

Week of prayer for Christian unity 2005

Foreword

Introduction

It is a joy for us both to announce the birth of a new era of collaboration between the Pontifical Council/Catholic Church and Faith and Order/World Council of Churches and a further, small step in the direction of Christian unity. This year, for the first time, the text for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity that you have in your hands has not only been jointly prepared by the PCPCU and Faith and Order but is being jointly published by them. Although this has been the case de facto for some years we have also now adopted a common format.

We urge you to make good use of the text - not only during one particular week in the year but as a basis both for your private and public prayers for unity throughout the year.

**Brian Farrell, Secretary,
Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity**

**Samuel Kobia, General Secretary,
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The search for unity: throughout the year

The traditional date for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is 18-25 January. Those dates were proposed in 1908 by Paul Watson to cover the days between the feast of St Peter and the feast of St Paul, and therefore have a symbolic meaning. 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.

Week of prayer for Christian Unity 2005
BIBLICAL TEXT

1 Corinthians 3: 1-23

And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, "I belong to Paul", and another, "I belong to Apollos", are you not merely human?

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labour of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it.

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness" and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile".

So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

(New Revised Standard Version)

Week of prayer for Christian unity 2005 Introduction to the theme for the year 2005

Christ, the one Foundation of the Church (1 Cor 3:1-23)

The situation in which the theme was developed is marked by new possibilities for church growth. The churches in Slovakia have experienced more than a decade of renewal and growth after four decades of living in a political situation which, while allowing the churches to exist, attempted to impede their growth and limit their witness in society. In the process of preparing the theme for this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the preparatory group reflected on the following questions: 1. What is the foundation on which the new "existence" of their churches is being built? 2. Is there a space to grow in unity as the respective confessional communities grow? 3. What are the means for strengthening the service of the church?

The New Testament preserves letters written to the churches as encouragement for their spiritual growth since they lived in a world often hostile to the values of the gospel. One of these is the first letter to the Christians of Corinth from which the members of the preparatory group drew their guidance. The following reflections provide a theological and pastoral introduction to this year's theme and the eight days drawing principally from the Slovak context and the recent experience of its Christian communities. These questions may challenge all churches and Christian communities in whatever context they find themselves - whether of growth or decline.

Growing in faith is growing in unity

While reflecting on the Slovak experience of growth, it was realized that this growth is truly a gift to all the churches in Slovakia. People, who previous to 1989 avoided church fellowship, began turning to the churches with the important questions in their lives. This meant that the churches needed to learn how to respond by communicating the gospel in this new context of growth. This situation was not unlike that of Paul who had aided the church in Corinth in its phase of growth.

However, the process of growth is not without its setbacks and problems. Paul observed that the Corinthians were still not ready for the solid food that provides for growth in faith. It is normal to begin growing with milk. However, if after a time, the body cannot absorb solid food, there is something wrong, unhealthy in the body.

Paul used a very strong expression to describe the people in Corinth. He calls them "people of the flesh" because he sees them lacking in spiritual maturity. They are still living according to human inclinations indicated by their petty jealousy and quarrelling among themselves (**day 1**). How can Paul use these strong words to describe a people whose church is so rich in diverse gifts and so full of life? He himself knows of this richness and comments on it in 1 Cor 14.

The lack of spiritual maturity was not evident in the absence of lofty thoughts or visible signs of power. The congregation was rich in gifts and works. They were not poorer or weaker than any other congregation in this regard. In spite of all of this Paul describes the church as one of the flesh, as infants. Why? Because there was a lack of unity among them.

In turn, the churches in Slovakia have asked themselves how authentic their growth has been these past 15 years of new freedom and new possibilities? What is the value of their achievements if there are still tensions among them as different confessions? The churches in Slovakia have realized the need to pray for growth in faith marked by unity in service and mutual understanding.

Humility in service unites

The reason for division in Corinth was not due to the rejection of any basic tenets of the faith. The problem in Corinth was a matter of not leaving behind the old unredeemed patterns of human behaviour. In spite of the many spiritual gifts the Corinthians had been blessed with, there was something lacking: they were not united in the same mind and the same purpose. Paul rejects this way of being Christian. He does not fall into the trap of jealousy of other leaders when some people adore him and identify themselves as those who belong to him. He insists that neither he nor Apollos are “lords” to whom people would belong. They are “servants through whom others came to believe” (1 Cor 3:5). Even this ministry was not exercised through their own power. In fulfilling this service, they were completely dependent on the grace of the Lord. They performed the service “as the Lord assigned to each”.

This attitude shows humility and greatness at the same time. Paul’s understanding of service is distinct from a worldly perspective, wherein to be “only a servant” is the opposite pole of wanting to be served as somebody important in the church. Jesus teaches us in Matthew 20:28: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve”. Therefore, all the gifts received need to be put at the service of the plan of God since these should point back to the author of these gifts and not the recipient.

Paul understands that the fruit of this service will be different since it is built on cooperation. This is indeed the reality experienced in the Slovakian context. Because of a new situation, namely the mobility of people, ministers frequently do not see the fruits of the word that was planted. Now, as in the pauline context, some plant while others tend to the daily needs of growth, and still others harvest. In the past, people remained in the same villages and towns so that their pastors tended to their spiritual needs from planting the seed of the gospel to its maturity in the fruits that were harvested. Today there may be many involved in this process of growth. This process is not without problems. Even within churches of the same confession this leads to tensions among fellow servants as it did in Corinth. Moreover it is often forgotten that it is not the ministers who enable faith to grow but it is “only God who gives the growth” (**day 2**).

This situation causes us to pause and ask: to what extent are the tensions among us really caused by differences in our teaching? How much pride is

there still among us? To what extent does a longing for power control our actions instead of a desire and a readiness to serve?

Paul had to confront a similar situation among Christians in Corinth. His solution was that humility in service unites. This, too, is what the churches are learning in their life together. We realize that we are co-workers, working together with God, each building on the one foundation laid by God, namely Jesus Christ. In knowing this we are then able to support each other and act according to the grace God has given to each of us (**day 3**).

Building service on the one foundation

The responsibility that we have in our service is great. The foundation has been laid, but the edifice that rises on it depends on the work of each builder. How will each use the gift that God gives? Paul makes reference later in his letter that there is a variety of gifts and services given but that it is the same Lord who bestows them. This diversity is given by the same Spirit for the common good and for unity of the body (1Cor 12: 4ff). These gifts must then be used appropriately for the work of edifying the church and of building bridges as a sign of hope and the fruit of unity in Christ (**day 4**).

What is clear for Paul and for our context is that the work that has been done in building will be tested so that the sort of work done by each will be brought to light. In the past, the churches have at times been caught up with themselves and in their agendas, and not with tending to the proclamation of Christ crucified and risen as the foundation of Christian life. Paul considered himself accountable before God for what he had accomplished. In the same way, the churches need to be accountable not only before God but to each other as co-workers in their service. The kind of work done will reveal the quality of our discipleship. (**day 5**).

In attempting to encourage the Christians in Corinth, Paul needed to affirm the nature of who they were. Because they have received the gift of the Spirit they have become the temple of God and bear God's image. This reality challenges these Christians to live united with the Spirit who in turn unites them to Christ, the one foundation (**day 6**).

From our human experiences and the histories that we recount, we can begin to see the folly of our ways which have caused divisions among those who follow Christ. This foolishness is what Paul began with in his letter to the Corinthians when he exhorts them to be in agreement and avoid divisions since they should be of the same mind and purpose (1 Cor 1:10). We have made from the one Church of Christ, many divisions, founded on disagreements since we have not been of the same mind and purpose but have worked against one another. This may be seen as the fruit of living in a world where such traits as individualism and competition are considered to be wisdom. By contrast, Paul proclaims the message of Christ who humbled himself to accept our human weaknesses even unto death, thus revealing "what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9) (**day 7**).

Paul makes a connection between different co-workers who are in the service of the gospel. Then he sets this fellowship into a context of universal and cosmic unity. He is assuring those, who in different times and different ways are building on the one foundation, that they together belong to Christ. They are of Christ. If we belong to Christ then we also belong to God. Paul is aware of how God has acted in creation through Christ to make all things new and to reconcile all things. As fellow servants and ministers, we are united when we realize that our service starts in Christ and is directed to God who has laid the one foundation of our faith and from whom our unity comes (**day 8**).

The eight days of prayer are an invitation to reflect together as different churches, to ask a blessing for each other and to see where we can grow together in unity.

Preparation of the material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2005

The initial draft of this material was prepared by an ecumenical group composed of members of The Theological Committee of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Slovakia. Those participating in the preparation were (in alphabetical order):

Bishop Augustin Bacinsky (Old Catholic Church)
Rev. Tsolt Görözdi (Reformed Church)
Rev. Jan Halama (Catholic Church)
Rev. Jozef Havercak (Orthodox Church)
Rev. Jan Henzel (Church of the Brethren)
Rev. Gabriela Kopas (Methodist Church)
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Rev. Mikulas Lazor (Orthodox Church)
Rev. Ondrej Prostrednik (Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession)

We wish to thank the theological committee for providing material and inspiration for our work.

The material reached its present form at a meeting of an international preparatory group named by the Commission on Faith and Order of The World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity of the Catholic Church. The international group met at the Jesuit Retreat House in Piestaň, Slovakia and was received by its director, Father Emil Vani. We also wish to thank the centre and all its staff for their welcome and their prayerful support of our work.

Our gratitude is expressed to the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Slovakia and its general secretary, the Rev. Ondrej Prostrednik for their work in organizing the local preparatory process and hosting the international preparatory meeting.

Week of prayer for Christian unity 2005 Ecumenical worship service

Introduction

The theme of the worship is : **Christ, the one foundation of the church.**

The worship begins with the congregation giving thanks to Christ for his work of salvation.

The complete text of 1 Cor 3 is at the heart of the worship, though one of our two options for the liturgy of the word proposes that only verses 10-13 are to be read within that liturgy. The other readings can develop the theme of sturdiness and the quality of the building of the church upon Christ, the cornerstone and foundation of our unity.

The penitential prayer and prayer of forgiveness comes after the proclamation of the word of God. This allows it to be an essential element in the worship. Some congregations will prefer to leave it in its traditional place towards the beginning. It is intended that each community participating in the service examine its collective conscience before Christ (v. 4) the foundation of the one church. Expressions of penitence, symbols and testimonies will assist this process.

Do we proclaim the gospel together, recognizing and sharing the gifts which the Lord gives our churches (v. 5)? Do we accept the complementary role of our churches in certain local situations? Do we recognize the primacy of Christ, whose servants we are? Do we really labour together at God's work? (v.9)

The symbol proposed here is that of two wooden planks or beams, assembled midway through the service into a simple cross. It evokes not only the gates of hell destroyed by Christ by his resurrection but also the solid materials habitually used in the construction of a house. Once placed on the ground as a cross, other symbols - of penitence, or expressing our faith and our unequivocal belonging to Christ for the building up of the one church - could be set on top of it, such as candles/nightlights, germinating heads of corn, flowers, or children's drawings.

During the intercessions, inspired by 1 Cor 3 : 1-23, the congregation entrusts to Christ, the one mediator, the work of Christians and the diakonia of the churches throughout the world, beyond the domain of ecumenism.

Order of Service

I. Gathering

Words of welcome

Dear friends in Christ, as we gather together, we thank God for calling us to search for unity. We thank God for all who in different parts of the world desire, and pray for Christian unity. Within the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity for the year 2005 we pray and meditate with the churches in Slovakia. God has blessed them with new opportunities to serve, reconcile and receive spiritual gifts. Inspired by their ministry, with Christians all over the world we reflect on the foundation of our common faith - Jesus Christ the Lord, who is the same yesterday, today and for ever.

As the service begins, two planks of wood will be carried to the altar/communion table. These wooden planks have rich, symbolic content. A common material for building houses, the wood represents the foundation on which the churches are invited to construct unity. During the worship, we shall assemble the two planks into the form of a cross, as a sign of our common foundation, Jesus Christ. The two planks also symbolize Christ's victory over death as he broke the gates of hell and announced life.

(Processional music)

Greeting

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Introductory sentence

No one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 3 : 11)

Opening prayer

Let us pray *(brief silence)*

Living God, we give thanks to you for your great works among us. We thank you especially for Jesus Christ who through his death on the cross has saved us. Keep us close to Jesus, seeking comfort and joy, healing and wisdom at the foot of his life-giving cross. With all the faithful, and all creation, we praise you; through Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Amen

L1 and L2: First and Second Leaders.

C: Congregation

After each verse - where "I" is Christ - the congregation praises the name of the Lord. The response to the Lord could be sung, formulated using the first person plural, "we" Alternatively, a simple spoken response could be used, as below. The litany might start with the words "Thus speaks the Lord Jesus".

Litany of thanksgiving

- L1 Because I love you, O my people, I was born in Bethlehem.
They called me Emmanuel, for I am God with you, for ever and ever.
- C *We praise you Lord*
- L2 I went down into the Jordan where I was baptized in the water,
as a sign of the baptism in the Spirit who would come that all flesh
might be
purified and renewed.
- C *We praise you Lord*
- L1 I was led by the Spirit into the desert to confront the Tempter,
to overcome him and to free you from his chains.
- C *We praise you Lord*
- L2 I proclaimed the good news of the reign of the Father,
a reign of justice and mercy, of love and truth, peace and joy.
I accomplished the signs of the “new age”, my hands cured the sick,
my presence brought peace.
- C *We praise you Lord*
- L1 I brought you together, little flock, as a hen gathers her chicks,
as the shepherd gathers his sheep.
I wanted to take you on my shoulders and lead you into heaven.
- C *We praise you Lord*
- L2 I broke bread and offered new wine to forge an alliance with you and to
give you
life in all its fullness. I prayed to the Father that my joy might be in you.
- C *We praise you Lord*
- L2 I died on a cross of wood, for the forgiveness of sins and to bring back
the scattered children of the Father, and I opened the gates of hell.
On the third day I rose from the dead.
- C *We praise you Lord*
- L1 From my place beside the Father, I pour down upon you my holy Spirit.
He will remind you of all that I have taught you,
He is the breath of life,
He is light and consolation, the force of your witness and the inspiration
of your prayer.
- C *We praise you Lord*
- L2 Listen to me O my people, for I am with you everyday until the end of
time, that you may be *one* with me as I am *one* with my Father, that the
world might believe.
Listen to my voice, my people and follow me so that there is but one
flock and one Shepherd.
- C *We praise you Lord.*

Congregational response:

- Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing! (*Eph 1*)
- Or Glory to God in the highest!
- Or To You be the glory
- Or another hymn of praise to Christ

II. The Word

Prayer before readings

May the pure light of divine knowledge shine in our hearts, O Lord, friend of all men and women. Open the windows of our minds to the meaning of your gospel message. Inspire in us the respect of your blessed commandments, so that, overcoming the desires of the flesh, we lead a life according to the spirit, directing all our intentions and acts that they may be pleasing to you. For you are the light of our souls and our bodies O Christ, and we glorify you together with your Eternal Father and your good and life-giving Holy Spirit, from now until eternity. Amen.

Readings (Set 1 or Set 2)

Set 1: Gen 28: 10-17
Psalm 118: 16-24
1 Cor 3: 10-13a

Set 2: 1 Cor 3: 1-23
Psalm 118: 16-24

Hymn

Gospel: Mt 7: 24-27

Sermon (or testimonies) *We recommend a brief sermon/homily.*

Hymn (*offering can be taken up here*)

Confession and pardon

(background music)

Two people form a cross from the two planks of wood. They place the cross on the ground, in a visible place in the worship space.

Between each expression of repentance, members of the congregation can come forward to place upon the cross either a symbol of Christ as foundation of the church, a candle/nightlight, a flower or a stem of corn. This gesture expresses our desire for conversion and our renewed belonging in Christ for the construction of the one church.

L1 Lord, you are peace and reconciliation!

L2 Forgive us Lord, for often choosing jealousy and animosity rather than confidence and respect between churches.
(silence and placing of a symbol on the cross)

- L1 Lord, you give us an abundance of blessings in the unity of faith!
- L2 Forgive us Lord, for often choosing isolation and refusing to be a blessing for each other, between churches.
(silence and placing of a symbol on the cross)
- L1 Lord, you have given joy to the afflicted, liberation to the captives, pardon to sinners!
- L2 Forgive us Lord, for having closed our hands and turned our faces away from those who need help.
(silence and placing of a symbol on the cross)
- L1 Lord, you have gathered us together as a shepherd gathers his flock and then goes to seek the one sheep that is lost!
- L2 Forgive us Lord, for having often strayed far from you, and pushed you away, thus underlining our divisions.
(silence and placing of a symbol on the cross)

Examples of openness to ecumenism which have required a true personal or community conversion can be given here.

Prayer for forgiveness

L: Almighty Lord, no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid. That foundation is Jesus Christ. We admit that we have not been able to finish building on this foundation in such a way that we may become the dwelling place of God. We have sometimes even been the cause of its ruin. Even if our work should be lost, save us, Lord and give us a fresh chance to work for unity. Create in us an ardent longing for the unity of your church and enable us to work towards it. Amen.

Sharing of the Peace

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

And also with you.

Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

Nicene Creed

III. Prayers

Intercessions *(two or more worship leaders)*

The apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians to encourage them. May we have the same hope as the Corinthian church as we pray for the church of God and for all people according to their needs.

Eternal God, we thank you for calling us by name. In you we live and move and grow. We pray for churches and Christians throughout the world. Remind

us of our common foundation in Christ . May we grow together in faith and in love, until we attain that unity which is your will.

*Build us together in Christ,
Make us your dwelling place.*

Send down your Spirit so that we may know Jesus and bear witness to our life and unity in him. May we know the mind of Christ in order to speak God's wisdom everywhere. Strengthen us to work towards peace and reconciliation in church and society.

*Build us together in Christ,
Make us your dwelling place.*

We pray for the churches in Slovakia and for all churches which are experiencing change – growth or struggle, reconciliation or conflict. Inspire and strengthen them in works of witness and service.

*Build us together in Christ,
Make us your dwelling place.*

We pray for those who have no home, no land, no food, no work, no medicine, no peace. May we recognize and serve Christ in the suffering and the needy.

*Build us together in Christ,
Make us your dwelling place.*

We thank you for all your gifts of creation. Teach us to share with others our time, our energy, our resources and our love. Make us sensitive and responsive to the wounds in the human family and creation. May we be faithful to our calling and live a long life on earth. May we give our whole life to Christ, for we belong to him and in him are united all things on earth and in heaven. Amen.

(Local congregations are encouraged to add petitions according to their own context and experience.)

The Lord's Prayer *(each in her or his own language)*

IV. Benediction and Dismissal

Benediction (Aaronic blessing)

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

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God!

(Postlude)

Week of prayer for Christian unity 2005 Biblical reflections and prayers for the year 2005

Day 1 Called to spiritual maturity (1 Cor 3: 1-4)

Hos 2:21-23	I will say to Lo-ammi (not my people) "you are my people"
Ps 24	Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
Col 1:25-28	The mystery hidden throughout the ages
Jn 15:1-8	I am the vine, you are the branches

Commentary

In Saint Paul's letter to the Christian community of Corinth, a community for whom he had played an important role in laying the foundations of faith, Paul is eager to call the Corinthians to spiritual maturity. While celebrating the gifts God had bestowed on this community, he confronts them with the echoes of division which have been reported to him, as expressed in the conflicting slogans: *I am for Paul; I am for Apollos; I am for Cephas*. Paul responds with the evocative question: *Has Christ been divided?*

There is a Hebrew tradition, found in the Old Testament, of God giving a people a name, reflective of their spiritual state, in order to call them to fidelity or conversion. In an analogous manner, Paul names the Corinthians as *people of the flesh*, as *infants in Christ*, lamenting that for the moment he cannot address them as *spiritual people*. He identifies their preoccupation with allegiances as immature and not in keeping with the mind of Christ. His words are abrupt, not because their behaviour is unusually small-minded, but because of its stark contrast with the magnitude and divine origin of their Christian calling: for they are God's temple, wherein God's Spirit dwells; they belong to Christ, and will be given all things in him. This identity in Christ carries with it a mission: with Paul, they are to make known *the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages*, and to be stewards of this mystery, proclaiming the great redemptive action of God in Christ and witnessing to it in their transformed lives.

It is worth noting that the divisions in Corinth had to do with conflicts in their reception of the preaching of the apostles: *I am for Cephas; I am for Paul*. Here we see a foreshadowing of the divisions which historically would scar our unity in Christ, built on the faith of the apostles. It is in a deepening acknowledgement of the faith of the early church that Christians today seek to find their unity. We live with Paul's question still: *Has Christ been divided?* Spiritual maturity has to do, in part, with retrieving and incarnating the unity given us in Christ. To what extent does our disunity derive from our being less than mature in the faith, less than expansive in our Christian vision? In what ways does our disunity keep us from carrying out the healing and reconciling mission of Christ in a broken and needy world?

Prayer

Gracious God, you continue to call us to spiritual maturity. You desire to name us as your own. Open our hearts and minds to the greatness of our calling, and help us to walk in unity - in communion with Paul and Apollos and Cephas

- as we proclaim and place ourselves at the service of your redeeming work in the world. Amen.

Day 2

God is in charge of growth (1 Cor 3: 5-9)

Gen 1: 26 - 2 : 9	The Lord God planted a garden in Eden.
Ps 104: 24-31	You renew the surface of the earth
Rom 8: 14-25	Creation awaits with impatience the revelation of
the Son of God	
Lk 8: 4-15	It is those who hear the word ...and bear fruit

Commentary

Speaking to the people of Corinth, Paul uses an image familiar to them, of planting and growth. It is a rural image taken to illustrate the works of God, who is directly at work in their midst, calling forth servants who will collaborate in his work.

Like the Corinthians, we are called to be instruments, faithful servants who will be judged for the way in which we accomplish this work. It is an important task, both to be in this service and to bear the responsibility of the work to be accomplished to the glory of God. We must offer our talents to him whom we serve; and place our competence on the only foundation which is Christ, in order to build an edifice in the service of love.

God has made this world good. We see this in the first chapter of Genesis. Humankind has gone beyond the role given us therein; we have destroyed this perfect world. That is why we are called to a ministry of healing in the world (Rom 8). This multi-faceted ministry unites us. It consists of diverse facets, transcending confessional and cultural barriers. The world is wounded, in the same way as the traveller lying on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. We must not be afraid to touch what is broken in our world. God desires to heal through our intervention. Creation awaits with impatience the healing which will come from God.

Within the unity which is sought, Christians can exchange their own experiences to show that beyond being of Paul or of Apollos, they are Christ's. Only Christ can help them grow in the love of the Father, in the service of the Spirit of holiness and of unity who desires to save the world and its marginalized people.

Prayer

O God,

We thank you for the confidence and blessing which you offer to those who work for the coming of your reign in this world.

Help us to find new ways of carrying out your work in the service of those around us.

May we serve, rather than seek to be served, and may your healing power be at work among us.

United as one family of your only Son, may we be faithful stewards of your creation so that you may be known by all men and women, great and small, by all things and all people, as the true living saviour and creator of all. Amen.

Day 3

Christ is the foundation (1 Cor 3: 10-11)

Is 28: 14-16

I am laying a foundation stone, a precious
cornerstone, a sure foundation

Ps 118: 16-24

The stone rejected has become the cornerstone

Eph 2: 19-22

Christ Jesus as the cornerstone

Mt 7: 24-27

A house built on the rock will not fall

Commentary

God in Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, has laid down a common foundation for all the baptized. Christians can therefore affirm their faith in Christ, the one foundation on which the church of God is built. Since nobody can lay down any other foundation, Christians can confess together that the foundation on which their faith is built, is what God in Christ has done. This conviction is a source of thankfulness and humility.

In their efforts to be rooted in the one foundation, many Christians have been and continue to be challenged by other voices that contradict and tend to reject Christ. Christians in such situations are called to be like leaven in society, trusting that they will be supported by the grace of God. Therefore in the face of testing, Christians must never waver. Since Jesus was rejected, his followers too must be prepared to endure the same trials.

On the foundation of Christ and his teaching, we are able to meet the challenges of present day society. As Christians, we are not afraid to make use of what others consider useless, as a starting point for witness in the world.

Christians are convinced that to build on Jesus Christ as the sure and common foundation implies the idea of working together from a common starting point towards a common goal, namely the unity of all the followers of Christ.

The meaning of Jesus Christ for us predefines in a unique and profound way the character of every joint activity or whatever we do separately. The power of Christ's love fills us with great hope that whatever we create in his name has a capacity to last, and survive even in the midst of difficulties, because Christ is the beginning and the end.

Prayer

Lord our God, through the work of the Holy Spirit you have established in Christ the one foundation on which your church is built. We thank you for what you have done for us in Christ. We thank you too for continually upholding your church in the midst of all attempts to destroy it. Help us by your grace that we may build on the foundation you have laid down in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Day 4

Neh 2: 17-18
Ps 127

1 Cor 12: 4-11
Mt 20: 1-16

You are to build on the foundation (1 Cor 3: 12-13)

Come let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit

A landowner went out to hire labourers to work in his vineyard

Commentary

Christ is God's gift to the world. In him the salvation and liberation of the whole of humankind is revealed. He is the basis and the source of the new life which God has given us. There is no need for us to add anything to complete this gift of God.

But this does not mean that we should remain passive and detached. Paul writes of the commitment to build on the foundation. He affirms our vocation and response. We are called to be workers in God's work of renewal and labourers in his household.

God has given us different gifts (1 Cor 12). We have to make use of them for the one purpose: to glorify Christ and the power of his peace. Through our work we are to be witnesses to God's love and to our unity in Christ.

In the history of the churches we can see that not everything which is done in the name of Christ was really "Christ-like". Sometimes Christ and his reconciliation have been overshadowed by arrogance, divisions and the struggle for power. "Church building" is not a matter of building confessional barriers against each other or of building our own "monuments".

In today's world, churches have to demonstrate how to build bridges and how to cooperate as a sign of hope and a fruit of unity in Christ. Old wounds can be healed and new challenges in a changing society can be met together, each respecting the other's traditions and gifts.

This foundation in Christ makes us sisters and brothers. It is the basis for being the one, true church of Christ, filled with love for the poor, the marginalized, trusting God and in the hope of his coming kingdom.

God's reconciliation commits us together and as individual churches to be living stones of unity in Christ, so that the foundation in Christ will become more and more evident.

Prayer

God, we thank you for your unique gift of life and peace in Christ. You have given our churches many different gifts. Help us to see this diversity as an enrichment to building your house in this world. Let us witness to what strengthens our unity and encourage all that helps us to bring your love to the people with whom we are living. Amen.

Day 5

God judges our efforts to build (1 Cor 3: 13-15)

Gen 4: 2b-10a	Am I my brother's keeper?
Ps 51: 1-4, 9-13	Against you, you alone, have I sinned
Phil 2: 1-5	Regard others as better than yourselves
Mt 25: 14-30	A man entrusted his property to his slaves

Commentary

It is a continuing wonder that in all ages God wants and needs people to work with him in what he is doing in the world. Though the one foundation, Jesus Christ, is laid there is always a task of building to be done.

In explaining this to Christians in Corinth, Paul also insists on God's quality control: how well we build is to be tested. Our works do not bring about salvation, but we remain responsible for our works before God.

Paul saw this in terms of the purifying fires of the final judgement which he thought would come soon. For us it is still a matter of urgency – regarding each opportunity as if it could be the last – and realizing that we all bring judgement on ourselves by how well we use the gifts God has given us for building up the kingdom. And for Christians in Slovakia, there is a special urgency because they sense new opportunities for Christian service in the community which are not to be missed.

We are all accountable both to God and to each other. Indeed churches too are accountable to each other in the quest for unity. Like the servants in the parable, entrusted with their master's property and required to make good use of it, we have all been given treasure: the life of a fragile planet, sisters and brothers world-wide to care for, the precious word of the gospel to share. They are given to all God's people together and provide an opportunity for us to share with one another, to learn from our successes and failures. And how well we work and build together is even now being put to the test.

Prayer

God, through your coming to us in Jesus and through using fallible people, you have shown yourself to be a vulnerable God; we thank you that you still trust us to offer service and work for the building of your kingdom. Keep us alert to your will and purpose and open our eyes that we may see the true needs of people around us. Enable us in humility to learn from one another, that we may be united in our mutual accountability and devoted in service for your kingdom; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Day 6

You are God's temple (1 Cor 3: 16-17)

Gen 1: 26-27	God created humankind in his image
Ps 8	What are human beings
1 Pet 2: 9-10	God's own people
Mt 16: 24-27	If any want to become my followers

Commentary

The question of identity is by no means a new one. Human beings have always asked themselves and sought to live out who they really are and what they are meant to be. Today, living in a world which is characterised by constant changes and a fundamental pluralism, the search for identity has become an even more crucial issue. We struggle with that question not only as individuals but also as communities and as churches. We try to find our own identity in what distinguishes us from others and makes us unique.

The apostle Paul – although addressing the Christians of Corinth 2000 years ago – reminds us even now that the question of identity has to be approached from another perspective: we are not “special” because we are different from others, but because we have all received the gift of the Holy Spirit – a gift which is present in every human being since we are all created in the image of God.

We are God's temple – sacred and full of dignity; nobody has the right to destroy this temple. We are those with whom God wants to feel at home – a place where his good Spirit dwells. God wants to have fellowship with us, which includes and requires that we have fellowship with each other. Since this call to fellowship extends beyond the borders of our Christian communities, the scandal of our divisions as Christian churches is heightened, making it imperative to overcome them.

Differences are also part of our Christian identity since we live in different situations and cultures, we live as women and men, we are shaped by particular personal experiences and by the history of the communities in which we live. But wherever we live, whatever the challenges we face or the talents we are given, we are united by the Holy Spirit who enables us to live as God means us to live, and as has been made manifest in Jesus Christ: holy, and in love-giving and love-receiving relationships.

Prayer

Eternal God, you created heaven and earth, you created human beings in your image, giving each of us identity and dignity. We thank you for your gift of life – life which binds us to you and to your creation. Help us – as Christians and as churches – to receive your gift in all its fullness so that we may be able to overcome whatever limits or reduces your gift of life. Fill us with your good Spirit so that we may grow into the image of Christ and become his image in the world. Amen.

Day 7 **20)**

Folly and wisdom, life in Christ (1 Cor 3 : 18-

Job 32: 7 - 33

It is the breath of the Almighty that makes for understanding

Ps 14: 1-7

The Lord looks down to see if there are any who seek after God

1 Cor 1: 17-30

God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise

Mt 10: 17-25a

It is the Spirit of your Father who will speak through you

Commentary

Democracy and liberty bring us many advantages but also temptations. That is as true for individuals as it is for churches. In countries which have been Christian since ancient times, churches are often tempted by a misplaced use of power. In consequence, their witness has offered human perspectives rather than the word of God. Nowadays, we can still be tempted to rely on relations of power and the advantages which come from being in the majority, or, alternatively, to abandon debate in our societies, too often futile. However, as churches we have been commanded to witness to a common foundation for the life of the world, that is Jesus Christ and his word, and nothing can change that.

The prophets underlined that what they proclaimed was not their own words, thoughts or opinions, but a word received from God. Job understands that he must seek wisdom elsewhere, in the inspiration of God, rather than from within his own resources.

The apostle Paul delved into this wisdom to proclaim to all the crucified Lord Jesus Christ. He says that he has decided to know nothing other than Jesus Christ. For the sake of the message of Christ crucified, he was ready to appear a fool in the eyes of the wise of his time. He writes to the Christians of Corinth that God's wisdom was to offer salvation "through the folly of what we preach": Christ crucified. It was a scandal and madness for the people of the time. But Paul says that the madness of God is wiser than human wisdom and that the fragility of God is more solid than human force. The Christ depicted in the gospels does not act like a hero but as somebody whose power is not of this world. He reaches out to the marginalized, he touches the dying, he forgives sins, even where the just and pious saw no possibility of forgiveness. This is the God who came down to walk the dusty ways of humankind! The word of the cross has also been entrusted to us, Christians of today. Between our churches, which the madness of humankind has separated, the pursuit of unity might seem a crazy project. Yet at the heart of a divided world, torn apart by war and violence, the search for peace and reconciliation remains the only wisdom. In the light of the cross, the foundation of our common witness takes shape here. With Christ, God reaches out towards humanity and sends us towards those who seek him in order to proclaim: the way to life passes through the crucified and risen Christ.

Prayer

O God, full of wisdom and truth, you made known to us the folly of your love when humanity crucified your only son, Jesus, and when you raised him from the dead as the Christ, we began to grasp your great wisdom. We pray you, keep us in the steps of your Son on the narrow road to Life. May we proclaim the good news of salvation by the cross of Jesus Christ which witnessed to life for all. May your church today stay faithful to him who is its foundation and may it lead all nations to the wisdom of your Spirit. Amen.

Day 8

You are Christ's (1 Cor 3: 21-23)

Is 44: 1-8

I am the first and I am the last

Ps 89: 1-4

Your steadfast love is established forever

Rev 4: 1-11

Worshipping the one who lives forever and ever

Mk 9: 33-35

Whoever wants to be first must be last

Commentary

We belong to Christ. We are his and no other's. This fact is the foundation for our unity: In baptism, Christ has claimed us for his own, and made us all one in him. The unity we share in Christ is greater than all the differences, past and present, which divide the churches today.

Because we belong to Christ, we belong to one another and are accountable to one another. That is why Christ calls us to build up his body, the church, together as co-workers and fellow-servants. That is why Christians and churches are called to live and work together, as fellow-servants in witnessing to their faith and in serving those in need. And that is why divisions, dissension, quarrelling, factions based on personalities (even if they are Paul or Apollos or Cephas) – all these are denials not only of our brothers and sisters in Christ, but of Christ himself.

As God's temple, the church is a place of worship, and common worship is the most powerful expression of our common belonging to Christ. Every act of common worship is a victory over our division and a celebration of the unity which we do have in Christ. We are united with all those, in all places and times, who have belonged to Christ and who in the Spirit have worshipped God. We do not always act, of course, in accordance with the unity given us in Christ. When we cannot worship together, especially at the Lord's table, our disunity is plain for all to see. Here there is more "building" to be done – and that by all churches!

Because we belong to Christ, we belong to God. Paul affirms in all boldness: "all things are yours". We live and move, together with all our co-workers and fellow-servants, within God's plan for all of creation. God acts within history, for salvation, for healing of the broken, for reconciliation of those at war, for the renewal of the whole creation. God acts, too, in judgement: we know that what we build together is being tested and the results made known. We anticipate a final accounting being made of our work. We do not know the exact time or form of this judgement; but we know that we will be judged by the God whose nature is life and love.

For all God's gifts of creation and redemption, we give praise and thanks to God who has made us one through his Spirit in Christ. May our building together of Christ's church, may our search for unity, be offered in praise of God.

Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for making us one in Christ. Give us imagination and courage to build your church together in unity and in love. Make our lives,

and the lives of our churches, a witness to your love for us and for the whole creation. Grant us unity in our time, O Lord. Amen!

Additional prayers from Ireland

Hymns and Blessings

(proposed by the ecumenical group in Ireland and published under their sole responsibility)

O King of the Friday (Ancient Irish Prayer)

Whose limbs were stretched on the Cross,
O Lord who did suffer
The bruises, the wounds, the loss,
We stretch ourselves
Beneath the shield of thy might,
Some fruit from the tree of thy pass
Fall on us this night!

Saint Patrick's Breastplate

I bind unto myself today
The strong name of the Trinity
By invocation of the same,
The Three in One and One in Three.

I bind this day to me forever,
By power of faith, Christ's incarnation,
His baptism in the Jordan River,
His cross of death for my salvation,
His bursting from the spiced tomb,
His riding up the heavenly way,
His coming at the day of doom,
I bind unto myself today.

I bind unto myself today the virtues of the
starlit heaven,
the glorious sun's life-giving ray, the
whiteness of the moon at even,
the flashing of the lightning free, the
whirling wind's tempestuous shocks,
the stable earth, the deep salt sea, around
the old eternal rocks.

I bind unto myself today
The power of God to hold and lead,

Love Divine, all Loves Excelling (Charles Wesley, 1747)

Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven, to earth come down,
Fix in us Thy humble dwelling,
All Thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, Thou art all compassion,
Pure, unbounded love Thou art;

His eye to watch, his might to stay,
His ear to hearken to my need,
The wisdom of my God to teach,
His hand to guide, his shield to ward,
The Word of God to give me speech,
His heavenly host to be my guard.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

I bind unto myself the name,
The strong name of the Trinity
By invocation of the same,
The Three in One and One in Three,
Of whom all nature has creation,
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word.
Praise to the Lord of my salvation;
Salvation is of Christ the Lord!

Visit us with Thy salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit
Into ev'ry troubled breast;
Let us all in Thee inherit,

Let us find Thy promised rest.
Take away the love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its beginning,
Set our hearts at liberty.

Come, almighty to deliver,
Let us all Thy life receive;
Suddenly return, and never,
Nevermore Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,

Serve Thee as Thy hosts above,
Pray, and praise Thee without ceasing,
Glory in Thy perfect love.

Finish then Thy new creation;
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in Thee:
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise

A 15th Century Gaelic Blessing

God be in my head and in my understanding:
God be in my eyes and in my looking:
God be in my mouth and in my speaking:
God be in my heart and in my thinking:
God be at mine end and at my departing.

An Old Irish Blessing

May the road rise up to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields,
And until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of his hand.
Amen.

Traditional Celtic hymn

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart
Naught be all else to me, save that thou art;
Thou my best thought in the day and the
night,
Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true
word,
I ever with thee, and thou with me, Lord;
Thou my redeemer, my love thou hast
won;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.

Riches I heed not, nor vain empty praise,

Thou mine inheritance through all my
days;
Thou, and thou only the first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art!

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright
sun,
Grant me its joys after vict'ry is won;
Christ of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

(words: Irish song (8th century), tr. Mary E. Byrne, 1905; versed by Eleanor H. Hull, 1912.)

Week of Prayer for Christian unity 2005

Ecumenical situation in Slovakia

Slovakia is a new state populated by old national groups. The majority of the 5.3 million inhabitants of the Slovak Republic are Slovak (86%). Hungarians are the largest ethnic minority (11%), and are concentrated in the southern and eastern regions of Slovakia. Proportionately, Slovakia has the highest population of Roma in the region, estimated at around 500,000 people. Other ethnic groups include Czechs, Ruthenians (or "Rusins"), Germans, and Poles. Recent and sometimes unregistered immigration has been mainly from the poorer Eastern European countries, with significant Russian, Ukrainian, Serb and Bulgarian groups concentrated in the larger cities.

Christianity was first brought to the region in its Eastern form in the 9th century by the Slavic missionary activity of Saints Cyril and Methodius. From the 11th until the early 20th century, present-day Slovakia was under Hungarian rule, and became a predominantly Roman Catholic territory. The Slovak national revival was begun in the 19th century by intellectuals seeking to revive the Slovak language and culture.

The formation of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918 following World War I satisfied the common aspirations of Czechs and Slovaks for independence from the Habsburg Empire. On November 17, 1989, a series of public protests known as the "Velvet Revolution" began, and led to the downfall of communist rule in Czechoslovakia. In 1992, negotiations on the new federal constitution deadlocked over the issue of Slovak autonomy, and in the latter half of 1992, agreement was reached to peacefully divide Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic (SR).

The socio-economic situation remains precarious, although generally better than Slovakia's eastern neighbours. Following important parliamentary elections in 2002 that saw the defeat of the nationalist parties, Slovakia has been accepted as a candidate for both NATO and European Union membership, both of which will have a significant influence on the country's future development.

The national unemployment rate is higher than 15%, and in some regions surpasses 30%. Thus the most endangered groups are long-term unemployed people. Roma people, single parent families, children and large families are other vulnerable categories at risk of poverty. The low level of social and health care has resulted in the fact that the Roma people's average life span is 15 years shorter than the rest of the Slovak population.

The organized forms of ecumenism in Slovakia had their origins in the environment of Protestant churches, and their purpose was to assert the interests of Protestants in relation to the majority Roman Catholic Church. In 1927, the Union of Evangelic Churches in Czechoslovakia (of which Slovakia was part from 1918 until 1993) was created. Within this union, the first contacts with the young world ecumenical movement started.

The representatives of particular churches had become increasingly aware of the movement that started to develop in Europe and in the entire world after World War II. They realized that the message of the gospel should unite the churches, not separate them. The Ecumenical Council of Churches in Czechoslovakia was established June 20, 1955. One of its purposes was to allow the churches to speak publicly about the social situation within the country after 1948, when communists took power in Czechoslovakia. This was a period of restraint in the life and service of the churches, as well as persecution of active church workers. In addition, co-operation with churches of neighbouring countries was needed. The task of the Ecumenical Council was to implement the ideas of the ecumenical movement in the territory of our country.

The year 1989 and the development of democracy provided a new impulse for the work of all churches; they could start the work of revival. As a result of change in general conditions, the mission and goals of the ecumenical movement in our country were transformed as well.

The Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Slovak Republic (ECCSR) resulted from the separation of Czechoslovakia into states, and begun its activity with its first meeting on April 15, 1993. The ECCSR associates churches that function in that territory. At the present, eleven churches are members, three of them as observers. The full members are the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession in Slovakia, the Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia, the Orthodox Church in Slovakia, the Brethren Church in the SR, the Evangelical Methodist Church Slovak District, the Czechoslovak Husite Church in Slovakia, the Baptist Union in the SR, and the Old Catholic Church in Slovakia. The observers are the Roman-Catholic and Greek-Catholic Churches, the Apostolic Church in Slovakia, and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

The ecumenical context is characterized by a disproportion of membership numbers between the respective churches. The following figures give an idea of the membership of different churches according to the results of the 2001 census: Roman Catholic 68,9% and Greek Catholic (Uniate) 4% - total of 72,9%; Lutheran 6,9%; Reformed 2,03%; Orthodox 0,93%; all other below 0,1%). There is some correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity. The majority of Reformed Christians are ethnic Hungarians, and most Orthodox are ethnic Ruthenian or Ukrainian immigrants. The total population of Slovakia is 5,3 million. In this context the Ecumenical Council mainly serves as a body representing the "smaller churches". According to the 2001 census, the number of persons who claimed a religious affiliation in Slovakia increased from 72% in 1991 to 84% in 2002. The increase is partly due to the reluctance of some religious groups to declare their religious affiliation in 1991, and partly to the active missionary outreach of churches in Slovakia.

The relations between church and state in Slovakia are generally positive, and have been strengthened in the recent period. The Church Department of the Ministry of Culture oversees relations between church and state. The Church Department administers the state subsidies to the registered religious

communities. It has no authority to interfere with their internal activities. The ministry also administers a cultural fund that, among other works, maintains and repairs historical religious buildings. The Ecumenical Council, subsidized by the state, provides an important point of dialogue and representation with the authorities. Public opinion surveys systematically uphold the church as one of the most trustworthy institutions in the country. Recent elections have reinforced the presence of explicitly Christian parties and leaders in the government.

In 2000, the Slovak government signed an international treaty with the Vatican to regulate its relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. In April 2002, the government also signed a joint agreement with the eleven registered churches relating to the ECCSR, in an attempt to provide equal status with Roman Catholics. This national agreement is understood as guaranteeing the recognition, status and financial support of the churches and ECCSR. The support of the state for church schools is also strengthened.

However, there is continued uncertainty about the future financing of clergy and church personnel by the Slovak state, which poses the challenge of the economic viability of church structures and their activities.

In March 2003, the assembly of the ecumenical council of churches urged Slovak citizens to support European Union accession. According to the churches, EU enlargement is a challenge for the internal integration of people and churches in Slovakia, and requires churches to accept their common responsibility for the service of the gospel in today's world. The process of European integration should not be limited to the economic and political aspects imposed by the European Union. Churches think that there should be a list of their own objectives in the integration process, like increasing their openness to ecumenical cooperation, and finding ways of strengthening cooperation. At the same time, the spiritual identity of churches and the cultural integrity of Slovakia must be carefully nurtured and safeguarded to avoid dissolution in a new integration. Some of the churches are concerned about the growing penetration of sectarian teachings in the school system, and neo-liberal attitudes in Slovak society, which may undermine traditional moral values.

Since the year 2000 ECCSR operates an educational programme which aims at enabling its member churches in their service - mainly in areas of social work, youth work and work with marginalized groups. Staffed with one secretary, the programme offers capacity-building seminars and conferences to specialized workers in the churches. The programme also coordinates and accompanies the work of Youth - Women - and Diaconal commissions of the ECCSR. In 2002, the programme organized nine capacity-building seminars and one conference on the status of women in the light of New Testament.

Since 1999, the ECCSR operates a centre for study of new religiosity. This programme is operated in cooperation with the Ecumenical Society for Study of Sects. The Catholic Bishops' Conference also supports the programme. The main activity is the publication of a quarterly magazine, ROZMER

(*Dimension*). In 2002, four issues with 2500 copies of each were published. Another activity is the dissemination of information. Nine lectures on topics of new religiosity in different parts of the country were offered last year. The centre also operates a webpage. 12,000 hits were recorded last year. Eighty e-mail questions were processed. Another 100 personal visits were made to the centre. The centre is staffed with one programme secretary and one administrative assistant. The ECCSR is searching for support to strengthen this programme and open a fulltime consulting/counselling position.

Since February 2001, the ECCSR has prepared a weekly news programme with information from churches and ecumenical organizations worldwide. In cooperation with the Slovak state radio, a 10-minute programme is prepared, based on news from ecumenical agencies like ENI, EPD, LWI, KNA as well as interviews with international guests. A transcript of the programme is distributed via e-mail to a wide network of subscribers.

The Round Table programme is an important instrument which serves the churches in Slovakia in strengthening their service. Since 1996 the programme has supported a large number of projects carried by the member churches or through the ECCSR secretariat. In 2002 a total of 113 projects were supported with an amount of 210,000 euros, focusing on education, social diaconia, mission, media work and organizational development.

One of the main issues to be focused on in the future is the transformation and decentralization of the state owned and operated social care system. Churches are aware of the historical meaning of this challenge and are currently in the process of assessing their capacity to take over some of the institutions to be operated under their diaconal structures.

Another challenge to the churches' social work is the growing ability of Slovak economy to provide humanitarian aid. ECCSR is currently in the process of mapping the ground and conditions for establishing an independent aid organization.

There are many good examples of ecumenical activities at grass roots level among the churches in Slovakia. One to be mentioned is the Ecumenical Fellowship in the city of Kosice, which is the industrial and administrative centre of Eastern Slovakia.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is observed by most churches in Slovakia. In many places Christians of different confessions meet during the Week of Prayer. Since 2003 the Christian youth movements in Slovakia also organize special ecumenical prayer meetings in January. A major event during the week is a central ecumenical worship which is attended by representatives of most churches participating in the ecumenical movement and also by representatives of civil and political life. The Slovak public TV broadcast the worship live on the nationwide channel.

Churches in Slovakia in these years pray mainly for wisdom and strength in the process of the transformation of society; for growth in unity which will

enable them to use the new positive opportunities as they enter the community of nations in the European Union; that they may serve as an enrichment for this community; and that they might find ways to effectively deal with negative social effects of the transformation.

(This description of the local ecumenical situation was prepared by the local preparatory group and is published under its sole authority.)

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Themes 1968-2005

In 1968, materials officially prepared jointly by the WCC Faith and Order Commission and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity began to be used.

- 1968 To the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1: 14)
Pour la louange de sa gloire
- 1969 Called to freedom (Galatians 5: 13)
Appelés à la liberté
(Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)
- 1970 We are fellow workers for God (1 Corinthians 3: 9)
Nous sommes les coopérateurs de Dieu
(Preparatory meeting held at the Monastery of Niederaltaich, Federal Republic of Germany)
- 1971 ...and the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13: 13)
...et la communion du Saint-Esprit
- 1972 I give you a new commandment (John 13: 34)
Je vous donne un commandement nouveau
(Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1973 Lord, teach us to pray (Luke 11: 1)
Seigneur, apprends-nous à prier
(Preparatory meeting held at the Abbey of Montserrat, Spain)
- 1974 That every tongue confess: Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2: 1-13)
Que tous confessent: Jésus-Christ est Seigneur
(Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1975 God's purpose: all things in Christ (Ephesians 1: 3-10)
La volonté du Père: Tout réunir sous un seul chef, le Christ
(Material from an Australian group. Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1976 We shall be like him (1 John 3: 2) or, Called to become what we are
Appelés à devenir ce que nous sommes
(Material from Caribbean Conference of Churches. Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)
- 1977 Enduring together in hope (Romans 5: 1-5)
L'espérance ne déçoit pas
(Material from Lebanon, in the midst of a civil war. Preparatory meeting held in Geneva.)

- 1978 No longer strangers (Ephesians 2: 13-22)
 Vous n'êtes plus des étrangers
(Material from an ecumenical team in Manchester, England)
- 1979 Serve one another to the glory of God (I Peter 4: 7-11)
 Soyez au service les uns des autres pour la gloire de Dieu
(Material from Argentina. Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1980 Your kingdom come (Matthew 6: 10)
 Que ton règne vienne!
(Material from an ecumenical group in Berlin, German Democratic Republic. Preparatory meeting held in Milan)
- 1981 One Spirit - many gifts - one body (1 Corinthians 12: 3b-13)
 Un seul esprit - des dons divers - un seul corps
(Material from Graymoor Fathers, USA - Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1982 May all find their home in you, O Lord (Psalm 84)
 Que tous trouvent leur demeure en Toi, Seigneur
(Material from Kenya. Preparatory meeting held in Milan, Italy)
- 1983 Jesus Christ - the Life of the World (1 John 1: 1-4)
 Jesus Christ - La Vie du Monde
(Material from an ecumenical group in Ireland. Preparatory meeting held in Céligny (Bossey), Switzerland)
- 1984 Called to be one through the cross of our Lord (1 Cor 2: 2 and Col 1: 20).
 Appelés à l'unité par la croix de notre Seigneur
(Preparatory meeting held in Venice, Italy)
- 1985 From death to life with Christ (Ephesians 2: 4-7)
 De la mort à la vie avec le Christ
(Material from Jamaica - Preparatory meeting held in Grandchamp, Switzerland)
- 1986 You shall be my witnesses (Acts 1: 6-8)
 Vous serez mes témoins
(Material from Yugoslavia (Slovenia), Preparatory meeting held in Yugoslavia)
- 1987 United in Christ - a New Creation (2 Corinthians 5: 17-6: 4a)
 Unis dans le Christ - une nouvelle création
(Material from England - Preparatory meeting held in Taizé, France)
- 1988 The love of God casts out fear (1 John 4: 18)
 L'Amour de Dieu bannit la Crainte

(Material from Italy - Preparatory meeting held in Pinerolo, Italy)

- 1989 Building community: one body in Christ (Romans 12: 5-6a)
Bâtir la communauté: Un seul corps en Christ
(Material from Canada - Preparatory meeting held in Whaley Bridge, England)
- 1990 That they all may be one...That the world may believe (John 17)
Que tous soient un...Afin que le monde croie
(Material from Spain - Preparatory meeting held in Madrid, Spain)
- 1991 Praise the Lord, all you nations! (Psalm 117 and Romans 15: 5-13)
Nations, louez toutes le Seigneur
(Material from Germany - Preparatory meeting held in Rotenburg an der Fulda, Federal Republic of Germany)
- 1992 I am with you always ... Go, therefore (Matthew 28: 16-20)
Je suis avec vous...allez donc
(Material from Belgium - Preparatory meeting held in Bruges, Belgium)
- 1993 Bearing the fruit of the Spirit for Christian unity (Galatians 5: 22-23)
Pour l'unité: laisser mûrir en nous les fruits de l'Esprit
(Material from Zaire - Preparatory meeting held near Zurich, Switzerland)
- 1994 The household of God: called to be one in heart and mind (Acts 4: 23-37)
La maison de Dieu: Appelés à être un dans le cœur et dans l'esprit
(Material from Ireland - Preparatory meeting held in Dublin, Republic of Ireland)
- 1995 Koinonia: communion in God and with one another (John 15: 1-17)
La koinonia: communion en Dieu et les uns avec les autres
(Preparatory meeting held in Bristol, England)
- 1996 Behold, I stand at the door and knock (Rev. 3: 14-22)
Je me tiens à la porte et je frappe
(Preparatory meeting held in Lisbon, Portugal)
- 1997 We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5: 20)
Au nom du Christ, laissez-vous reconcilier avec Dieu
(Preparatory meeting held in Stockholm, Sweden)
- 1998 The Spirit helps us in our weakness (Romans 8: 14-27)
L'Esprit aussi vient en aide à notre faiblesse
(Preparatory meeting held in Paris, France)
- 1999 He will dwell with them as their God, they will be his peoples (Rev. 21: 1-7)
Dieu demeurera avec eux. Ils seront ses peuples
et lui sera le Dieu qui est avec eux

(Preparatory material from Malaysia: meeting held in Monastery of Bose, Italy)

2000 Blessed be God who has blessed us in Christ (Eph 1: 3-14)
Béni soit Dieu, qui nous a bénis en Christ
(Preparatory material from the Middle East Council of Churches: meeting held La Verna, Italy)

2001 I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (Jn 14: 1-6)
Je suis le chemin, et la vérité et la vie
(Preparatory material from Romania and meeting held at Vulcan, Romania)

2002 For with you is the fountain of life (Ps 36: 5-9)
Car chez toi est la fontaine de la vie (**Ps 35, 6-10**)
(Preparatory material CEEC and CEC, meeting near Augsbourg, Germany)

2003 We have this treasure in clay jars (2 Cor. 4: 4-18)
Car nous avons ce trésor dans des vases d'argile
(Preparatory material churches in Argentina, meeting at Los Rubios, Spain)

2004 My peace I give to you (John 14: 23-31; John 14: 27)
Je vous donne ma paix
(Preparatory material from Aleppo, Syria; meeting in Palermo, Sicily)

2005 Christ, the one foundation of the church (1 Cor 3 1-23)
Le Christ, unique fondement de l'Eglise
(Preparatory material from Slovakia; meeting in Piestaňy, Slovakia)

Some key dates in the history of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

- ca. 1740 In Scotland a Pentecostal movement arose, with North American links, whose revivalist message included prayers for and with all churches.
- 1820 The Rev. James Haldane Stewart publishes "Hints for the General Union of Christians for the Outpouring of the Spirit".
- 1840 The Rev. Ignatius Spencer, a convert to Roman Catholicism, suggests a "Union of Prayer for Unity".
- 1867 The First Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops emphasizes prayer for unity in the Preamble to its Resolutions.
- 1894 Pope Leo XIII encourages the practice of a Prayer Octave for Unity in the context of Pentecost.
- 1908 The observance of the "Church Unity Octave" initiated by the Rev. Paul Wattson.
- 1926 The Faith and Order movement begins publishing "Suggestions for an Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity".
- 1935 Abbé Paul Couturier of France advocates the "Universal Week of Prayer for Christian Unity" on the inclusive basis of prayer for "the unity Christ wills by the means he wills".
- 1958 Unité Chrétienne (Lyon, France) and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches begin co-operative preparation of materials for the Week of Prayer.
- 1964 In Jerusalem, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I prayed together Jesus' prayer "that they all may be one" (John 17).
- 1964 The "Decree on Ecumenism" of Vatican II emphasizes that prayer is the soul of the ecumenical movement and encourages observance of the Week of Prayer.
- 1965 The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity [now known as the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity] begin official joint preparation of the Week of Prayer material.
- 1968 First official use of Week of Prayer material prepared jointly by Faith and Order and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity [now known as the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity]
- 1975 First use of Week of Prayer material based on a draft text prepared by a local ecumenical group. An Australian group was the first to take up this plan in preparing the 1975 initial draft.

- 1988 Week of Prayer materials were used in the inaugural worship for The Christian Federation of Malaysia, linking the major Christian groupings in that country.
Text for 1996 prepared in collaboration with YMCA and YWCA.
- 2004 Agreement reached that resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity be *jointly published and produced in the same format* by Faith and Order (WCC) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Catholic Church).