

2019 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue (Deuteronomy 16:18-20)

BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS FOR THE EIGHT DAYS

QUESTIONS FOR BIBLE STUDY

This Canadian resource was prepared by members of the Canadian Week of Prayer for Christian Unity ecumenical writing team. The short summaries and discussion questions below are based on the 2019 Biblical Reflections and Prayers for the Eight Days, Introduction to the Theme for the Year 2019, and The Ecumenical Situation in Indonesia international Week of Prayer resources, prepared by Indonesian Christians. This Canadian resource can be used for private or communal Bible study, to supplement the Indonesian resources available on www.weekofprayer.ca.

See also 2019 Bible Study Tips for some suggestions on how to use these materials as an individual or in a group. This Canadian resource is available on www.weekofprayer.ca.

The theme for this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is “Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue” (Deuteronomy 16:18-20). The topic of each day has been chosen to reflect struggles that result from injustice.

In preparation for your own reflection or group discussion, you might find it helpful to read the “Introduction to the Theme” and “The Ecumenical Situation in Indonesia” sections of the 2019 international materials.

Day One: True Worship Leads to Action

Let justice roll down like waters (Amos 5:24)

Indonesian Context / Issue

Christians can sometimes be very committed to prayer and worship, but less concerned for the poor and the marginalized. Sometimes we pray in church, but at the same time oppress our fellow human beings or exploit the environment. Christians in Indonesia recognize that, in their land, there are people who passionately try to practice their faith, but who oppress those of other beliefs, even using violence in doing so. Across the diversity of ethnicity, language and religion, Indonesians have historically lived by the principle of *gotong royong*, which is to live in solidarity and by collaboration. However, much recent economic growth in Indonesia has been built on competition, in stark contrast to the collaboration of *gotong royong*, resulting in corruption and injustice.

Biblical Reflection: *Amos 5:22-25; Luke 11:37-44*

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus reminds us that the outward sign of true worship of God is acting justly. He is fierce in his condemnation of those who neglect this obligation.

In the prophecy of Amos, God rejects the worship offered by those who neglect justice, until they “let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (5:24). The prophet insists on the absolute link between worship and doing deeds of justice. When Christians work together to listen to the cry of the poor and the oppressed, they grow in communion with one another and with the Triune God.

Questions for Private Meditation or Group Discussion

1. In what way(s) might the Indonesian dilemma of collaboration vs. competition echo our own situation?
2. What is the link between worship and doing justice? Where is that link found in your church or community?
3. How can we practice doing justice in our community or country? What initiatives in your neighbourhood – or Canada-wide – will you join and commit to this year? You can find some Canada-wide and denominational initiatives and resources listed below in Question 3 for each Day of Prayer and on www.weekofprayer.ca. We also encourage you to find out about, and connect with, ecumenical and interfaith justice initiatives in your denomination or locally.

Prayer

God of the widow, the orphan and the stranger,
You have shown us the path of justice.
Help us to follow your way by doing justice as our worship of you.
As Christians together,
may we worship you not only with our hearts and minds, but also by our deeds.
May the Holy Spirit help and guide us to work for justice wherever we are,
so that many people may be strengthened through our works.
In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Day Two: Standing up for Truth

Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No' (Matthew 5:37)

Indonesian Context / Issue

Violence towards fellow humans is not found only in physical assault and robbery, but also in gossip and malicious rumours. Social media have made it easy for untruths to be circulated instantly to a wide audience. Christians in Indonesia are aware of how this has sometimes led to lies and prejudice being propagated by religious groups, including Christians, against other religious groups. Fear and the threat of reprisals can make people reluctant to stand up for the truth and can cause them to remain silent in the face of unjust and untrue statements aimed at causing fear.

Biblical Reflection: *Ephesians 4:22-25; Matthew 5:33-37*

Jesus boldly said, “Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.” Deceitfulness destroys good relationships between persons and between groups, including churches. Dishonesty disrupts the unity of the Church. The Letter to the Ephesians reminds us that we are members of one another. This is a call for Christians to be honest and accountable to each other, so that they may grow in fellowship. When we do so, it is not the spirit of the evil one, but the Holy Spirit of God who will be with us.

Questions for Private Meditation or Group Discussion

1. What is the danger in dealing dishonestly with others?
2. What can we do to confront gossip and malicious rumours? How can we live as truthful people?
3. Check your online news sources, read your local newspaper, watch television, listen to the radio carefully. If you find something troubling, what can you do about it? How might you do the same thing with social media? You can find some ecumenical resources that equip us to listen to one another's truths without prejudice, openly, breaking down stereotypes at www.weekofprayer.ca. You might especially engage the following resources and programs:
 - [Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network \(CEARN\) publications](#)
 - [Engage Difference! Deepening Understanding for Intercultural Ministry](#). A program of the [Forum for Intercultural Leadership and Learning](#).
 - [Learning How to Animate Racial Justice Workshops](#) training program, co-sponsored by the [Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network](#) and the [Forum for Intercultural Leadership and Learning](#).

Prayer

God of righteousness,
grant us wisdom to distinguish right from wrong.
Let our hearts be guided by honesty and our lips speak the truth.
Give us courage to be truthful even when others go against us.
Keep us from spreading deceit;
make us, rather, agents of unity and peace,
spreading good news for all people.
We pray in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Day Three: Called to Be Gracious and Merciful to Everyone

The Lord is gracious and merciful to all (Psalm 145:8)

Indonesian Context / Issue

Indonesia is a nation of over 17,000 islands and 1,340 different ethnic groups, and churches are often separated along ethnic lines. Such exclusivity can lead some to see themselves as the sole possessors of the truth, thus wounding the unity of the Church. But churches in Indonesia are also aware of the importance of building and strengthening relationships with people of different faiths, and both Protestant and Roman Catholic church councils have worked together closely to encourage interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Amidst escalating ethnic and religious fanaticism and a growing spirit of intolerance throughout the world today, Christians can serve the human family by joining together to bear witness to the all-embracing love of God, proclaiming with the psalmist that “the Lord is gracious and merciful” to all.

Biblical Reflection: *Psalm 145:8-13; Matthew 1:1-17*

“The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made,” said the psalmist, proclaiming that the love of God is beyond boundaries of ethnicity, culture, race, and even religion. The account of the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel reflects this expansive vision. While ancient cultures often saw women as inferior, or as the property of their fathers or husbands, Matthew names four women among the ancestors of Jesus, two of whom, Ruth and Rahab, were Gentiles. Three other ancestors in the list were known for their sinfulness, including the adulterous King David. Naming these in the genealogy of Jesus and making them part of God’s human history, proclaims that God includes everyone, male and female, sinner and righteous, in his plan of salvation, regardless of their backgrounds.

Questions for Private Meditation or Group Discussion

1. How do some of the stories in the Bible challenge us to do a better job of including everyone in our thinking and fellowship?
2. Think about how you (or your group) might have changed over the years in including everyone in programs, language, etc. What has been easy? Difficult? What still needs doing?
3. Here are some initiatives you might participate in, and some ecumenical and denominational projects and resources that might help your reflection and work. More can be found at www.weekofprayer.ca.
 - [*Cracking Open White Identity Towards Transformation: Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network Examines White Identity, Power and Privilege.*](#) Published by the [Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network](#) of the [Canadian Council of Churches](#).
 - [*Who Is My Neighbour? A Window into the Interfaith Experience and Potential of Member Churches of The Canadian Council of Churches.*](#) Published by the [Christian Interfaith Reference Group](#) of the [Canadian Council of Churches](#).
 - [*Truth and Reconciliation and the Doctrine of Discovery.*](#) Published by the [Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network](#) of the [Canadian Council of Churches](#).
 - [*On the Doctrine of Discovery.*](#) Published by the [Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network](#) of the [Canadian Council of Churches](#).
 - [*Mamow Be-Mo-Tay-Tah: Let Us Walk Together.*](#) Published by the [Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network](#) of the [Canadian Council of Churches](#).
 - [Friendship Ministries Canada. People With and Without Disabilities Growing in Faith Together.](#)
 - [Our Whole Society](#) conference, sponsored by the [Canadian Interfaith Conversation](#).
 - [*Deepening Understanding for Intercultural Ministry.*](#) A five-day workshop facilitated by the [Forum for Intercultural Leadership and Learning](#), a reference group of the [Canadian Council of Churches](#).
 - [KAIROS](#) initiatives, reflections, and resources on [indigenous rights](#) and [migrant justice](#).
 - Two examples of local communities reaching out to the marginalized: [St. Martin's Manor](#), a home for young mothers without support in Hamilton, ON, and [Covenant House](#), a shelter and resource for homeless at-risk street youth in Vancouver, BC. We encourage you to find and support similar initiatives in your area.

Prayer

Father (or Creator), Son and Holy Spirit, one God,
we give praise to you for your great glory made manifest in all of creation.
Give us an open heart to embrace all who experience discrimination.
Help us to grow in love beyond prejudice and injustice.
Grant us the grace to respect the uniqueness of each person,
so that in our diversity we may experience unity.
This prayer we make in your holy name. Amen

Day Four: Living Simply and Contentedly

Be content with what you have (Hebrews 13:5)

Indonesian Context / Issue

Jesus teaches us that material things should not be our main concern. Rather, we should strive first for the reign of God and its values, trusting that our heavenly Father will provide for us. In recent years, some churches in Indonesia have been providing various kinds of financial, human and educational support to small churches in rural areas. In this simple and practical example of mutual love, they are demonstrating the unity with their fellow-Christians which is God's gift to his Church. Living more simply, not preoccupied with earning money beyond our needs or with hoarding resources for the future, can enable us to make the earth, our common home, a more just place.

Biblical Reflection: *Hebrews 13:1-5; Matthew 6:25-34*

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews warns against excessive love of money and material things. In the face of our tendency to think we never have enough, the text reminds us of God's providence and assures us that God will never forsake creation. Through the fruitfulness of earth, rivers and seas, God's goodness has provided ample food and fresh water to sustain all living beings, and yet many people lack these basic necessities. Human weakness and greed frequently lead to corruption, injustice, poverty and hunger. It can be tempting, instead of caring about others and sharing our goods with them, to gather and accumulate money, food and natural resources for ourselves, or our own nation or ethnic group.

Questions for Private Meditation or Group Discussion

1. How are the larger Indonesian churches helping their more vulnerable neighbours? What lessons can they teach us?
2. What are some ways we can cultivate an attitude of gratitude for what we have? What leads to contentment with life?
3. Here are a few Canadian initiatives and resources that might inspire your work of caring for one another and good stewardship. You can find more denominational and national initiatives and resources on www.weekofprayer.ca.
 - [Oikocredit Canada](#). Transforming lives in developing countries through investment.
 - [On the Theology of Money: A Resource for Study and Discussion](#). Published by the [Anglican Church of Canada](#).
 - In the Lenten season, Catholic parishes in the Archdiocese of Toronto participate in [the Share Life campaign](#) to support those in need in Canada and around the world. On Good Friday, Catholic parishes across Canada take up [a collection to support and protect the holy sites in the Holy Land](#).
 - Christian Jewish Dialogue of Toronto's [Basic Income Initiative](#).

- [Citizens for Public Justice's church resources on refugee rights](#) and [other research and resources on refugee rights](#). We also encourage you to learn more about [the challenge to the Canada-US Safe Third Country Agreement](#).
- [Taxes for the Common Good](#). A research report prepared by the [Citizens for Public Justice](#), which highlights the positive role taxes play in a democratic society and summarizes up-to-date information on the costs and opportunities afforded by various federal tax policy options.

Prayer

Compassionate God,
we thank you for your bountiful gifts.
Give us the grace to accept all blessings
in simplicity and with humble gratitude.
Enable us to be content and ready to share with others who are in need,
so that all may experience unity in the love that flows from you,
our Triune God,
who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

Day Five: Bringing Good News to the Poor

To bring good news to the poor (Luke 4:18)

Indonesian Context / Issue

Although the Indonesian nation is founded on *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) and *gotong royong* (the principle of sharing in all aspects of life), too often, those who are supposed to promote justice and protect the weak do the opposite. We live in a globalized world where marginalization, exploitation and injustice are rampant. The gap between the rich and the poor is getting wider. Economic achievement becomes a deciding factor in relationships between peoples, nations and communities. Economic issues often trigger tensions and conflicts between them. It is hard to enjoy peace when justice is absent.

Biblical Reflection: *Amos 8:4-8; Luke 4:16-21*

The prophet Amos criticized traders who practiced deceit and exploited the poor in order to gain maximum profit. Amos also underlined how God observes their wrongdoing and will never forget it. God listens to the cries of victims of injustice and never forsakes those who are exploited and treated unjustly.

By virtue of our common Baptism, all Christians share in the prophetic mission of Jesus to proclaim good news to the poor and the weak, in both words and deeds. When we recognise this mission, the Spirit of the Lord will be upon us too, empowering us to work for justice. Our dignity as Christians calls us to speak and act in such a way that the words from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah which Jesus proclaimed in Nazareth are fulfilled each day in the hearing of those around us.

Questions for Private Meditation or Group Discussion

1. What can the prophet Amos teach us about daily living?
2. What are some of the ways we can live justly?
3. What is happening in your community to promote justice for our lives and the world? Here are a few resources and initiatives that might help or inspire your work. More resources and initiatives can be found at www.weekofprayer.ca.
 - [The Burden of Poverty: A Snapshot of Poverty across Canada](#), published by [Citizens for Public Justice](#), current [research on poverty in Canada](#), and [church resources on poverty](#) collected by [Citizens for Public Justice](#).
 - [Dignity For All](#) – a multi-partner, non-partisan campaign co-organized by [Citizens for Public Justice](#) and [Canada Without Poverty](#) with a vision to create a poverty-free and more socially secure and cohesive Canada.
 - [Citizens for Public Justice](#)'s [church resources on refugee rights](#) and [other research and resources on refugee rights](#). We also encourage you to learn more about [the challenge to the Canada-US Safe Third Country Agreement](#).
 - A theological reflection and ideas for action on poverty in Canada prepared by the [Commission on Justice and Peace](#) of the [Canadian Council of Churches](#). Forthcoming in September 2018.

Prayer

Loving God,
forgive our lust for power
and free us from the temptation to oppress others.
By your Holy Spirit of communion,
help us to live in solidarity with our neighbour,
and so share together with your Son Jesus
in fulfilling your promise of freedom from poverty and oppression.
We pray in his name. Amen.

Day Six: Caring for Creation

The Lord of hosts is his name (Jeremiah 10:16)

Indonesian Context / Issue

Movements among people of different faiths in Indonesia and many other places are inspiring Christians to promote eco-friendly churches, and to take a stand against environmental abuses. This unites Christians in bearing witness to their Creator, “for he is the one who formed all things.” When we join with other Christians in defence of our common earthly home, we are not just engaging in activism, but are fulfilling the Lord’s command to proclaim the good news of God’s healing and restoring love to *all* of creation.

Biblical Reflection: *Jeremiah 10:12-16; Mark 16:14-15*

The created world is a manifestation of God’s wondrous power. The greatness of God is made visible in and through all creation: “The Lord of hosts is his name.”

Today, however, we are facing a serious global ecological crisis, which threatens the survival of the natural world. Many people have been driven by greed to exploit creation beyond its capacity. In the name of development, forests are cleared and pollution destroys land, air, rivers and seas, rendering agriculture impossible, making fresh water unobtainable and causing animals to die. In this context it is useful to remember that after his resurrection, Jesus commissioned the disciples to proclaim the good news “to the *whole* creation.” No part of creation is outside God’s plan to make all things new. And so conversion is needed from a tendency to exploit to an attitude that values and reconciles us with creation.

Questions for Personal Meditation or Group Discussion

1. How are environmental issues affecting our world and our local communities?
2. What can you or your group do to help the health of our creation?
3. Here are some ecumenical, denominational, and interfaith resources that might be helpful as you reflect on and engage in ecological justice work and care for creation. Other resources and initiatives can be found at www.weekofprayer.ca.
 - Pope Francis’ encyclical letter *Laudato Si’* and accompanying study resources: [Living Out Laudato Si’: A Commentary and Practical Resource for Canadian Catholics](#) – a resource for group study, prepared by the [Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace](#), Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops; [On Care for Our Common Home: A Dialogue Guide for Laudato Si’](#), produced by the [Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice](#).
 - [Resources on ecological justice](#) and [research on ecological justice](#) collected by the [Citizens for Public Justice](#). You might also wish to participate in their [Climate Witness Project](#).
 - [KAIROS](#) reflections, initiatives, and resources on [ecological justice](#).
 - [Interfaith and ecumenical resources and calls for actions on climate justice](#) coordinated by the [Canadian Council of Churches](#).
 - [Interfaith Climate Statement](#). A multi-faith invitation to sustainable lifestyles.

Prayer

Loving God,
by your word all things came to be.
We thank you for the universe
which manifests your glory, beauty and kindness.
Grant us the wisdom to walk gently upon the earth
and together to be prophets of your good news to all creation. Amen.

Day Seven: Empowering Women in Our Communities

Woman, great is your faith! (Matthew 15:28)

Indonesian Context / Issue

The marginalization and dismissing of women's voices continues in our own times. Indeed, even within our churches we are often complicit with cultures that devalue women. As Christians become aware of their own failings in this area, they come to recognize more clearly the horror of violence against women and children, snatched forcibly from their homes and trafficked to other lands. These and many other migrant workers are often treated as less than human, and are denied the most basic human rights. In recent years churches in Indonesia have taken common action against human trafficking and the sexual abuse of children. Their efforts, and those of people of other faiths, are all the more urgent since the number of victims in some parts of their country is increasing daily.

As Christians unite in prayer and study of the Scriptures, truly listening for God's voice, they can discover that God also speaks today through the cries of the most abused in society. It is when they hear God's call together that they are inspired to join in common action against the scourge of human trafficking and of other evils.

Biblical Reflection: *1 Samuel 1:13-17; Matthew 15:21-28*

Eli misjudges Hannah's deep and fervent prayer and condemns her, dismissing her supplications as drunken ramblings. Yet the words of her reply, calling on him not to dismiss her as "a worthless woman" softened his heart and he sent her away with a blessing. Likewise, when the Canaanite woman came to beg Jesus to heal her daughter, he initially dismissed her, saying that he had come only for his own people. Yet she persisted in her begging and challenging and eventually, recognising her great faith, Jesus granted her request. In both cases, a woman who was initially marginalised and judged unworthy of attention turned out to be speaking prophetic words that softened hearts and brought healing and wholeness.

Questions for Private Meditation or Group Discussion

1. What does it mean to say "within our churches, we are often complicit with cultures that devalue women?" Think of the ways women are treated within our church and society. Would you agree or disagree with the above statement?
2. How can we all work together to create a society where everyone is valued equally?
3. Here are some ecumenical and denominational resources and initiatives to help you engage in creating such a society. More resources and initiatives can be found at www.weekofprayer.ca.
 - [Human Trafficking in Canada: A Leadership and Learning Kit for Churches](#). Published by the [Human Trafficking in Canada working group](#) of the [Canadian Council of Churches' Commission on Justice and Peace](#).
 - [A Woman's Voice: Conversations of Discernment & Grace](#). A documentary from [Salt+Light TV](#).

- [KAIROS](#) initiatives, reflections, and resources on [gender justice](#).
- [Restore: Ending Violence Against Women](#). An online collection of resources and initiatives against gender-based violence by the [Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada](#).
- [The Fellowship of the Least Coin](#), a worldwide ecumenical women's movement of prayer for peace and reconciliation.
- The [World Council of Churches' Thursdays in Black](#) – a campaign of solidarity and advocacy against all forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

Prayer

Gracious God,
You are the source of human dignity.
By your grace and power
the words of Hannah changed the heart of Eli the Priest;
by your grace and power
the words of the Canaanite woman moved Jesus to heal her daughter.
As we search to manifest the unity of the Church,
grant us the courage to reject all forms of violence against women
and to celebrate the gifts of the Spirit
that women bring to the service of the Church.
This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God forever and ever. Amen.

Day Eight: Summing Up Our Conversations

The Lord is my light and my salvation (Psalm 27:1)

Indonesian Context / Issue

Throughout the eight days of this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the daily reflections have considered many difficult situations facing the world today, including greed, violence, exclusion, exploitation, poverty, pollution, hunger and trafficking. Churches in Indonesia are conscious of these issues as challenges facing all Christians. They recognise and confess that some of these sins have tainted the lives of their churches too, wounding their unity and diminishing their witness to the world.

At the same time, they recognise as well the many promising instances of churches coming together to witness to their unity in Christ. (See “The Ecumenical Situation in Indonesia” in the international resource.) Christians in other parts of the world can name many other examples from their own situations.

Biblical Reflection: *Psalm 27:1-4; John 8:12-20*

Day by day, year by year, and especially during this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Christians join together for common prayer, professing their common baptismal faith, listening for God's voice in the Scriptures and praying together for unity in Christ's body. In doing so, they recognise that the Holy Trinity is the source of all unity and that Jesus is the light of the world, who promises the light of life to those who follow him. The many injustices in the world frequently sadden or anger them. But they do not lose hope, they move to action. Because the Lord is their light and their salvation and the stronghold of their lives, they do not fear.

Questions for Private Meditation or Group Discussion

1. What situations in Indonesia did you recognize as similar to ours?
2. What good and not so good news can you take away from your meditation or group discussion? What makes you happy? Content? What challenges you? What gives you hope?
3. Here are some ongoing action possibilities, resources and examples. More can be found on www.weekofprayer.ca.
 - [Initiatives and reflections by Canadian churches](#) engaging with the [World Council of Churches' Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace](#). Consider joining this world-wide journey of faith and transformation, which seeks unity and communion through engaging together in concrete actions for justice and peace.
 - [The Bruised Reed: A Christian Reflection on Suffering and Hope](#). Published by the [Commission on Faith and Witness](#) of the [Canadian Council of Churches](#).
 - [Principles of Peace](#). A theological reflection on peace and peacemaking prepared by the [Commission on Justice and Peace](#) of the [Canadian Council of Churches](#).
 - Inspiring and thought-provoking [articles and reflections](#) on social justice from the [Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada](#).

Prayer

God our Sustainer,
we praise you for your loving kindness,
for upholding us in times of trial,
and showing us your light in times of darkness.
Transform our lives so that we may be a blessing for others.
Help us to live unity in diversity as a witness to your communion,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
one God now and forever. Amen.