finalize the *Order of Worship* and select hymns and other music; decide whether you will use pre-recorded music or videos; decide whether you will require people to register for in-person or online events; print additional posters or other promotional materials, as necessary.
- Finalize plans to promote your event(s) in each participating parish / congregation and in the wider community: for example, assign someone to place posters in grocery stores, libraries, and other public locations; craft another media release with more details about your event(s); divide posters for distribution in local churches; plan to include the details of your event(s) on various church websites and social media.
- Share your event(s) with us for promotion via The Canadian Council of Churches channels at weekofprayer.ca/share-your-week-prayer-celebration / semainedepriere.ca/fr/faire-part!

2-4 weeks prior

- Communicate with all participating churches; remind them to promote your event(s) in their worship bulletins, during announcements, on their websites / social media, and with posters.


1-2 weeks prior

- Hold a final, brief meeting to confirm all arrangements (for example, event staffing, hospitality, online platform and tech support); walk through the worship service or event outline with

leaders (and musicians, if possible); finalize the bulletin (hardcopy or digital) to be used during your worship service or event.

- Print bulletins or distribute a digital copy to participants.

At event

- **For in-person events:** Place hospitality ministers / greeters at the doors of the venue, so that people who are unfamiliar with the space can be welcomed, provided with a worship aid or program, and directed to seating. **For online events:** Designate someone to open your online event early and greet people as they join.
- If you are incorporating the symbol of the *calabash* in your event, everyone may be given an individual drinking vessel as they arrive at in-person events. Near the beginning of the worship service, or at another appropriate point during your event, water from the calabash (or from another central vessel, if you choose to use an alternative one) will be shared among the participants. For online events, participants can be encouraged to pour some water from a pitcher into a cup at home (ask them to prepare in advance and, at the beginning of your online event, remind them to have their pitcher of water and cup ready).
- At the beginning of your in-person event, ask your worship / event leader – or someone from the host parish / congregation – to let everyone know where the washrooms are located and whether there is a wheelchair-accessible space for those with mobility issues, as you are expecting a number of people who are probably unfamiliar with your space.
- Capture information about how many faith communities are represented via a guest register or online registration.
- **Photos / video recordings:** At in-person events, assign a photographer / videographer to capture some moments to share via traditional or social media. Post a sign on all doors with a standardized message, such as: “Please be aware that photographs may be taken at today’s event and may be used in church media or by The Canadian Council of Churches and its ecumenical partners (in print or online) to promote and share this event. Your participation today constitutes your agreement to have your photograph taken and used in this way.” This notice can also have a little camera icon, such as this one: . At online events, assign someone to make a video recording and to take screenshots. At the beginning of your online event, ask for your participants’ permission to record and to take screenshots. Those who do not wish to participate in this way can turn off their cameras.
- **Use hashtags #WPCU or #weekofprayer (for posts in English) and #SPUC or #semainedepriere (for posts in French) when you share photos or stories from your WPCU worship service or event on social media.**
- Speak with participants to ask about their experience at the event and / or to gather material for an article (make sure to get permission if you will attribute any quotes).
- If you would like to share your photos, videos, quotes or stories on the WPCU website (www.weekofprayer.ca / www.semainedepriere.ca) and on The Canadian Council of Churches’ social media, please contact our WPCU Program Coordinator, Marina Fanous, at wpcu-spuc@councilofchurches.ca .

After event

- As soon as you are able, meet briefly with the organizing team to reflect on your event(s) and collect ideas on what went well, and what you would change for next year.

- Write a brief article about your event(s) for submission to local media outlets or for publication on www.weekofprayer.ca / www.semainedepriere.ca websites. Be sure to include pictures or photos!
- Complete your social media communications about your event(s).
- Please pass along any helpful feedback you may have to the Canadian Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Writing and Animation Team, using the online Comments and Feedback form available at www.weekofprayer.ca/comments-and-feedback / www.semainedepriere.ca/fr/commentaires. We would love to hear from you!
- Select the organizing team and venue for next year's WPCU event(s).