Salt of the Earth

Reflections for the 8 days

www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2016
**Starting Point**

**Reflections from the Catholic Youth Centre of the Archdiocese of Riga**

From their experience of organising an annual Ecumenical Way of the Cross, the CYCAR reflect on the meaning of the passion and resurrection in their context, and the Lord’s mighty acts that Christians are called to proclaim.

Latvia’s Soviet history continues to cast a shadow. The grief and pain of wounds inflicted are difficult to forgive and, like the stone at Jesus’ tomb, they can imprison us in a spiritual grave. Jesus’ resurrection is the earthshaking event that opens our graves, frees us from pain and bitterness, and re-unites us with our brothers and sisters who have been imprisoned and hurting too. And like Mary Magdalene we must “go quickly” from this great moment of joy to tell others what the Lord has done.

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**Ezekiel 37:12-14**

I am going to open your graves.

**Psalm 71:19 -23**

Your power and your righteousness, O God, reach the high heavens.

**Romans 8:15-21**

We suffer with him so that we may also be glorified.

**Matthew 28: 1-10**

He is not here: he has been raised.

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**Reflection**

**The Stone**

You have drawn the stone over the door of your fine and private tomb.

A cosy death this.

Night embraces the broken body of Christ, shrouded in complacency on its solid rock of dogma.

Shush! Let no one roll away the stone lest you must go forth, whole, in his footsteps to meet the day’s challenge.

Riga’s Roman Catholic Cathedral and the adjacent “Barikades” memorial to the 1991 confrontations against Soviet troops.
Questions

- There is an odd comfort about a tomb because it protects us from the strangeness and challenge of Christ’s resurrection. What is it in our lives that makes us resist the stone being rolled away?
- How can we share our experience of God with others?

Prayer

Risen Lord Jesus, the stone was no barrier to you; your resurrection brings love, new life, new challenges.

Give us strength and courage to allow ourselves to believe this and so to roll back the stones that imprison us, embrace the glory of the Easter morning, and meet the believers from whom we are separated.

In your name, O risen Lord, we pray.

Amen.

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

- Exchange stones between churches with a word of peace or blessing written on each stone creating a cairn in each place of worship. When you hold or see these stones pray that each fellowship and congregation would be living stones in your community.
- Together tidy up your local community garden/neglected graves in your cemetery.
- Blessed are those who mourn – in Colombia names are written on stones to commemorate the disappeared. Visit Go and Do to read Maria’s story.
Salt of the Earth

Isaiah 61: 1-4
The spirit of the Lord God is upon me.

Psalm 133
How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

Philippians 2:1-5
Make my joy complete: be of the same mind.

John 15: 9-12
I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you.

Starting Point
Reflections from the creators of Christian programming at Latvian State Radio

In the Soviet era a Christian presence through public media was impossible in Latvia. Since independence, Latvian State Radio broadcasts Christian programmes providing a forum for leaders from diverse churches to encounter one another. This public witness of mutual respect, love and joy contributed to the spirit of Latvian ecumenical life.

The joy of the Gospel calls Christians to live the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘…to bring good news to the oppressed’.

When we are saddened by our own suffering, we may lack the vigour to proclaim the joy that comes from Jesus. Even when we feel unable to give anything to anyone, by bearing witness to the little that we have, Jesus multiplies it in us and in those around us. When we love one another as Jesus loves us, so we discover mutual love and joy at the heart of our prayer for unity.

Reflection
Good news

Good news indeed!

Such nice people, in such a nice part of town: no immigrants, no offenders, no prison.

A new vicar: young, white, and thankfully male, to match the new church roof and the state of the art kitchenette that cost thousands.

The poor? Ah yes. The poor...

Isn’t something sent to a place called the Third World? And doesn’t someone collect tins and stuff for a food bank somewhere?

But this is a good area.

The sleepy stillness of its Sundays knows no sigh of need, no howl of pain, no cry of despair.
Questions

- Pope Francis writes of the ‘joy of the gospel’. What do you think the joy of the gospel is for the world and for the churches?
- Joy is Christ’s gift, and he gives it through other people. What can you receive from other Christians so that Jesus’ joy may be in you, inspiring you to witness?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Lord of joy, the world craves good news; the world craves your love and joy.

Fill us with that love and joy. Help us to see the plight of others, to hear the sighs of need, the howls of pain the cries of despair, and to respond, always, in the love and joy of you, our Saviour and our Lord. Amen.

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

- Agree on a song of joy to be sung in each place of worship during the offering.
- Invite your local community to participate in an activity you enjoy doing together. e.g. a picnic or a walk.
- Blessed are the poor in spirit – in Ethiopia joy is being brought to communities living in poverty. Visit Go and Do to read Adi’s story.
Jeremiah 31:10-13
They shall come and sing aloud.

Psalm 122
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

1 John 4:16b-21
Those who abide in love, abide in God.

John 17:20-23
That they may become completely one.

Reflection
‘That they may become completely one’

You weep for your faith, for few come to your festivals; churches are desolate; priests groan.

This, you say, is a second exile. “Our retrograde God will restore his people, as he restored Israel.”

Hear the word of the Lord, as you sugar-coat doctrine, water-down liturgy in the futile pursuit of a fractured mission:

“My people divided and unrepentant shall never rebuild Jerusalem”.

Starting Point

This reflection is inspired by Chemin Neuf. http://www.chemin-neuf.org/

Catholic and Lutheran members experience the joy of the ‘common life’ in Christ which is “to welcome, love, serve, pray and witness with Christians from diverse traditions”. They also experience the pain of disunity: “the world cannot believe that we are Jesus’ disciples when we cannot receive together the body and blood of Christ.” As a sign of this division, they place an empty paten and chalice on the altar during evening prayer.

The Sanctuary in Riga’s Roman Catholic Cathedral
Prayer

Lord Jesus, Lord of wholeness, your prayer for unity amongst your disciples has fallen on closed ears and on hard hearts.

Forgive us our closed ears, forgive us our hard hearts which perpetuate suspicion, prejudice and division:

forgive us our fractured mission.

Open our hearts, eyes and minds to your love and truth within all Christian people and strengthen in us the resolve to work to restore the unity of your Church and your creation to the glory of your name. Amen.

Questions

• What does it mean to you to be ‘one in Christ’?
• How does being ‘one in Christ’ help us to overcome the prejudices caused by centuries of division amongst Christians in our own islands as well as in mainland Europe?

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

• Place a communion cup and plate centrally in your place of worship.
• Host a meal for the wider community.
• Blessed are the meek – in Brazil the Quilombola community are living meekly on the earth. Visit Go and Do to learn from their story.
Genesis 17:1-8
Your name shall be Abraham, the ancestor of a multitude of nations.

Psalm 145:8-12
The Lord is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love.

Romans 10:14-15
How can they believe in him if they have never heard about him?

Matthew 13:3-9
But some seeds fell on fertile soil.

Reflection

Words

Priests of Babel, your words are launched like missiles from your pulpits to justify where you stand and why you cannot in conscience but agree to disagree.

Words, words, words. Subtle, serpentine, their poisonous shells stifling in the soil the seed of the one Word of the Kingdom of God.

They have learnt “that only when we recognise other Christians as brothers and sisters can we dare to take God’s Word into the public space.”

Words flood our lives: in conversation, from television, radio and social media. These words have the power to build up and to knock down. Much of this ocean of words can seem meaningless: diversion rather than nourishment. This ocean could drown us, where there is little meaning to grasp. But the saving Word we have heard has been thrown to us as a lifeline. It calls us into communion, and draws us into unity with others who have heard it too. Once we were not a people, but now we are God’s priestly people.

The cross on the site of St Meinhard’s Church, Ikskile
Questions

• In what ways do your attitudes to other Christian traditions hinder the proclamation of the Gospel?
• Who hears the word of life from our lips?

Prayer

Lord Jesus,
the Word made flesh and sent to live among us,
the Word of truth, of love, of joy,
the Word of compassion,
of acceptance, of unity.
Forgive our negative, critical, wounding and divisive thoughts and words.

Inspire us with your Spirit and give us that unity which will empower us to speak words of joy, acceptance and of reconciliation.
Make us life-giving, priestly people in our communities, to your glory. Amen.

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

• Choose to read the Gospel of John together as churches.
• Hold a poetry evening for your local community.
• Blessed are the persecuted – sometimes the words of the persecuted and the persecutors need to be heard. Visit the Go and Do to hear about Israeli NGO, Breaking the Silence.
The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is traditionally observed from 18th to 25th January (the octave of St Peter and St Paul). However, some groups choose other times of the year, particularly around Pentecost which is a symbolic date for the unity of the church. Do make your own decision, taking local factors into account. To allow for use at any time in the year, the Days material uses the notation 1-8.
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Genesis 37:5–8
Listen to this dream that I dreamed.

Psalm 98
O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvellous things.

Romans 12: 9–13
Love one another with mutual affection.

John 21:25
The world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

**Starting Point**

*Reflections from the Editors of an Ecumenical journal Kas Mus Vieno? (what unites us?) founded in 2005 as a response to disunity.*

Christian disunity hurts. Churches suffer from their inability to be united as one family at the Lord’s Table. They suffer from rivalry and from histories of combativeness.

When Joseph shares his dream with his brothers they react with anger and violence as the dream implies they must bow down before him. In Egypt when they ultimately do bow before him they experience reconciliation and grace rather than the abasement and dishonour they feared.

Jesus, like Joseph’s story, unfolds a vision of unity to us. But like Joseph’s brothers, we are fearful of the vision when it implies we submit to the will of another. We fear what we might lose. But the vision is about gain: regaining our once separated brothers and sisters.

**Reflection**

**Joseph’s dream**

A dream of abasement this, turned into a tale of reconciliation with suffering brothers in a moment of grace, foreshadowing the dream: “that they may become completely one”; estranged brothers and sisters reconciled in prayer and mission.

This, you know, must be right. Disunity hurts, strife cripples;

and there is even in your debatable doctrines nothing that speaks of a schism in heaven.

Ruins of St Meinhard’s Church, Ikskile, the first masonry building in Latvia

Salt of the Earth
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Prayer

Jesus, our suffering Lord, our disunity as churches compounds your suffering and causes pain to those who long for your dream of unity to become reality. Forgive us our part in continuing division; grant us humility to hear your voice ever urging reconciliation. Inspire us to work tirelessly to be one so that the world may believe in your name. Amen.

Questions

- What does it mean to place our dreams for Christian unity at the feet of Christ?
- In what ways does the Lord’s vision of unity call the churches to renewal and change today?

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

- Share your dreams for your church and the community with each congregation in your area.
- Share these dreams with local community leaders in a request for necessary changes to make them happen.
- Blessed are the pure in heart – in India those considered impure, the untouchables, dream of a time when all are treated equally. Visit Go and Do to hear Seema’s story.
Starting Point

This reflection comes out of the experience of an ecumenical prayer chapel in the centre of the small town, Madona. The chapel grew out of the experience of praying through the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity together. The group represents Lutheran, Catholic and Orthodox traditions. They continue to join in round the clock prayer.

As long as God’s people are divided, and Christians are estranged from one another, we are like Jesus in Samaria, strangers in a foreign land, without safety, refreshment or a place of rest. Isaiah tells us of the Lord’s mighty act: he posted sentinels on the walls of Jerusalem so that his people could worship him in safety day and night.

In the Week of Prayer our churches and chapels become places of safety, rest and refreshment for people to join in prayer. The challenge from this week is to create more places and protected times of prayer, because as we pray together, we become one people.

Reflection

Sentinels

This is the one week when, as you encircle the church with prayer you become, all too briefly, one people.

Persist in this prayer.

Persevere,
watchful as the sentinels upon the walls of Jerusalem.

Be not silent.
Take no rest.
Give the Lord no respite until, at last, he binds you together and to himself: one people, one mission, one God, that the world may believe.

Ruins of St Meinhard’s Church, Ikskile, the first masonry building in Latvia
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Questions

• What would it mean for the Church to be ‘one’ in your locality?
• How important is it to pray together?

Prayer

Lord Jesus,
You asked your apostles to stay
awake and pray with you.
May we offer the world sacred
space and holy time
in which to find refreshment
and peace,
so that praying together we come to
know you more deeply.
Amen

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

• Organise a 12 hour prayer room where each church commits to one
  prayer slot. End with a joint time of prayer together.
• Put a prayer box, identify a tree or similar so the local community can post
  or tie on their prayers and requests for prayer.
• Blessed are the merciful. Many of Syria’s refugees to Lebanon are children.
  Visit Go and do to get a glimpse into their lives.
Starting Point

Reflections inspired by Latvians who have come to faith through the Alpha Course remaining open to learning from and being enriched by the gifts of other Christian communities. http://www.alpha.org/

The disciples who leave Jerusalem for Emmaus have lost their hope that Jesus was the Messiah and walk away from their community. It is a journey of separation and isolation. By contrast, they return to Jerusalem full of hope with a Gospel message on their lips. It is this resurrection message that drives them back into the heart of the community and into a communion of fellowship. So often Christians try to evangelise with a competitive spirit, hoping to fill their own churches. Ambition overrides the desire for others to hear the life-giving message of the Gospel. True evangelism is a journey from Emmaus to Jerusalem, a journey from isolation to unity.

Reflection

The Road to Unity

You have withdrawn, baffled and disillusioned, from the communion of fellowship, and taken the lonely road to your own Emmaus:
a journey of separation and isolation.

When your eyes are opened to recognise him who comes near and goes with you,
explains to you the scriptures, blesses and breaks the bread,
you will return at once,
your hearts burning within you, to your companions, gathered together in Jerusalem.

Russian Orthodox Church, Riga
Questions

- Is mission just an excuse for perpetuating our own particular tradition?
- What challenges and opportunities would there be in doing mission together in our localities?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, constant companion on the journey you have made our hearts burn within us, and have sent us back on the road towards our brothers and sisters, with the Gospel message on our lips. Help us to see that hope and obedience to your commands always lead to the greater unity of your people. Amen.

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

- Organise a pilgrimage around each of the churches in your area.
- Invite the local community on that walk to visit these buildings.
- Blessed are the peacemakers. Pray for those who are working to build peace in the many conflict hotspots across the world. Visit Go and Do to inspire these prayers.
**Isaiah 56:6-8**
My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

**Psalm 24**
Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?

**Acts 2:37-42**
They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship.

**John 13:34-35**
Love one another.

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**Starting Point**

**Reflections from Levi Ivars Graudins, the founder of the Gaizins House of Prayer.**

Set on Gaizins, Latvia’s highest hill, this house of prayer regularly hosts the 40-hour fellowship of Christian leaders who, for the duration, are supported in prayer and worship by the faithful. These encounters renew the leaders as fellow-workers in Christ, and help shape the visible expression of ecumenical life in Latvia.

Jesus’ commandment to love one another is not theoretical. Our communion of love with one another becomes concrete when we gather together intentionally, in apostolic simplicity, as Christ’s disciples to share fellowship and prayer.

The more Christians, especially their leaders, encounter Christ together in humility and patience, the more prejudice diminishes, so we discover Christ in one another and become authentic witnesses to the kingdom of God.

**Reflection**

**Fellowship**

The sermon was about healing, wholeness, the feast of rich food and well-matured wines, that is for all peoples.

Out in the street, Christ’s body and blood still sweet on your tongue, you eye with disdain strangers drifting out of alien churches.

Outcasts, you say.
Children of darkness.

Outcast yourself, Christ’s body and blood a noxious poison now in your crabbed soul.

Cloisters of Riga’s Lutheran Cathedral
Questions

- We have no greater gift to give God or others than our time. What gifts have we received from God when we have spent time with our fellow Christians?

- Share a little of what you mean by leadership. How can leaders encourage the visible unity of the Church? How can we support and encourage them in that?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you commanded us to break bread together and to drink one cup in remembrance of you - your imperative ignored. Forgive us, Lord. Open the hearts and minds of Christians world-wide, especially those entrusted with leadership in your Church, to the joys and blessings of this fellowship. Create in all of us a passion to realise the hope to which you have called us: one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one baptism, one God who is above and through and in all.

Amen.

Go and Do (see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

- Identify your nearest mountain or hill and encourage the church leaders to walk it together, if they are able. Set out a bowl of salt to remind you to pray for their expedition.

- Have a reception for your community leaders and gift them with a candle from your churches.

- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness – many communities across the world experience real food and water shortages as a result of a changing climate. Visit Go and Do to help work for righteousness in the world.