

# TO THOSE ORGANIZING THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

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## **The search for unity: throughout the year**

The traditional period in the northern hemisphere for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is 18-25 January. Those dates were proposed in 1908 by Paul Wattson to cover the days between the feasts of St Peter and St Paul, and therefore have a symbolic significance. In the southern hemisphere where January is a vacation time churches often find other days to celebrate the Week of Prayer, for example around Pentecost (suggested by the Faith and Order movement in 1926), which is also a symbolic date for the unity of the Church.

Mindful of the need for flexibility, we invite you to use this material throughout the whole year to express the degree of communion which the churches have already reached, and to pray together for that full unity which is Christ's will.

## **Adapting the text**

This material is offered with the understanding that, whenever possible, it will be adapted for use in local situations. Account should be taken of local liturgical and devotional practice, and of the whole social and cultural context. Such adaptation should ideally take place ecumenically. In some places ecumenical structures are already set up for adapting the material; in other places, we hope that the need to adapt it will be a stimulus to creating such structures.

## **Using the Week of Prayer material**

- For churches and Christian communities which observe the Week of Prayer together through a single common service, an order for an ecumenical worship service is provided.
- Churches and Christian communities may also incorporate material from the Week of Prayer into their own services. Prayers from the ecumenical worship service, the "eight days", and the selection of additional prayers can be used as appropriate in their own setting.
- Communities which observe the Week of Prayer in their worship for each day during the week may draw material for these services from the "eight days".
- Those wishing to undertake bible studies on the Week of Prayer theme can use as a basis the biblical texts and reflections given in the eight days. Each day the discussions can lead to a closing period of intercessory prayer.
- Those who wish to pray privately may find the material helpful for focusing their prayer intentions. They can be mindful that they are in communion with others praying all around the world for the greater visible unity of Christ's Church.

# BIBLICAL TEXT FOR 2019

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*(Deuteronomy 16:11-20)*

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

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

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

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

New Revised Standard Version

# INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME FOR THE YEAR 2019

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

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

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2019 has been prepared by Christians from Indonesia. With a population of 265 million, 86% of whom are reckoned to be Muslim, Indonesia is well known as having the largest Muslim population of any country. However, about 10% of Indonesians are Christian from various traditions. In terms of both population and the vast extension of the country Indonesia is the biggest nation in South East Asia. It has more than 17,000 islands, 1,340 different ethnic groups and over 740 local languages and yet is united in its plurality by one national language Bahasa Indonesia. The nation is founded on five principles called Pancasila,<sup>1</sup> with the motto *Bhineka Tunggal Ika (Unity in Diversity)*. Across the diversity of ethnicity, language and religion, Indonesians have lived by the principle of *gotong royong* which is to live in solidarity and by collaboration. This means sharing in all aspects of life, work, grief and festivities, and regarding all Indonesians as brothers and sisters.

This always fragile harmony is today threatened in new ways. Much of the economic growth that Indonesia has experienced in recent decades has been built on a system that has competition at its heart. This is in stark contrast to the collaboration of *gotong royong*. Corruption is experienced in many forms. It infects politics and business, often with devastating consequences for the environment. In particular, corruption undermines justice and the implementation of law. Too often those who are supposed to promote justice and protect the weak do the opposite. As a consequence, the gap between the rich and

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<sup>1</sup> The five principles of Pancasila are (1) *Belief in the one and only God*, (2) *Just and civilized humanity*, (3) *The unity of Indonesia*, (4) *Democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations amongst representatives*, (5) *Social justice for all People of Indonesia*.

the poor has widened; and so a country rich in resources has the scandal of many people living in poverty. As a traditional Indonesian saying goes, "A mouse dies of hunger in the barn full of rice." Meanwhile particular ethnic and religious groups are often associated with wealth in ways that have fed tensions. Radicalization that pits one community against another has grown and is exacerbated by the misuse of social media that demonizes particular communities.

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

Moved by these concerns, the Christians of Indonesia found that the words of Deuteronomy, "Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue ..." (see Deut. 16:18-20) spoke powerfully to their situation and needs. Before the people of God enter the land God has promised them they renew their commitment to the Covenant God established with them. The pericope comes in a chapter whose central theme is the festivities to be celebrated by the Covenant people. After each festival the people are instructed, "Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns" (Deut. 16:14, see also 16:11). Indonesian Christians look to recover this same spirit of inclusive festivities across communities, which they previously enjoyed. At the end of this long chapter it may seem strange to have two verses about appointing judges, but in this Indonesian context the links between festivities for all and justice become alive. As people of the Covenant established in Jesus, we know that the delights of the heavenly banquet will be given to those who hunger and thirst and are persecuted for justice "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:6, 10).

Christ's Church is called to be a foretaste of this kingdom. However, in our disunity we fall short. We fail to be the sign of God's love for his people. Just as injustice has widened the divisions that have riven Indonesian society, so injustice has also fed the divisions of the Church. We repent of the injustice that causes division, but as Christians we also believe in the power of Christ to forgive us and heal. And so, we find ourselves united under the cross of Christ, calling both for his grace to end injustice and for his mercy for the sins which have caused our division.

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

- Day 1: Let justice roll down like water (Amos 5: 24)
- Day 2: Let your word be 'Yes, Yes,' or 'No, No' (Matthew 5:37)
- Day 3: The Lord is gracious and merciful to all (Psalm 145: 8)
- Day 4: Be content with what you have (Hebrews 13:5)
- Day 5: To bring good news to the poor (Luke 4: 18)
- Day 6: The Lord of hosts is his name (Jeremiah 10:16)
- Day 7: Woman, great is your faith! (Matthew 15:28)
- Day 8: The Lord is my light and my salvation (Psalm 27: 1).

## **THE PREPARATION OF THE MATERIAL FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2019**

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The preparatory work on the theme for this year's Week of Prayer material was undertaken by a group of representatives of different Christian communities in Indonesia. This ecumenical group was brought together by the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia, PGI) under the leadership of Rev. Dr Henriette T. Hutabarat Lebang, and the Indonesian Catholic Bishops' Conference (Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia, KWI) under the leadership of Mgr Ignatius Suharyo. Gratitude is extended in particular to the leaders of PGI and KWI, and those who contributed to these resources:

- Ms Rahel Daulay, M.L.M. (Church Musician and Lecturer at the Jakarta Theological Seminary, Methodist Church in Indonesia)
- Revd Dr Junifrius Gultom (Director, Graduate Program of the Bethel Theological Seminary in Indonesia, Indonesian Bethel Church)
- Revd Dr Justitia Vox Dei Hattu (Lecturer at the Jakarta Theological Seminary and Minister of the Protestant Church in Moluccas)
- Revd Dr Henriette T. Hutabarat Lebang (General Chairperson of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, Toraja Church)
- Revd Irene Umbu Lolo, M. Th. (Minister of the Christian Church of Sumba)
- Mr Williams Bill Mailoa, S.Si. (B. Th.) (Member of the Liturgy and Church Music Division, Indonesian Christian Church)
- Revd Yolanda Pantou (Commissioner of the Faith and Order and Minister of the Indonesian Christian Church)
- Revd Fr Yohanes Rusae, Lie.Lit. (Secretary of the Liturgical Commission, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Indonesia)

- Ms Susan Fr. Sahusilawane, S.Si. (B. Th.) (Staff of the World Vision Indonesia and Member of the Liturgy and Church Music Resource Centre of the Jakarta Theological Seminary, Protestant Christian Church in Western Indonesia)
- Revd Fr Agus Ulahay (Executive Secretary of the Commission for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Indonesia)
- Revd Sri Yuliana, M. Th. (Executive Secretary of Unity and Church Renewal, Communion of Churches in Indonesia, Christian Church of Southern Sumatra)

The materials of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2019 were presented by the local group to an international team sponsored jointly by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU). At this meeting, held at the PGI's Guest House in Jakarta on 3-8 September 2017, the draft text was edited and finalised.

The international team had the opportunity to worship with the congregations of Gereja Toraja Jemaat Kata and Gereja Katolik Santo Yakobus, both in Kelapa Gatling, Jakarta. A visit to the Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Park helped the international team to understand the diversity and the richness of various cultures and religions of the people of Indonesia as well as the basic principles that unite this big nation. A conversation session with some members of the Indonesian Christian Forum also enriched our understanding of the ecumenical fellowship of churches in Indonesia and its role in building a peaceful and just society of Indonesia.

On the last day of the meeting, the international team had an opportunity to introduce the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and how it is being used in a number of different contexts to the students and faculty members of the Jakarta Theological Seminary (QTS) and to church leaders and lay members at the JTS campus. The staff members of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches also gave a presentation on the Faith and Order document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* that has been translated into Bahasa Indonesia.

The international team would like to thank the leaders of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia for their generosity in hosting us at the Guest House and to the staff members who made our stay so comfortable, especially Revd Sri Yuliana and Mr Abdiel Tania. We also wish to express our gratitude for the support of the staff members of the Catholic Bishops' Conference, in particular Revd Fr Agus Ulahay. Our appreciation also goes to the leaders and staff members of the Jakarta Theological Seminary who helped us in arranging a half-day seminar on their campus.