



DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the  
**WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**  
12 MAY – 19 MAY 2013

**“What does God require of us?”** (cf Micah 6:6-8)

**INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME  
FOR THE YEAR 2013**

**BIBLICAL TEXT**

Micah 6:6-8

(New Revised Standard Version)

*“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”*

**Introduction**

To mark its centenary, the Student Christian Movement of India (SCMI) was invited to prepare the resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU) 2013, and they involved the All India Catholic University Federation and the National Council of Churches in India. In the preparatory process, while reflecting on the significance of the WPCU, it was decided that in a context of great injustice to Dalits in India and in the Church, the search for visible unity cannot be disassociated from the dismantling of casteism and the lifting up of contributions to unity by the poorest of the poor.

The Dalits in the Indian context are the communities which are considered ‘out-castes’. They are the people worst affected by the caste-system, which is a rigid form of social stratification based on notions of ritual purity and pollution. Under the caste-system, the castes are considered to be ‘higher’ or ‘lower’. The Dalit communities are considered to be the most polluted and polluting and thus placed outside the caste-system, and were previously even called ‘untouchable’. Because of casteism the Dalits are socially marginalized, politically under-represented, economically exploited and culturally subjugated. Almost 80% of Indian Christians have a Dalit background.

Despite outstanding progress in the twentieth century, the churches in India remain divided along the doctrinal divisions inherited from Europe and elsewhere. Christian disunity in India, within churches and between them, is further accentuated by the caste system. Casteism, like apartheid, racism and nationalism, poses severe challenges for the unity of Christians in India and therefore, for the moral and ecclesial witness of the Church as the one body of Christ. As a church-dividing issue, casteism is consequently an acute doctrinal issue. It is in this context that this year’s WPCU invites us to explore the well known biblical text of Micah 6:6-8, focusing upon the question: “What does God require of us?” as the main theme. The Dalit experience serves as the crucible from within which theological reflections on the biblical theme emerge.

Micah was one of the twelve minor prophets of the Old Testament who prophesied from approximately 737-690 BC in Judah. He came from Moresheth, southwest of Jerusalem, and prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah (Micah 1:1). He lived in the same political, economic, moral, and religious conditions as his contemporary, Isaiah, and with him witnessed the destruction of Samaria and the invasion of the Southern Kingdom by the King of Assyria in the year 701 BC. His grief as he wept over the plight of his people informs the tone of his book, and he turns his anger upon the leaders (2:1-5) and priests who had betrayed his people.



National Council of  
**Churches in Australia**  
Faith and Unity Commission



DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the  
**WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**  
12 MAY – 19 MAY 2013

**“What does God require of us?”** (cf Micah 6:6-8)

**INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME  
FOR THE YEAR 2013 cont**

The Book of Micah belongs to the literary tradition of Prophecy. At the heart of its message is the oracle of judgment. The book unfolds in three sections demonstrating a journey from judgment in general (ch.1-3), to the proclamation of salvation (ch. 4-5), to the word of judgment and the celebration of salvation (ch.6-7).

In the first part, Micah harshly criticizes those in authority, both political and religious, for abusing their power and stealing from the poor: They “tear the skin off my people” (3:2), and “give judgment for a bribe” (3:11). In the second part of the book Micah exhorts the people to walk in pilgrimage “up to the mountain of the Lord... that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his path” (4:2). God’s judgment is revealed in the third part to be accompanied by a call to wait in hope for salvation, with faith in God who “pardons iniquities and passes over transgression” (7:18). This hope focuses upon the Messiah, who will be “peace” (5:4), and who will come forth from Bethlehem (5:1) bringing salvation “to the ends of the earth” (5:4). Micah ultimately calls upon all nations of the world to walk in this pilgrimage, to share in the justice and peace which is their salvation.

Micah’s strong call to justice and peace is concentrated in chapters 6:1 – 7:7, part of which forms the theme of this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU). He sets justice and peace within the history of the relationship between God and humanity, but insists that this history necessitates and demands a strong ethical reference. Like other prophets who lived in the period of the Israel monarchy, Micah reminds the people that God has saved them from slavery in Egypt and called them through the covenant to live in a society built on dignity, equality and justice. Thus, true faith in God is inseparable from personal holiness and the search for social justice. More than just worship, sacrifices and burnt offerings (6:7), God’s salvation from slavery and daily humiliation rather demands that we should “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God” (6:8).

In many ways, the situation facing the people of God in the time of Micah can be compared to the situation of the Dalit community in India. Dalits also face oppression and injustice from those who wish to deny them their rights and dignity. Micah compared the greed of those who exploited the poor to those who “eat the flesh of my people, flay the skin off them, break their bones in pieces” (3:3).

Micah’s rejection of rituals and sacrifices which were impoverished by a lack of concern for justice, speaks of God’s expectation that justice ought to be at the core of our religion and rituals. His message is prophetic in a context where discrimination against the Dalits is legitimized on the basis of religion and notions of ritual purity and pollution. Faith gains or loses its meaning in relation to justice. In the contemporary Dalit situation Micah’s insistence on the moral element of our faith requires us to ask ourselves what God truly requires of us: mere sacrifices, or to walk with God in justice and peace.

The path of Christian discipleship involves walking the path of justice, mercy and humility. The metaphor of “walking” has been chosen to link together the 8 days of prayer because, as an active, intentional and ongoing act, the metaphor of walking communicates the dynamism which characterizes Christian discipleship. Further, the theme of the tenth assembly of the World Council of Churches to be held in Busan, Korea, in 2013: “God of life, lead us to Justice and Peace” resonates with the image of the Trinitarian God who



National Council of  
**Churches in Australia**  
Faith and Unity Commission



DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the  
**WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**  
12 MAY – 19 MAY 2013

**“What does God require of us?”** (cf Micah 6:6-8)

**INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME  
FOR THE YEAR 2013 cont**

accompanies humanity and walks into human history while inviting all people to walk in partnership.

The 8 subthemes for the week, related to different modes of walking, enable us to focus on various dimensions of an authentic Christian discipleship that walks the path of righteousness that leads to life (Prov 12:28a).

Day 1: *walking in conversation*. We reflect on the importance of the practices of dialogue and conversation, as a means of overcoming barriers. Both in ecumenism, and in the struggles for liberation of people across the globe, the skills of speaking and listening are recognised as essential. In such authentic conversation we can come to recognise Christ more clearly.

Day 2: *walking with the broken body of Christ*. Recognising the solidarity between Christ crucified, and the “broken peoples” of the world, such as the Dalits, we seek as Christians together to learn to be more deeply a part of this solidarity ourselves. In particular, the relation of eucharist and justice is opened up, and Christians invited to discover practical ways of eucharistic living in the world.

Day 3: *walking towards freedom*. Today we are invited to celebrate the efforts of communities across our world that are oppressed, like the Dalits in India, as they protest against all that enslaves human beings. As Christians committed to greater unity, we learn that the removal of all that separates people from one another is an essential part of fullness of life, freedom in the Spirit.

Day 4: *walking as children of the earth*. Awareness of our place in God’s creation draws us together, as we realize our interdependence upon one another and the earth. Contemplating the urgent calls to environmental care, and to proper sharing and justice with regard to the fruits of the earth, Christians are called into lives of active witness, in the spirit of the year of Jubilee.

Day 5: *walking as the friends of Jesus*. Today we reflect on the biblical images of human friendship and love as models for God’s love for every human being. Understanding ourselves as beloved friends of God has consequences for relationships within the community of Jesus. Within the Church, all barriers of exclusion are inconsistent within a community in which all are equally the beloved friends of Jesus.

Day 6: *walking beyond barriers*. Walking with God means walking beyond barriers that divide and damage the children of God. The biblical readings on this day look at various ways in which human barriers are overcome, culminating in St Paul’s teaching that “As many of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

Day 7: *walking in solidarity*. To walk humbly with God means walking in solidarity with all who struggle for justice and peace. Walking in solidarity has implications not just for individual believers, but for the very nature and mission of the whole Christian community. The Church is called and empowered to share the suffering of all by advocacy and care for the poor, the needy and the marginalised. Such is implicit in our



National Council of  
**Churches in Australia**  
Faith and Unity Commission



DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the  
**WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**  
12 MAY – 19 MAY 2013

**“What does God require of us?”** (cf Micah 6:6-8)

**INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME  
FOR THE YEAR 2013 cont**

prayer for Christian unity this week.

Day 8: *walking in celebration*. The biblical texts on this day speak about celebration, not in the sense of celebrating a successful completion, but celebration as a sign of hope in God and in God’s justice. Similarly, the celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is our sign of hope that our unity will be achieved according to God’s time and God’s means.

What God requires of us today is to walk the path of justice, mercy and humility. This path of discipleship involves walking the narrow path of God’s reign and not the highway of today’s empires. Walking this path of righteousness involves the hardships of struggle, the isolation which accompanies protest and the risk associated with resisting “the powers and principalities” (Ep 6:12). This is especially so when those who speak out for justice are treated as trouble makers and disrupters of peace. In this context we need to understand that peace and unity are complete only if founded on justice.

Given the focus of the WPCU on the Dalit communities in India, this walk of discipleship is metaphorically speaking ‘a walk which is accompanied by the beat of the Dalit drum’. Several Dalit communities have been associated with professional ritual drumming in Indian villages. Dalit drumming not only invokes the presence of the divine but also enables the safe passage of the community during times of transition by warding off what is considered to be evil. Today Dalit drumming has been recovered as a celebration of Dalit culture and identity. Therefore, when we speak of ‘a walk of discipleship accompanied by the Dalit drum’ we are referring to a form of discipleship which is constantly reminded of God’s abiding presence with the most marginalized. It also recalls a form of discipleship which recognizes the resilient strength of the Dalits in confronting evil and contributing to the well-being of the wider community. We are reminded of a form of discipleship which affirms Dalit culture and identity as being unexpected spaces of the experience of Christ’s presence (cf. Mt 25:40). Such discipleship will lead to true solidarity as well as forms of Christian unity which are free from unjust discrimination and exclusion.

One of the professions associated with certain Dalit communities in India is ‘sewing sandals’. As one of the means of survival for Dalit communities it symbolizes their experience of forging together a meaningful existence of resilience and hope in degrading and dehumanizing conditions. It is the hope of the daily reflections that the gifts of the Dalit experience of survival amidst struggle may become for us the sandals which we put on as we seek to walk the path of righteousness in our own contexts by doing what God requires of us. ‘Any semblance of a caste-based prejudice in relations between Christians,’ says the late Pope John Paul II,<sup>1</sup> ‘is a countersign to authentic human solidarity, a threat to genuine spirituality and a serious hindrance to the Church’s mission of evangelization’. May our God of justice, unity and peace enable us to be authentic signs of human solidarity by strengthening us to do what God requires of us.

---

<sup>1</sup> Papal address to Bishops of Madras-Mylapore, Madurai and Pondicherry-Cuddalore, 17 November 2003.







## DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 12 MAY – 19 MAY 2013

DAY 1—SUNDAY 12 MAY

### “Walking in conversation”

#### Scripture Readings

<b>Genesis 11: 1-9</b>	The story of Babel and legacy of our diversity
<b>Psalms 34:11-18</b>	“Come...listen”. God’s invitation to conversation
<b>Acts 2: 1-12</b>	The outpouring of the Spirit, the gift of understanding
<b>Luke 24: 13-25</b>	Conversation with the Risen Jesus on the road

#### “Walking in conversation”

We reflect on the importance of the practices of dialogue and conversation as a means of overcoming barriers. Both in ecumenism, and in the struggles for liberation of people across the globe, the skills of speaking and listening are recognised as essential. In such authentic conversation we can come to recognise Christ more clearly.

#### Commentary

To walk humbly with God means to walk as people speaking with one another and with the Lord, always attentive to what we hear. And so we begin our celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity by reflecting on scripture passages which speak of the essential practice of conversation. Conversation has been central to the ecumenical movement, as it opens up spaces for learning from one another, sharing what we have in common, and for differences to be heard and attended to. In this way mutual understanding is developed. These gifts from the search for unity are part of our basic call to respond to what God requires of us: through true conversation justice is done, and kindness learnt. Experiences of practical liberation from all over the world make clear that the isolation of people who are made to live with poverty is forcefully overcome by practices of dialogue.

Today’s Genesis reading, and the story of Pentecost, both reflect something of this human action, and its place in God’s liberating plan for people. The story of the tower of Babel first describes how, where there is no language barrier, great things are possible. However, the story tells how this potential is grasped as a basis for self-promotion: “Let us make a name for ourselves!” is the motivation for the building of the great city. In the end this project leads to a confusion of speech; from now on we must learn our proper humanity through patient attentiveness to the other who is strange to us.

The experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus is a conversation taking place in a context of travel together, but also of loss and disappointed hope. As churches living with levels of disunity, and as societies divided by prejudices and fear of the other we can recognise ourselves here. Yet it is precisely here that Jesus chooses to join the conversation – not presuming the superior role of teacher, but walking alongside his disciples. It is his desire to be a part of our conversations, and our response of wanting him to stay and speak more with us, that enables a living encounter with the Risen Lord.

All Christians know something of this meeting with Jesus, and the power of his word “burning within us”. This resurrection experience calls us into a deeper unity in Christ. Constant conversation with each other and with Jesus – even in our own disorientation – keeps us walking together towards unity.

It is with the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost that understanding across differences is made possible in a new way, through the power of Jesus’ resurrection. Now we are invited to share the gift of speech and listening orientated toward the Lord, and towards freedom. We are called to walk in the Spirit.

#### Questions for reflection/discussion

1. Do you speak a language other than English? Do you regularly interact with people of another language, religion or culture? Why or why not? What do you talk about?
2. Who do we converse with, and who is not included in our conversations? Why?
3. Where do branches of the church practice true conversation, across the various differences that separate us?
4. Is our conversation orientated towards some grand project of our own, or towards justice and positive change [new life] which brings hope of resurrection?

#### Prayer for the Day

Jesus Christ, we proclaim with joy our common identity in you, and we thank you for inviting us into a dialogue of love with you and others. Open our hearts to share more perfectly in your prayer to the Father that we may be one, so that as we journey together we may draw closer to each other. Give us the courage to bear witness to the truth together, and may our conversations embrace those who perpetuate disunity. Send your Spirit to empower us to challenge situations where dignity and compassion are lacking in our societies, nations, and the world.

God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen



National Council of  
**Churches in Australia**  
Faith and Unity Commission



## DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 12 MAY – 19 MAY 2013

DAY 2—MONDAY 13 MAY

### “Walking with the broken body of Christ”

#### Scripture Readings

<b>Ezekiel 37:1-14</b>	“Shall these dry bones live?”
<b>Psalms 22: 1-8</b>	God’s servant, mocked and insulted, cries out to God
<b>Hebrews 13: 12-16</b>	The call to go to Jesus “outside the camp”
<b>Luke 22: 14-23</b>	Jesus breaks the bread, giving the gift of himself before his suffering

### “Walking with the broken body of Christ”

Recognising the solidarity between Christ crucified and the broken peoples of the world, such as the Dalits, we seek as Christians together to learn to be more deeply a part of this solidarity ourselves. In particular, the relation of eucharist and justice is opened up, and Christians are invited to discover practical ways of eucharistic living in the world.

#### Commentary:

To walk humbly with God means hearing the call for us to walk out of the places of our own comfort, and accompany the other, especially the suffering other. “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.” These words from Ezekiel give voice to the experience of many people across the globe today. In India, it is the “broken people” of the Dalit communities whose lives speak vividly of this suffering – a suffering in which Christ, the crucified one, shares. With injured people of every time and place, Jesus cries out to the Father: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Christians are called into this way of the cross. The Epistle to the Hebrews makes clear not only the saving reality of Jesus’ suffering, in the place of the margins, but also the need for his disciples to go “outside the camp” to join him there. When we meet those who have been excluded, like the Dalits, and we recognise the crucified one in their sufferings, the direction we should be going is clear: To be with Christ, means to be in solidarity with those on the margins whose wounds he shares.

The body of Christ, broken on the cross, is “broken for you”. The story of Christ’s suffering and death is prefaced by the story of the last supper: it is then celebrated as victory over death in every Eucharist. In this Christian celebration, Christ’s broken body is his risen and glorious body; his body is broken so that we can share his life, and, in him, be one body.

As Christians on the way to unity we can often see the Eucharist as a place where the scandal of our disunity is painfully real, knowing that, as yet, we cannot fully share this sacrament together as we should. This situation calls us to renewed efforts towards deeper communion with one another.

Today’s readings might open up another line of reflection. Walking with Christ’s broken body opens up a way to be eucharistic together: to share our bread with the hungry, to break down the barriers of poverty and inequality – these, too, are sacramental acts, in which all Christians are called to work together. Pope Benedict XVI frames his reflections on Eucharist for the church in just this way: that it is a sacrament not only to be believed in and celebrated, but also to be lived (*Sacramentum caritatis*). In keeping with the Orthodox understanding of “the liturgy after the liturgy”, here it is recognised that there is “nothing authentically human” that does not find its pattern and life in the eucharist. (SC 71)

#### Questions for reflection/ discussion

1. How are Christians united in the Eucharist? How divided?
2. What do you understand by the word ‘sacrament’? What other meanings are there?
3. In light of that prophetic tradition in which God desires justice, rather than ritual without righteousness, we need to ask: how is the Eucharist, the mystery of Christ’s brokenness and new life, celebrated in all the places where we walk?
4. What might we do, as Christians together, better to witness to our unity in Christ in places of brokenness and marginality?

**Prayer for the Day:** God of compassion, your Son died on the Cross so that by his broken body our divisions might be destroyed. Yet we have crucified him again and again with our disunity, and with systems and practices which obstruct your loving care and undermine your justice towards those who have been excluded from the gifts of your creation. Send us your Spirit to breathe life and healing into our brokenness, that we may bear witness together to the justice and love of Christ. Walk with us towards that day when we can share in the one bread and the one cup at the common table. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.



National Council of  
**Churches in Australia**  
Faith and Unity Commission



**DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the  
WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY  
12 MAY – 19 MAY 2013**

**DAY 3—TUESDAY 14 MAY**

**“Walking towards freedom”**

**Scripture Readings**

<b>Exodus 1: 15-22</b>	The Hebrew midwives obey God’s law over the command of Pharaoh
<b>Psalms 17: 1-6</b>	The confident prayer of one open to God’s gaze
<b>2 Cor. 3: 17-18</b>	The glorious freedom of God’s children in Christ
<b>John 4: 4-26</b>	Conversation with Jesus leads the Samaritan woman into freer living

**“Walking towards freedom”**

Today we are invited to celebrate the efforts of communities across our world that are oppressed, like the Dalits in India, as they protest against all that enslaves human beings. As Christians committed to greater unity, we learn that the removal of all that separates people from one another is an essential part of fullness of life, freedom in the Spirit.

**Commentary:**

Walking humbly with the Lord is always a walk into receiving the freedom he opens up before all people. With this in mind we celebrate. We celebrate the mystery of the struggle for freedom, which takes place even in the places where oppression, prejudice and poverty seem to be impossible burdens. The resolute refusal to accept inhuman commands and conditions – like those given by Pharaoh to the midwives of the enslaved Hebrew people – can seem like small actions; but these are often the kinds of actions towards freedom going on in local communities everywhere, among people caught up in different ways within the patterns of inequality across the globe. So we celebrate the determination for freedom – in dignity, social inclusion, and a proper share in all that is good.

The step-by-step journey into freedom from unjust discrimination and practices of prejudice is brought home to us by the story of Jesus’ meeting at the well with the woman of Samaria. Here is a woman who seeks, first of all, to question the prejudices which confront her, as well as to seek ways of alleviating the practical burdens of her life. These concerns are the starting place for her conversation with Jesus. Jesus himself engages in conversation with her on the bases both of his need for her practical help (he is thirsty) and in a mutual exploration of the social prejudices which make this help seem problematic. Bit by bit the way of a freer life is opened up before the woman, as the reality of the complexities of her life are seen more clearly in the light of Jesus’ words. In the end these personal insights return the conversation to a place where what divides these two groups of people – including where they should worship – is transcended. “Worship in spirit and in truth” is what is required; and here we learn to be free from all that holds us back from life together, life in its fullness.

To be called into greater freedom in Christ, is a calling to deeper communion. Those things which separate us – both as Christians searching for unity, and as people kept apart by unjust traditions and inequalities – keep us captives, and hidden from one another. Our freedom in Christ is, rather, characterised by that new life in the Spirit, which enables us, together, to stand before the glories of God “with unveiled faces”. It is in this glorious light that we learn to see each other more truly, as we grow in Christ’s likeness towards the fullness of Christian unity.

**Questions for reflection/ discussion**

1. What does it mean to “reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces”, to be transformed into his likeness, and to see that glory and transformation in others? [II Cor. 3:18]
2. How do the prejudices and judgments of the world – with regard to caste, age, gender, race, educational background – stop us, even in our own Christian communities, seeing each other clearly in the light of Christ? How can we change this?
3. What steps can we take – practical, political and ideological – towards justice, freedom and the meeting of basic human needs for people caught up in different ways within the patterns of inequality across the globe?
4. What small, practical steps can we take, as Christians together, towards the freedom of the Children of God (Romans 8.:21) for ourselves and our churches, and for our wider society?

**Prayer for the Day:** Liberating God, we thank you for the resilience and hopeful faith of those who struggle for dignity and fullness of life. We know that you raise up those who are cast down, and free those who are bound. Your Son Jesus walks with us to show us the path to authentic freedom. May we appreciate what has been given to us, and be strengthened to overcome all within us that enslaves. Send us your Spirit, and by that Spirit set us free from all that inhibits, alienates and divides us, so that with voices united we can proclaim your love to the world. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.



National Council of  
**Churches in Australia**  
Faith and Unity Commission



**DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the  
WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY  
12 MAY – 19 MAY 2013**

**DAY 4—WEDNESDAY 15 MAY**

**“Walking as children of the earth”**

**Scripture Readings**

<b>Leviticus 25: 8-17</b>	The land is for the common good, not personal gain
<b>Psalms 65: 5b-13</b>	The fruitful outpouring of God’s grace on the earth
<b>Romans 8: 18-25</b>	The longing of all creation for redemption
<b>John 9: 1-11</b>	Jesus’ healing, mud, bodies and water

**“Walking as children of the earth”**

Awareness of our place in God’s creation draws us together, as we realize our interdependence upon one another and the earth. Contemplating the urgent calls to environmental care, and to proper sharing and justice with regard to the fruits of the earth, Christians are called into lives of active witness, in the spirit of the year of Jubilee.

**Commentary:**

If we are to walk in humility with God, we will need always to be aware of ourselves as part of creation, and recipients of God’s gifts. There is a growing recognition in today’s world that better understanding of our authentic place in creation must become a priority for us. Among Christians, especially, there is a growing awareness of the ways in which ecological concern is a part of “walking humbly with God”, the creator, for all we have is given by God in his creation, and so is not ours to do with as we wish. It is for this reason that from 1<sup>st</sup> September to 4<sup>th</sup> October Christians are called to observe the “Season of Creation” – a practice increasingly observed by many churches. In 1989 the Ecumenical Patriarch, Dimitrios I, proclaimed 1<sup>st</sup> September as a day of prayer for the environment. The Orthodox Church’s liturgical year starts on that day with a commemoration of God’s creation of the world. On 4<sup>th</sup> October, many churches from the Western traditions commemorate Francis of Assisi, the author of the Canticum of Creation. The beginning and closing of the Season of Creation are thus linked with the concern for creation in the Eastern and the Western traditions of Christianity, respectively.

The Christian story is one of redemption for all creation; it is creation’s own story. The belief that, in Jesus, God becomes a human person, in a particular place and time, is a central belief around which all Christians gather. It is a shared belief in the Incarnation which carries with it a profound recognition of the importance of creation – of bodies, food, earth, water, and all that feeds our life as living creatures on the planet. Jesus is fully part of this world. It may be slightly shocking to hear how Jesus heals using his spittle and the dust from the earth; but it is true to this real sense of the created world as integral to God’s bringing us to new life.

Across the world the earth is often worked by the poorest people, who frequently do not themselves share in the fruitfulness that results; such is the experience of many Dalits in India. At the same time it is the Dalit communities who have a particular care for the earth, as the practical wisdom of working the land is shown forth in their labours.

Care of the earth includes basic questions of how human beings are to live within creation, in ways which are more life-enhancing for all. That the earth – its working and ownership – should so often be a source of economic inequalities and degrading work practices is a cause for great concern and action for Christians together. The covenantal recognition of these dangers of exploitation with regard to the earth is spoken about in Leviticus’ instructions concerning the Year of Jubilee: the land and its fruits are not given to be an opportunity for “taking advantage of one another”. Rather, the working of the land is for the benefit of all. This is not just a religious idea; it is tied to very ecological, economic and business practices concerning how the land is managed, bought and sold.

**Questions for reflection/ discussion**

1. What do you think is signified by Jesus’ using his spittle and the dust of the earth to heal a blind man? What did the water have to do with it?
2. What do you understand about the biblical concept of “jubilee”? Where outside the bible have you come across it?
3. Today’s readings invite Christians into a deep unity of action in common concern for the earth. Where do we practice the spirit of the year of Jubilee in our life as Christians together?
4. Where, in our Christian communities, are we complicit with things that degrade and exploit the earth? Where can we work more, individually and together, in learning and teaching reverence for God’s creation?

**Prayer for the Day:** God of life, we thank you for the earth, and for those who care for it and bring forth its fruits. May the Spirit, the giver of life, help us to recognise that we are part of creation’s web of relationships. May we learn to cherish the earth, and to hear and respond to creation’s groaning. May we truly walk together in the steps of Christ, bringing reform to all that wounds this earth, and ensuring a just sharing of the things that it brings forth. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.



National Council of  
**Churches in Australia**  
Faith and Unity Commission





**DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the  
WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY  
12 MAY – 19 MAY 2013**

**DAY 5—THURSDAY 16 MAY**

**“Walking as the friends of Jesus”**

**Scripture Readings**

<b>Song of Solomon 1.5-8</b>	Love and the beloved
<b>Psalms 139.1-6</b>	You have searched me out and known me
<b>3 John 2-8</b>	Hospitality to friends in Christ
<b>John 15.12-17</b>	I call you friends

**“Walking as the friends of Jesus”**

Today we reflect on the biblical images of human friendship and love as models for God’s love for every human being. Understanding ourselves as beloved friends of God has consequences for relationships within the community of Jesus. Within the Church, all barriers of exclusion are inconsistent within a community in which all are equally the beloved friends of Jesus.

**Commentary:**

To walk humbly with God does not mean walking alone. It means walking with those who are the vital signs of God’s presence among us, our friends. “But I have called you friends”, says Jesus in John’s Gospel. Within the freedom of love, we are able to choose our friends, and to be chosen as a friend. “You did not choose me, but I chose you”, Jesus says to each of us. Jesus’ friendship with each of us transfigures and transcends our relationships with family and society. It speaks of God’s deep and abiding love for us all.

The Bible’s love poem, the Song of Solomon, has been interpreted in various ways such as the love of God for Israel, or the love of Christ for the Church. It remains the testimony of passion between lovers which transcends the imposed boundaries of society. While the young woman says to the other women: “I am black and beautiful”, her words come with the plea: “Do not gaze at me because I am dark.” But her lover does gaze, and chooses love, as does God in Christ. Dalits know that when God gazes upon them it is with this same passionate love. When Christ says to Dalits: “I have called you friends”, it is a form of liberation from the inhumanity and injustice inflicted upon them by the caste system. In India today, it is a costly response for a Dalit to become a friend of Jesus.

What does the Lord require of those called to walk with Jesus and his friends? In India it is a call to the churches to embrace the Dalits as equal friends of their common friend. Such a call to be friends with the friends of Jesus is another way of understanding the unity of Christians for which we pray this week. Christians around the world are called to be friends with all those who struggle against discrimination and injustice. The walk towards Christian unity requires that we walk humbly with God with, and as, the friends of Jesus.

**Questions for reflection/discussion**

1. Who are the “Dalits” in Australian society today? In what ways are they disadvantaged, marginalized and discriminated against?
2. Who are those in your communities whom Christ calls into your friendship?
3. What makes it hard to be friends with others? What makes a friendship? What breaks one?
4. What prevents the friends of Jesus from being friends with one another?
5. How does being the friends of the same Jesus challenge the divided churches?

**Prayer for the Day**

Jesus, from the first moment of our being you offered us your friendship. Your love embraces all peoples, especially those who are excluded or rejected because of human constructions of caste, race, colour or background. Filled with the confidence and assurance of our dignity in you, may we walk in solidarity towards each other, and embrace each other in the Spirit, as children of God.

God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.



**National Council of  
Churches in Australia**  
Faith and Unity Commission



DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the  
**WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**  
12 MAY – 19 MAY 2013

DAY 6—FRIDAY 17 MAY

**“Walking beyond barriers”**

**Scripture Readings**

Ruth 4.13-18	The offspring of Ruth and Boaz
Psalms 113	God the helper of the needy
Ephesians 2.13-16	Christ has broken down the dividing wall between us
Matthew 15.21-28	Jesus and the Canaanite woman

**“Walking beyond barriers”**

Walking with God means walking beyond barriers that divide and damage the children of God. The biblical readings today look at various ways in which human barriers are overcome, culminating in St Paul’s teaching that “You who are many were baptized into Christ and have clothed yourselves with Christ. So there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”. (Gal. 3: 27-28)

**Commentary:**

To walk humbly with God means walking beyond barriers that divide and damage the children of God. Christians in India are aware of the divisions among themselves. The treatment of Dalits within the churches and between them is a church-dividing issue that betrays the biblical vision of that unity for which we pray this week. St Paul lived with the devastating divisions in the earliest Christian community between Gentile and Jewish Christians. To this barrier and to every subsequent one, Paul proclaims that Christ “is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall between us.” Elsewhere Paul writes: “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3.27-28). In Christ, all the deep barriers of the ancient world, and their modern successors, have been removed, because on the Cross Jesus created in himself one new humanity.

In a world in which religious barriers are often difficult to cross, Christians who are a tiny minority in the multi-religious context of India remind us of the importance of interreligious dialogue and cooperation. Matthew’s Gospel tells of the difficult journey for Jesus, and his disciples, to cross the barriers of religion, culture and gender when he is confronted by a Canaanite woman who pleads with Jesus to cure her daughter. The disciples’ visceral instinct to send her away and Jesus’ own hesitation are overcome by her faith, and by her need. From hence Jesus and his disciples were able to cross the imposed human barriers and boundaries of the ancient world.

Such is already present in the Hebrew Bible. The book of Ruth, the story of a Moabite woman of a different culture and religion, concludes with a list of her offspring with her Israelite husband, Boaz. Their child Obed was the father of Jesse, the father of David. The ancestry of the hero-King of ancient Israel reflects the fact that God’s will may be fulfilled when people cross the barriers of religion and culture. The walk with God today requires that we cross the barriers that separate Christians from one another and from people of other faiths. The walk towards Christian unity requires walking humbly with God beyond the barriers that separate us from one another.

**Questions for reflection/discussion**

1. What are the barriers that separate Christians in your community? What are the things that unite Christians in your community? When and how do Christians in your community meet, worship, celebrate and act together?
2. On what social issues are Christians united in Australia? How, when and why do Christian leaders speak out in public together? How is this reported in the media?
3. What are the barriers that separate Christians from other religious traditions in your community?
4. What are the differences and similarities between walking beyond the barriers that separate Christians from one another, and walking beyond those between Christianity and other religions?

**Prayer for the Day:** Gracious God, forgive us for the barriers of greed, prejudice, and contempt that we continually build, which separate us within and between churches, from people of other faiths, and from those we consider to be less important than us. May your Spirit give us courage to cross these boundaries, and to tear down the walls that disconnect us from each other. Then with Christ may we step forth into unknown terrain, to carry his message of loving acceptance and unity to all the world. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.



National Council of  
**Churches in Australia**  
Faith and Unity Commission



**DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the  
WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY  
12 MAY – 19 MAY 2013**

**DAY 7—SATURDAY 18 MAY**

**“Walking in solidarity”**

**Scripture Readings**

<b>Numbers 27.1-11</b>	The right of inheritance to daughters
<b>Psalms 15</b>	Who shall abide in God’s sanctuary?
<b>Acts 2.43-47</b>	The disciples held all things in common
<b>Luke 10.25-37</b>	The Good Samaritan

**“Walking in solidarity”**

To walk humbly with God means walking in solidarity with all who struggle for justice and peace. Walking in solidarity has implications not just for individual believers, but for the very nature and mission of the whole Christian community. The Church is called and empowered to share the suffering of all by advocacy and care for the poor, the needy and the marginalised. Such is implicit in our prayer for Christian unity this week.

**Commentary:**

To walk humbly with God means walking in solidarity with all who struggle for justice and peace. This poses a question for those who pray for the unity of Christians this week: what is the unity we seek? The Faith and Order Commission, which includes the members of the fellowship of the World Council of Churches as well as the Catholic Church, understands unity as: “Visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship.” The ecumenical movement is dedicated to overcoming the historic and current barriers that divide Christians, but it does so with a vision of visible unity that links the nature and mission of the Church in the service of the unity of humankind, and the overcoming of all that harms the dignity of human beings and keeps us apart. As Faith and Order has said:

*The Church is called and empowered to share the suffering of all by advocacy and care for the poor, the needy and the marginalised. This entails critically analysing and exposing unjust structures, and working for their transformation ... This faithful witness may involve Christians themselves in suffering for the sake of the Gospel. The Church is called to heal and reconcile broken human relationships, and to be God’s instrument in the reconciliation of human division and hatred (Nature and Mission of the Church).*

There are many examples of such acts of healing and reconciliation by the Indian churches. Dalit Christians remind us of other kinds of injustice and the ways in which they are overcome. Until very recently, Christian inheritance laws in India disempowered daughters. The churches supported the demand for a repeal of this archaic law. The story of the daughters of Zelophehad, in which Moses turned to God for justice in support of the rights of the daughters, was invoked to demand justice for women. Thus, Dalit Christians have been moved in their struggles for justice by such biblical witness. They have engaged with Dalits of other faiths and with secular networks and social movements in India and all over the world in their resistance to injustice. Dalits have been inspired in their struggle for justice by the examples of other movements for social reform.

A biblical image of the church united in solidarity with the oppressed is Jesus’s parable of the Good Samaritan. Like the Dalits, the Good Samaritan is from a despised and outcast community. But he is the one in the story who cares for the man abandoned by the wayside, and who proclaims by his solidarity in action, the hope and comfort of the Gospel. The walk towards Christian unity is inseparable from walking humbly with God in solidarity with any and all in need of justice and kindness.

**Questions for reflection/discussion**

1. Think (and share if you are able) of a time when you have had to stand in solidarity with someone in need, suffering injustice or exclusion. What was that like? Has someone stood with you in such a time? Has there been a time when you felt you failed to stand with someone in such a time? Where is God in all of this?
2. Who in your local community stands in need of the solidarity of the Christian community?
3. What churches are, or have been, in solidarity with you? In what need/issue?
4. In what ways would more visible Christian unity enhance the Church’s solidarity with those who stand in need of justice and kindness in your context?

**Prayer for the Day**

Triune God, in your very being you offer us a unique pattern of interdependence, loving relationships and solidarity. Enable us to live our lives in this way. Teach us to share the hope that we find in people who struggle for life all over the world. May their endurance inspire us to overcome our own divisions, to live in holy accord with one another, and to walk together in solidarity. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.



**National Council of  
Churches in Australia**  
Faith and Unity Commission



DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the  
WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY  
12 MAY – 19 MAY 2013

DAY 8—SUNDAY 19 MAY

“Walking in celebration”

Scripture Readings

Habakkuk 3.17-19	Celebrating in a time of hardship
Psalms 100	The worship of God through all the earth
Philippians 4.4-9	Rejoice in the Lord always
Luke 1:46-55	The Song of Mary

“Walking in celebration”

Today’s biblical texts speak about celebration, not in the sense of celebrating a successful completion, but celebration as a sign of hope in God and in God’s justice. Similarly, the celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is our sign of hope that our unity will be achieved according to God’s time and God’s means.

Commentary:

To walk humbly with God means to walk in celebration. The visitor to India is struck by the hardships and struggles endured by Dalits, but at the same time by their sense of hope and celebration. There was a slum on railway land near Bangalore that was inhabited largely by Dalits and other “backward classes” who were migrant workers from Tamilnadu who came to build the original railways before Indian independence. After the community was threatened by expulsion by the railway company in the early 1980s, the community, through its women’s leadership, organized itself in such a way that it was able to find new land, and build permanent housing for nearly a thousand people. The community of Dalits and others moved into their new homes in 2011, homes paid for by themselves. This is but one instance of struggle against injustice carried out with great hope, which calls forth celebration.

Hope and celebration occur together in today’s Bible readings. The prophet Habakkuk rejoices in the Lord at a time of drought and crop failure. Such testimony that God will walk with his people in their difficulties is a celebration of hope. The Blessed Virgin Mary walks to her cousin Elizabeth in order to celebrate her pregnancy. She sings her ‘Magnificat’ as a song of hope even before the birth of her child. And from prison, Paul exhorts the Christian community at Philippi to celebration: “Rejoice in the Lord always!” In the Bible, celebration is linked to hope in God’s faithfulness.

The celebratory aspects of Dalit culture bear similar testimony to a gospel of faith and hope, forged out of the crucible of the Dalit experience of struggle for dignity and resilient survival. As we pray for Christian unity this week, we turn to the celebration of life that we see in India, with focus on the faithfulness of Dalits to their Christian identity in the context of their struggles for life. Our celebration for a unity among Christians which has yet to be achieved likewise occurs in hope and struggle. It is grounded in hope that Christ’s prayer that we may be one will be achieved in God’s time and through God’s means. It is grounded in gratitude that unity is God’s gift, and in recognition of the unity we already experience as the friends of Jesus, expressed in one baptism. It is grounded in the conviction that God calls each of us to work for that unity, and that all our efforts will be used by God, trusting with St Paul: “In everything by prayer and thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” The walk towards Christian unity requires that we walk humbly with God in celebration, in prayer, and in hope.

Questions for reflection/discussion

1. “We have been called not only to pray together but to play together.” Why is it important to celebrate and rejoice with one another? How/when/what does your congregation celebrate?
2. Recall and think/talk about some of the celebration stories in the Bible.
3. What are the struggles towards justice in your community? What are the causes for celebration on the way?
4. What are the struggles towards Christian unity in your community? What are the causes for celebration along the way?

**Prayer for the Day:** Jesus Christ, we proclaim with joy our common identity in you, and we thank you for inviting us into a dialogue of love with you and others. Open our hearts to share more perfectly in your prayer to the Father that we may be one, so that as we journey together we may draw closer to each other. Give us the courage to bear witness to the truth together, and may our conversations embrace those who perpetuate disunity. Send your Spirit to empower us to challenge situations where dignity and compassion are lacking in our societies, nations, and the world. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen

**Acknowledgement:** This resource for Christian unity is based on the international material for the 2013 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which originated with the Student Christian Movement in India, 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. The image Artist: Raymond Trevaiks Photo: Michael Stephenson.

**Donation:** If you have found these resources useful, any donations to help cover the cost of producing the resource will be gratefully received by NCCA Faith and Unity. Locked Bag 199, QVB NSW 1230. Many thanks

**For more information:** ph. (02) 9299 2215 or visit [www.churchestogetherinprayer.org.au](http://www.churchestogetherinprayer.org.au)

