

**MEDIA RELEASE****12 May 2022****A CALL TO UNITE IN PRAYER****THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**

During these tumultuous times, we have learnt that it is important to focus on the essentials that unite us rather than the differences that divide us.

These past two years have certainly been tumultuous, both individually and as a nation. The pandemic, for example, often changed our daily lives in unimagined ways with just a few hours' notice. The freedom to gather with family and friends, to celebrate milestone events, and to even come together in communal worship of our Lord, stopped. What we had assumed was a right of life became a rare privilege. We spent too much time separated from our wider community.

With limited opportunities to be together in person, local church gatherings – let alone broader ecumenical gatherings – were often restricted to on-line services. While we were thankful for this, the on-line experience did not substitute being together in fellowship with a broad range of faith communities and different Christian traditions.

Believers coming together to worship is highly valued by the members of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA). As you know and have experienced first-hand, the NCCA is committed to deepening relationships with all churches, and focused on glorifying God by working together and worshipping together with other believers.

This is a primary reason for celebrating the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, held this year on May 29-June 5.

In this week prior to Pentecost, where churches celebrate the Holy Spirit filling the first believers and drawing them together as a unified community that worshipped and embodied the risen Christ, this week gives us an opportunity to gather with other churches and engage in one of the practices that both characterise and unite us: prayer to our loving, listening God.

"In a world where individualism seems to be the norm, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity affirms and celebrates our connections to each other and God's call to unity," Reverend John Gilmore, NCCA President, reminds us. "Beyond our differences, there are expressions of warmth, respect and of our common humanity."

How can we embrace this call to express unity?

One way is to hold a simple prayer service or gathering during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and to open it to all believers in your area. As we have often experienced, there is a profound sense of unity when we listen to and join with the prayers of people from different traditions. We express that we are one and are seeking to communicate with the One.

Reverend Anne Hewitt, General Secretary of Churches Together SA, encourages us that these displays of unity can do more than just make us feel closer. Unity can help pave the way for a deeper connection – something we have yearned for during these pandemic years. "Let's celebrate that we hold the same Wisdom of the Spirit and express it in different ways," she says, "so that we bring understanding to our misunderstanding. Our spiritual ecumenism will draw us closer to God and in so doing, to each other."

The NCCA is delighted to offer free resources focusing on unity, and they can be found at [www.ncca.org.au/faith-and-unity-resources/wopcu22](http://www.ncca.org.au/faith-and-unity-resources/wopcu22). The 2022 theme for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – “We saw the star in the East, and we came to worship.” (Matthew 2:2) – was chosen by the Middle East Council of Churches. In such difficult times, it is good for those who may have more experience of living in tumultuous times to point out that there is always a light that shines in the darkness.

We know, too, that when we gather in unity, we can reflect that light to others.

During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we ask you to continue to open your hearts and your doors to other believers, and to join with them in prayer – in doing so, we will hear their heart and also God’s.

By Craig Brown

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