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)*

REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS FOR THE EIGHT DAYS:

The 2027 WPCU international and Canadian resources are available to download at:
www.weekofprayer.ca (English)
www.semainedepriere.ca (French)

The daily themes, Scripture readings, reflections, and prayers below were prepared by representatives of the churches in Ireland.

Each of the 8 Days has "Questions to Consider". The first question for each day has been prepared by the representatives of the churches in Ireland. The additional questions have been prepared by the Canadian WPCU Writing and Animation Team.

This material is offered with the understanding that, whenever possible, it will be adapted for use in local contexts. 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.

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 *Eight Days of Prayer* resource 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.

The 2027 materials for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity have been prepared by representatives of the churches in Ireland. Those wishing to undertake bible studies on the Week of Prayer theme can use as a basis the biblical texts and reflections given in the eight days. Each day the discussions, which this year include some questions to consider, can lead to a closing period of intercessory prayer.

The 2027 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity "Prayers and Reflections for the Eight Days" resource includes reflections for psalms for each day, readings from both the Hebrew Scriptures, Gospel, and the letters from Paul to various churches, and prayers from various Irish saints. Participants are invited to collaborate with other churches and communities of faith in their area for in-person or online discussions together.

Before you begin your Bible discussion, it would be a best practice to invite the group to establish a structure for the week. Will there be a facilitator? Will this role change each time? Establishing the norms of the group will allow the participants to know what to expect and be able to participate fully.

The Bible discussion uses the NRSVUE translation of the Bible, however participants are also welcome to use other translations as is appropriate for their context.

REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS FOR THE EIGHT DAYS

DAY 1

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want

Psalm for the day

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. *(Psalm 23)*

Additional Scripture Passages

Isaiah 40:9-11 1 Peter 5:1-7 John 10:7-14

Reflection

The psalmist is quietly confident that the Lord will provide all that is needed for the security of those who are faithful to him. Even in the darkest times, God will be there. It is likely that we all know people who have been through the most difficult of times, and yet have remained strong in their faith and similarly confident in the love and provision of God. The supplementary readings use the image of the caring shepherd in a variety of ways, with the Gospel telling of the Good Shepherd, Jesus himself, who will make the ultimate sacrifice for his flock. In so doing, Christ unites us. The Shepherd says 'Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom' (Luke 12:32).

Questions to consider

1. Think of a time when God accompanied you through a dark valley. How can you share this story with others and offer them encouragement?
2. The shepherd imagery is a powerful one in Christian Scripture. It is also one that works because it is so closely tied to the culture of the ancient Near East. Jesus would rely on contextually based metaphors to share the Gospel. If shepherds are not common in your area, what else might Jesus have used to explain his role to your community?

Prayer

I bind unto myself today,
The power of God to hold and lead,

His eye to watch, his might to stay,
His ear to hearken to my need,
The wisdom of my God to teach,
His hand to guide, his shield to ward,
The word of God to give me speech
His heavenly host to be my guard.

From Saint Patrick's Breastplate, versified by Cecil Frances Alexander.

DAY 2

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord

Psalm for the day

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!
If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with you, that you may be revered.
I wait for the Lord; my soul waits, in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning. *(Psalm 130:1-6)*

Additional Scripture Passages

Isaiah 40:1-8 1 John 5:1-5 Mark 10:46-52

Reflection

The psalmist is feeling utterly forsaken and alone. Perhaps there is a need to be forgiven for a particular shortcoming or sin; perhaps he has been deserted by those he has loved and trusted. He is desolate, but he has faith enough to know that he may call on the only One able to help. This psalm is fundamentally one of hope. Even in the depths - of fear, of despair, of abandonment, of disunity - God hears our cries, because, with him, there is steadfast love. This is the position of the blind beggar at Jericho (Mark 10:46-52). In a helpless and seemingly hopeless situation, he calls 'Have mercy on me!' And his faith in Jesus' ability to help him is rewarded. The Psalmist is similarly clear that, from the depths, his cry will be heard. May we learn to feel the pain of Christian division so deeply in our souls, in the knowledge that if we cry out, we too, will be heard.

Questions to consider

1. What is our reaction, when things are at their worst and nothing is going well – to seek comfort from the Lord, to have faith that conquers the things of the world, or simply to cry out? What is our reaction to the scandalous division among Christians?
2. In Mark 10:48, after Bartimaeus had pleaded for Jesus' mercy, he was rebuked by several in the crowd. Despite this, he called louder and Jesus heard him. What is our reaction if we either are rebuked for crying out, or hear others cry out for relief?
3. It is a part of many of our Christian traditions to empathize with the pain that others experience. We are encouraged to weep with those who weep and lament with those who lament. What might this look like in your experience as churches in your community?

Prayer

Help me to journey beyond the familiar
and into the unknown.
Give me the faith to leave old ways
and break fresh ground with you.
Christ of the mysteries, I trust you
to be stronger than each storm within me.

I will trust in the darkness and know
that my times, even now, are in your hand.
Tune my spirit to the music of heaven,
and somehow, make my obedience count for you. Amen.

Inspired by the story of Saint Brendan the Navigator (c. 484-577).

DAY 3

From where will my help come?

Psalm for the day

I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.
He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore. *(Psalm 121)*

Additional Scripture Passages

Joshua 1:7-9 Ephesians 6:10-17 Luke 12:4-7

Reflection

This is a Song of Ascent as pilgrims make their way up to Jerusalem. In the Hebrew tradition, the name El Shaddai is used for God, and is variously translated as "God of the mountains" or as "God Almighty". God was to be met in the heights – think about Abraham at Mount Moriah, Moses at Mount Sinai, Elijah at Mount Carmel and Mount Horeb, Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. The psalmist expects that, as he looks to the hills, he will find the help needed for the journey. The God who he believes to be powerfully present in the heights is God Almighty who never sleeps, who protects both in the heat of the day and the chill of the night and who will keep his people safe from evil. As we turn our eyes towards the future with anxiety about increased polarisation, violence and division, both in society and in our churches, this psalm invites us to seek help from the Lord.

Questions to consider

1. What gives you the most confidence when you are fearful – of the future, of war and violence, of job prospects, of illness – whatever? Are you able to lift your eyes to the hills? The journey towards unity might be seen as an uphill struggle – what may be the obstacles in our path?
2. Are there any regular practices that you do, individually or in your communities of faith, that help maintain this confidence in God's presence? Are there scriptures, songs, stories, or prayers that help you along your journey?

Prayer

Be thou a bright flame before me;
Be thou a guiding star above me;
Be thou a smooth path below me;
Be thou a kindly Shepherd behind me
Today, tonight and for evermore. Amen.

Attributed to Saint Columba (521-597).

DAY 4

The Lord surrounds his people

Psalm for the day

Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be moved, but abides for ever.
As the mountains surround Jerusalem, the Lord surrounds his people,
from this time on and for evermore.
For the sceptre of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous,
so that the righteous may not stretch out their hands to do wrong.
Do good, O Lord, to those who are good,
to those who are upright in their hearts. *(Psalm 125:1-4)*

Additional Scripture Passages

Isaiah 40:25-31 Philippians 1:12-18 Matthew 6:25-33

Reflection

Here again, mountains are seen as places where God is particularly present for God's people, offering security and peace of mind. In the Gospel reading, Jesus urges his disciples not to worry – 'look about you,' he suggests, 'and see how God is providing for life all around you!' (Mt 6:25-33) Worry is one of the most paralysing and debilitating of emotions, and all of us are prey to it at some time or another. The prophet Isaiah notes that even the young and strong may have issues, but those who trust in God will be strengthened. Note his wonderful image of eagles soaring effortlessly on the thermal air currents over the land below (Is 40:25-31). Paul, writing from prison (Phil 1:12-18), sees his trials as opportunity – he is upheld by the God he serves. The Lord surrounds his people and unity is his gift.

Questions to consider

1. Reflect on the idea that challenges of life may become opportunities. Has this ever been your experience? Was there some sense of being 'surrounded by God'? How might the challenge of unity become an opportunity?
2. Ireland has a long and complex history of religious conflict that has played out in both religious and political spheres. The Irish Council of Churches was founded in 1923 after the civil war that split Ireland into the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (a part of the United Kingdom). Since 1973 they have held the Irish Inter Church Meeting to meet regularly for ecumenical work. More on their work can be found here: https://www.irishchurches.org/news-blog/2023/09/being-churches-together-celebrating-a-reconciling-vision-of-hope. The Irish Inter Church Meeting is an example of ecumenical work pursued in times of conflict. Is there anything similar or different to the work you are doing in your own communities?

Prayer

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,

Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

From Saint Patrick's Breastplate*, versified by Cecil Frances Alexander*

DAY 5

The LORD Almighty is with us

Psalm for the day

God is our refuge and strength a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.
There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.
God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns.
The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.
The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.
Come, behold the works of the LORD; see what desolations he has brought on the earth.
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.
'Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.'
The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. *(Psalm 46)*

Additional Scripture Passages

Ezekiel 47:1-12 Revelation 22:1-5 Matthew 14:22-31

Reflection

In times of difficulty, especially among our friends, we tend to have a feeling that we must 'do' something, that action is required, that we can improve the situation. However, very often, the better thing is to stop and simply to 'be there', to be 'present' with those who are under pressure. It can be incredibly difficult to stop – simply because we feel so helpless and inadequate. This sounds like a contradiction in terms, but is it really? The most important thing is that God is present with us. The Psalmist paints a vivid picture of a world in turmoil. The images of earthquake and flood are all-too familiar today. That chaos is reflected in the political turmoil of the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, God is with us, a perennial source of gladness. Christians are empowered by Jesus to model unity in this fractured world.

Questions to consider

1. In a time of insecurity, how can we embody together the justice, peace and joy that flow from God? 'Be still and know that I am God'. Take some minutes to think of what this means for you.
2. In Psalm 46 we are called to have courage while the world is in chaos and are promised that God is our refuge. In a country like Canada, where we see the devastating effects of changing weather patterns, climate change, and environmental devastation, what would not being afraid look like? How would embracing God's command, "Be still and know that I am God" unfold in our community?

Prayer

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;

Be all else but naught to me, save that thou art.
Be thou my best thought in the day and the night;
Both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.
Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word;
Be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord.
Be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
Be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

Attributed to Saint Dallan Forgaill (c. 530–598).

DAY 6

The Lord has done great things for us

Psalm for the day

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.'
The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.
Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb.
May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.
Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves. *(Psalm 126)*

Additional Scripture Passages

Isaiah 35:5-7 1 Peter 3:8-16a Matthew 5:43-48

Reflection

The Negeb (Negev) is a very arid region of the Judean desert, and for most of the year, the watercourses to which the Psalmist refers are completely dried up, empty channels. However, when the rain does come, flowing water fills these channels with surprising speed, offering life to plants and animals alike, and the desert rejoices and blossoms (cf. Isaiah 35.6)! This is an amazing image for how things can change dramatically for the better in a short time – the Lord indeed does great things for his people. It is good to remember and give thanks for all that God has already done for us along the path to unity.

Questions to consider

1. Where in the ecumenical pilgrimage are the 'rains' needed? What great things will the Lord do for us?
2. Day 6's readings all give us examples of the transformative power of God's love, turning hardships into blessings. This includes 1 Peter 3:9 where we must "repay evil with blessing", and the Gospel of Matthew reminding us to love our enemies. Have you experienced this transformation of hatred into love in your lives? What did that feel like?

Prayer

We will never stop giving thanks to you, O God,
who have kept us faithful in times of temptation.
You have defended us in all our difficulties.
Who are we, Lord, or what is our calling,
that you have worked with us with such divine presence?
We will praise and magnify your name among the nations,
not only in good times but in the difficult times too,
for you have shown us that we can put our trust in you without wavering.
You are the Holy One, world without end. Amen.

Adapted from the Confessio *of Saint Patrick.*

DAY 7

Let us go to the house of the Lord

Psalm for the day

I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'
Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.
Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together.
To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord,
as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord.
For there the thrones for judgement were set up, the thrones of the house of David.
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: 'May they prosper who love you.
Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers.'
For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, 'Peace be within you.'
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good. *(Psalm 122)*

Additional Scripture Passages

Isaiah 2:1-4 Ephesians 4:1-6 John 14:27-31

Reflection

The Psalmist sees the city of Jerusalem and the Temple within the city imagining the tortuous journey up the steep hill until finally standing in the Temple court. He has come with those from many places to worship together. The Psalmist prays for peace for those around him, all gathered in the name of the Lord. Jesus sent his disciples from Jerusalem 'to Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth' (Acts1:8), bearing the gospel of peace. The additional readings, in varying ways, speak of what it means to walk in the light of the Lord and to maintain the bond of peace and to know for ourselves that peace which is Jesus' prayer for us.

Questions to consider

1. What is the significance of worshipping our God together as Christians of different traditions? How challenging is it for me/our congregation to cross the threshold of the church of a different Christian community?
2. Are there specific challenges in your community that would make it harder to work with another Christian community? Are there any specific strengths about your community, whether church, neighbourhood, or city, that could allow Christian unity to flourish?

Prayer

Kindle in our hearts, O God,
The flame of that love which never ceases,
That it may burn in us, giving light to others.
May we shine forever in thy holy temple,
Set on fire with thy eternal light,
Even thy son, Jesus Christ,
Our Saviour and Redeemer. Amen.

Attributed to Saint Columba (521-597).

DAY 8

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

Psalm for the day

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!
It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes.
It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion.
For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life for evermore. *(Psalm 133)*

Additional Scripture Passages

Genesis 50:15-21 Philippians 4:2-7 John 15:12-17

Reflection

The psalmist reflects on how very good it is when we can be at one with each other. And this is not easily achieved. Jesus needed to still the arguing of his disciples (Lk 22:24-26), Paul had to reprimand the Christians in Corinth (1 Cor 3:3-9; 11:17-22) and to encourage others to be 'of the same mind in the Lord' (Phil 4:2). Joseph's incredible kindness to the brothers who had sold him into captivity is exemplary, and hugely challenging! (Gen 42:25) Yet, Jesus' command is that we love one another, without distinction of class, status, race or tongue, living together in unity and mutual respect.

Questions to consider

1. 'How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity'! During this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, how might we have a renewed sense of this? How might we be ambassadors of togetherness in the world today?
2. How has this week of prayer and discussion given you hope for the future? What does this hope look like?
3. We are not called to be naïve to the challenges that are set before us, but to be hopeful that our work will help build a future of our kindred living in unity. Are there moments of hope-building from this week that you can name and bring with you into the coming months?
4. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity encourages us to work throughout the year towards that goal of unity. We invite participants to explore The Canadian Council of Churches' website for the many initiatives that are taking place throughout the year with the CCC and our ecumenical partners.

Prayer

The sun which we see rising for us each day at your command, O Christ,
will not endure and its splendour will not shine forever.
But you, Lord Christ, are the true Sun,
the Light that will never perish, whom we adore.
We rejoice in the knowledge that we will rise again
in the radiance of your glory, O bright heaven's Son,
who abide with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
now and for all the ages of ages. Amen.

Adapted from the Confessio *of Saint Patrick*