

DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the
WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY
20 MAY – 27 MAY 2012

“We will all be changed by the Victory of our Lord Jesus Christ”

(cf. 1 Cor 15:51-58)

**INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME
FOR THE YEAR 2012**

BIBLICAL TEXT

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

(New Revised Standard Version)

Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us **the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ**. Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.

Introduction

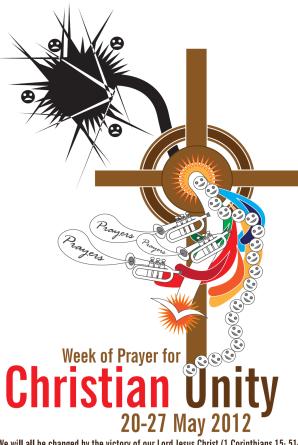
The material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2012 was prepared by a working group composed of representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and Old Catholic and Protestant Churches active in Poland.

Following extensive discussions in which the representatives of various ecumenical circles in Poland took part, it was decided to focus on a theme that is concerned with the transformative power of faith in Christ, particularly in relation to our praying for the visible unity of the Church, the Body of Christ. This was based on St. Paul’s words to the Corinthian Church which speaks of the temporary nature of our present lives (with all its apparent “victory” and “defeat”) in comparison to what we receive through the victory of Christ through the Paschal mystery.

Why such a theme?

The history of Poland has been marked by a series of defeats and victories. We can mention the many times that Poland was invaded, the partitions, oppression by foreign powers and hostile systems. The constant striving to overcome all enslavement and the desire for freedom are a feature of Polish history which have led to significant changes in the life of the nation. And yet where there is victory there are also losers who do not share the joy and triumph of the winners.

This particular history of the Polish nation has led the ecumenical group who have written this year’s material to reflect more deeply on what it means to “win” and to “lose”, especially given the way in which the language of “victory” is so often understood in triumphalist terms. Yet Christ shows us a very different way!



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(cf. 1 Cor 15:51-58)

**INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME
FOR THE YEAR 2012 (*cont.*)**

In 2012 the European Football Championship will be held in Poland and Ukraine. This would never have been possible in years gone by. For many this is a sign of another “national victory” as hundreds of millions of fans eagerly await news of winning teams playing in this part of Europe. Thinking of this example might lead us to consider the plight of those who do not win - not only in sport but in their lives and communities: who will spare a thought for the losers, those who constantly suffer defeats because they are denied victory due to various conditions and circumstances? Rivalry is a permanent feature not only in sport but also in political, business, cultural and, even, church life.

When Jesus’ disciples disputed over “*who was the greatest*” (Mk 9:34) it was clear that this impulse was strong. But Jesus’ reaction was very simple: “*Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all*” (Mk 9:35). These words speak of victory through mutual service, helping, boosting the self-esteem of those who are “last”, forgotten, excluded. For all Christians, the best expression of such humble service is Jesus Christ, His victory through death and His resurrection. It is in His life, action, teaching, suffering, death and resurrection that we desire to seek inspiration for a modern victorious life of faith which expresses itself in social commitment in a spirit of humility, service and faithfulness to the Gospel. And as he awaited the suffering and death that was to come, he prayed that his disciples might be one so that world might believe. This “victory” is only possible through spiritual transformation, conversion. That is why we consider that the theme for our meditations should be those words of the Apostle to the Nations. The point is to achieve a victory which integrates all Christians around the service of God and one’s neighbour.

As we pray for and strive towards the full visible unity of the church we – and the traditions to which we belong – will be changed, transformed and conformed to the likeness of Christ. The unity for which we pray may require the renewal of forms of Church life with which we are familiar. This is an exciting vision but it may fill us with some fear! The unity for which we pray is not merely a “comfortable” notion of friendliness and co-operation. It requires a willingness to dispense with competition between us. We need to open ourselves to each other, to offer gifts to and receive gifts from one another, so that we might truly enter into the new life in Christ, which is the only true victory.

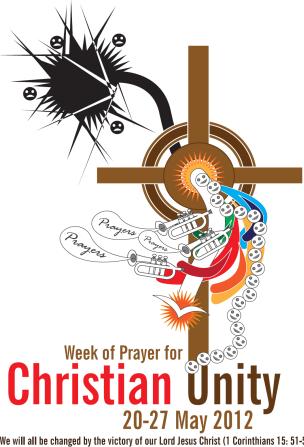
There is room for everyone in God’s plan of salvation. Through His death and resurrection, Christ embraces all irrespective of winning or losing, “*that whoever believes in him may have eternal life*” (Jn 3:15). We too can participate in His victory! It is sufficient to believe in Him, and we will find it easier to overcome evil with good.

Eight Days reflecting on our change in Christ

Over the coming week we are invited to enter more deeply into our faith that we will all be changed through the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ. The biblical readings, commentaries, prayers and questions for reflection, all explore different aspects of what this means for the lives of Christians and their unity with one another, in and for today’s world. We begin by contemplating the Christ who serves, and our journey takes us to the final celebration of Christ’s reign, by way of His cross and resurrection.



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DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

20 MAY – 27 MAY 2012

DAY 1—SUNDAY 20 MAY

Changed by the Servant Christ

Scripture Readings

Zechariah 9:9-10 A king righteous and victorious – and humble

Psalm 131 My heart is not proud

Romans 12:3-8 We have different gifts with which to serve

Mark 10:42-45 The Son of Man came to serve

The Son of Man came to serve (Mark 10:45)

Transformative Power through faith in Christ—a transformation of human life, with all its apparent “triumph” and “defeat”, through the victory of Christ's resurrection.

The Week of Prayer materials, produced jointly by the WCC & the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, draw on Polish churches' experience of change. Adapted here for Australia, they seek to deepen our unity in Christ as we pray for transforming unity and change in the world.

Reflection

The coming of the Messiah (i.e. the Christ) and his victory were accomplished through service. Jesus wants a spirit of service to fill the hearts of his followers as well. He teaches us that true greatness consists in serving God and others. Christ gives us the courage to discover that he is the one for whom *to serve is to reign* – as an early Christian saying has it.

Zechariah's prophecy concerning a victorious and humble king was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He, the king of peace, comes to his own, to Jerusalem – the city of peace (as its name means). Christ does not conquer by deceit or violence, but by gentleness and humility.

Psalm 131 briefly but eloquently describes the state of spiritual peace which is the fruit of humility. The picture of a mother and child is a sign of God's tender love and of trust in God, to which the entire community of believers is called.

Paul the apostle challenges us to make a sober and humble assessment of ourselves and to discover our own abilities. While we have a diversity of gifts we are one body in Christ. In our divisions each of our traditions has been endowed by the Lord with gifts that we are called to place at the service of others.

For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). By his service, Christ redeemed our refusal to serve God. He became an example for repairing all relations between people: *Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant* – those are the new standards of greatness and priority.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul reminds us that the diverse gifts given to us are for mutual service: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership and compassion. In our diversity we are always one body in Christ, and members of one another. The use of our diverse gifts in common service to humanity makes visible our unity in Christ. The joint action of Christians for the benefit of humanity, to combat poverty and ignorance, defend the oppressed, to be concerned about peace and to preserve life, develop science, culture and art are an expression of the practical ecumenism which the Church and the world badly need. The imitation of Christ the servant of God provides eloquent testimony to the Gospel, moving not only minds, but also hearts. Such common service is a sign of the coming kingdom of God – the kingdom of the servant Christ.

For reflection/discussion

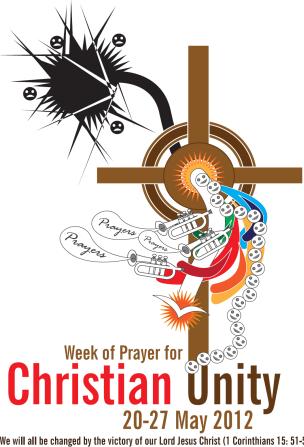
1. “Opportunities for service are often missed because they are dressed in overalls and look like work.” Discuss.
2. What opportunities for service are most threatened by pride and arrogance?
3. What should be done to ensure that all Christian ministries are experienced as service rather than charity or controlling?
4. In our community, what can Christians of different traditions do better together than in isolation to reveal the servant Christ?

Prayer for the Day

Almighty and eternal God, by travelling the royal road of service your Son leads us from the arrogance of our disobedience to humility of heart. Unite us to one another by your Holy Spirit, so that through service to our sisters and brothers, your true countenance may be revealed. Amen.



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DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

20 MAY—27 MAY 2012

DAY 2—MONDAY 21 MAY

Changed through patient waiting for the Lord

Scripture

1 Samuel 1:1-20 Hannah's trust and patient waiting

Psalm 40 Patient waiting for the Lord

Hebrews 11:32-34 Through faith they conquered kingdoms, administered justice

Matthew 3:13-17 Let it be so now, for it is proper to fulfil all righteousness

Let it be so now, for it is proper to fulfil all righteousness (Matthew 3:15)

Reflection

Victory is often associated with immediate triumph. Everybody knows the taste of success when, after a difficult struggle, congratulations, recognition, and even tributes are paid. At such a joyful moment, hardly anyone realises that from a Christian perspective victory is a long-term process of transformation. Such an understanding of transformative victory teaches us that it occurs in God's time, not ours, is often imperceptible in the process, and so calls for our patient trust and deep hope in God.

Hannah is an example of such patient trust and hope. After many years of waiting to be pregnant, she prayed to God for a child, at the risk of having her weeping prayer dismissed as drunkenness by the priest at the doorpost of the Temple. When Eli assured her that God would grant her prayer, she simply trusted, waited, and was sad no longer. Hannah conceived and bore a son, whom she named Samuel. The great victory here is not that of nations or armies, but a glimpse into the realm of a private and personal struggle. In the end, Hannah's trust and hope results not only in her own transformation, but that of her people, for whom the God of Israel intervened through her son Samuel.

Psalm 40 echoes Hannah's patient waiting for the Lord in the midst of another kind of struggle. The psalmist too sought deliverance from a situation which remains unknown to us, but which is hinted at in the language of the "desolate pit of the miry bog." They give thanks that God has transformed their shame and confusion, and continue to trust in God's steadfast love.

The letter to the Hebrews recalls the patience of people like Abraham (6:15) and others who were able to be victorious through their faith and trust in God. The realisation that God is part of and enters into the narrative of human history eliminates the temptation to be triumphant in human terms.

In the gospel reading, the voice from heaven at the baptism of Jesus announcing *This is my son, the beloved*, seems to be a guarantor of the immediate success of his messianic mission. In resisting the evil one, however, Jesus, does not succumb to the temptation to usher in the kingdom of God without delay, but patiently reveals what life in the kingdom means through his own life and ministry, which leads to his death on the Cross. While the kingdom of God breaks through in a decisive way in the resurrection, it is not yet fully realised. The ultimate victory will only come about with the second coming of our Lord. And so we wait in patient hope and trust with the cry "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Our longing for the visible unity of the Church likewise requires patient, trustful and active waiting. Our prayer for Christian unity is like the prayer of Hannah and the psalmist. Our work for Christian unity is like the deeds recorded in Hebrews. Our attitude of patient waiting is not one of helplessness or passivity, but a deep trust that the unity of the Church is God's gift, not our achievement. Such patient waiting, praying and trust transforms us and prepares us for the visible unity of the Church not as we plan it, but as God gives it.

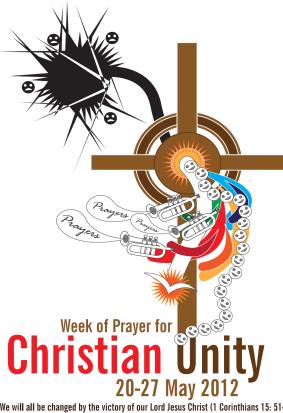
For reflection/ discussion

1. What sort of changes happen quickly? Suddenly? Slowly? Gradually? When does force or intervention assist, and when does it interfere with, a life-giving process of change?
2. Often we cannot perceive the transforming work of God until well after the process is complete. Can you think of a time in your life when this has been the case?
3. In what situations in our life should we have a greater trust in God's promises?
4. What areas of church life are particularly at risk from the temptation to act hastily?
5. In what situations should Christians wait, and when should they act together?

Prayer for the Day: Faithful God, you are true to your word in every age. May we, like Jesus, have patience and trust in your steadfast love. Enlighten us by your Holy Spirit that we may not obstruct the fullness of your justice by our own hasty judgements, but rather discern your wisdom and love in all things, you who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.



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DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

20 MAY—27 MAY 2012

DAY 3—TUESDAY 22 MAY

Changed by the Suffering Servant

Scripture

Isaiah 53:3-11 The man of sorrows accustomed to suffering
Psalm 22: 12-24 He did not despise the affliction of the afflicted
1 Peter 2:21-25 Christ suffered for us
Luke 24:25-27 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things?

Christ suffered for us (1 Peter 2:21)

Reflection

The divine paradox is that God can change tragedy and disaster into victory. God transforms our sufferings and misfortunes, and the enormity of history's pain, into a resurrection that encompasses the whole world. While appearing to be defeated, the Lord is nevertheless the true victor whom no one and nothing can overcome.

Isaiah's moving prophecy about the suffering servant of the Lord was completely fulfilled in Christ. After suffering enormous agony, the man of sorrows *shall see his offspring*. We are that offspring, born from the Saviour's suffering. In this way we are made one family in him.

One can say that Psalm 22 is not only about Jesus, but also for Jesus. Matthew and Mark record that Jesus prayed this psalm on the cross, when he used its desolate opening words: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* Yet in the second part of the psalm (from verse 22) the lamentation, the imploring full of pain, changes into praise of God for rescuing people from their oppression.

The apostle Peter is a *witness of the sufferings of Christ* (1 Peter 5:1), which he presents to us as an example: it is to this suffering for the sake of love that we are called. His wounds have healed us, and returned us all to the 'one shepherd'.

Only in the light of the presence of the Lord and his word does the divine purpose of the Messiah's sufferings become clear. Just as for the disciples on the way to Emmaus, the risen Lord Jesus is our constant companion on the stony road of life, stirring our hearts and opening our eyes to the mysterious plan of salvation.

Christians experience suffering as a result of humanity's fragile condition; we recognise this suffering in social injustice and situations of persecution. The power of the cross draws us into unity. Here we encounter Christ's suffering as the source of compassion for and solidarity with the entire human family. As one contemporary theologian puts it: "The closer we come to the cross of Christ, the closer we come to one another." The witness of Christians together in situations of suffering assumes remarkable credibility. In our shared solidarity with all who suffer we learn from the crucified suffering servant the lessons of self-emptying, letting go and self-sacrifice. These are the gifts we need from his Spirit on our way to unity in him.

For reflection/discussion

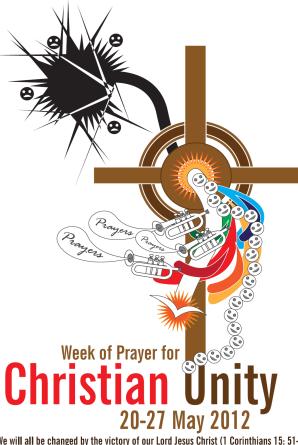
1. "Life is about sadness." Discuss this statement.
2. Where is the suffering in our country, and how can we come close to those who suffer in order to understand and learn from them?
3. How can our faith help us in our response to long-lasting suffering?
4. What areas of human suffering are unnoticed and belittled today?
5. How can Christians bear witness together to the power of the cross?

Prayer for the Day

God of consolation, you have transformed the shame of the cross into a sign of victory. Grant that we may be united around the cross of your Son to worship him for the mercy offered through his suffering. May the Holy Spirit open our eyes and our hearts, so that we may help those who suffer to experience your closeness. May we stand with those who suffer so that they may help us understand what it truly means to be human. We pray in the name of the suffering servant, our Lord Jesus. Amen.



National Council of
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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

20-27 May 2012

"We will all be changed by the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15: 51-58)"

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DAY 4—WEDNESDAY 23 MAY

Changed by the Lord's victory over evil

Scripture

Exodus 23:1-9 Do not follow the majority in wrongdoing

Psalm 1 Happy are those whose delight is in the law of the Lord

Romans 12:17-2 Overcome evil with good

Matthew 4:1-11 Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only

Overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21)

Reflection

In Jesus we learn what ‘victory’ really means for human beings - that is, happiness with one another in God’s love through his overcoming of all that keeps us apart. This is a sharing in Christ’s victory over the destructive forces that damage humanity and all of God’s creation. In Jesus we can share in a new life which calls us to struggle against what is wrong in our world with renewed confidence and with a delight in what is good.

The words of the covenant given in Exodus give a categorical warning against engaging in wrongdoing and injustice. The attitude of the majority must not in any way provide an excuse. Neither do wealth nor other situations in life entitle a person to do wrong.

Psalm 1 draws attention not only to the need to observe the commandments, but especially to the joyful fruits of doing so. A person who loves the law of the Lord above all else is called happy and blessed. The word of God is a sure guide in adversity and is the fulfilment of human wisdom. Meditating on the word of God *day and night* enables a person to lead a life full of fruitfulness for the good of others.

In Paul’s admonitions in Romans 12 we find encouragement to *overcome evil with good*. Only good can interrupt the endless spiral of hatred and the human desire for revenge. In the struggle for what is good, not everything depends on human beings. However, the apostle Paul calls for every effort to be made to maintain peace with others. He understands our continuous struggle against our instincts to harm those who hurt us. But Paul appeals to us not to let ourselves be overcome by these destructive feelings. Doing good is an effective way of combating wrong-doing among us.

The gospel reading describes the Son of God’s struggle with the temptations of Satan – the personification of evil. Jesus’ victory over these in the desert is fulfilled in his obedience to the Father, which leads him to the cross. The Saviour’s resurrection confirms that here God’s goodness ultimately wins: love overcomes death. The risen Lord is near! He accompanies us in every struggle against temptation and sin in the world. Christ’s presence calls Christians to act together in the cause of goodness.

The scandal is that because of our divisions we cannot be strong enough to stand against the evils of our time. United in Christ, delighting in his law of love, we are called to share in his mission of bringing hope to the places of injustice, hatred, and despair.

For reflection/discussion

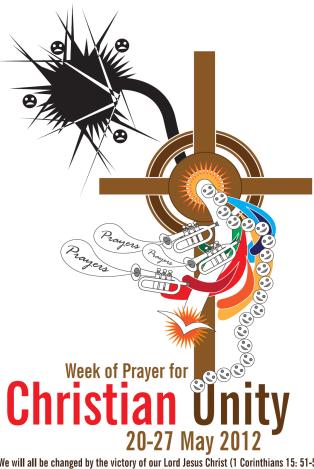
1. “In Jesus we learn what ‘victory’ really means for human beings - that is, happiness with one another in God’s love through his overcoming of all that keeps us apart.” Is this a good definition of ‘victory’? Is it helpful for you?
2. What is ‘evil’? Where do we see evil in our own lives?
3. In what way can our faith in Christ help us to overcome evil and the Evil One? When have you seen faith in Christ help to overcome evil?
4. When should we struggle, and when should we patiently wait (Day 2)?
5. What can we learn from situations in our community where division has given way to reconciliation?

Prayer for the Day

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for your victory over evil and division. We praise you for your sacrifice and your resurrection that conquer death. Help us in our everyday struggle against all adversity. May the Holy Spirit give us strength and wisdom so that, following you, we may overcome evil with good, and division with reconciliation. Amen.



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DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

20 MAY—27 MAY 2012

DAY 5—THURSDAY 24 MAY

Changed by the Peace of the Risen Lord

Scripture

Malachi 4:5-6	<i>He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents.</i>
Psalm 133	<i>How good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!</i>
Ephesians 2:14-20	<i>To reconcile both groups to God in one body, putting to death hostility.</i>
John 20:19-23	<i>Jesus stood among them and said: Peace be with you!</i>

Jesus stood among them and said: Peace be with you! (John 20:19)

Reflection

The final words of the last book of our Old Testament convey the promise that God will send his chosen one to establish harmony and respect in all households. Usually we fear strife between nations or unexpected aggression. But the prophet Malachi draws attention to one of the most difficult and enduring conflicts - the heartbreak in relations between parents and their offspring. This restoration of unity between parents and children is not possible without God's help – it is God's emissary who performs the miracle of transformation in people's hearts and relationships.

Psalm 133 shows what great joy such unity among people can bring. The human person was not created to be alone (c.f. Genesis 2:18), and cannot live contentedly in a hostile atmosphere. Happiness consists in living in a human community in harmony, peace, trust and understanding. Good relations between people are as dew upon the dry earth and a fragrant oil which furthers health and pleasure. The psalm refers to the goodness of living together as a blessing and undeserved gift from God, like the dew. Living together in unity is not restricted to family members only – this is rather a declaration of the closeness between all people who accept the peace of God.

Ephesians tells us of the one Malachi announced. Jesus brings unity, because he has demolished the *wall of hostility* between people in his own body, the Church. Generally, a person's victory involves the downfall and shame of those who have been defeated, or who prefer to withdraw. Jesus does not reject, or destroy, or humiliate; he puts an end to alienation, he transforms, heals and unites all, that they may become *members of God's household*.

The gospel reading recalls the amazing gift of the risen Lord, given to his uncertain and terrified disciples. *Peace be with you* – that is Christ's greeting and also his gift. It is also an invitation to seek peace with God and establish new, lasting relationships within the human family and all of creation. Jesus has trampled down death and sin.

By the gift of the Holy Spirit, the risen Lord invites his disciples into his mission of bringing peace, healing and forgiveness to all the world. As long as Christians remain divided, the world will not be convinced of the full truth of the gospel message that Christ has brought about one new humanity. Peace and unity are the hallmarks of this transformation. The churches need to appropriate and witness to these gifts as members of the one household of God built upon the sure foundation of Jesus as the cornerstone.

For reflection/discussion

- What causes violence?

There are only two feelings: love and fear

There are only two languages: love and fear

There are only two activities: love and fear.

There are only two motives, two procedures

two frameworks, two results: love and fear. [Michael Leunig, 1990]

How far do you agree (or not)?

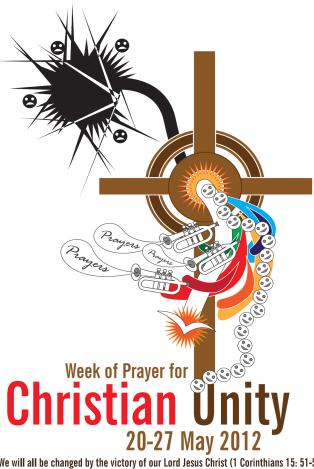
- What forms of violence in our community can we as Christians confront together?
- How do we experience hidden hostilities that affect our relationship to each other as Christian communities?
- How can we learn to welcome each other as Christ welcomes us?
- How can we learn to welcome each other as Christ welcomes us?

Prayer for the Day

Loving and merciful God, teach us the joy of sharing in your peace. Fill us with your Holy Spirit so that the walls of hostility separating us may be removed. May the risen Christ, who is our peace, help us overcome all division, and unite us as members of his household. We ask this in the name of Jesus, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory, now and forever. Amen.



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DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

20 MAY—27 MAY 2012

DAY 6—FRIDAY 25 MAY

Theme: Changed by God's Steadfast Love

Scripture

Habakkuk 3:17-19 *God, the Lord is my strength*

Psalm 136:1-4,23-26 *The Lord's steadfast love endures forever*

1 John 5:1-6 *This is the victory that conquers the world, our faith*

John 15:9-17 *No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends*

This is the victory, our faith (1 John 5:4)

Reflection

The prophet Habakkuk teaches us that it is trust in God's abiding faithfulness that keeps hope alive in spite of all failure. Habakkuk's lamentation turns to joy in God's fidelity that supplies strength in the face of despair.

Psalm 136 confirms that the memory of the marvellous deeds of God in Israel's history is trustworthy evidence of God's steadfast love. Because of divine intervention, the people of Israel experienced extraordinary and surprising victories. Recalling God's great works of salvation is a source of joy, gratitude and hope, which believers have for centuries expressed in prayer, hymns of praise, and music.

1 John reminds us that *that which has been born of God* is what overcomes the world. This does not necessarily mean victories which can be measured by human standards. Victory in Christ involves a change of heart, perceiving earthly reality from the perspective of eternity, and believing in the final victory over death. This victorious force is faith, the bestower and source of which is God. And its most perfect manifestation is love.

In the words of the gospel reading, Christ assures his disciples of God's love, the final confirmation of which is Jesus' death on the cross. At the same time, he invites and challenges them to show love to one another. Jesus' relationship to his disciples is based on love. He does not treat them merely as disciples, but calls them 'my friends'. Their service of Christ consists in conforming their lives to the one commandment of love, resulting from internal conviction and faith. In a spirit of love, even when the progress on the way to full visible unity seems slow, we do not lose hope. God's steadfast love will enable us to overcome the greatest opponent and the deepest divisions. That is why *the victory that conquers the world is our faith and the transforming power of God's love*.

For reflection/discussion

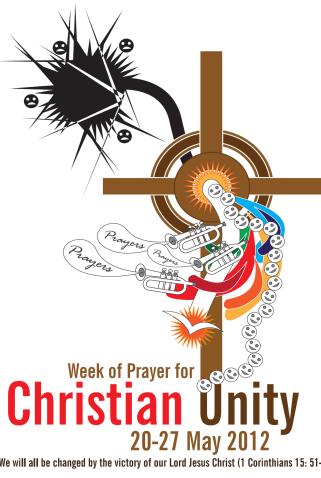
1. Does victory always mean God is with you? Whose side is God on: that of the victor, or of the vanquished – or of both? What about times when God does not do 'marvellous deeds' on our behalf?
2. What does it mean to 'lay down one's life for one's friends'?
3. How should we express Christian love in contexts of different religions, ideologies and philosophies?
4. What must we do to become more credible witnesses of God's steadfast love in a divided world?
5. How can Christ's followers more visibly support one another throughout the world?

Prayer for the Day

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, by your resurrection you have triumphed over death, and have become the Lord of life. Out of love for us you have chosen us to be your friends. May the Holy Spirit unite us to you and to one other in the bonds of friendship, that we may faithfully serve you in this world as witnesses to your steadfast love; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



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DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE

for the

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

20 MAY—27 MAY 2012

DAY 7—SATURDAY 36 MAY

Changed by the Good Shepherd

Scripture

1 Samuel 2:1-10	<i>Not by might does one prevail</i>
Psalm 23	<i>You are there with your rod and your staff</i>
Ephesians 6:10-20	<i>Be strong in the Lord</i>
John 21:15-19	<i>Feed my sheep</i>

Feed my sheep (John 21:19)

Reflection

Those who prevail over suffering still need support from on high. That support comes through prayer. We read about the power of Hannah's prayer in the first chapter of 1 Samuel. In the second chapter, we find Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving. She realised that some things happen only with the help of God. It was through the divine will that Hannah and her husband became parents. This text is an example that strengthens one's faith in what would seem to be a hopeless situation. It is an example of godly victory.

The 'good shepherd' of Psalm 23 guides his sheep even through the darkest places, comforting them with his presence. Those who place their trust in the Lord have no need to fear even the shadows of dissolution or disunity, as their shepherd will lead them into the green pastures of truth, to dwell together in the Lord's own house.

The letter to the Ephesians urges us to *be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power* by putting on spiritual armour: truth, righteousness, proclaiming the good news, faith, salvation, the word of God, prayer and supplication.

The risen Lord urges Peter – and in his person each disciple – to discover in himself a love of him who alone is the one true shepherd. If you have such love, then *Feed my sheep!* In other words, nurture them, protect them, empower and strengthen them – because they are mine and belong to me! Be my good servant and tend those who have loved me and who follow my voice. Teach them mutual love, cooperation, and boldness as they go along the twists and turns of life.

As a result of divine grace, the witness to Christ that has been confirmed in us obliges us to act jointly for the sake of unity. We have the ability and the knowledge to bear such witness! But are we willing to? The good shepherd, who by his life, teaching and conduct strengthens all who have put their trust in his grace and support, invites us to minister with him unconditionally. Thus fortified, we will be able to help one another on the road to unity. So let us become strong in the Lord, that we may strengthen others in a joint testimony of love.

For reflection/discussion

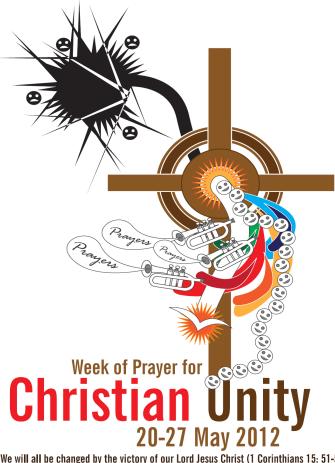
1. Who are 'the lost'? Aren't we all a little lost (at least)?
2. Is it always right to hang in there in what seems to be a hopeless situation? Or is it sometimes better to give up and move on? How do we know which is best?
3. How does Jesus the good shepherd inspire us to comfort, revive, and restore the confidence of those who are lost?
4. In what ways can Christians of various traditions strengthen each other in confessing and bearing witness to Jesus Christ?
5. For us today, what can be the meaning of Paul's exhortation: "Be strong in the Lord.... put on the whole armour of God"?

Prayer for the Day

Father of all, you call us to be one flock in your Son, Jesus Christ. He is our good shepherd who invites us to lie down in green pastures, leads us beside still waters, and restores our life. In following him, may we so care for others that all see in us the love of the one true shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.



National Council of
Churches in Australia
Faith and Unity Commission



**DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the
WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY
20 MAY—27 MAY 2012**

DAY 8—SUNDAY 27 MAY

United in the Reign of Christ

Scripture

I Chronicles 29:10-13 *It is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all*
Psalm 21:1-7 *You set a crown of fine gold on his head*
Revelation 3:19b-22 *To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne*
John 12:23-26 *Whoever serves me, the Father will honour*

To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne (Revelation 3:21)

Reflection

Jesus Christ is the first born from the dead, who has humbled himself and been exalted. Christ is not covetous of his victory, but shares his reign and exaltation with all people.

David's hymn in Psalm 21, born of the joy of the king and the people of Israel before their temple was built, expresses the truth that everything happens by grace. Even an earthly monarch can be an image of the reign of God, *in whose hand it is to make great and to give strength to all*.

The king's psalm of thanksgiving continues this idea. The Christian tradition also gives it a messianic sense: Christ is the true king, full of blessing and life, the perfect presence of God among people. In a certain sense this image can also refer to people. Are not human beings the crowning achievement of creation (see Psalm 8)? Does not God want us to become 'co-heirs with his Son' and 'members of his royal household'?

The book of Revelation / the Apocalypse opens with brief letters to seven local churches in Asia Minor (Revelation 1-3). Yet they constitute a message to the Church in all times and places. Those who admit Christ into their homes will all be invited to share with the Lord in the banquet of eternal life. The promise regarding sitting on thrones, previously announced to the twelve apostles, is now extended to all who are victorious.

Where I am, there will my servant be also. We can link Jesus' *I am* to the unutterable Name of God. The servant of Jesus, whom the Father honours, will be where his Lord is, who has sat on the right hand of the Father in order to reign.

Christians are aware that unity among them, even though requiring human effort, is above all a gift of God. It is a share in Christ's victory over sin, death, and the evil which causes division. Our participation in Christ's victory reaches its fullness in the new creation, the new 'heavens and earth'. But our common witness to the Gospel starts now. We should announce in a way that is credible and visible, to the people of our day and age, that Christ's victory overcomes all that keeps us from sharing fullness of life with him and with each other.

For reflection/discussion

1. Read again the 'Introduction to the theme for the year 2012' and the comments above on Psalm 21. How are we to make sense of verses 8-13 of the Psalm?
2. In what ways do false humility and a desire for earthly glory manifest themselves in our lives? In the church life?
3. How do we express together our faith in the reign of Christ?
4. How do we live out our hope in the coming new creation?
5. What are some other ways of describing, the 'reign of Christ' and the 'kingdom of God'?

Prayer for the Day

Almighty God, ruler of all, teach us to contemplate the mystery of your glory. Grant that we may accept your gifts in each other with humility, and respect each person's dignity. May your Holy Spirit strengthen us for the spiritual battles which lie ahead, so that united in Christ we may reign with him in glory. Grant this through him who humbled himself and was exalted, who lives with you and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.

Acknowledgement

This resource for Christian unity is based on the international material for the 2012 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which originated with the Churches in Poland, 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.

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