



'That they may become one in your hand'

(Ezekiel 37:17)

DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 24 MAY – 31 MAY 2009

Reconciliation—personal, social, national and global—is the key theme of the worldwide Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in this UN Year of Reconciliation.

The Week of Prayer materials, produced jointly by the WCC & the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, draw on Korean churches' experience. Adapted here for Australia, they seek to deepen our unity in Christ and strengthen our own commitment to live in God's hand.

DAY 1—SUNDAY 24 MAY

Facing divisions

That they may become one in your hand (Ezek 37:17)

Ezek 37: 15-19, 22-24a *One in your hand*

Ps 103: 8-14 *The Lord is merciful and gracious,
...abounding in steadfast love*

1 Cor 3: 3-7, 21-23 *Jealousy and quarrelling among you
... you belong to Christ*

Jn 17: 17-21 *That they may all be one... that the world may believe*

Reflection

Divisions between Christians on fundamental matters of faith and discipleship seriously wound our witness before the world. In Korea, as in Australia, the gospel was brought by conflicting voices, proclaiming discordant Good News and internally contradicting the message that God has reconciled the world in Christ. Together however, by God's grace, we can be renewed and heal others.

Ezekiel's vision of two sticks, inscribed with the names of the divided kingdoms of ancient Israel, becoming one in God's hand, is a telling image of the power of God to bring about reconciliation, to do for a people entrenched in division what they cannot do for themselves. It is a highly evocative metaphor for divided Christians, prefiguring the source of reconciliation found at the heart of the Christian proclamation itself. On the two pieces of wood which form the cross of Christ, the Lord of history takes upon himself the wounds and divisions of humanity. In the totality of Jesus' gift of himself on the cross, he holds together human sin and God's redemptive steadfast love. To be a Christian is to be baptised into this death, through which God, in his boundless mercy, etches the names of wounded humanity onto the wood of the cross, holding us to himself and restoring our relationship with God and with each other.

Linked to our other efforts for unity among Christians—our prayer for unity is thus a privileged instrument through which the Holy Spirit is making that reconciliation in Christ visibly manifest in the world Christ came to save.

Prayer points

- * Give thanks for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and for the Churches in Korea
- * Give thanks for all those who work for reconciliation between peoples and pray for those who remain at enmity
- * Pray for the national & state ecumenical bodies in Australia, the World Council of Churches and other global networks
- * Pray for the unity of all Christians

Prayer for the Day

God of compassion, you have loved and forgiven us in Christ, and sought to reconcile the entire human race in that redeeming love.
Look with favour upon us, who work and pray for the unity of divided Christian communities.
Grant us the experience of being brothers and sisters in your love.
May we be one, one in your hand. Amen.



National Council of
Churches in Australia
Faith and Unity Commission



DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE
for the
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24 MAY—31 MAY 2009

DAY 2—MONDAY 25 MAY

**Facing up
to war and
violence**

Scripture

Isaiah 2:1-4 *They shall no longer learn war*
Ps 74:18-23 *Do not forget the life of your poor for ever*
1 Pet 2:21-25 *His wounds have healed you*
Mt 5:38-48 *Pray for those who persecute you*

That they may become one in your hand (Ezek 37:17)

Reflection

War and violence are major obstacles to the unity willed by God. Ultimately, they result from the unhealed division existing inside ourselves, and from the human arrogance which prevents us from recovering the real foundation of our existence. To find peace we need to share God's peace.

For their part, Korean Christians long to end more than 50 years of separation between North Korea and South Korea and to see peace established elsewhere in the world. The instability in the Korean peninsula represents not only the pain of that still divided nation; it also symbolises the mechanisms of division, hostility and vengeance plaguing humanity.

What can end this cycle of war and violence? Jesus shows us the way. To his disciples, who react in worldly ways to violence, paradoxically he teaches the renunciation of violence (Mt 26: 51-52). Faithful to the Father, he dies on the cross to save us from sin and death. The cross reveals the truth about violence and the conflict inherent in human nature. Jesus' violent death nails human sin, violence and war to this very cross and begins a new creation. Through his love we are reconciled and given strength to live God's peace.

Jesus Christ teaches a non-violence based on more than humanism. He teaches the reestablishment of God's creation, and hope and faith in the final coming of a new heaven and a new earth. This hope, founded on Jesus' ultimate victory over death on the cross, encourages us to persevere in the search for Christian unity and in the struggle against all forms of war and violence.



Prayer points

- * Give thanks for today's prophets of peace who unceasingly pray, speak out and witness for peace
- * Pray for the work of the Decade to Overcome Violence and for Christian witness to the power of nonviolence
- * Pray for the work of **act for peace** and all other Australian ministries of peacemaking
- * Pray for the churches of Africa
& the All Africa Conference of Churches
- * Pray for those who find their home in the Anglican and Mar Thoma Churches



act for peace is the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia. *act for peace* works with church partners overseas to reduce poverty, protect refugees, prevent conflicts and empower communities.

www.actforpeace.org.au

Prayer for the Day

Prince of Peace, who gave yourself on the cross for the unity of all, we offer up to you our human nature marred by egoism, arrogance, and anger. Reach out to us with compassion and care for your people, so that we may enjoy the peace and joy integral to the order of your creation. May all Christians work together to bring about *your* justice, rather than ours. Give us the courage to help others to bear their cross, rather than putting our own on their shoulders: and teach us the wisdom to treat our enemies with love instead of hatred, as Jesus taught and lived. Amen.



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DAY 3—TUESDAY 26 MAY

**Facing up
to economic
injustice
and poverty**

Scripture

Lev 25:8-14 *The jubilee which liberates*
Ps 146 *The Lord executes justice
for the oppressed*
1 Tim 6:9-10 *The love of money
is the root of all evil*
Lk 4:16-21 *Jesus and the jubilee
as liberation*

That they may become one in your hand (Ezek 37:17)

Reflection

today we honour the indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history... We apologise for the laws and policies of successive parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians. We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country. ... For the future we take heart; resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written... A future where this parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.

Words of apology, such as those of the Australian Prime Minister last year, can powerfully enable a 'new page' to be written in history. As we recognise and share one another's sufferings, so we can pray and work together more effectively to bring life and healing for all. This is not a cheap grace however. As the Prime Minister said in the National Apology, true Reconciliation must involve a common commitment to 'Close the Gap' of inequality. Beginning with our own Indigenous sisters and brothers in Australia, we need to *Make Poverty History*.

We pray for the kingdom of God to arrive. We long for a world where people, especially the poorest, do not die untimely deaths. According to Leviticus, during God's jubilee, liberation was to be proclaimed and money was not to be lent for interest nor food sold for profit. The jubilee implied a community ethic, the freeing of slaves and their return home, the restoration of financial rights and the cancellation of debts. For the victims of unjust social structures, this meant the restitution of law and of their means of existence.

The priorities of today's world, in which 'more money' is often the highest value and goal of life, can only lead to death. As Christians, we are called to counter this by living together in the spirit of jubilee and following Christ. As we experience the healing of our divisions we become more sensitive to other divisions which wound humanity and creation.

Prayer points

- * Give thanks for God's work of liberation and for all who pray, speak and work for justice in our world
- * Pray for the Stolen Generations, for Indigenous Christians, and for all who work to *Make Poverty History* everywhere
- * Pray for the churches of North, Central and South America
- * Pray for those who find their home in the Salvation Army and in the Society of Friends

For more information on how to support Indigenous Christians and work for justice and an end to poverty, please contact:

www.ncca.org.au/natsiec



**Indigenous
MAKE POVERTY HISTORY.**

Prayer for the Day

God of justice, there are places in this world overflowing with food, but others where there is not enough and where the hungry and the sick are many.

God of peace, there are those in this world who profit from violence and others who because of violence are forced to leave their homes and become refugees.

God of compassion, help us to understand that we cannot live by money alone but only out of the word of God: and enable us to understand that we cannot attain true prosperity except by loving God and obeying his will, in whose name we pray. Amen.



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DAY 4—WEDNESDAY 27 MAY

**Facing up to
discrimination
and prejudice**

Scripture

Is 58:6-12 *Do not hide yourself*
Ps 133 *How good it is when
kindred live in unity,*
Gal 3:26-29 *You are all one in Christ Jesus*
Lk 18:9-14 *To some who trusted in
their own righteousness*

That they may become one in your hand (Ezek

Reflection

In the biblical understanding of Creation, human beings created in the image of God were but one in his hand. Sin, however, entered the hearts of men and women and throughout history we have built up all kinds of prejudice. In some places it may be according to race or ethnic identity, elsewhere sexual identity or the simple fact of being man or woman is cause for discrimination. In yet other places it is being disabled or adhering to a particular religion which is a reason for exclusion. All these discriminatory factors are dehumanising and a source of conflict and great suffering.

Jesus continually saw all those met as people of dignity, listening and learning from them, and ready to encourage and support as well as rebuff and rebuke, especially the pride which some of his contemporaries derived from despising those they saw as beneath them. He continually denounced discrimination of all sorts and the pride which some of his contemporaries derived from it. The just are not always those whom you would imagine. Contempt has no place in the hearts of believers.

Psalms 133 compares the joy of a life shared with sisters and brothers to the goodness of a precious oil or the dew of Mount Hermon. We are given to taste this joy with our sisters and brothers, each time we let go of our confessional prejudices within our ecumenical gatherings.

Reconciliation is the common mission of all Christians. Together we must struggle against all discrimination. It is also our common hope because all are one in Christ and there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, man or woman. As Reconciliation Week begins in Australia today, let us seek fresh opportunities to make this real amongst us.

Prayer points

- * Give thanks for the steadfastness of God in bringing new life and reconciliation
- * Give thanks for all who work to overcome discrimination and prejudice in church and in the world and pray for greater inclusivity for all during Reconciliation Week
- * Pray for the churches in Asia and the Christian Conference of Asia
- * Pray for those who find their home in the Roman Catholic Church

Reconciliation Week: 27 May to 3 June 2009

National Reconciliation Week celebrates the rich culture and history of the first Australians. The dates of 27 May and 3 June mark the referendum of 27 May 1967 which allowed Indigenous Australians to be counted as citizens, and the Mabo case of 3 June 1992 which ended the legal fiction of 'terra nullius' and helped restore land rights. It is thus a good time for Christians to talk about reconciliation generally and to explore how we can value all of us better.

Contact your local Reconciliation group about activities this week or go to www.ncca.org.au/natsiec for more NCCA resources

Prayer for the Day

God of all people, help us to recognise the discrimination and exclusion which damage societies.

Direct our gaze and help us to recognise our own prejudices.

By your good Spirit, teach us to banish all contempt and to taste the joy of living together in unity.:

Following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.





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DAY 5—THURSDAY 28 MAY

**Facing up
to ecological
challenges**

Scripture

Gen 1:31-2:3 *God saw everything he had made
and it was very good*
Ps 148 *He commanded
and they were created*
Rom 8:18-25 *The destruction of creation*
Mt 13:31-32 *The smallest of all the seeds*

That they may become one in your hand (Ezek 37:17)

Reflection

We ask the churches to help their members to rediscover the traditional Christian values of self-restraint and asceticism (simplicity of lifestyle), and to propagate these values in their societies as a way of counteracting individualism and consumerism, and as an alternative foundation for economic and social development.
(Pacific Conference of Churches, Island of Hope statement)

God created our world with wisdom and love and when he had finished his great work of creation, God saw that it was good.

Today however the world is confronted with a serious ecological crisis. The earth is suffering from global warming as a result of our excessive consumption of energy. The extent of forested area on our planet has diminished by 50% over the last 40 years while the deserts are spreading ever faster. Three quarters of ocean life has already disappeared. Every day more than 100 living species die out and this loss of biodiversity is a serious menace to all life on Earth. With the apostle Paul we can affirm: creation has been delivered into the power of destruction, it groans as in the pains of childbirth. We cannot deny that human beings bear a heavy responsibility for environmental destruction. Our unbridled greed casts the shadow of death on the whole of creation.

Together Christians must do their utmost to save creation. Before the immensity of this task, we must unite their efforts. It is only *together* that we can protect the work of the creator. It is impossible not to notice the central place which natural elements occupy in the parables and teaching of Jesus. Christ shows great respect even for the smallest of all the seeds. With the biblical vision of creation having its origin and hope of transformation in God's goodness, Christians can contribute with one voice to the present reflection on the future of our planet.

Many of our Christian sisters and brothers in the Pacific and elsewhere are bearing the brunt of the ecological crisis whilst in Australia there is an increasing impact on many communities. Let us pray that God may strengthen the work of those responding.

Prayer points

- * Give thanks for today's prophets who work for ecological sustainability and pray for Australian governments and for international cooperation in addressing today's ecological challenges
- * Pray for the work of Christians caring for Creation and for Christian witness to living humbly on the Earth
- * Pray for the churches of Aotearoa-New Zealand and the Pacific; for the Pacific Conference of Churches;
- * Pray for those who find their home in the Churches of Christ and the Congregational Federation.

Prayer for the Day

God our creator,
you fashioned creation by your Word and Spirit,
and saw that it was good.
Yet for many years, and even today, we spread
death and destruction to the environment.
God of forgiveness and hope, bring us to repent
of our greed and thoughtfulness.
Help us to care for all that you have made, so
that together our desire is to protect this creation.
God of new creation, pour out your hope on us,
that we may work towards your new creation
foreshadowed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
Amen.





DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE
for the
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DAY 6—FRIDAY 29 MAY

**Facing up to
disease and
suffering**

Scripture

II Kings 20:1-6 *Remember me, O Lord!*
Ps 22:1-11 *Why have you forsaken me?*
James 5:13-15 *The prayer of faith will save the sick*
Mk 10:46-52 *Jesus asked:
What do you want me to do?*

That they may become one in your hand (Ezek 37:17)

Reflection

How often Jesus encounters the sick and is willing to heal them!

Common to all our still separated churches is the awareness of our Lord's compassion for the sick. Christians have always followed his example, by healing the sick, building hospitals, dispensaries, organizing medical missions and caring not only for the souls but also the bodies of God's children. This is not an obvious response: the healthy tend to take health for granted and forget those who cannot take part in the regular life of the community because they are sick or disabled. And the sick? They may feel cut off from God, his presence, blessing and healing power.

The deep grounded faith of Hezekiah supports him through sickness. In a time of sorrow, he finds words to remind God of his grace. Yes, those who are suffering might even use words from the Bible to cry out or struggle with God: Why have you forsaken me? When an honest relationship with God is well established, grounded in language of faithfulness and thankfulness in good times, it creates space also for a language to express sorrow, pain or anger in prayer when necessary.

The sick are not objects and not only at the receiving end of care; rather, they are subjects of faith, as the disciples must learn in the story of the gospel of Mark. The disciples want to continue directly along their way with Jesus; the sick man on the edge of the crowd is ignored. When he cries out, it is a diversion from their goal. We are used to caring for the sick, but we are not so used to their crying loudly and disturbing us. Their cries today may be for affordable medicine in poor countries, which touches the question of patents and profits.

The disciples who tried to prevent the blind man getting near Jesus had to become the messengers of a rather different and caring response. Only when the disciples brought the sick man to Jesus did they come to understand what Jesus wants: to take time to meet and talk with the sick, asking what they need. A healing community can grow when the sick experience the presence of God through a mutual relationship with their sisters and brothers in Christ.

Prayer points

- * Pray for all those who are sick and give thanks for the grace of God to be found in health services and other ministries of healing
- * Pray for a greater commitment to affordable medicine for the poor and for the work of international aid and medical agencies
- * Pray for the churches of Europe and the Conference of European Churches
- * Pray for the Lutheran, Chinese Methodist and Uniting Churches and those who find their home in them

Prayer for the Day

God of compassion, listen, we beseech you, to people who cry to you in sickness and pain, that they may know your comfort and healing presence.

God of grace, inspire the healthy to give thanks for their well-being, and serve the sick with loving hearts and open hands.

God of true health, empower us to live in your grace and providence, to become a community of true healing, praising you together in the healing peace of Christ. Amen.





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DAY 7—SATURDAY 30 MAY

**Facing up to
a plurality of
religions**

Scripture

Isaiah 25:6-9 *This is the Lord
for whom we have waited*
Ps 117 *Praise the Lord, all you nations*
Rom 2:11-16 *The doers of the law will be justified*
Mk 7:24-30 *For saying this,
you may go home happy*

That they may become one in your hand (Ezek 37:17)

Reflection

There is much violence in different parts of the world between followers of different faiths. Yet religions can together make a vital contribution to peace. Korea, for example, is a place where different faiths – Buddhist, Christian, Confucian – mostly coexist in peace, and, in Australia, many people of different faiths and none nurture peace and harmony together. For reconciliation requires both the speaking of truth to power and the living out of our truth in love. On the one hand, Christians are called to stand in solidarity with those who are persecuted and to witness against oppressive beliefs and practices. On the other hand, Christians must seek to love their neighbours, however different they may at first appear. This is the path to a healthy world.

This is also the Way of Jesus. When, for example, Jesus meets a non-Jewish woman who pleads for healing for her daughter he initially refuses to help, in surprising terms. The woman persists: “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs”. Love is not limited to our family or faith connections. Jesus affirms her insight into his mission to Jews and non-Jews alike, and sends her on her way with the promise of healing for her daughter.

In recent years, dialogue also developed between people of other faiths, particularly those ‘of the Book’ (Judaism, Christianity, Islam). This is not the same as dialogue between Christians as unity is not the common goal. Yet such encounters can help promote respect and good relations between neighbours, and build peace where there is conflict. If our Christian witness is *united* by virtue of our faith in Christ, our opposition to prejudice and conflict will be all the more effective. And if we listen carefully to our neighbours of other faiths, can we learn something more of the inclusiveness of God’s love *for all people*, and of his kingdom?



Dialogue with people of different faiths and ideologies should not lead to loss of Christian identity but to a deeper sense of sharing in God’s love, as we obey Jesus’ prayer that we become one, as he is one with the Father.

Prayer points

- * Pray for peace between people of different faiths & ideologies
- * Give thanks for the diversity of Australian life, for those who share their gifts with others and serve their community
- * Pray for elected leaders within Australian Governments, leaders within all spheres of community life, and all public servants.
- * Pray for those who find their home in the Pentecostal tradition and for Australian churches who are observers or friends of the National Council of Churches in Australia

Prayer for the Day

Lord our God, we thank you for the wisdom we gain from your scriptures.

Grant us the courage to open our hearts and our minds to neighbours of other Christian confessions and of other faiths; the grace to overcome barriers of indifference, prejudice or hate; and a vision of the new creation, when all your people walk together toward that final feast, the wedding banquet of the Lamb, when tears and dissension will be overcome through the love of Christ, who laid down his life for all. Amen.



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DAY 8—SUNDAY 31 MAY

**Proclaiming
hope in a world
of separation**

Scripture

Ezek 37:1-14 *I will open your graves*
Ps 104:26-36 *You renew the face of the earth*
Rev 21:1-5 *I am making all things new*
Mt 5:1-12 *Blessed are you...*

That they may become one in your hand
(Ezek 37:17)

Reflection

Biblical faith contains the radical hope that history's last word belongs to God, and that this word is not one of judgment but of new creation. As this year's Week of Prayer reflects, Christians live in a world of much division and alienation. Yet the Church remains full of hope, grounded not in human ability, but in the power and abiding desire of God to transform fragmentation into wholeness, death-giving hatred into life-giving love. As the Korean Church witnesses, the tragedies of national division may continue, yet there too, Christian hope abounds.

Christian hope lives on even in profound suffering because it is born of the steadfast love of God revealed on the cross. Hope rises with Jesus from the tomb, as the forces of death are overcome; it spreads with the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, which renews the face of the earth. Christ's resurrection announces the end of the old order and sows the seeds of a new eternal creation, where all will be reconciled in him and God will be all in all.

Christian hope begins with creation's renewal, thus fulfilling God's original intention. For in Revelation 21, God does not say 'I am making *all new things*' but rather, 'I am making *all things new*'. Christian hope does not imply a long passive wait for the end of the world but the desire for this renewal, already begun in the resurrection and at Pentecost. It is not the hope for an apocalyptic culmination of history collapsing our world, but rather, hope for the fundamental change of the world already known to us. God's new beginning ends the sin, divisions and finitude of the world, transfiguring creation so that it can take part in God's glory and share in God's eternity.

When Christians gather to pray for unity, they are motivated and sustained by this hope. The strength of the prayer for unity comes from God's renewal of the created world; its wisdom from the Holy Spirit who breathes new life on dry bones; its integrity from opening ourselves completely to God, to be transformed into instruments of the unity Christ wills for his disciples.

Prayer points

- * Give thanks for the diversity of peoples, languages and cultures, especially in Australia
- * Give thanks for the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the call to travel on to greater unity
- * Pray for churches in the Middle East and for the Middle East Council of Churches;
- * Pray for those who find their home in the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, & the Assyrian Church of the East.

Prayer for the Day

Gracious God, you are with us always, amidst suffering and turmoil, and will be to the end of time.
 Help us to be a people deeply imbued with hope, living out the beatitudes which Jesus taught, serving the unity which is his desire and prayer. Amen.

This resource for Christian unity is based on the international material for the 2009 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which originated with the Churches in Korea, and was agreed by the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity. It has been adapted for use in Australia by the Faith and Unity Commission of the National Council of Churches in Australia.

For more information: ph. (02) 9299 2215 or visit www.churchestogetherinprayer.org.au