

*Resources for*  
**THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**  
*and throughout the year*

2025

“Do you believe this?”

*(John 11:26)*

*Jointly prepared and published by*  
Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity  
Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches

# 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, which this year includes a challenge, 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 2025

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### *John 11:17-27*

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him". Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again". Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day". Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world".

*New Revised Standard Version*

# INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME FOR THE YEAR 2025

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## **“Do you believe this?”**

*(John 11:26)*

For this year, 2025, the prayers and reflections for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity were prepared by the brothers and sisters of the monastic community of Bose in northern Italy. This year marks the 1,700th anniversary of the first Christian Ecumenical Council, held in Nicaea, near Constantinople in 325 AD. This commemoration provides a unique opportunity to reflect on and celebrate the common faith of Christians, as expressed in the Creed formulated during this Council; a faith that remains alive and fruitful in our days. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2025 offers an invitation to draw on this shared heritage and to enter more deeply into the faith that unites all Christians.

### **The Council of Nicaea**

Convoked by the Emperor Constantine, the Council of Nicaea was attended, according to tradition, by 318 Fathers, mostly from the East. The Church, having just emerged from hiding and persecution, was beginning to experience how difficult it was to share the same faith in the different cultural and political contexts of the time. Agreement on the text of the Creed was a matter of defining the essential common foundations on which to build local communities that recognised each other as sister churches, each respecting the diversity of the other.

Disagreements had arisen among Christians in the previous decades, which sometimes degenerated into serious conflicts. These disputes were on matters as diverse as: the nature of Christ in relation to the Father; the question of a single date to celebrate Easter and its relationship with the Jewish Passover; opposition to theological opinions considered heretical; and how to re-integrate believers who had abandoned the faith during the persecutions in earlier years.

The approved text of the Creed used the first-person plural, “We believe...”. This form emphasised the expression of a common belonging. The Creed was divided into three parts dedicated to the three persons of the Trinity, followed by a conclusion condemning affirmations that were considered heretical. The text of this Creed was revised and expanded at the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD, where the condemnations were removed. This is the form of the profession of faith that Christian churches today recognise as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, often referred to simply as the Nicene Creed.

### **From 325 to 2025**

Although the Council of Nicaea decreed how the date of Easter should be calculated, subsequent divergences of interpretation led to the feast frequently being marked on different dates in East and West. Though we are still awaiting the day when we will again have a common celebration of Easter yearly, by happy coincidence, in this anniversary year of 2025, this great feast will be celebrated on the same date by the Eastern and Western churches.

The meaning of the saving events which all Christians will celebrate on Easter Sunday, 20 April 2025, has not changed with the passage of seventeen centuries. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an opportunity for Christians to explore afresh this living heritage and re-appropriate it in

ways that are in keeping with contemporary cultures, which are even more diverse today than those of the Christian world at the time of the Council of Nicaea. Living the apostolic faith together today does not imply re-opening the theological controversies of that time, which have continued down the centuries, but rather a prayerful re-reading of the scriptural foundations and ecclesial experiences that led to that Council and its decisions.

## **The Biblical Text for the Week of Prayer**

It is with this in mind that the guiding biblical text was chosen – John 11:17-27. The theme for the week, “Do you believe this?” (v. 26), takes its cue from the dialogue between Jesus and Martha when Jesus visited the home of Martha and Mary in Bethany following the death of their brother Lazarus, as narrated by the evangelist John.

At the start of the chapter, the Gospel says that Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus (v. 5), yet when informed that Lazarus was gravely ill, Jesus declared that his illness would “not lead to death” but that the Son of God would be “glorified through it” (v. 4), and remained where he was for two days longer. When Jesus eventually arrived in Bethany, despite being warned of the risk of being stoned there (v. 8), Lazarus “had already been in the tomb for four days” (v. 17). Martha’s words to Jesus express her disappointment at his late arrival, perhaps containing also a note of reproach: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (v. 21). However, this exclamation is followed immediately by a profession of confidence in Jesus’ saving power: “But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him” (v. 22). When Jesus assures her that her brother would rise again (v. 23), she responds by affirming her religious belief: “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day” (v. 24). Jesus leads her a step further, declaring his power over life and death and revealing his identity as the Messiah. “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (vv. 25-26). Following this astonishing declaration, Jesus challenges Martha with a very direct and deeply personal question: “Do you believe this?” (v. 26.)

Like Martha, the first generations of Christians could not remain indifferent or passive when the words of Jesus touched and searched their hearts. They earnestly sought to give a comprehensible answer to Jesus’ question, “Do you believe this?” The Fathers of Nicaea strove to find words that would embrace the entire mystery of the incarnation and the passion, death and resurrection of their Lord. While awaiting his return, Christians around the world are called to witness together to this faith in the resurrection, which is for them the source of hope and joy, to be shared with all peoples.

## **Ecumenical Celebration of the Word of God**

In this anniversary year of the Council of Nicaea, the Ecumenical Celebration of the Word of God during the Week of Prayer is centred on the meaning of believing and on the affirmation of faith, both personal and communal, both “I believe” and “We believe”. The biblical text from which the theme for the week is drawn, with its challenging question, “Do you believe this?”, is proclaimed in a dialogue between three readers and the assembly as part of the invitation to worship. After a brief introduction to the first Ecumenical Council, an opening prayer inspired by Clement of Rome (c. 35-99 AD) leads into the Old Testament and New Testament readings.

After the sermon/homily, the dialogue between readers and assembly continues, echoing the dialogue between Jesus and Martha. The participants are invited to celebrate their common faith, by receiving a candle, and sharing its flame with one another as a sign of the light of the Risen Christ. They then recite the Nicene Creed together.

The Prayers of Intercession, based on patristic<sup>1</sup> writings from the second to the eighth centuries, are a call to grow in faith, and to bear witness to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, together, in the world. All who are present then pray the Lord's Prayer together and are sent out with a blessing.

### **Material for each day of the Week of Prayer**

The texts provided for personal or communal prayer for each of the eight days include two scripture readings and a psalm. The biblical texts for each day highlight in turn key statements of the Nicene Creed.

Day 1: The fatherhood and care of God who rules the universe

Day 2: Creation as God's work

Day 3: The Incarnation of the Son

Day 4: The Paschal Mystery: Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus

Day 5: The Holy Spirit, the giver of life and joy

Day 6: The Church: Community of believers

Day 7: Baptism into the Death and Resurrection of the Lord

Day 8: Waiting for the Kingdom and the life to come

Instead of newly-written reflections for each day, the scripture texts are followed by short patristic readings from different geographical areas and ecclesial traditions (Greek, Syriac, Armenian and Latin). The aim in selecting these short texts, mostly dating from the first millennium, is to offer an insight into Christian reflection at that time, helping to situate the Council of Nicaea's definitions in both the contexts that gave rise to them and those that were influenced by them. The prayers of intercession and contemplation for each day invite us to actualise the content of the faith shared and celebrated throughout the ages and around the world, finding in it a motive for thanksgiving.

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1. By early Christian authors.

# THE PREPARATION OF THE MATERIAL FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2025

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The international team appointed jointly by the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity (DPCU) and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to review and finalise the materials for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2025 met at the Monastery of Bose, Italy from 11 to 15 September 2023.

The drafting of the materials had been entrusted by the DPCU and the WCC to the community of Bose and a group of brothers and sisters of the community prepared the first draft of the texts. During the meeting in Bose, this group collaborated with the international team to finalise the texts. The meeting was chaired jointly by Revd Dr Mikie Roberts of the World Council of Churches in Geneva and Revd Fr Martin Browne OSB of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity in Rome.

## **Members of the international group participating**

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## **Members of the Bose Community drafting group participating**

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