2027 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" *(Luke 12:32)*

ANNOTATED ECUMENICAL WORSHIP SERVICE

Before you begin

The Canadian Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Writing and Animation Team encourages worship organizers to begin their planning with a review of the background information provided by those who crafted the international materials.

The prayers and reflections for this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity have been prepared by representatives of the churches in Ireland. Although the island of Ireland is divided between two political jurisdictions, the churches represented by the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference are organised on an all-island basis. The leaders of the churches meet regularly and, as a Church Leaders Group, engage with governments, public bodies and communities in order to bring the voice of the Gospel into shared public discourse.

Jesus is our Good Shepherd, the one who can be trusted to lead us on the good path of life towards lifegiving waters of abundance. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus models sacrificial leadership that moves towards the one sheep that has lost its way. In Luke 12:22–34, Jesus calls his followers out of fear and towards this life of radical trust, vigilant hope, and responsible service. These teachings aren't meant for lone disciples but for a gathered community: a "little flock" called to live, pray, and work together. This year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity invites churches in Ireland and across the globe to explore what it means to be followers of the Good Shepherd: how letting go of fear and keeping watchful hearts become powerful catalysts for reconciliation and shared witness.

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Jesus reframes royal terminology into an invitation: our true treasure isn't in buildings or budgets or politics, but in the reign of God — visible in mercy, justice, and mutual care. In ecumenical settings, differing liturgies or doctrines can feel like competing claims to "the kingdom". Such diversity can also be an asset. Focusing on shared values, such as hospitality, forgiveness and *diakonia*, shifts attention from our distinct traditions toward the one reality we are called to embody together.

God's call to the little flock is a call to unity in diversity — a shared life in Christ that casts out fear, watches over one another, and stewards his gifts with common purpose. In Ireland's evolving landscape and across the globe, this unity shines brightest when we embrace it not as uniformity, but as a journey of deep listening, humble witness, and mutual care. Though differences in theology, memory, and tradition remain, we walk forward together, reconciled and reconciling, repenting of past failings and renewing our focus on Christ, who prayed "that they may all be one" (John 17:21). As we enter this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, may we point the world toward the kingdom of mercy, mutual service, and steadfast love.

We encourage you to enrich your understanding of the context by reading the *Introduction to the Theme* and the *Appendix* sections of the international 2027 WPCU booklet, available on www.weekofprayer.ca.

Adapting the Order of Service

This material is offered with the understanding that, whenever possible, it will be adapted for use in local context. Account should be taken of local liturgical and devotional practice, and of social and cultural context. For example, we invite you to use gender-inclusive language as appropriate for your communities. Such adaptation should ideally take place ecumenically.

General suggestions for worship planners

How might this passage (Luke 12:22-34) serve as an invitation towards deeper discipleship in your community? Some possibilities might be:

Bible Study Series: How might a group join together to study the passage? Perhaps you could divide the passage into a number of sections, providing reflection questions on unity and reconciliation.

Local Ecumenical Prayer Watches: Consider inviting churches from different traditions to pray together, organising daily "watch moments". Are there times your community could come together whether at dawn, noon, or dusk, in unison, online or in person? Are there simple liturgical elements, such as Scripture readings, responsive chants and moments of silence, that you could use to create a common rhythm that transcends language or tradition and turns collective vigilance into a unified act of solidarity and service?

Joint Outreach Projects: Is there a common project your churches could join together, working alongside other partner organizations, NGOs or local government bodies, to feed the hungry, support migrant families, or care for creation, ensuring leadership teams from different churches share in the decision-making?

There might be other invitations emerging from these suggestions. Consider how this week may serve to set up rhythms for the rest of the year that foster deeper, Christ-like reconciliation within your community.

In preparation for the celebration of the worship, and for the symbolic action that takes places during it, printed copies of a Celtic Cross need to be provided for the congregation. Drawing on the image of the rising sun, Irish Celtic Crosses have a circle at their centre, representing the risen Christ, the light of the world. It is desirable that some time before the worship, children and young people be given copies of the Celtic Cross to be painted or coloured. They are invited to bring these with them to the worship. Extra copies should also be available at the time of the worship service.

After the sermon/homily, these images of the Cross that have been decorated by the young people are carried in procession through the congregation and arranged together in the form of a larger Celtic Cross visible to all in a prominent place. A reading from the writings of Saint Patrick follows. Where appropriate, this account might be narrated by a young person in shepherd's attire.

The texts assigned to the leader **(L)** may be divided between the various clergy or representatives from the different traditions present. Likewise, texts assigned to a reader **(R)** may be distributed among several persons. The sending and the blessing may be proclaimed jointly by ministers/representatives of the different communities present.

Music

Hymns and music suggestions from the Canadian Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Writing and Animation Team are available on www.weekofprayer.ca.

Depending on your local context, appropriate hymns and songs that highlight this year's theme can be substituted.

Contents of the Worship Service

Gathering: All taking part in the Worship Service are invited to gather in the church or worship space.

Opening Hymn: Canadian suggestions can be found in the *2027 Hymn Suggestions* resource, available on www.weekofprayer.ca

Words of Welcome: Can be offered by someone from the host community.

Traditional Territory Acknowledgment: Use one appropriate for your local context.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Lament: Read by the reader(s) with the congregation responding "**Christ our Shepherd, unite us as one flock"**, as outlined in the Order of Worship.

Listening to the Word of God: The Scripture readings for this year focus on belief.

- **Old Testament Reading:** Ezekiel 34:15-22
- **Psalm:** Psalm 23
- **Gospel Reading:** Luke 12:22-34

Sermon / Homily

Silence/Instrumental Interlude

Symbolic Action and Profession of Faith: Instrumental music is played, while the shape of a Celtic Cross is recreated by children and young people at the front of the worship space.

Creed: The **Nicene Creed** is recited. In addition to the Nicene Creed, you may also choose to invite representatives from participating churches to recite their Creeds or Affirmations of Faith to express our unity in diversity.

Intercessions: Each intercession is prayed by the reader, with the congregation responding, "Lord save your flock."

The Lord's Prayer: You may wish to invite the congregation to sing or say the Lord's Prayer in the language closest to their hearts or using a version appropriate to your context.

Closing Prayers: As each prayer is read by the Leader, the congregation responds as directed in the Order of Worship.

Materials needed for the service

1. Order of Service: 1 printed for each participant, with music included, or an electronic version to project.
2. Celtic Crosses: printed copies of a Celtic Cross need to be provided for the congregation. Drawing on the image of the rising sun, Irish Celtic Crosses have a circle at their centre, representing the risen Christ, the light of the world. It is desirable that some time before the worship, children and young people be given copies of the Celtic Cross to be painted or coloured. They are invited to bring these with them to the worship. Extra copies should also be available at the time of the worship service

Worship Leaders Needed for the Service

The texts assigned to the leader (L) may be shared between the various clergy or representatives from the different traditions present. Likewise, texts assigned to a reader (R) may be distributed among several persons.

The final blessing may be proclaimed jointly by ministers / representatives of the different communities present.

Annotated Order of Worship

L Leader
R Reader
A Assembly
C. Choir or Cantor

Traditional Territory Acknowledgement*

* Use one appropriate to your context.

Hymn*

Introduction*

* Words of welcome can be offered by the host community prior to the Opening Hymn. A more formal welcome will take place as part of the Introduction.

L: Peace be with you.
A: And also with you.

L: Christ is among us.
A: He is and he will be.

L: We are gathered in God's name to pray for the unity of all Christians. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity this year is guided by the words of Jesus, "Do not be afraid, little flock," from a passage in Luke's Gospel. This year's ecumenical service has been prepared by Christians from different churches across the island of Ireland. With them, we give thanks that, following many years of estrangement, in our time they have come to know that the Christian heritage first brought to their land by Saint Patrick and other early saints is a treasure they hold in common.

Opening Prayer

R: Blessed are you Lord God of all creation.
Blessed are you Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life.
Blessed are you Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life.
Blessed are you, O Holy Trinity.
Blessed are you in your saints.

Blessed be this gathering as we come together in your Divine Presence to celebrate in the name of the Father*, Son and Holy Spirit. **A: Amen.**	* Instead of 'Father', you can use a gender-inclusive term, as appropriate for your communities.
Hymn	
Prayer of Thanksgiving and Lament	
R: We give thanks that we are called to be one flock, *(brief pause)* but we lament that we often betray our unity. **A: Christ our Shepherd, unite us as one flock.**	
R: We give thanks that we have one Shepherd, *(brief pause)* but we lament that we often fail to recognize others as his* own. **A: Christ our Shepherd, unite us as one flock.**	*Can replace "his" with "Christ's" as is appropriate for your context.
R: We give thanks that we have been baptized into one fold, *(brief pause)* but we lament that we often act otherwise. **A: Christ our Shepherd, unite us as one flock.**	
R: We give thanks that we have one hope, *(brief pause)* but we lament that we often make it hard for all to share in it. **A: Christ our Shepherd, unite us as one flock.**	
R: We give thanks for the love that unites us in mutual care *(brief pause)* but we lament that we often care chiefly for ourselves. **A: Christ our Shepherd, unite us as one flock.**	

Acclamation* (sung three times)

C/A: As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia!

*Acclamation can be changed according to your community's preference.

Scripture Readings*

Old Testament Reading*
*Ezekiel 34:15-22**

* While this Order of Service uses the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, your communities are welcome to use other versions of the Scripture, including versions with more inclusive language. Your communities may also choose to use several versions of the Bible to celebrate our unity in diversity.

R: I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strays, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord God: I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats: Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture? When you drink of clear water, must you foul the rest with your feet? And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet and drink what you have fouled with your feet?

Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you pushed with flank and shoulder and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged, and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

L: The word of the Lord.
A: Thanks be to God. *

* Closing: An ending to the scripture passage more familiar to your communities may be used here.

Psalm 23* *(The psalm may be read, or a musical setting or metrical version may be sung.)* R: The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He* makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.	*While this Order of Service uses the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, your communities are welcome to use other versions of the Scripture, including versions with more inclusive language. Your communities may also choose to use several versions of the Bible to celebrate our unity in diversity.
Gospel Reading – Luke 12:22-34* R: The Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Luke.* A: Glory to you, Lord our God. R: Jesus said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about	* While this Order of Service uses the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, your communities are welcome to use other versions of the Scripture, including versions with more inclusive language. Your communities may also choose to use several versions of the Bible to celebrate our unity in diversity.

the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, you of little faith! And do not keep seeking what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that seek all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

R: The Gospel of the Lord.
A: Praise to you, Lord, Jesus Christ.*

Sermon/Homily*

Silence or an instrumental interlude

Symbolic Action and Profession of Faith*

R: Drawn to Christ and his Cross, in prayer for the unity of Christians, let us remember that as his little flock, we need not be afraid. Drawing on the image of the rising sun, Irish Celtic Crosses have a circle at their centre, representing the Risen Christ, the light of the world.

* Closing: An ending to the Gospel more familiar to your communities may be used here.

*In preparation for the celebration of the worship, and for the symbolic action that takes place during it, printed copies of a Celtic Cross need to be provided for the congregation. Drawing on the image of the rising sun, Irish Celtic Crosses have a circle at their centre, representing the risen Christ, the light of the world. It is desirable that some time before the worship, children and young people be given copies of the Celtic Cross to be painted or coloured. They are invited to bring these with them to the worship. Extra copies should also be available at the time of the worship service.

After the sermon/homily, these images of the Cross that have been decorated by the young people are carried in procession through the congregation and arranged together in the form

*Instrumental music is played, while the shape of a Celtic Cross is recreated by children and young people at the front of the worship space. **	of a larger Celtic Cross visible to all in a prominent place. A reading from the writings of Saint Patrick follows. Where appropriate, this account might be narrated by a young person in shepherd's attire.
R: Patrick, Ireland's principal patron saint, lived in the fifth century. As a youth, he was taken into slavery in Ireland and put to work tending a flock of sheep. Later, as an adult, he received the call to be a missionary, and soon he was evangelising and shepherding God's flock in the land where he had once been enslaved.	
R: "When I had arrived in Ireland and was looking after the flocks the whole time, I prayed frequently each day. And more and more, the love of God and the fear of him grew in me, and my faith was increased and my spirit enlivened. So much so that I prayed up to a hundred times in the day, and almost as often at night. I even remained in the wood and on the mountain to pray. And – come hail, rain or snow – I was up before dawn to pray, and I sensed no evil nor spiritual laziness within. I now understand this: at that time 'the Spirit was fervent' in me." *(From the* Confessio *of Saint Patrick)*	
L: With our spirits enlivened by the love of God, let us love one another, so that with oneness of mind we may confess our common faith.	
*The sign of peace is exchanged, after which the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is recited.**	* Worship planners may opt to use another version of the Creed or an Affirmation of Faith, as appropriate for your communities.
A: We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were	

made. For us all, and for our salvation he came down from heaven; and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and was made man.* For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried. On the third day he rose from the dead in accordance with the scriptures. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father. Who, with the Father and the Son, is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. We confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and to life in the age to come. Amen.	* This may be omitted or another option used.
Intercessions	
R: Good Shepherd*, we pray for the unity of Christians and peace in the world. Guide us out of our divisions to reconciliation, that we may bear witness convincingly. **A: Lord, save your flock.***	*May wish to omit "Good Shepherd" in the prayer and include it in the response for each intercession: "Good Shepherd, save your flock."
R: Good Shepherd, we pray for your flock throughout the world, especially those experiencing various forms of persecution. Strengthen and protect them; may they bear witness courageously. **A: Lord, save your flock.**	
R: Good Shepherd, we pray for those who are victims of systematic persecution of ethnic, racial and religious identity. Unite our churches in opposing hatred and prejudice; may	

we bear witness to the dignity of our common humanity.

A: Lord, save your flock.

R: Good Shepherd, we pray for those who endure the worry of economic uncertainty and food insecurity. Embolden our churches to challenge oppressive structures; may our witness be compassionate.

A: Lord, save your flock.

R: Good Shepherd, we pray for all created life, threatened by climate change and ecological injustice. Make us wise and gentle stewards of creation; may our witness be effective in addressing the global urgency of care for the earth.

A: Lord, save your flock.

R: Good Shepherd, we pray for those in positions of leadership in our churches. Be their pattern as they exercise the responsibilities entrusted to them. May their care for your flock be a wise, discerning and courageous witness to the unity of the Church.

A: Lord, save your flock.

The Lord's Prayer*

L: We pray together, in our many languages as Jesus taught us:

A: Amen

A: Our Father…

* You may wish to invite the congregation to sing or say the **Lord's Prayer** in the language closest to their hearts or using a version appropriate for your context.

Hymn*

*You may wish to only have one hymn after the final blessing.

Concluding Prayer

L: Kindle our lamps, Saviour most dear to us,
that we may always shine in your presence
and always receive light from you, the Light Perpetual,

so that our own personal darkness may be overcome, and the world's darkness driven from us.

A: **Amen.**

(Inspired by a sermon of Saint Columbanus)

Blessing

L: The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

A: **Amen.**

Hymn*