

Resources for
The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2019

Justice and only justice you shall pursue

(Deuteronomy 16:18-20)

Jointly prepared by

The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and
the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches
Adapted for use in New Zealand by the Catholic Bishops Committee for Ecumenism

**TO THOSE ORGANIZING THE WEEK OF PRAYER
FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**

The traditional period in the northern hemisphere for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is 18-25 January. Those dates were proposed in 1908 by Paul Wattson to cover the days between the feasts of St Peter and St Paul, and therefore have a symbolic significance. In the southern hemisphere where January is holiday time, churches celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity around the feast of Pentecost. In Aotearoa New Zealand it is celebrated between Ascension Sunday and Pentecost.

This prayer and liturgy material is offered with the understanding that, whenever possible, it will be adapted for use in local situations. The resources for use in New Zealand parishes and dioceses are:

Order of Service for a joint liturgy

Two options are provided, for use at either a parish or diocesan celebration. Both can be adapted in any way which suits the needs of a particular group.

8-days of Prayer

A longer and shorter version of the 8 days of Prayer are provided. The prayers can be used in a variety of ways:

- As a prayer after Communion
- As a resource for prayers of the faithful
- As a take-away prayer sheet for use at home
- For praying together in groups.

Message for parish newsletters

Parishes are asked to use the message from Cardinal John Dew on behalf of the bishops and the Committee for Ecumenism in their newsletter for Ascension Sunday.

BACKGROUND TO THE THEME

Biblical Text for 2019 (Deuteronomy 16:11-20 NRSV)

“Rejoice before the Lord your God — you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites resident in your towns, as well as the strangers, the orphans, and the widows who are among you — at the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and diligently observe these statutes.

You shall keep the festival of booths for seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing-floor and your wine press. Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns. For seven days you shall keep the festival to the Lord your God at the place that the Lord will choose; for the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all your undertakings, and you shall surely celebrate.

Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose: at the festival of unleavened bread, at the festival of weeks, and at the festival of booths. They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed; all shall give as they are able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God that he has given you.

You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall render just decisions for the people. You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.”

The theme for 2019

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

Every year Christians across the world gather in prayer for growth in unity. We do this in a world where corruption, greed and injustice bring about inequality and division. Ours is a united prayer in a fractured world: this is powerful. However, as individual Christians and communities, we are often complicit with injustice, and yet we are called together to form a united witness for justice and to be a means of Christ’s healing grace for the brokenness of the world.

Christian communities become newly aware of their unity as they join in a common concern and a common response to an unjust reality. At the same time, confronted by these injustices, we are obliged, as Christians, to examine the ways in which we are complicit. Only by heeding Jesus’s prayer “that they all may be one” can we witness to living unity in diversity. It is through our unity in Christ that we will be able to combat injustice and serve the needs of its victims.

The reflections for the eight days and the worship service are focused on the chosen theme. To deepen our reflection on unity and justice, the topic of each day has been carefully chosen to present struggles that result from injustice. The themes for each day are:

Day 1: Let justice roll down like water (Amos 5: 24)

Day 2: Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes,’ or ‘No, No’ (Matthew 5:37)

Day 3: The Lord is gracious and merciful to all (Psalm 145: 8)

Day 4: Be content with what you have (Hebrews 13:5)

Day 5: To bring good news to the poor (Luke 4: 18)

Day 6: The Lord of hosts is his name (Jeremiah 10:16)

Day 7: Woman, great is your faith! (Matthew 15:28)

Day 8: The Lord is my light and my salvation (Psalm 27: 1).