

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY

Resources for

**THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY
and throughout the year 2009**

That they may become one in your hand (Ezek 37, 17)

Jointly prepared and published by
The Pontifical Council for Christian Unity
The Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches

To those organizing the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

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 (which was suggested by the Faith and Order movement in 1926), which is also a symbolic date for the unity of the church.

Mindful of this flexibility concerning the date, we encourage you to understand the material presented here as an invitation to find opportunities throughout the whole year to express the degree of communion which the churches have already received, 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 at the local level. In doing this, account must be taken of local liturgical and devotional practice, and of the whole social and cultural context. Such adaptation should normally 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 do 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.

Ezekiel 37: 15-28

The word of the Lord came to me: Mortal, take a stick and write on it, 'For Judah, and the Israelites associated with it'; then take another stick and write on it, 'For Joseph (the stick of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel associated with it'; and join them together into one stick, so that they may become one in your hand. And when your people say to you, 'Will you not show us what you mean by these?' say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am about to take the stick of Joseph (which is in the hand of Ephraim) and the tribes of Israel associated with it; and I will put the stick of Judah upon it, and make them one stick, in order that they may be one in my hand. When the sticks on which you write are in your hand before their eyes, then say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from every quarter, and bring them to their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all. Never again shall they be two nations, and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms. They shall never again defile themselves with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. I will save them from all the apostasies into which they have fallen, from all the settlements in which they have sinned and will cleanse them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. They shall live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, in which your ancestors lived; they and their children and their children's children shall live there for ever; and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them for evermore. My dwelling-place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations shall know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is among them for evermore.

(NRSV)

Introduction to the Theme of the Week of Prayer for 2009

The biblical theme

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2009 is rooted in the experience of the churches in Korea. In their context of national division the churches have turned for inspiration to the prophet Ezekiel, who also lived in a tragically divided nation and longed for the unity of his people.

Both prophet and priest, Ezekiel was called by God at the young age of 30. Working from 594 through 571 BC, he was greatly influenced by the religious and political reforms which King Josiah had begun in 621 BC. King Josiah had sought to eliminate the destructive legacy of the earlier Assyrian conquest of Judah, through reforms which restored the law and the true worship of the God of Israel. But after Josiah's death in battle, his son King Jehoiakim paid homage to Egypt and worship to a variety of gods flourished. Prophets daring to criticize Jehoiakim were brutally suppressed: Uriah was executed and Jeremiah banished. After the Babylonian invasion and destruction of the temple in 587 BC the leaders and craftsmen of the nation – the young Ezekiel among them – were captured and taken to Babylon. There Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, criticized the "prophets" who were offering unrealistic hopes, and because of this had to endure the hostility and contempt of his fellow Israelites in exile.

Yet in such great suffering, Ezekiel's love for his people only grew. He criticized leaders who acted against God's commandments and sought to guide the people back to God, emphasizing God's faithfulness to God's covenant and solidarity with God's people. Above all, in this apparently hopeless situation Ezekiel did not despair but proclaimed a message of hope: God's original intention for the renewal and the unity of God's people may yet be realized. Ezekiel was encouraged in his efforts by two visions, the first being the familiar vision of the valley of dry bones which, through the action of God's Spirit, are restored from death to life (Ezekiel 37: 1-14).

This year's week of prayer materials are based on Ezekiel's second vision which depicts two pieces of wood, symbolizing the two kingdoms into which Israel had been divided. The names of the tribes in each of the divided kingdoms (two of the original twelve in the North, and ten in the South) are written upon the pieces of wood, which are then brought together again into one (Ezekiel 37: 15-23).

According to Ezekiel the division of the people reflected - and resulted from - their sinfulness and alienation from God. They may become again one people by renouncing their sins, undergoing conversion, and returning to God. Yet ultimately it is God who unites God's people by purifying, renewing and liberating them from their divisions. For Ezekiel this unity is not simply the joining of previously divided groups; it is rather a new creation, the birth of a new people which should be a sign of hope to other peoples and indeed to all of humanity.

The theme of hope is also expressed in another text which is dear to the churches in Korea. Revelation 21: 3-4 points to the purification of God's people, to embody the true peace, reconciliation, and unity which is to be found where God dwells: "He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more..."

It is these biblical themes - unity as God's intention for God's people; unity as God's gift, but requiring conversion and renewal; unity as a new creation; and the hope that God's people may yet be one - which have inspired the Korean churches in offering these Week of Prayer materials for 2009.

The theological theme

In the year 2009, Christians around the world will pray for unity: "that they may be one in your hand" (Ezekiel 37: 17). Ezekiel - the name meaning "God makes him strong" - was called upon to give his people hope in the desperate religious and political situation following the fall and occupation of Israel, and the exile of many of its people.

The local group from Korea found that the text of Ezekiel offered some compelling parallels to their own situation within a divided country and for a divided Christendom. Ezekiel's words give them hope that God will gather God's people again into one, calling them God's own, and blessing them to make them a mighty people. A new ultimate hope is born: that God will create a new world. Just as in the text of Ezekiel, where sinfulness is seen in all its ramifications of the people being defiled through their idolatry and transgressions, so too with the sinfulness of the disunity of Christians, which has caused great scandal in today's world.

In the reading of this text from the Old Testament, Christians may reflect on how we may understand its application to our own situation of division. In particular we see how God is the one who restores unity, reconciles people, and brings a new situation into being. The role of Israel united, forgiven and purified becomes a sign of hope for all the world.

As noted above, this prophecy of the two sticks of wood joined into one is the second prophecy to be found in Ezekiel 37. The first, which is probably more familiar to the churches, is that of the dry bones which come to life again through the action of God's Spirit. In both prophecies God is seen to be the originator of life, of a new beginning. In the first prophecy God's Spirit is the spirit of life. In the second, God himself brings about unity, reconciliation and peace within a divided nation. In other words, new life is given through the union of the two divided parts.

Christians may see in this a prefiguration of what Christ will bring about, namely new life which comes through conquering death, in obedience to God's salvific will. From the two pieces of wood which form his cross, Jesus reconciles us to God; with this, humanity is infused with new hope. In spite of our sinfulness, in spite of our violence and wars, in spite of the disparity between rich and poor, in spite of our abuse of creation, in spite of disease and suffering, in spite of discrimination, and in spite of our disunity and divisions, Jesus Christ -through his outstretched hands on the cross - embraces all of creation and offers us God's shalom. In his hands we are one, as we are drawn to him who is lifted up on the cross.

From the situation of a country which is divided, but has the will to overcome not only political divisions but also divisions among Christian churches, the Korean churches propose the theme for the week of prayer 2009: "That they may become one in your hand". They find that new hope is born from their reflection on God's action to reconcile and bring shalom to God's people.

The eight days

Flowing from the central text taken from Ezekiel, our reflection during the “eight days” of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity brings us to a deeper awareness of how the unity of the church is also for the sake of the renewal of human community. With this awareness comes a grave responsibility: that all those who confess Christ as Lord should seek to fulfil his prayer “that they may all be one so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17: 21).

This is why the eight days begin with a reflection on the unity of Christians. Contemplating our doctrinal divisions, and our scandalous history of separation - and sometimes even hatred - among Christians, we pray that the God who breathes the Spirit of life into dry bones, and who moulds in his hands our unity amidst diversity, will breathe life and reconciliation upon our dryness and division today. On this and each of the eight days, we are invited to pray for situations in our world where reconciliation is needed, especially attentive to the role that the unity of Christians will play in bringing about this reconciliation.

On Day 2 the churches will pray for an overcoming and end to war and violence. We pray that as disciples of the Prince of Peace, Christians in the midst of conflicts can bring about a reconciliation rooted in hope. Day 3 will offer a meditation on the great disparity between the rich and the poor. Our relationship to money, our attitude toward the poor, is a gauge of our discipleship in the following of Jesus, who came among us to set us free and to proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to slaves and justice for all.

The intention of Day 4 prays that Christians will realize that only together will they be able to protect the gifts that God gives us in creation, the air that we breathe, the earth that bears fruit and the creation that glorifies its maker. On Day 5 we pray for the cessation of prejudice and discrimination that mark our societies today. As we recognize that our dignity comes from God, our unity as Christians witnesses to the unity of the one who creates each of us as a unique being of God’s love. The kingdom that we are called to build up is one of justice and love that respects difference because in Christ we are all one.

On Day 6 we remember in prayer all those who suffer and those who serve them. The psalms help us to see that language of crying out to God in pain or in anger can be an expression of a deep and faithful relationship with God. The merciful response of Christians to the plight of those who suffer is a sign of the kingdom. Together Christian churches can make a difference in helping to obtain for the sick the support they need, both material and spiritual.

Day 7 finds Christians confronted with pluralism praying for their unity in God. Without that unity it will be difficult to build a kingdom of peace with all men and women of good will. Our prayer intentions come full circle on Day 8 when we pray that the spirit of the Beatitudes will overcome the spirit of this world. Christians carry the hope that all things are being made new in a new order established by Christ. This enables Christians to be bearers of hope and artisans of reconciliation in the midst of wars, poverty, discrimination, and other contexts where human beings suffer and creation is groaning.

The Preparation of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2009

Source material

A first draft of this year’s week of prayer material was prepared by a group of representatives from the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea (CBCK) and the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCK). Rev. Dr Chai Soo-il, professor at Han Shin University, PROK / NCCK; Rev. Dr Kim Woong-Tae, president, Dong-Sung High School CBCK; Rev. Dr Shim Kwang-Sup, professor at Methodist Theological Seminary, KMC, NCCK; Ms Jung Hae-Sun, executive secretary, NCCK; Rev. Fr Kang Diego, member of Consolata missionaries in Korea, CBCK; Ms Han Mi-Sook, member of the Focolare movement, Korea, CBCK. We thank them most warmly for their hard work and their perspicacity.

The international preparatory meeting in Marseilles, France

For some years, a member of the international preparatory team for the week of prayer had been urging that team to hold its meeting in Marseilles. He spoke of an interesting social movement in the city: a group of

religious leaders of different confessions, faiths and cultures had been formed around the office of the mayor, with a view to ensuring communication between faith groups, improving relations and preventing polarisation between various sectors of the population in the city.

This organization is known as *Marseille Espérance* (the Hope of Marseilles). Standing together, the members have spoken out against local and international actions which had an element of religious intolerance or hatred (desecration of tombs, the September 11 attacks in New York, etc.) and believe that their united stance in favour of tolerance has helped avoid some of the inter-faith and inter-cultural troubles which have marked other European cities. Not linked to any political party, they keep silence around election time. (Secularism is a strict principle of French public life.) Leaving theological dialogue to other groups, their prime interest is peace in the city.

Thus the international preparatory team of Protestants, Orthodox and Catholics, together with two members of the Korean group which produced the source text (and their two advisors) met from 24-29 September 2007, at *Centre Notre Dame du Roucas*, run by *Chemin Neuf*, a hospitable Roman Catholic community with an ecumenical vocation, in a sunny house overlooking the sea and close to the basilica of *Notre Dame de la Garde*. The work of adapting a text which had been written in Korean, translated into English and would now be edited for international use, took place in an atmosphere of cheerful confidence, engendered by mutual respect among members of the team. At the end of the meeting, the representatives from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity warmly thanked Faith and Order Director, Tom Best, and Carolyn McComish, who would both shortly retire, for their many years of collaboration in the work of the international preparatory group.

During the week the team was invited to meet with the members of *Marseille Espérance (ME)* to learn about their activities and then to visit various sites significant to ME in the city – including the ancient church of Saint Victor and a local mosque. We thank *Marseille Espérance* for their welcome, hospitality and evocation of their activities as well as for their interest in the work of the international preparatory team. The international team prays that the work of *Marseille Espérance* continues not only to keep peace in the city, but that through its example of religious tolerance, it enriches the life of the population of Marseilles.

Introduction to the Worship Service

“that they may become one in your hand” (*Ezek 37: 17*)

In this text from Ezekiel (37: 15-19, 22-24a), we discover God’s fervent wish for the unity of the divided tribes of Israel. Ezekiel’s inspired prophetic gesture of joining together two pieces of wood represents the reunification of the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel: “join them together into one stick, so that they may become one in your hand” (Ezekiel 37: 17).

God is relying on his prophet to bring about this work of renewal in unity. Thus Ezekiel is charged with the mission of announcing to Israel that it is God’s wish to bring together the tribes and “hold them together in his hand”.

Ezekiel must also call the people to repentance in order to prepare the way for this future state of reconciliation and peace which will only come about through Israel’s sincere conversion. It is the task of the prophet to proclaim its urgent necessity in the name of the Lord. Whoever desires unity according to the Covenant must turn away from idols and be cleansed by God. “I will save them from all the apostasies into which they have fallen and will cleanse them. Then they shall be my people and I will be their God.” Hope will be rekindled through renewal of faithfulness to God.

In the time of Ezekiel, Israel longed for national unity. We Christians, sent to all the nations, hope and pray for full communion *in Christ*. Thus, this worship service based on Ezekiel 37 calls us to interpret - *in the light of Christ* - the prophet’s call for the unity of the people of God.

Order of service

The celebration begins with the sound of a gong, evocation of our communion in prayer with the Christians of Korea. In the spirit of Ezekiel calling his people to conversion, the penitential rite urges us - as faithful servants of

God and Christian unity - to follow the paths of the personal and ecclesial renewal which lead towards full communion.

The service of the word opens by calling us to strengthen our faith in the Father's desire for unity (Ezek 37: 15-19, 22-24a). The Epistle to the Romans (Rom 8: 18-25) assures us that together with creation itself we are held in the hands of God and that the Holy Spirit intercedes in our favour. The gospel (John 17: 8-11) affirms that the gift of our spiritual unity has been won for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Through the intercessions we share in Jesus' hope and prayer for our perfect unity, and in his impatience to see us working in the unity of love for the regeneration of the world, through justice and peace.

At the conclusion of the service we proclaim with Romans 8: 38 that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, for God our Father has made all things new in him. God sends us to witness to this new creation. It is an encouragement for all those Christians who through their ecumenical commitment also contribute to this new state of unity in the risen Christ.

Material needed: gong, Bible, about a dozen wooden sticks or poles and some means of tying them together for the symbolic action.

Order of Service

Opening

(The gong is sounded three times to indicate the beginning of the service.)

L: Leader
R: Reader
A: Assembly

Salutation

L. May the grace and peace of God our Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit be with you always
A. *And also with you*

Opening psalm : Ps 146 (*or another hymn or psalm may be sung*)

Procession of worship leaders together with those participants carrying the Bible and sticks/poles to bind together as a symbol of unity inspired by the Ezekiel text. The pole bearers stand before the cross or in the liturgical space at the head of the church.

(moment of silence)

L: Come near to God, let us come near to God, who is merciful towards us and the source of our hope and longing.

(This invitation could be spoken in Korean to underline the fact that it is the Christians of that country who are helping us to pray for Christian unity this year: Kadja Heemang-e dju-nim-kke).

Penitential rite

L: This year's worship has been proposed by Christians in Korea, one people divided into two countries. We will hear the prophet Ezekiel who had a vision of God uniting two separate pieces of wood. We gather as Christians from divided communities, praying for forgiveness for the scandal of our disunity and our inability to be

ambassadors of reconciliation in the world. What paths of personal and ecclesial conversion must we take to arrive at full communion in Christ?

(Silence)

During this moment of silence the pole bearers - seated at the front of the church or with the worship leaders - disperse among the congregation as a sign of our divisions and our sin against unity in Christ.

L: Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord, Lord, hear my voice.

A: *Lord, we cry out to you, but so often we cry with many voices.*

L: May your ears be attentive to my prayer.

A: *We plead for unity but do not pay the price of reconciliation.*

L: If you should remember our sins, O Lord, who would survive.

A: *Who would survive? We come before you with our failure to respond to the suffering and divisions of the world.*

L: But in you, Lord, there is forgiveness, that you may be revered.

A: *Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.*

L: I await the Lord with all my soul, and I long for his word.

A: *My soul waits for the Lord, more fervently than those who watch for the morning.*

L: Ezekiel speaks this word of the Lord: I will deliver them from all their iniquities and will cleanse them. Then they shall be my people and I shall be their God. They shall be one in my hand. God, you are our only hope.

A: *Help us to be instruments of your reconciliation.*

Celebration of the word of God

First reading: Ezekiel 37: 15-19, 22-24a

Hymn: *Let us be One* (Korea)

Second reading: Romans 8: 18-25

Alleluia!

Gospel: John 17: 8-11

Sermon

(silence)

Intercessions

L : With faith we pray to God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit

“Lord, hear our prayer” (could be sung by a choir)

R1: Let us pray for our local Christian communities, our churches and ecumenical groups; for those here present, and those who are absent from our assembly today. Lord, forgive us when we are indifferent to each other, and bring your healing to the wounds and divisions that keep us apart.

R2 : Let us pray for a deeper appreciation of our common baptism into the one body of Christ. Lord, sustain each of us and our communities as we continue on the path towards the unity you desire for all your disciples.

A : *Lord, hear our prayer*

R1: Let us pray for our spiritual leaders and church authorities, that the Spirit may continue to enlighten them and grant them the grace to work in harmony, joy and love.

R2: Let us pray for all civil authorities. Lord, grant that they may work towards justice and peace, and give them

the wisdom to attend to the needs of all, especially the most vulnerable.

A: Lord, hear our prayer

R1 : Let us pray for all the nations and communities who live with deep divisions and internal conflicts. Lord, we remember in a special way the people of Korea, north and south, that their search for unity in spite of political divisions and separation may bear fruit, and be a sign of hope for all who seek reconciliation in the midst of divisions.

R2: Let us pray in thanksgiving for those who, inspired by you, Lord, have held an important place in our lives of faith, and for all who have reflected your forgiveness, compassion and love. May their gifts and generosity inspire our own desire to give and to serve with our lives.

A: Lord, hear our prayer

R1: Let us pray for all those who bring the gospel to bear on the great ethical challenges of our times. Lord, may we each learn to play our part in mitigating the global and ecological disasters which bring human suffering and threaten your creation.

R2 Let us pray for all Christian churches and ask for your help, Lord, so that one day they may be able to gather around the table and share the fellowship of holy communion.

A: Lord, hear our prayer

Our Father

L: Each in his or her own language, let us pray together in the words Jesus gave us:

A: Our Father...

L: As a sign of our commitment to seek reconciliation, let us now offer one another a sign of peace.

(The sign of peace is accompanied by the singing of Come now, O God of Peace (O-So-So))

Symbolic action

(The pole bearers now bind together the wooden poles/sticks, two by two, as a sign of our reconciliation being the initiative and work of God, who holds us united in his hand. During the proclamation of the confession of faith the cross could be presented, symbolically linking it with the bound poles. In churches where there is a baptistry in a central location, the symbolic action could be carried out there, as a reminder of the baptism which already holds us "united in the hand of God".)

The Nicene Creed

L: Let us join together in professing the Nicene Creed

A: We believe in One God...

Final prayers and dismissal

R: *(preferably a young person)*

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8: 38)

L: We leave this place of prayer to return to the particular circumstances of our own lives. Let us go forth strong in our faith and our hope, for God our Father has made all things new in Jesus Christ. He sends us to witness to his love and to play a role in the new creation. May God, who knows our joy, our anger and our pain, guide us always, and may we be courageous, stay faithful and live a life worthy of the Christian faith.

A: *Lord stay with us.*

Hymn: *(Possibly one which celebrates God's reconciliation with his people through the cross. During the singing of this hymn, the pole bearers take up their poles again and give them to members of the congregation representing different Christian communities present, as a sign of their ties of communion.)*

Benediction

L: Christians gathered here today, brothers and sisters in faith, you/we who would wish to be a sign of reconciliation through the power of the cross:

May the Lord bless you/us and keep you/us

May the Lord make his face shine upon you/us and be gracious to you/us May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you/us and give you/us peace. Amen

Biblical reflections and prayers for the eight days

Day 1

Christian communities face to face with old and new divisions

"that they may become one in your hand" (Ezek 37)

Ezek 37: 15-19, 22-24a

One in your hand

Ps 103: 8-13, or 18

The Lord is merciful and gracious, ...abounding in steadfast love

1 Cor 3: 3-7, 21-23

Jealousy and quarrelling among you... you belong to Christ

Jn 17: 17-21

That they may all be one... so that the world may believe

Commentary

Christians are called to be instruments of God's steadfast and reconciling love in a world marked by various kinds of separation and alienation. Baptised in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, and professing faith in the crucified and risen Christ, we are a people who belong to Christ, a people sent forth to be Christ's body in and for the world. Christ prayed for this for his disciples: may they be one, so that the world may believe.

Divisions between Christians on fundamental matters of faith and Christian discipleship seriously wound our ability to witness before the world. In Korea, as in many other nations, the Christian gospel was brought by conflicting voices, speaking a discordant proclamation of the Good News. There is a temptation to see current divisions, with their accompanying background of conflicts, as a natural legacy of our Christian history, rather than as an internal contradiction of the message that God has reconciled the world in Christ.

Ezekiel's vision of two sticks, inscribed with the names of the divided kingdoms of ancient Israel, becoming one in God's hand, is a powerful image of the power of God to bring about reconciliation, to do for a people entrenched in division what they cannot do for themselves. It is a highly evocative metaphor for divided Christians, prefiguring the source of reconciliation found at the heart of the Christian proclamation itself. On the two pieces of wood which form the cross of Christ, the Lord of history takes upon himself the wounds and divisions of humanity. In the totality of Jesus' gift of himself on the cross, he holds together human sin and God's redemptive steadfast love. To be a Christian is to be baptised into this death, through which the Lord, in his boundless mercy, etches the names of wounded humanity onto the wood of the cross, holding us to himself and restoring our relationship with God and with each other.

Christian unity is a communion grounded in our belonging to Christ, to God. In being converted ever more to Christ, we find ourselves being reconciled by the power of the Holy Spirit. Prayer for Christian unity is an

acknowledgement of our trust in God, an opening of ourselves fully to that Spirit. Linked to our other efforts for unity among Christians - dialogue, common witness and mission - prayer for unity is a privileged instrument through which the Holy Spirit is making that reconciliation in Christ visibly manifest in the world Christ came to save.

Prayer

God of compassion, you have loved and forgiven us in Christ, and sought to reconcile the entire human race in that redeeming love. Look with favour upon us, who work and pray for the unity of divided Christian communities. Grant us the experience of being brothers and sisters in your love. May we be one, one in your hand. Amen.

Day 2

Christians face to face with war and violence

“that they may become one in your hand”

Is 2: 1-4	They shall no longer learn war
Ps 74: 18-23	Do not forget the life of your poor for ever
I Pet 2: 21-25	His wounds have healed you
Mt 5: 38-48	Pray for those who persecute you

Commentary

War and violence are still major obstacles to that unity willed by God for humanity. In the last analysis, war and violence are the result of unhealed division which exists inside ourselves, and of the human arrogance which prevents us from recovering the real foundation of our existence.

Korean Christians long to put an end to more than 50 years of separation between North Korea and South Korea and to see peace established elsewhere in the world. The instability which prevails in the Korean peninsula represents not only the pain of the one remaining nation in the world which is still divided; it also symbolises the mechanisms of division, hostility and vengeance which plague humanity.

What can bring an end to this cycle of war and violence? Jesus shows us the power which can stop the vicious circle of violence and injustice in even the most brutal of situations. To his disciples, who react to violence and rage according to the ways of the world, paradoxically he teaches the renunciation of violence (Mt 26: 51-52).

Jesus reveals the truth about human violence. Faithful to the Father, he dies on the cross to save us from sin and death. The cross reveals the paradox and the conflict inherent in human nature. Jesus' violent death marks the beginning of a new creation which nails human sin, violence and war to this very cross.

Jesus Christ teaches a non-violence based on more than humanism. He teaches the reestablishment of God's creation, and hope and faith in the final coming of a new heaven and a new earth. This hope, founded on Jesus' ultimate victory over death on the cross, encourages us to persevere in the search for Christian unity and in the struggle against all forms of war and violence.

Prayer

Lord, who gave yourself on the cross for the unity of all humankind, we offer up to you our human nature marred by egoism, arrogance, vanity and anger. Lord, do not abandon the oppressed who suffer from all sorts of violence, anger and hatred, victims of erroneous beliefs and conflicting ideologies. Lord, reach out to us with compassion and take care of your people, so that we may enjoy the peace and joy integral to the order of your creation. Lord, may all Christians work together to bring about your justice, rather than ours. Give us the courage

to help others to bear their cross, rather than putting our own on their shoulders. Lord, teach us the wisdom to treat our enemies with love instead of hatred. Amen.

Day 3
Christians face to face with
economic injustice and poverty
“that they may become one in your hand”

Lev 25: 8-14	The jubilee which liberates
Ps 146	The Lord executes justice for the oppressed
1 Tim 6: 9-10	The love of money is the root of all evil
Lk 4: 16-21	Jesus and the jubilee as liberation

Commentary

We pray for the kingdom of God to arrive. We long for a world where people, in particular the poorest, do not die before their appointed time. However, the economic system of the world today aggravates the situation of the poor and accentuates social inequity.

Today the world community is confronted with the growing precariousness of labour and its consequences. The idolatry of the market (profit), like the love of money according to the author of the Epistle to Timothy, thus appears as ‘the root of all evil’. What can and must the churches do in this context? Let us look at the biblical theme of jubilee which Jesus evoked to define his ministry.

According to the Leviticus text, during the jubilee, liberation was to be proclaimed; economic immigrants could return to their homes and their family; if somebody had lost all his goods he could also live with the populace as a foreign resident. Money was not to be lent for interest nor food sold for profit.

The jubilee implied a community ethic, the freeing of slaves and their return home, the restoration of financial rights and the cancellation of debts. For the victims of unjust social structures, this meant the restitution of law and of their means of existence.

The priorities of today’s world, in which ‘more money’ is seen as the highest value and goal of life, can only lead to death. As churches, we are called to counter this by living together in the spirit of jubilee and following Christ, spreading this good news. As Christians experience the healing of their divisions they become more sensitive to other divisions which wound humanity and creation.

Prayer

God of justice, there are places in this world overflowing with food, But others where there is not enough and where the hungry and the sick are many. God of peace, There are those in this world who profit from violence and war and others who because of war and violence are forced to leave their homes and become refugees. God of compassion, Help us to understand that we cannot live by money alone but that we can live by the word of God, Help us to understand that we cannot attain life and true prosperity except by loving God and obeying his will and his teaching. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Day 4
Christians face to face
with ecological crisis
“that they may become one in your hand”

Gen 1: 31-2: 3	God saw everything he had made and it was very good
Ps 148: 1-5	He commanded and they were created

Rom 8: 18-23
Mt 13: 31-32

The destruction of creation
The smallest of all the seeds

Commentary

God created our world with wisdom and love and when he had finished his great work of creation, God saw that it was good.

Today however the world is confronted with a serious ecological crisis. The earth is suffering from global warming as a result of our excessive consumption of energy. The extent of forested area on our planet has diminished by 50% over the last 40 years while the deserts are spreading ever faster. Three quarters of ocean life has already disappeared. Every day more than 100 living species die out and this loss of biodiversity is a serious menace for humanity itself. With the apostle Paul we can affirm: creation has been delivered into the power of destruction, it groans as in the pains of childbirth.

We cannot deny that human beings bear a heavy responsibility for environmental destruction. Their unbridled greed casts the shadow of death on the whole of creation.

Together Christians must do their utmost to save creation. Before the immensity of this task, they must unite their efforts. It is only together that they can protect the work of the creator. It is impossible not to notice the central place which natural elements occupy in the parables and teaching of Jesus. Christ shows great respect even for the smallest of all the seeds. With the biblical vision of creation as affirmation, Christians can contribute with one voice to the present reflection on the future of our planet.

Prayer

God our Creator, the world was created by your Word and you saw that it was good. But today we are spreading death and destroying our environment. Grant that we may repent of our greed; help us to care for all that you have made. Together, we desire to protect your creation. Amen.

Day 5

Christians face to face with discrimination and social prejudice *"that they may become one in your hand"*

Is 58: 6-12
Ps 133
Gal 3: 26-29
Lk 18: 9-14

Do not hide yourself from your own kin
How good it is when kindred live in unity
You are all one in Christ Jesus
To some who trusted in their own righteousness

Commentary

In the beginning, human beings created in the image of God were but one in his hand. Sin, however, entered the hearts of men and women and since then we have built up all kinds of prejudice. Here it may be according to race or ethnic identity, elsewhere sexual identity or the simple fact of being man or woman is cause for discrimination. In yet other places it is being disabled or adhering to a particular religion which is a reason for exclusion. All these discriminatory factors are dehumanising and a source of conflict and great suffering.

In his earthly ministry, Jesus showed himself to be particularly sensitive regarding the common humanity of all men and women. He continually denounced discrimination of all sorts and the pride which some of his contemporaries derived from it. The just are not always those whom you would imagine. Contempt has no place in the hearts of believers.

Psalm 133 compares the joy of a life shared with sisters and brothers to the goodness of a precious oil or the dew of Mount Hermon. We are given to taste this joy with our sisters and brothers, each time we let go of our confessional prejudices within our ecumenical gatherings.

The restoration of the unity of all humankind is the common mission of all Christians. Together they must struggle against all discrimination. It is also their common hope because all are one in Christ and there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, man or woman.

Prayer

Lord help us to recognize the discrimination and exclusion which damage societies. Direct our gaze and help us to recognize our own prejudices. Teach us to banish all contempt and to taste the joy of living together in unity. Amen.

Day 6

Christians face to face with disease and suffering

“that they may become one in your hand”

II Kings 20: 1-6

Remember me, O Lord!

Ps 22: 1-11

Why have you forsaken me?

Jas 5: 13-15

The prayer of faith will save the sick

Mk 10: 46-52

Jesus asked: What do you want me to do for you?

Commentary

How often Jesus encounters the sick and is willing to heal them! Common to all our still separated churches is the awareness of our Lord's compassion for the sick. Christians have always followed his example, by healing the sick, building hospitals, dispensaries, organizing medical missions and caring not only for the souls but also the bodies of God's children.

This is not such an obvious response; the healthy tend to take health for granted and forget those who cannot take part in the regular life of the community because they are sick or handicapped. And the sick? They may feel cut off from God, his presence, blessing and healing power.

The deep rooted faith of Hezekiah supports him through sickness. In a time of sorrow, he finds words to remind God of his grace. Yes, those who are suffering might even use words from the Bible to cry out or struggle with God: Why have you forsaken me? When an honest relationship with God is well established, grounded in language of faithfulness and thankfulness in good times, it creates space also for a language to express sorrow, pain or anger in prayer when necessary.

The sick are not objects and not only at the receiving end of care; rather, they are subjects of faith, as the disciples must learn in the story of the gospel of Mark. The disciples want to continue directly along their way with Jesus; the sick man on the edge of the crowd is ignored. When he cries out, it is a diversion from their goal. We are used to caring for the sick, but we are not so used to their crying loudly and disturbing us. Their cries today may be for affordable medicine in poor countries, which touches the question of patents and profits. The disciples who wanted to prevent the blind man getting near Jesus have to become the messengers of the Lord's rather different and caring response: Come, he is calling you.

It is only when the disciples bring the sick man to Jesus that they come to understand what Jesus wants: to take time to meet and talk with the sick man, asking what he wants and needs. A healing community can grow when the sick experience the presence of God through a mutual relationship with their sisters and brothers in Christ.

Prayer

God, listen to people when they cry to you in sickness and pain. May the healthy thank you for their wellbeing, And may they serve the sick with loving hearts and open hands. God, let all of us live in your grace and providence, becoming a truly healing community and praising you together. Amen.

Day 7

Christians face to face with a plurality of religions *“that they may become one in your hand”*

Ils 25: 6-9	This is the Lord for whom we have waited.
Ps 117 :1-2	Praise the Lord, all you nations.
Rom 2:12-16	The doers of the law will be justified
Mk 7:24-30	For saying this, you may go home happy.

Commentary

Nearly every day we hear of violence in different parts of the world between followers of different faiths. We learn that Korea however is a place where different faiths – Buddhist, Christian, Confucian – mostly coexist in peace.

In a great hymn of praise, the prophet Isaiah speaks of all tears being wiped away and a rich feast for all people and nations! One day, asserts the prophet, all the peoples of the earth will praise God and rejoice in the salvation he offers. The Lord for whom we have waited is the host at the eternal feast in Isaiah’s song of praise.

When Jesus meets a non-Jewish woman who pleads for healing for her daughter he initially refuses to help her, in surprising terms. The woman persists, in similar terms: “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs”. Jesus affirms her insight into his mission to Jews and non-Jews alike, and sends her on her way with the promise of healing for her daughter.

The churches are committed to dialogue in the cause of Christian unity. In recent years, dialogue has also developed between people of other faiths, particularly those ‘of the Book’ (Judaism, Islam): encounters which are not only enlightening but also help promote respect and good relations between neighbours, and build peace where there is conflict. If our Christian witness is united by virtue of our faith in Christ, our opposition to prejudice and conflict will be all the more effective. And if we listen carefully to our neighbours of other faiths, can we learn something more of the inclusiveness of God’s love for all people, and of his kingdom?

Dialogue with other Christians should not lead to a loss of a particular Christian identity but to joy as we obey Jesus’ prayer that we become one, as he is one with the Father. Unity will not come today or even tomorrow; but together, with other believers, we walk towards that final, common destiny of love and salvation.

Prayer

Lord our God, we thank you for the wisdom we gain from your scriptures. Grant us the courage to open our hearts and our minds to neighbours of other Christian confessions and of other faiths; the grace to overcome barriers of indifference, prejudice or hate; and a vision of the last days, when Christians might walk together towards that final feast, when tears and dissension will be overcome through love. Amen.

Day 8

Christian proclamation of hope in a world of separation *“that they may become one in your hand”*

Ezek 37: 1-14	I will open your graves
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Ps 104: 24-34
Rev 21: 1-5a
Mt 5: 1-12

You renew the face of the earth
I am making all things new
Blessed are you...

Commentary

I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live. Biblical faith is imbued with a radical hope that the last word in history belongs to God, and that God's last word is not one of judgment but of new creation. As reflected upon in meditations of previous days, Christians live in the midst of a world which is marked by various kinds of division and alienation. Yet the stance of the church remains one of hope, grounded not in what human beings can do, but in the power and abiding desire of God to transform fracture and fragmentation into unity and wholeness, death-giving hatred into life-giving love. The people of Korea continue to endure the tragic consequences of national division, yet there too, Christian hope abounds.

Christian hope lives on even in the midst of profound suffering because it is born out of the steadfast love of God revealed on the cross of Christ. Hope rises with Jesus from the tomb, as death and the forces of death are overcome; it spreads with the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, which renews the face of the earth. The risen Christ is the beginning of a new and authentic life. His resurrection announces the end of the old order and sows the seeds of a new eternal creation, where all will be reconciled in him and God will be all in all.

See, I am making all things new. Christian hope begins with the renewal of creation, such that it fulfils God's original intention in the act of creating. In Revelation 21, God does not say 'I am making all new things' but rather, 'I am making all things new'. Christian hope does not imply a long passive wait for the end of the world but the desire for this renewal, already begun in the resurrection and at Pentecost. It is not the hope for an apocalyptic culmination of history collapsing our world, but rather, hope for the fundamental and radical change of the world already known to us. God's new beginning ends the sin, divisions and finitude of the world, transfiguring creation so that it can take part in God's glory and share in God's eternity.

When Christians gather to pray for unity, they are motivated and sustained by this hope. The strength of prayer for unity is the strength which comes from God's renewal of the created world; its wisdom, that of the Holy Spirit which breathes new life on dry bones and brings them to life; its integrity, that of opening ourselves completely to the will of God, to be transformed into instruments of the unity Christ wills for his disciples.

Prayer

Gracious God, you are with us always, amidst suffering and turmoil, and will be to the end of time. Help us to be a people deeply imbued with hope, living out the beatitudes, serving the unity you desire. Amen.

Additional worship resources from Korea

***Woo-Ri Gi-Do* (Listen to our prayer, Korean song)**

God, listen to our prayer.
You know what
we need and you listen to us.
Grant us your peace.

Common Prayer for Peace and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula, 2006

We hope our reunification will be strong and beautiful.
We hope it will set aright our history of pain and suffering,
Bring unity to our nation, and offer hope to the whole world, ...
Lord,
In You, once again we dream a great dream.

The dream you dreamed on the cross in that ancient time,
The great dream of every person and all of history abiding in You,
Is our dream also.

**Common Easter Prayer of the Churches of South
and North Korea April 2007**

O Lord, who overcame death and rose to life! ("I have overcome the world" Jn 16:33)

We praise our risen Lord who,
in the end, overcame the cross,
left behind the empty tomb,
and rose, clothed in white.

Our risen Lord,
whose tears in Gethsemane made spring flowers bloom,
whose pain on Golgotha brought light to the darkness,
who transformed the anguish outside the tomb to joy,
is the eternal Hope of all humankind.

Now, we who are weary of the long darkness of division,
we who, bearing the cross, have wandered in this land as in a wilderness, we who have walked the thorn-
infested road until the new dawn,
here,
today,
across every valley through the length of our land,
churches of north and south gathering as one,
Christians of south and north uniting warm hearts,
praise God for Easter's new morning.

O God,
that we may become living witnesses of the resurrection,
let our hands, bloodied by hammering the nail of hatred
and thrusting the spear of condemnation,
become hands that bind the wounds, hands that reach out in reconciliation. On the road of suffering,
help us to regain our voices of comfort, our steps of peace.
And, finally,
help us to realize that we can transform the history of death.

Then, as the cross and resurrection are one,
as the Daedong River in the north and the Han River in the south meet in one sea,
from Halla Mountain in the south to Baekdu Mountain in the north,
from Kaesong in the west to the Keumgang Mountains in the east,
may our incomplete liberation become perfect reunification.

And, further,
may our Lord's Easter greeting, "Peace be with you," (Jn 20:19,21,16) reach beyond our land to Asia and all the
world
and unite us all
in peace, joyful shouts, laughter, the embrace of friendship.
And may the uncertain days of the global village become, rather,
the Third Day of hope.

We pray in the name of the risen Jesus Christ who guides our land to become one country, a new creation.

This Common Prayer was jointly written by the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) and the Korean Christian Federation (KCF).

The Cross

Yun Dongju

(A poet and martyr who strove for the independence of Korea in the Japanese colonial period. He was put to death in 1945.)

The sun-lights,
Following me behind Until a minute ago,
Are now stuck upon the cross
At the top of the church.

I wonder how they could climb
So high a pinnacle.
I was walking up and down restlessly,
Whispering,
No church bell ringing.

And if a cross were ever allowed to me
The same as to the agonizing man,
To the happy Jesus Christ,
I would dribble silently
The blood blooming like a flower,
Hanging down my neck,
Under the sky falling to dusk.

Let us be One

Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name - the name you gave me - so that they may be one as we are one.

As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Further suggestions:

Come to us now (*Uso-o-so-so*)

Some Good News must be coming (*Jo-un-ili It-su-ri*)

With Passion in our Hearts (*Ttugoun maum*)

Words: Ik Hwan Moon, Korea

Music: Don Hwan Cho, Korea

English trans.: S T Kimbrough, Jr., USA, © 2000 General Board of Global Ministries, GBG Music, 475 Riverside Dr., New York, NY 10115.

Dream on, Dream on

Words: Hae-Jong Kim, Korea;

Music: Sunkyung Lee, Korea

from *Come, Let Us Worship* (Louisville: Geneva, 2001, © 2001 The United Methodist Publishing House).

God who, by your Words

Words: Won Yong Kang, Korea

English trans.: Edward Poitras (Pak Tae In) para. Geoffrey Wainwright, UK/US

Music: Unsu Kang, Korea

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These additional worship resources have been kindly sent us by the preparatory group in Korea and other ecumenical friends. For lack of space (and reasons of copyright) we are unable to reproduce all the material in full.

Ecumenical Situation in Korea [\[1\]](#)

1. The Korean People: 5000 years of history as one nation

To understand the ecumenical situation in Korea it is necessary to understand the special history of the Korean nation and people.

Korea, founded in 2333 BC by *Dankun*, maintained itself as a racially homogenous nation for 5,000 years. Although it faced great threats from China during its first 2,000 years, Korea kept its dignity and freedom as a nation (*Ancient Choson*). During the period from the 1st century BC to the 7th century AD, Korea experienced several dynasties. From 57 BC to 935 AD the Kokuryeo (37 BC to 668 AD), *Paikje* (18 BC to 660 AD) and *Shilla* (57 BC to 935 AD) Dynasties formed the *Three Kingdoms* (Samkuk) period in Korean history; in the north, the Balhae Dynasty (698-926 AD) was succeeded by the *Koryo* Dynasty (918 – 1392) in the 10th century, and the *Chosun* Dynasty (1392 – 1910) in the 14th century. During all this time Korea not only maintained itself as an homogenous nation, but also achieved great cultural developments.

In 1897 *Imperial Korea* (*Daehan Jeguk*) was founded, beginning a modern era in Korean history. From 1910 to 1945 Korea was occupied by the Japanese; yet the Koreans never lost their hope and never abandoned the struggle to achieve their freedom. Their efforts and struggle led finally to liberation from Japanese occupation in 1945, with the end of World War II. This history reflects the fate of Korea: since its location is highly important in geopolitical terms, it has had to suffer many invasive influences, and many invasions, from great world powers.

Korea has also had to struggle with internal conflicts reflecting various ideologies. Many years of ideological struggle ended in the founding of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), based on Communism, in the north of Korea and the founding of the Republic of Korea (ROK), based on democracy and freedom, in the south. The conflict and confrontation between these ideologies led to the tragedy of the Korean War (1950-53), in which many persons lost their lives. In 1953 an armistice was signed, and the border between North and South Korea, with its demilitarized zone (DMZ), became the visible symbol of the tragedy of Korean history.

The number of families divided by the war and its aftermath may be as many as 10 million. Recently these families have been granted limited opportunities for meeting; but most do not even know whether family members on the other side of the north-south divide are alive or not. The grief of these families remains in the heart of every Korean; it is a deep wound in the pride and very identity of the nation.

2. North and South in relation to reconciliation and collaboration

On 4 July 1972, the Korean Peninsula experienced an historical turning point. The Joint Declaration of that date changed the atmosphere of conflict and hostility, curtailing mutual abuse and facilitating discussion and practical efforts towards national unification as a common task.

The World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church have also shown great interest in facilitating peace and easing strained relations. In 1988, the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCC-Korea) announced the "Korean Churches' Declaration on the National Reunification and Peace", and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea (CBCK) organized its Committee on National Reconciliation.

Following this event several churches (such as the Changchungdang Catholic Church and the Chilkok Church) have been founded in North Korea, and services are being held there.

In this context, the Nobel Peace Prize winner KIM Dae-Jung – a former President of the ROK – held a summit with the North Korean leader KIM Jong-Il. This meeting issued the Joint Declaration of June 15, 2000. This strengthened the South Korean government in its “sunshine policy” towards the North. However, the situation in the DMZ shows the high level of tension between north and south. Efforts for peace in the Korean peninsula, moderated by the countries involved in the six-party talks, have borne fruit in cooperation and collaboration in various realms: for example, material support on the governmental level and, on the civil level, exchanges in the fields of culture, sports, religion and art as well as academic and economic exchanges.

3. Overcoming conflicts and division on the way to unity and unification

In spite of the many efforts made to achieve peace and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula, there remain deep roots of conflict, division and confrontation. To realize peaceful unification, North and South must face some common issues: the confrontation between liberalism and socialism, the gap between wealth and poverty, and the oppression of faith and religion.

There is a wall between the two peoples of north and south, a wall which seems hard to break down. Yet the hope of, and longing for, unification is common to both sides, just as they sing the same song expressing this hope (“Uri Ui Sowon Eun Tongil”). All Koreans, even though they face many differences and conflicts, hope for a peaceful and reconciling unification on the Korean peninsula. As Christians we hope and wait for the day when God will bring the divided parties together, so that we may praise and thank God for this act of reconciliation and new creation.

4. Background of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2009: the Korean ecumenical movement

The Catholic community in Korea was founded in 1784 by the first baptized Catholic in Korea, LEE Sung-Hun, who spread the Christian doctrine among his compatriots. Protestantism was introduced in Korea in the 1880s. In 1919, Korean Christians cooperated with their neighbours of other faiths, for example, leaders of Buddhism, Chon Taoism, and traditional religions, to resist the Japanese powers, for the sake of the independence of Korea.

The Korean ecumenical movement can be traced back to the recommendations and spirit of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and especially its [*Decree on Ecumenism*](#), which emphasized the importance of all Christians’ efforts for Christian unity. The churches participating in inter-church dialogue in Korea are the Orthodox Metropolis of Korea, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea, the National Council of churches in Korea (and member churches: The Presbyterian Church in Korea, the Korean Methodist Church, the Presbyterian church in the Republic of Korea, The Salvation Army Korea Territory, The Anglican Church of Korea, the Korea Evangelical Church, the Korea Assemblies of God Full Gospel), and the Lutheran Church in Korea. The NCC-Korea, which represents Protestantism, and the Korean Roman Catholic Church, have alternately hosted joint services for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity since the early 1970s. This joint prayer has provided Christians with a space for praying and working together to foster the ecumenical movement in Korea. In 1977 biblical scholars from both the Protestant and Catholic churches finished the common translation of the Bible so that, for the first time, all Korean churches could have the same Korean version of the Bible.

The Korean ecumenical movement now consists of diverse joint programmes for different groups: for the staff of various denominations, for theologians, seminary students, and for the moderators of different denominations. A study group of theologians has been hosting the Ecumenical Forum since 2000; this deals with diverse theological subjects in order to encourage mutual understanding between Protestant and Catholic churches. In addition, a group organized by seminary students has been carrying out programmes such as visiting different seminaries and hosting athletic games to develop friendship among members of various churches. The Moderators of various denominations meet and have meals together on a regular basis in order to improve their understanding and friendship, and to exchange ideas.

A seminar on Christian Unity in Asia, held July 24-28, 2006 at Aaron’s House, was a memorable event in the history of the Korean ecumenical movement. The seminar was hosted by Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of

the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity; it brought together ecumenical leaders from Asian countries to discuss and share different approaches to, and ideas for, Christian unity. On July 23, 2006, at the 19th World Methodist Conference held in Seoul, Korea, the Methodist Church “signed on” to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification which had been agreed by the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation in 1999. Thus this notable world-level event for Christian unity took place in Korea.

Based on the experience and mutual trust accumulated through joint programmes and activities, leaders of both the Protestant and Catholic churches in Korea carried out an ecumenical pilgrimage on December 8-16, 2006. They visited Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, and His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul, Turkey. In Rome they also met the staff of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and in Geneva staff members of the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches. During these visits they presented an idea that Korean Christians could prepare the draft resource materials for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2009. The two ecumenical bodies positively considered the idea, and agreed with the Korean churches’ suggestion to produce the source materials.

On January 23, 2007, the Korean churches held services for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at the Chongju Anglican Church, and also held a meeting of theologians from both the Protestant and Catholic churches. This meeting appointed two persons from the Protestant churches and three from the Catholic church to be members of the preparation subcommittee for writing the common prayer material for the week of prayer in 2009. The subcommittee held its first meeting on February 8, 2007 and chose Ezekiel 37:15-23, which contains the prophecy of the reunified kingdom of Israel, as the subject for the resource booklet for the Christian Unity Week in 2009. For the churches in Korea this passage in Ezekiel is evocative of the situation of the Korean peninsula, which remains the only divided country in the world. It was decided that each denomination would write a biblical reflection and a prayer for one of the “8 days”. Thus began the work which eventually led to the materials distributed worldwide for the week of prayer, 2009.

Conclusion

The current state of the Korean peninsula - which prevents Koreans in one part from communicating with their parents, children, siblings, relatives, and friends living in the other - represents an unacceptable situation that must be surmounted. The political situation in North Korea, which prevents people from choosing their own religious tradition, represents an oppressive situation restricting human conscience. Yet such situations of confrontation, antagonism, conflict, violence, and war rooted in religious, racial, and ethnic hostilities are not limited to the Korean peninsula, but occur in many places in the world today. Thus the Korean experience of division and suffering is surely relevant for Christians and societies world-wide. The Christians (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox) in Korea work together for the common good – to bring an authentic peace to the Korean peninsula – with neighbours of other faiths, Buddhism, Confucianism, and other traditional religions, including Won Buddhism and Chon Taoism (*Chon Do Gyo*).

During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2009, Christians are requested to pray for the promotion of unity and the building of peace, tasks that are important responsibilities for Christians in this world. The hope inspiring this prayer is that all people in the world will become God’s people; God will be their God; and people will be given the happiness of joy and prosperity when confrontation, conflict, and division are surmounted and unity is achieved. Christians must pray with patience until the “new heaven and the new earth” come to pass: “Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Ezekiel 37: 23).