

2021 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

“Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit” (John 15:5-9)

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY CELEBRATED IN SCHOOLS

As Christians around the world celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we invite you to share this celebration with your school community so that children and young people of all ages may come to recognize the need for a strong Christian witness in society, and the blessing this can be for the world.

We encourage you to share *The Story of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* [found below] with your students so they may better understand the purpose of our prayer. This may be shared during morning announcements or in individual classes. You can learn more about the week by visiting the website www.weekofprayer.ca. On this website, you will also find photos and stories of past celebrations of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity across Canada. Perhaps your school will have photos to add to the collection! When sharing on social media, use the hashtag #WPCU2021 for posts in English and #SPUC2021 for posts in French.

The Story of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

What is it?

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an annual *ecumenical* celebration. What that means is that Christians around the world are invited to pray for the unity of all Christians, to reflect on scripture together, to participate in jointly-organized inclusive services, and to share fellowship. In our churches and throughout our communities, Christians will gather during this week to study the word of God together, to consider ways in which we can work together as disciples of Christ, and to join in fellowship and prayer.

In our schools, we can take time during this week to pray for one another and to recognize how we are called to work together.

When does it take place?

In Canada, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is traditionally observed between January 18th (the Feast of the Confession of Saint Peter) and January 25th (the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul). We have been celebrating this week in Canada for over 50 years.

Why does it matter?

In the Gospel of John, Christ prays for his disciples before going to the cross. He asks that his followers “may all be one,” as he and the Father are one, “so that the world may believe” and have life in his name (John 17). In this prayer of Jesus, Christian unity is central to the very being of the church and to its mission and witness.

Through the worldwide celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we strive for “unity in diversity”. This time of shared prayer, reflection, and fellowship invites Christians of different traditions to deepen our relationships and to live and witness together throughout the year.

How to use these prayers and suggestions for reflection or action:

You may choose to highlight the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity on a single day during the week that is most appropriate in your context, or you may choose to pray each day during the week using the suggestions for daily prayer. In either case, the prayer is followed by a question for reflection or a suggestion for action, so that we can reflect on concrete ways to witness to our shared faith. You can learn more about the remarkable group of religious sisters responsible for preparing this year’s international materials by visiting their website:

<https://www.grandchamp.org/en/community/>

As teachers and staff, your shared prayer is also a powerful witness to the desire for “unity in diversity”.

When Choosing to Pray for a Single Day

Begin with the *Story of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*. Then say:

The 2021 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was prepared by a group of religious sisters in Switzerland called the Monastic Community of Grandchamp. The theme that was chosen, “*Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit*”, is based on the Gospel of John where Jesus says he is the true vine (John 15:1-17). Throughout this week, Christians will be asked to think about what it means to abide in Christ – that is, how to really live deeply connected to Christ – and how we might bear fruit in our love of one another and our witness to the Gospel.

The Monastic Community of Grandchamp began almost 100 years ago. Today, there are 50 sisters from different church traditions and countries. The sisters devote their lives to three pillars that help us as we think about Christian unity: prayer, community life and hospitality.

The sisters also believe in the importance of times of silence and times of listening to God’s word. In our prayer today, we can listen to God’s word and take a moment of silence to think about that word before we pray together.

Let us begin by thinking of the Sisters of Grandchamp, from many different Christian traditions, and let us remember all of the Christians in our own community of _____ (*name of city or town*). And let us remember that Jesus prayed that we may all be one so that the world may believe (John 17:21).

Listen to God’s word:

“You did not choose me but I chose you.” (John 15:16a)

(You might say something like: Let us think about Jesus’s choosing of us. You may then want to repeat the verse one more time slowly.)

Let us pray. +

Jesus Christ,
you choose us; you seek us; you call us.
You wish to offer us your friendship
and lead us to a life that is ever more complete.
Grant us the confidence to answer your call
so that we may be transformed
and become witnesses of your tenderness for the world.
Amen.

Suggestion for action: How can we be witnesses in our families, school, and community? You may find an activity as a class or as a whole school. You may reach out to other Christian communities in your neighbourhood to see what projects you could work on together to be witnesses to God’s tenderness for the world.

If this is your first time celebrating the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, you may want to reach out to other Christian communities just to introduce yourselves and say that you are happy to be praying together during this week, or even to invite some members of another Christian group to your school for a time of shared prayer or social gathering.

Post your outreach on social media using the hashtags: #WPCU2021 (for posts in English) and #SPUC2021 (for posts in French) or send in your photos to communications@councilofchurches.ca so you can inspire other schools and churches to join this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

When Choosing Daily Prayers for the Week

Day 1: Called by God

Begin the week using the prayer for a single day found above.

Day 2: Forming One Body

Throughout this week, we will read from Chapter 15 of the Gospel of John. This chapter tells us about some important teachings that Jesus gave his disciples at the Last Supper.

Today’s verse says: “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12b). *(Pause for a moment of silence.)*

Loving one another is not always easy. When we hurt each other, we must say ‘sorry’ and seek reconciliation. When we have reconciliation, it means that our relationship is repaired. This week

we think about how Jesus wants us to live in right relationship with God and with one another. Jesus calls all of us to be part of one body.

When he says, “I am the true vine and you are the branches,” he helps us understand how we are connected. God’s love is the sap running through that vine. God’s love is what makes us into one body and makes reconciliation possible.

Let us pray +

God,
you reveal to us your love through Christ and through each other.
Open our hearts so that we can welcome each other
with our differences and live in forgiveness.
Grant us to live united in one body,
so that the gift that is each person comes to light.
May all of us together be a reflection of the living Christ.
Amen

Suggestion for action: In just a few weeks, we will celebrate Valentine’s Day. To whom can we send a Valentine’s card this year to show that we love one another as Jesus taught us? As we grow older, we may be able to suggest other actions we can take to help people in our community to show our love in concrete ways.

Day 3: Praying Together

In Christ, God came to meet us. Jesus lived in prayer, intimately united to his Father, while creating friendships with his disciples and all those he met. He introduced them to that which was most precious to him: the relationship of love with his Father, who is our Father. In today’s verse, we learn that Jesus wants us to know him, and through him, his Father, because he considers us to be his friends.

Today’s verse says: “I do not call you servants any longer ... I have called you friends” (John 15:15). (*Pause for a moment of silence.*)

Prayer can be on our own or shared with others. It can express wonder, complaint, intercession (which is asking for what we need), thanksgiving or simple silence. Sometimes we are not sure what is the best way to pray. Turning to Jesus and saying to him, “teach me,”* can pave the way.

Let us pray +

Lord Jesus,
your entire life was prayer,
perfect harmony with the Father.
Through your Spirit, teach us to pray according to your will of love.
May the faithful of the whole world unite in intercession and praise,
and may your kingdom of love come.
Amen

**You may also choose to pray the Our Father / The Lord's Prayer today, as this is the prayer Jesus taught his followers and it is shared by all Christian traditions.*

Question for Reflection: Getting together in a group offers us support. Through hymns, words and silence, a feeling of unity is created. If we pray with Christians of other traditions, we may be surprised to feel united by a bond of friendship that comes from the One who is beyond all division. How can we find ways to join in prayer with Christians of other traditions (in person or online)?

Day 4: Letting Ourselves Be Transformed by the Word

The Word of God is very close to us. It is a blessing and a promise of happiness. If we open our hearts, God speaks to us and patiently transforms us. He removes anything that might hurt our spiritual growth, just as a vine grower prunes the vine.

Today's verse says: "You have already been pruned by the word" (John 15:3). *(Pause for a moment of silence.)*

The Sisters of the Grandchamp Community, who prepared this year's materials for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, recite these words every day to remind them of the importance of God's word:

Pray and work that God may reign.
Throughout your day
Let the Word of God breathe life into work and rest.
Maintain inner silence in all things
so as to dwell in Christ.
Be filled with the spirit of the Beatitudes,
joy, simplicity, mercy.

Let us pray +

Blessed are you, God,
for the gift of your word in Holy Scripture.
Blessed are you for its transforming power.
Help us choose life and guide us by your Spirit,
so that we can experience the happiness
which you want so much to share with us.
Amen.

Suggestion for Action: Let us look at the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) today and consider how our lives can be transformed by God's Word. We may choose one Beatitude individually or as a class. You might copy it, decorate it and post it, praying that you may be transformed by God's word.

Day 5: Growing in Unity as Branches of One Vine

Each tradition seeks to lead us to the heart of our faith: communion with God, through Christ, in the Spirit. The more we live this communion, the more we are connected to other Christians and to all of humanity. Paul warns us against an attitude of division and reminds us that we all need one another in the Body of Christ and that we belong to God through Christ in the power of the Spirit. “All are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God” (1 Cor 3:22-23).

Today’s verse says: “I am the vine, you are the branches” (John 15:5a). (*Pause for a moment of silence.*)

Christ helps us on our path of unity and reconciliation by helping us see we are all called to be branches of the one true vine. Remember it is Jesus who prays, “that they may all be one ... so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21).

Let us pray +

Holy Spirit,
life-giving fire and gentle breath,
come and abide in us.
Renew in us the hope for unity so that we may live
knowing more of the bond that unites us in you.
May all who have put on Christ at their Baptism
unite and bear witness together to the hope that sustains them.
Amen.

Question for Reflection: Is there any ongoing action you can engage in with other Christians in your community, beyond just this week, so you may be an ongoing witness to our hope?