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TO THOSE ORGANIZING THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

The search for unity: throughout the year

The traditional period in the northern hemisphere for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is 18-25 January. Those dates were proposed in 1908 by Paul Wattson to cover the days between the feasts of St Peter and St Paul, and therefore have a symbolic significance. In the southern hemisphere where January is a vacation time churches often find other days to celebrate the week of prayer, for example around Pentecost (suggested by the Faith and Order movement in 1926), which is also a symbolic date for the unity of the Church.

Mindful of the need for flexibility, we invite you to use this material throughout the whole year to express the degree of communion which the churches have already reached, and to pray together for that full unity which is Christ's will.

Adapting the text

This material is offered with the understanding that, whenever possible, it will be adapted for use in local situations. Account should be taken of local liturgical and devotional practice, and of the whole social and cultural context. Such adaptation should ideally take place ecumenically. In some places ecumenical structures are already set up for adapting the material; in other places, we hope that the need to adapt it will be a stimulus to creating such structures.

Using the Week of Prayer material

- For churches and Christian communities which observe the week of prayer together through a single common service, an order for an ecumenical worship service is provided.
- Churches and Christian communities may also incorporate material from the week of prayer into their own services. Prayers from the ecumenical worship service, the "eight days", and the selection of additional prayers can be used as appropriate in their own setting.
- Communities which observe the week of prayer in their worship for each day during the week may draw material for these services from the "eight days".
- Those wishing to undertake bible studies on the week of prayer theme can use as a basis the biblical texts and reflections given in the eight days. Each day the discussions can lead to a closing period of intercessory prayer.
- Those who wish to pray privately may find the material helpful for focusing their prayer intentions. They can be mindful that they are in communion with others praying all around the world for the greater visible unity of Christ's Church.

BIBLICAL TEXT FOR 2017

2 Corinthians 5:14-20

For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

The text used above is from the New Revised Standard Version which is the agreed English translation always used for our materials. However, the writers felt that "the love of Christ compels us," the rendering of verse 14 from the New International Version made a stronger title, and therefore we use this title and phrase in these materials.

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME FOR THE YEAR 2017

Reconciliation – The Love of Christ Compels Us
(cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14-20)

Germany: The Land of the Lutheran Reformation

In 1517 Martin Luther raised concerns about what he saw as abuses in the Church of his time by making public his 95 theses. 2017 is the 500th anniversary of this key event in the reformation movements that marked the life of the Western Church over several centuries. This event has been a controversial theme in the history of inter-church relations in Germany, not least over the last few years. The Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) has been building up to this anniversary since 2008, by focusing each year on one particular aspect of the Reformation, for example: the Reformation and Politics, or the Reformation and Education. The EKD also invited its ecumenical partners at various levels to help commemorate the events of 1517.

After extensive, and sometimes difficult, discussions, the churches in Germany agreed that the way to commemorate ecumenically this Reformation event should be with a *Christusfest* – a Celebration of Christ. If the emphasis were to be placed on Jesus Christ and his work of reconciliation as the center of Christian faith, then all the ecumenical partners of the EKD (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Baptist, Methodist, Mennonite and others) could participate in the anniversary festivities.

Given the fact that the history of the Reformation was marked by painful division, this is a very remarkable achievement. The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity has worked hard to produce a shared understanding of the commemoration. Its important report, *From Conflict to Communion*, recognizes that both traditions approach *this* anniversary in an ecumenical age, with the achievements of fifty years of dialogue behind them, and with new understandings of their own history and theology. Separating that which is polemical from the theological insights of the Reformation, Catholics are now able to hear Luther's challenge for the Church of today, recognising him as a "witness to the gospel" (*From Conflict to Communion* 29). And so after centuries of mutual condemnations and vilification, in 2017 Lutheran and Catholic Christians will for the first time commemorate together the beginning of the Reformation.

From this agreement and the wider ecumenical context emerges the strong theme of this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: "Reconciliation – The Love of Christ Compels Us" (cf. 2 Cor 5:14-20).

The Council of Churches in Germany (ACK) and the Reformation Anniversary 2017

The Council of Churches in Germany launched several projects to commemorate 1517. One was entitled “Discover Anew the Bible’s Treasures”. Here, in a manner reminiscent of the importance Martin Luther placed on the meaning of the Bible, all ACK member churches wrote texts describing their approach to the Bible. These were later published in a brochure. In addition, the ACK conducted a symbolic “pilgrimage” to various member churches in Wittenberg. Each community visited, expressed and celebrated its own unique relationship to the Bible. In April 2015, the ACK also organized a conference entitled: “Irreparably Divided? Blessed Renewal? – 500 Years of Reformation in Various Ecumenical Perspectives”, the proceedings of which have been published.

It was in the context of the anniversary that the Council of Churches in Germany (ACK), invited by the World Council of Churches, took up the work of creating the resources for this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. A committee comprised of ten members representing different churches met three times in 2014/2015 to develop the necessary texts. A particular emphasis was placed on the preparation of the ecumenical worship service for the Week (see pp. 11 to 24). The resources should serve the general purpose of the Week of Prayer, while at the same time commemorating the Lutheran Reformation.

The Theme of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2017

When the German national planning committee met in the autumn of 2014, it quickly became clear that the materials for this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity would need to have two accents: on the one hand, there should be a celebration of God’s love and grace, the “justification of humanity through grace alone”, reflecting the main concern of the churches marked by Martin Luther’s Reformation. On the other hand, the materials should also recognize the pain of the subsequent deep divisions which afflicted the Church, openly name the guilt, and offer an opportunity to take steps toward reconciliation.

Ultimately it was Pope Francis’ 2013 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (“The Joy of the Gospel”) which provided the theme for this year, when it used the quote: “The Love of Christ Compels Us” (Paragraph 9). With this scripture verse (2 Cor 5:14), taken in the context of the entire fifth chapter of the second letter to the Corinthians, the German committee formulated the theme for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2017.

The Biblical Text: 2 Cor 5:14-20

This biblical text emphasizes that reconciliation is a gift from God, intended for the entire creation. “God was reconciling the world (*kosmos*) to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us” (v. 19). As a result of God’s action, the person who has been reconciled in Christ is called in turn to proclaim this reconciliation in word and deed: “The love of Christ compels us” (v. 14, NIV). “So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (v. 20). The text stresses that this reconciliation is not without sacrifice. Jesus gives his life; he died for all. The ambassadors of reconciliation are called, in his name, to give their lives similarly. They no longer live for themselves; they live for him who died for them.

The Eight Days and the Worship Service

The text, 2 Cor 5:14-20, shapes the reflections of the eight days, which develop some of the theological insights of the individual verses, as follows:

Day 1: One has died for all

Day 2: Live no longer for themselves

Day 3: We regard no one from a human point of view

Day 4: Everything old has passed away

Day 5: Everything has become new

Day 6: God reconciled us to himself

Day 7: The ministry of reconciliation

Day 8: Reconciled to God

In the Ecumenical Worship Service, the fact that God in Christ has reconciled the world to himself is a reason to celebrate. But this must also include our confession of sin before we hear the Word proclaimed and draw from the deep wellspring of God’s forgiveness. Only then are we able to testify to the world that reconciliation is possible.

Compelled to Witness

The love of Christ compels us to pray, but also to move beyond our prayers for unity among Christians. Congregations and churches need the gift of God’s reconciliation as a wellspring of life. But above all, they need it for their common witness to the world: “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21).

The world needs ministers of reconciliation, who will break down barriers, build bridges, make peace, and open doors to new ways of life in the name of the one who reconciled us to God, Jesus Christ. His Holy Spirit leads the way on the path to reconciliation in his name.

As this text was being written in 2015, many people and churches in Germany were practising reconciliation by offering hospitality to the numerous refugees arriving from Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, as well as countries of the Western Balkans, in search of protection and a new life. The practical help and powerful actions against hatred for the foreigner were a clear witness to reconciliation for the German population. As ministers of reconciliation, the churches actively assisted the refugees in finding new homes, while at the same time trying to improve the living conditions in the countries they had left behind. Concrete acts of help are just as necessary as praying together for reconciliation and peace, if those who are fleeing their terrible situations are to know some hope and consolation.

May the wellspring of God's gracious reconciliation overflow in this year's Week of Prayer, so that many people may find peace, and so that bridges may be built. May people and churches be compelled by the love of Christ to live reconciled lives and to break down the walls that divide!

THE PREPARATION OF THE MATERIAL FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2017

The preparatory work on the theme for this year's week of prayer material was undertaken by a group of representatives of different Christian communities in Germany. This National Committee was brought together by the working group of Christian Churches in Germany (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen/ACK), led by Dr Elisabeth Dieckmann.

Gratitude is extended in particular to the leaders of ACK, the members of its National Committee, and those who contributed to these resources:

- Revd Dr. Eberhard Amon (Prelate, German Bishops Conference)
- Pastor Bernd Densky (Baptist Pastor, Consultant of ACK)
- Dr Elisabeth Dieckmann (Secretary of ACK, Catholic Church)
- Revd Leonie Grüning (Pastor, Evangelical Church of Germany/EKD)
- Revd Anette Gruschwitz (Pastor, Methodist Church)
- Archpriest Constantin Miron (Orthodox Bishops Conference)
- Revd Scott Morrison (Pastor, Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church)
- Mrs Ruth Raab-Zerger (Mennonite Church)
- Dr Dagmar Stoltmann-Lukas (Consultant of the Bischöfliches Generalvikariat, Bishop's Vicariate General)
- Revd Jan-Henry Wanink (Pastor, Reformed Church in Germany)
- Revd Allison Werner-Hoenen (Pastor, Evangelical Church of Germany/EKD)
- Mr Marc Witzenbacher (Consultant of the Evangelical Church of Germany/EKD)

The texts proposed in this booklet were finalized during a meeting of the International Committee nominated by Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The members of the Committee met the National Committee in September 2015 in the Luther-Hotel of Wittenberg/Germany. They thank the ACK for generously hosting the meeting and for the very kind hospitality. In particular they wish to thank Pastor Bernd Densky whose assistance greatly facilitated their work. The working group was also accompanied and guided on a visit to Wittenberg and Eisleben by Revd Jürgen Dittrich, a local Lutheran pastor, who is responsible for the ecumenical work in the local church of Saxony-Anhalt. The visit started with visiting Wittenberg, where Martin Luther lived with his family and worked after he had left the monastery in Erfurt. The group also went to the famous castle church, where the German Reformer probably nailed the 95 thesis. It also visited Luther's birthplace and the church of his baptism in Eisleben. These visits gave deep insights into the meaning and influence of Martin Luther for the Reformation in Germany.

An evening meeting with local representatives of different Christian communities was very helpful to understand the religious landscape in Germany, especially in Eastern Germany.

ECUMENICAL WORSHIP SERVICE

Introduction to the Worship

Reconciliation – The Love of Christ Compels Us
(cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14-20)

Commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation

The churches in Germany decided to commemorate this anniversary as a *Christusfest* (an ecumenical celebration of Christ). The Reformation was the occasion of a renewed focus on salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We rejoice in God's salvation centered on the cross of Christ, who overcomes division and draws us together. This worship openly confesses and asks forgiveness for the sins of division which followed the Reformation. The service will celebrate Christ and his act of reconciliation, which moves the hearts of divided Christians to become ambassadors for Christ as ministers of reconciliation.

The Contents of the Worship Service

The theme "Reconciliation – the Love of Christ Compels Us" celebrates the irrevocable reconciliation that we have received through faith in Jesus Christ. Christ's love becomes the driving force that moves us beyond our division toward acts of reconciliation.

Through psalms and songs we gather in Jesus' name in praise of God's wondrous deeds. We confess our sins of division and make our plea for forgiveness. The proclamation of the Word highlights the reconciling action of Christ as "One who died for all" (v. 14). The faithful respond to this good news by accepting the call to be ministers of reconciliation .

Symbolic Actions in the Service

The Wall

1989 saw the fall of the Berlin Wall, that began with the Peace Prayer Movement in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) in which people placed candles in windows and doorways and prayed for freedom. Horst Sindermann, a member of the GDR Leadership until 1989, noted "We had planned everything. We were prepared for everything, just not for candles and prayers." This is why the division of Christians and the reconciliation we seek are represented by the

construction and dismantling of a wall. This can become a symbol of hope for any situation in which a division seems insurmountable. Thus the construction of a symbolic wall at the confession of sin, the visible presence of this wall during the proclamation of the Word, and finally the dismantling of this wall to form a cross as a sign of hope, give us courage to name these terrible divisions and to overcome them with the help of God.

Directions/Material: Building up and tearing down the Wall

“Division due to our sin”: after a brief introduction some members of the congregation will construct a wall of separation representing the sins and division that we confess. The wall remains standing during the service until the section headed *“Respond in faith – live in reconciliation.”* At this point the stones will be removed from the wall and placed in the shape of a cross.

Depending on the size of the worship space, the following materials will be necessary for this symbolic action: 12 boxes of the same size (i.e. shoe boxes, transport boxes) covered in packing paper to make the “stones.” On the front side of each box a key term will be noted (lack of love, hate and contempt, false accusation, discrimination, persecution, broken communion, intolerance, religious wars, division, abuse of power, isolation, and pride). As each sin is named the stone is brought forward to build the wall. Following a moment of silence, the stone bearer makes the plea for forgiveness, to which the congregation responds “forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.”

After the proclamation of God’s word which concludes with the sermon, a prayer for reconciliation follows. As the wall is dismantled and the stones are laid in the form of the cross, a song of reconciliation or a hymn of the glory of the cross is sung.

For worship services in small groups, an alternative liturgical action could be either to expand upon or to replace the wall with personal testimonies. These testimonies in the first part should name situations which have been hurtful to others. In the second part concerning the faith response, stories about reconciliation and acts of healing could be told.

Candles

Following the creed, four intercessory prayers are offered. After each petition, three people light their candles from a central source of light (for example a Paschal candle) and remain standing around the cross until the section headed “Christ’s commission.” After the commission, the twelve pass the light throughout the congregation until each person has a lighted candle. The service concludes with a blessing and sending out.

Order of Service

Reconciliation – The Love of Christ Compels Us
(cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14-20)

L Leader
C Congregation
R Reader

I. Gathered in Jesus' Name

Hymns for Gathering (*will be chosen locally*)

Procession with Bible/Lectionary

Opening

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

L Grace and peace from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ, be with you all. (2 Cor. 5:18)

C And also with you.

Introductory Words

L Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this year many Christians and churches will be commemorating the anniversary of the Reformation. Saint Paul reminds us that God has reconciled us through Jesus Christ and that the love of Christ compels us to be ministers of reconciliation. Let us worship and praise God together in the unity of the Holy Spirit!

Psalm 98 (*sung*) or a **hymn of praise**

II. Divided by our Sins (Confession)

Invitation to confession

L In the course of history, there have been many renewal movements in the Church, which is always in need of deeper conversion to her head, Jesus Christ. Sometimes these movements have led to unintended divisions. This fact contradicts what Jesus asks the Father in John 17:23: "that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." Let us confess our sins and pray for forgiveness and healing for the wounds which have resulted

from our divisions. As we name these sins we will see how they become a wall which divides us.

Silence

L Let us pray: God and Father in heaven, we come to you in Jesus' name. We experience renewal through your Holy Spirit, and yet we still construct walls that divide us, walls which hinder community and unity. We bring before you now the stones with which we erect our walls and pray for your forgiveness and healing.

C Amen.

(As each sin is named the corresponding stone is brought forward to build the wall. Following a moment of silence, the stone bearer [R] makes the plea for forgiveness as the congregation responds "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.")

L One stone in our wall is "lack of love".
(The stone with the key term "lack of love" is placed.)

R1 Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for whenever we have failed to love. We humbly pray:

C Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

L One stone in our wall is "hate and contempt".
(The stone with the key term "hate and contempt" is placed.)

R2 Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for our hate and contempt for one another. We humbly pray:

C Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

L One stone in our wall is "false accusation."
(The stone with the key term "false accusation" is placed.)

R3 Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for denouncing and falsely accusing one another. We humbly pray:

C Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

L One stone in our wall is "discrimination."
(The stone with the key term "discrimination" is placed.)

R4 Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for all forms of prejudice and discrimination against one another. We humbly pray:

C Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Sung response: "Lord, forgive us".

(Local committees choose their own sung responses)

- L One stone in our wall is “persecution”.
(*The stone with the key term “persecution” is placed.*)
- R5 Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for persecuting and torturing one another. We humbly pray:
- C **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**
- L One stone in our wall is “broken communion.”
(*The stone with the key term “broken communion” is placed.*)
- R6 Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for perpetuating broken communion among our churches. We humbly pray:
- C **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**
- L One stone in our wall is “intolerance”.
(*The stone with the key term “intolerance” is placed.*)
- R7 Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for banishing our brothers and sisters from our common homeland in the past and for acts of religious intolerance today. We humbly pray:
- C **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**
- L One stone in our wall is “religious wars”.
(*The stone with the key term “religious wars” is placed.*)
- R8 Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for all wars that we have waged against one another in your name. We humbly pray:
- C **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**

Sung response: “Lord, forgive us”.

- L One stone in our wall is “division.”
(*The stone with the key term “division” is placed.*)
- R9 Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for living our Christian lives divided from one another and astray from our common calling for the healing of all creation. We humbly pray:
- C **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**
- L One stone in our wall is “abuse of power.”
(*The stone with the key term “abuse of power” is placed.*)
- R10 Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for our abuse of power. We humbly pray:
- C **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**
- L One stone in our wall is “isolation.”
(*The stone with the key term “isolation” is placed.*)
- R11 Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for the times when we have isolated ourselves from our Christian sisters and brothers and from the communities in which we live. We humbly pray:
- C **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**

- L One stone in our wall is “pride”.
(*The stone with the key term “pride” is placed.*)
- R12 Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for our pride.
We humbly pray:
- C **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**

Sung response: “Lord, forgive us”.

- L Let us pray: Lord, our God, look upon this wall that we have built, which separates us from you and from one another. Forgive us our sins. Heal us. Help us to overcome all walls of division and make us one in you.
- C. Amen.

Hymn/Song/Meditative music

III. Be reconciled to God – Hear God’s Word

First Reading: Ezekiel 36:25-27

Responsorial Psalm: 18:25-32 (*sung*)

Response: I love you, O Lord, my strength.

With the loyal you show yourself loyal;
with the blameless you show yourself blameless;
with the pure you show yourself pure;
and with the crooked you show yourself perverse.
For you deliver a humble people, but the haughty eyes you bring down.

Response: I love you, O Lord, my strength.

It is you who light my lamp;
the LORD, my God, lights up my darkness.
By you I can crush a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall.
This God — his way is perfect;
the promise of the LORD proves true;
he is a shield for all who take refuge in him.
For who is God except the LORD? And who is a rock besides our God?—
the God who girded me with strength, and made my way safe.

Response: I love you, O Lord, my strength.

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:14-20

Alleluia (*sung*)

Gospel Reading: Luke 15:11-24

Alleluia (*sung*)

Sermon

IV. Respond in Faith – Live Reconciled

(As the wall is dismantled and the stones are laid in the form of a cross, a song of reconciliation or a hymn of the glory of the cross is sung.)

L Let us pray: Gracious God and Father in Heaven, we have heard your word that you have reconciled us to yourself through your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord. By the power of the Holy Spirit transform our hearts of stone. Help us to become ministers of reconciliation and heal our churches' divisions so that we may better serve as instruments of your peace in the world.

C Amen.

The Peace

L The peace of the Lord be with you always.
Let us give one another a sign of peace.

Hymn/Song

(Collection/Offering)

V. Respond in Faith – Proclaim Reconciliation

Creed

Intercessory Prayers

(After each petition, three people light their candles from a central source of light (for example a Paschal candle) and remain standing around the cross until the section headed "Christ's commission.")

R1 Almighty God, you sent your Son Jesus Christ to reconcile the world to yourself. We praise you for those whom you sent in the power of the Spirit to preach the Gospel to all nations. We thank you that in all parts of the earth a community of love has been gathered together by their prayers and labours, and that in every place your servants call upon your name. May your Spirit awaken in every community a hunger and thirst for unity in you. Let us pray to the Lord:

Spoken/Sung response: Lord, hear our prayer.

(Allow enough time for the assistants to light their candles from the Paschal candle.)

R2 Gracious God, we pray for our churches. Fill them with all truth and peace. Where faith is corrupted, purify it; where people go astray, redirect them; where they fail to proclaim your Gospel, reform them; where they witness to what is right, strengthen them; where they are in need, provide for them; and where they are divided, reunite them. Let us pray to the Lord:

Spoken/Sung response: Lord, hear our prayer.

(Allow enough time for the assistants to light their candles from the Paschal candle.)

R3 Creator God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus Christ, your Son. Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred that infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love. And even in our weaknesses, work to accomplish your purposes on earth, so that every people and nation may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne. Let us pray to the Lord:

Spoken/Sung response: Lord, hear our prayer.

(Allow enough time for the assistants to light their candles from the Paschal candle.)

R4 Holy Spirit, Giver of Life, we are created to become whole in you and to share this life on earth with our brothers and sisters. Awaken in each of us your compassion and love. Give us strength and courage to work for justice in our neighborhoods, to create peace within our families, to comfort the sick and the dying, and to share all we have with those who are in need. For the transformation of every human heart, let us pray to the Lord:

Spoken/Sung response: Lord, hear our prayer.

(Allow enough time for the assistants to light their candles from the Paschal candle.)

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread,
Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen.

VI. Ambassadors for Christ – Ministers of Reconciliation

Christ's Commission

(The twelve pass the candlelight throughout the congregation until each person has a lighted candle.)

- L** A lighted candle is a deeply human symbol: it enlightens the darkness, creates warmth, security and community. It symbolizes Christ, the light of the world. As ambassadors for Christ we will carry this light into the world, into the dark places where fighting, discord and division impede our united witness. May Christ's light effect reconciliation in our thoughts, words and deeds.

Receive the Light of Christ and carry it into the dark places of our world! Be ministers of reconciliation! Be ambassadors for Christ!

Blessing and Sending

- L** We call out to you, most merciful God:
Let all who seek reconciliation experience your help
so they may proclaim your mighty deeds of Love!
We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

C **Amen.**

- L** May the blessing of Almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit
come upon you and remain with you forever.

C **Amen.**

- L** Go in God's Peace.

C **Thanks be to God.**

Hymn/Song

"Sonne der Gerechtigkeit", by Christian David ("Rise, O Sun of Righteousness", translated by Frank W. Stoldt), or other song to be selected by the local planning committee.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES AND PRAYERS FOR THE EIGHT DAYS

Day 1

One has died for all (2 Corinthians 5:14)

Isaiah 53:4-12
Psalm 118: 1.14-29
1 John 2:1-2
John 15:13-17

He gave his life as an atoning sacrifice
God did not abandon me to death
Christ died for all
Giving his life for his friends

Commentary

When Paul was converted to Christ he came to a radical new understanding: one person has died for all. Jesus did not just die for his own people, nor merely for those who sympathized with his teachings. He died for all people, past, present and future. Faithful to the Gospel, many Christians down the centuries have laid down their lives for their friends. One such person was the Franciscan Maximilian Kolbe, who was imprisoned in the concentration camp at Auschwitz and who in 1941 willingly gave up his life so that a fellow prisoner could live.

Because Jesus died for all, all have died with him (2 Cor 5:14). In dying with Christ our old way of life becomes a thing of the past and we enter into a new form of existence: abundant life – a life in which we can experience comfort, trust and forgiveness, even today – a life which continues to have meaning even after death. This new life is life in God.

Having come to this realization, Paul felt compelled by the love of Christ to preach the Good News of reconciliation with God. Christian churches share in this same commission of proclaiming the Gospel message. We need to ask ourselves how we can proclaim this gospel of reconciliation in view of our divisions.

Questions

- What does it mean to say that Jesus died for all?
- The German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: “I am a brother to another person through what Jesus Christ did for me and to me; the other person has become a brother to me through what Jesus Christ did for him.” How does this affect how I view others?
- What are the consequences of this for ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue?

Prayer

God our Father,
in Jesus you gave us the one who died for all.
He lived our life and died our death.
You accepted his sacrifice and raised him to new life with you.
Grant that we, who have died with him,
may be made one by the Holy Spirit
and live in the abundance of your divine presence
now and for ever. Amen.

Day 2 **Live no longer for themselves** (2 Corinthians 5:15)

Micah 6:6-8	God has told you what is good
Psalms 25:1-5	God of my salvation, show me your ways
1 John 4:19-21	We love because God first loved us
Matthew 16:24-26	Those who lose their life for my sake will find it

Commentary

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have been freed from the need to create our own meaning and from living only out of our own strength. Rather, we live in the life-giving power of Christ, who lived, died, and rose again for us. When we 'lose' our life for his sake, we gain it.

The prophets were constantly faced with questions concerning the right way to live before God. The prophet Micah found a very clear answer to this question: "To do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God." The author of Psalm 25 knew that we cannot do this by ourselves and cried out to God for guidance and strength.

In recent years, social isolation and increasing loneliness have become important issues in Germany as in many contemporary societies. Christians are called to develop new forms of community life in which we share our means of livelihood with others and nurture support between generations. The Gospel call to live not for ourselves but for Christ is also a call to reach out to others and to break down the barriers of isolation.

Questions

- How does our culture tempt us to live only for ourselves rather than for others?
- In what ways can we live for others in our daily life?
- What are the ecumenical implications of the call to live no longer for ourselves?

Prayer

God our Father,
in Jesus Christ you have freed us for a life that goes beyond ourselves.
Guide us with your Spirit
and help us to orient our lives as sisters and brothers in Christ,
who lived, suffered, died and rose again for us,
and who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

Day 3 **We regard no one from a human point of view** (2 Corinthians 5:16)

1 Samuel 16:1. 6-7
Psalm 19:7-13
Acts 9:1-19
Matthew 5:1-12

The Lord looks not at outward appearances but at the heart
The commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes
Saul becomes Paul
The Beatitudes

Commentary

Encountering Christ turns everything upside down. Paul had that experience on the road to Damascus. For the first time he could see Jesus for who he really was: the Saviour of the world. His point of view was changed completely. He had to lay his human, worldly judgment aside.

Encountering Christ changes our perspective as well. Nevertheless, we often linger in the past and judge according to human standards. We make claims or do things “in the name of the Lord” that in reality may be self-serving. Throughout history, in Germany and in many other countries, both rulers and the churches themselves have misused their power and influence to pursue unjust political goals.

Transformed by their encounter with Christ, in 1741, the Christians of the Moravian Church (Herrnhuter) answered the call to regard no-one from a human point of view by choosing to ‘submit to Christ’s Rule’. In submitting ourselves to the rule of Christ today, we are called to see others as God sees them, without mistrust or prejudice.

Questions

- Where can I identify Damascus experiences in my life?
- What changes when we view other Christians or people of other faiths as God views them?

Prayer

Triune God, you are the origin and goal of all living things.

Forgive us when we only think of ourselves
and are blinded by our own standards.

Open our hearts and our eyes.

Teach us to be loving, accepting and gracious,
so that we may grow in the unity which is your gift.

To you be honour and praise, now and for ever. Amen.

Day 4

Everything old has passed away (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Genesis 19:15-26

Psalms 77: 5-15

Philippians 3: 7-14

Luke 9:57-62

Don't look back

God is always faithful

Forgetting what lies behind

Keep your hand on the plough

Commentary

We often live out of the past. Looking back can be helpful, and is often necessary for the healing of memories. It can also paralyze us and prevent us from living in the present. Paul's message here is liberating: "everything old has passed away".

The Bible encourages us to keep the past in mind, to draw strength from our memories, and to remember what good God has done. However, it also asks us to leave the old, even what was good, in order to follow Christ and live a new life in him.

During this year, the work of Martin Luther and other reformers is being commemorated by many Christians. The Reformation changed much in the life of the Western Church. Many Christians showed heroic witness and many were renewed in their Christian lives. At the same time, as scripture shows, it is important not to be limited by what happened in the past, but rather to allow the Holy Spirit to open us to a new future in which division is overcome and God's people is made whole.

Questions

- What could we learn by reading together the history of our divisions and mutual mistrust?
- What must change in my church so that divisions can be overcome and that which unites can be strengthened?

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
the same, yesterday, today and for ever.
Heal the wounds of our past,
bless our pilgrimage towards unity today
and guide us into your future,
when you will be all in all,
with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Day 5

Everything has become new (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Ezekiel 36:25-27

Psalm 126

Colossians 3:9-17

John 3:1-8

Receiving a new heart from God

Being filled with joy

Being renewed in Christ

Being born in the Spirit

Commentary

Paul encountered Christ, the risen Lord, and became a renewed person—just as everyone does who believes in Christ. This new creation is not visible to the naked eye. Instead it is a reality of faith. God lives in us by the power of the Holy Spirit and lets us share in the life of the Trinity.

By this act of new creation, the Fall is overcome and we are brought into a saving relationship with God. Truly amazing things can be said about us: as Paul said, in Christ we are a new creation; in his resurrection death is overcome; no person or thing can snatch us out of the hand of God; we are one in Christ and he lives in us; in Christ we are “a kingdom and priests” (Rev 5:10) as we give thanks to him for overcoming death and we proclaim the promise of the new creation.

This new life becomes visible when we allow it to take shape and live it out in “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” It must also become apparent in our ecumenical relationships. A common conviction in many churches is that the more we are in Christ, the closer we are to each other. Especially on this 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we are reminded of both the achievements and tragedies of our history. The love of Christ compels us to live as renewed beings in actively seeking unity and reconciliation.

Questions

- What helps me to recognize that I am a new creation in Christ?
- What are the steps I need to take to live out my new life in Christ?
- What are the ecumenical implications of being a new creation?

Prayer

Triune God, you reveal yourself to us
as Father and creator, as Son and Saviour,
and as Spirit and giver of life,
and yet you are one.

You break through
our human boundaries and renew us.

Give us a new heart to overcome
all that endangers our unity in you.

We pray in the name of Christ Jesus,
by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Day 6

God reconciled us to himself (2 Corinthians 5:18)

Genesis 17:1-8
Psalm 98
Romans 5:6-11
Luke 2:8-14

God makes a covenant with Abraham
The world has seen the victory of God
God reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ
Proclamation of the good news

Commentary

Reconciliation has two sides: it is fascinating and terrifying at the same time. It draws us in so that we desire it: within ourselves, with one another, and between our different confessional traditions. We see the price and it scares us. For reconciliation means renouncing our desire for power and recognition. In Christ God graciously reconciles us to himself even though we have turned away from him. God's action goes beyond even this: God reconciles not only humanity, but the whole of creation to himself.

In the Old Testament God was faithful and merciful to the people of Israel, with whom he established a covenant. This covenant remains: "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29). Jesus, who inaugurated the new covenant in his blood, was a son of Israel. Too often in history our churches have failed to honor this. After the Holocaust, it is the distinctive task of the German churches to combat antisemitism. Similarly all churches are called to bring forth reconciliation in their communities and resist all forms of human discrimination, for we are all part of God's covenant.

Questions

- How do we as Christian communities understand being part of God's covenant?
- What forms of discrimination do our churches need to address today in our societies?

Prayer

Merciful God, out of love
you made a covenant with your people.
Empower us to resist
all forms of discrimination.
Let the gift of your loving covenant
fill us with joy and inspire us to greater unity.
Through Jesus Christ, our risen Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit
now and forever. Amen.

Day 7 **The ministry of reconciliation** (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

Genesis 50:15-21	Joseph is reconciled with his brothers
Psalms 72	God's kingdom brings righteousness and peace
1 John 3:16b-21	God's love compels us to love one another
John 17:20-26	Jesus prays for the unity of his church

Commentary

Reconciliation between God and human beings is the key reality of our Christian faith. Paul was convinced that the love of Christ compels us to bring God's reconciliation to bear in all aspects of our life. Today this leads us to examine our consciences in relation to our divisions. As the story of Joseph demonstrates, God always gives the grace needed for the healing of broken relationships.

The great reformers such as Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin, as well as many who remained Catholics, such as Ignatius of Loyola, Francis de Sales and Charles Borromeo, sought to bring about renewal in the Western church. However, what should have been a story of God's grace was also marred by human sinfulness and became a story of the rending of the unity of God's people. Compounded by sin and warfare, mutual hostility and suspicion deepened over the centuries.

The ministry of reconciliation includes the work of overcoming divisions within Christianity. Today, many Christian churches work together in mutual trust and respect. One positive example of ecumenical reconciliation is the dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the Mennonite World Conference. After the dialogue results were published in the document "Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ", the two organizations held a penitential service together in 2010 followed by further reconciliation services throughout Germany and in many other countries.

Questions

- Where do we see the need for a ministry of reconciliation in our context?
- How are we responding to this need?

Prayer

God of all goodness, we give you thanks
for reconciling us and the whole world
to yourself in Christ.

Empower us, our congregations and our churches
in ministries of reconciliation.

Heal our hearts and help us
to spread your peace.

“Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy”.

We pray in the name of Christ Jesus,
by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Day 8

Reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20)

Micah 4:1-5

Psalms 87

Revelation 21:1-5a

John 20:11-18

In the last days justice will reign

Glorious things are spoken of God

God will make a new heaven and a new earth

Meeting the risen Christ leads to personal mission

Commentary

What if? What if the prophecies in the Bible actually came true? If the wars between people stopped and if life-giving things were to be made out of the weapons of war? What if God's justice and peace reigned, a peace which was more than simply the absence of war? If all of humanity came together for a celebration in which not a single person was marginalized? What if there really was no more mourning, no more tears, and no more death? It would be the culmination of the reconciliation that God brought about in Jesus Christ. It would be heaven!

Psalms, canticles, and hymns sing of the day when the whole perfected creation finally arrives at its goal, the day when God will be “all in all”. They tell about the Christian hope for the fulfilment of God's reign, when suffering will be transformed into joy. On that day, the Church will be revealed in her beauty and

grace as the one body of Christ. Wherever we gather in the Spirit to sing together about the fulfilment of God's promises, the heavens break open and we begin here and now to dance to the melody of eternity.

As we can already experience this presence of heaven, let us celebrate together. We may be inspired to share images, poems and songs from our particular traditions. These materials can open up spaces for us to experience our common faith in and hope for God's Kingdom.

Questions

- How do you envision heaven?
- Which songs, stories, poems, and pictures from your tradition give you the feeling of participating in the reality of God's eternity?

Prayer

Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
we thank you for this week of prayer,
for being together as Christians
and for the different ways
we have experienced your presence.
Let us always praise your holy name together
so that we may continue to grow in unity and reconciliation. Amen.

or:

Lamb of God, the heavens adore you,
the saints and angels sing before you
with harp and cymbals' clearest tone.
Of one pearl each shining portal,
where, joining with the choir immortal,
we gather round your radiant throne.
No eye has seen that light,
no ear the echoed might
of your glory;
yet there shall we in victory
sing shouts of joy eternally!

[German: "Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme," author: Philipp Nicolai (1599); English: "Wake, awake, the night is flying" (third stanza), translated by Catherine Winkworth]

THE ECUMENICAL SITUATION IN GERMANY*

Working Together in a Changing Society

Of the 81 million inhabitants in Germany today, 50 million are Christian. Most of them belong either to the Roman Catholic Church or to one of the Protestant regional churches which together make up the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). Although small by comparison, there are also “Free Churches”, the Orthodox Church and, indeed, all major Christian traditions are present in Germany today.

Centuries ago, Germany consisted of many kingdoms and principalities but was united by a common church. The Reformation, led among others by Martin Luther, resulted in schisms within Western Christianity and ultimately in wars between Catholic and Protestant forces. The Peace of Augsburg (1555) temporarily put an end to these conflicts by stipulating that the people of a kingdom or principality were to adhere to the faith of their ruler. Those who believed differently were forced to convert or move to a different region. These provisions applied to Lutherans and Catholics, but not to the followers of Calvin and the Anabaptists, who were thus subject to persecution. The Peace of Augsburg held for over six decades until the outbreak of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). Peace was re-established by the Peace of Westphalia which affirmed the Peace of Augsburg, this time, however, with provision for Calvinists. As a result, the German people lived in regional denominational isolation. Confessional diversity within a sovereign land was unthinkable, and, driven by the horrors of war, mistrust and animosity between the denominations were rampant.

The 19th century saw the advent of other churches and denominations in Germany, among them the Baptist and Methodist as well as old-confessional churches (the Old Lutheran, Old Reformed and Old Catholic churches). Their rise was often due to inner church protest movements. As a result, these churches were relatively small in number and mostly disinclined to ecumenical relations.

After World War II, the situation of the Christian churches in Germany changed significantly. About 12 million people of German ancestry fled or were expelled from Eastern Europe. When they were settled in Germany no consideration was given to the question of which Christian tradition they belonged to. Protestants came to live in Catholic areas and vice versa. As a result, Protestants and Catholics came in closer contact with each other.

Post-War economic and industrial growth created a demand for labour, resulting in agreements between the German government and many Mediterranean countries

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concerning “guest workers”. In this way people from Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Morocco and Tunisia came to Germany, which increased the confessional and religious diversity of the country. This saw in particular an increase in the Orthodox presence in Germany. Although it was initially thought that they would return to their home countries after a couple of years (hence the name “guest workers”), many stayed and left their mark on German life and culture. The 1980s saw an increase of immigrants with German roots from the former Soviet Union, many of whom were Orthodox, Baptist or Jewish. In recent years war, terror and social unrest in the Middle East, Africa, Afghanistan, Ukraine and many other countries have generated a large flow of refugees. While most of these flee to neighbouring regions, there are increasing numbers of migrants seeking refuge in Germany and in other European countries.

In former Eastern Germany the churches, most especially the Protestant church, played a key role in the events leading up to the fall of the Berlin wall (1989) and the downfall of the Communist government. Even that, however, did not prevent the Christian faith from losing its significance in East Germany. The British newspaper, *The Guardian*, went so far as to describe East Germany as “the most godless place on earth”. The rule of the Communist government was by no means the only reason for the lack of religiosity there; the Christian faith had been on the decline in East Germany even before the communists came to power. The atheism there is not at all aggressive in nature, like that of the so-called “new atheists”. Instead, it is characterized by a deep-rooted indifference to any kind of faith. When people in Berlin were asked whether they considered themselves to be believers or unbelievers, one person responded: “I’m neither, I’m normal”.

Today Germany is home to people of many different cultural backgrounds and of different – or no – beliefs. About one third of the population belongs to one of the Protestant regional churches in the EKD, one third is Roman Catholic and just under one third does not adhere to any faith. 1,7% of the population are Orthodox Christians, another 1,8% are members of one of the free churches. These are mostly churches which have strong historical and theological links to the Reformation but do not have ties to the state like the Roman Catholic Church and the EKD. 4,9% of the people in Germany are Muslim, 0,1% are Jewish.

The churches in Germany have not yet overcome all their differences, but they have learned to work together. During the rule of the National Socialists there were Christians who collaborated with the government. Others, however, offered resistance and were imprisoned or sent to concentration camps. The common experience of living and suffering under the dictatorship of the Nazis brought Christians of different traditions closer together. Today, German churches do a much better job of cooperating in order to fulfil the mission of the Church and witness to the Gospel in word and deed. Because the Roman Catholic Church and the EKD each have many members, they also make up a large part of the ecumenical cooperation that takes place in Germany.

Much of the ecumenism in Germany occurs at the grassroots level, for example the Prayer Week of the Evangelical Alliance and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Neighbouring parishes and congregations often organize ecumenical activities like Bible study, discussing theological topics, celebrating festivals, creating a common website, visiting people who are new to the community and distributing leaflets at a local train station that contain information about the Christian churches. This kind of work is usually done by volunteers who are members of the local churches. In some regions congregations and parishes enter into local ecumenical partnerships, signing a formal agreement that shapes their cooperation. These agreements are usually based on similar written agreements between the leaders of the churches concerned.

Ecumenical co-operation also occurs on the level of church leadership. For example, a group of Catholic and Protestant bishops from the EKD meets twice a year to discuss current topics that affect the churches. Another group discusses theological issues – such as the concept of human dignity. In addition to these bilateral meetings, there are also regular meetings between representatives of the Orthodox Bishops' Conference with Roman Catholic and with Protestant bishops, respectively, and between the Association of Free Churches and the EKD.

Large church conventions or gatherings for the members of a church are a typical feature of the German Christian landscape. For Catholics they are called *Katholikentage*, and for Protestants, *Kirchentage*. Both take place every two years, and are organized by the Central Committee of German Catholics and the German Evangelical *Kirchentag* (DEKT), respectively. In principle, they are primarily gatherings for the members of one church, but for many years now members of different churches have attended or have even been invited as guest speakers.

In 2003 and in 2010 all the member churches of the German Council of Churches joined together to organise a similar convention on an ecumenical level called an *Ökumenischer Kirchentag*. Many issues that are important to German society were discussed (the global financial crisis, climate change, ethical questions concerning human life, justice, etc.). Of equal importance were the many Bible studies, theological discussions, and ecumenical worship services. Holding these gatherings, especially the ecumenical *Kirchentage*, is an excellent opportunity for Christians in Germany to demonstrate not only that they are still active, but also that they are prepared to work together and to engage the rest of German society in dialogue.

The Council of Churches in Germany

The Council of Churches in Germany (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen*, ACK) was founded on 10 March 1948, i.e. a few months before the World Council of Churches was established. The founding members were the EKD, Mennonites, Baptists, Methodists and the Old-Catholic Church. In 1974, ten years after the Decree on Ecumenism had been adopted by the Second Vatican Council, the

Catholic Bishops' Conference of Germany joined the Council of Churches. The Orthodox Church, too, became a member in 1974. After the reunification of Germany the West German and the East German Councils of Churches merged. Both councils had had different structures and membership, so it was necessary to form a new ecumenical body with new statutes. Today the Council of Churches in Germany has 17 member churches. In addition, six churches are guest members and four ecumenical organizations have observer status.

In 2003, during the first Ecumenical *Kirchentag* in Berlin, representatives of all member churches of the ACK celebrated an ecumenical service and signed the *Charta Oecumenica* produced by the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Episcopal Conferences of the Roman Catholic Church. The ACK also published its own text which reflects on the meaning of the *Charta Oecumenica* in the German context and on how the *Charta* can be put into practice in Germany.

In 2010, during the second Ecumenical *Kirchentag* in Munich, the ACK established an "Ecumenical Day of Creation", thus implementing one of the recommendations of the *Charta Oecumenica*. The Ecumenical Day of Creation is intended both to be a common witness to our belief in God as Creator and to remind us of our joint task in preserving God's creation. This Day of Creation is to be celebrated each year on the first Friday in September. The initial celebration of the Ecumenical Day of Creation was held by the ACK in an Orthodox church in Brühl. Today the Day of Creation is observed in cities all over Germany. The ACK encourages all German Christians to celebrate this day and publishes suggestions for worship services and additional material well in advance of September so that people can use it to plan their own celebration.

Another topic to which the Council of Churches has devoted much time and discussion is that of Baptism. In 2007 eleven member churches signed an agreement on the mutual recognition of Baptism. Five members of the Council of Churches, among them the Mennonites and the Baptists, felt unable to sign. Since then, the ACK has worked further on the issue of Baptism. The subject was discussed by the General Assembly of the ACK, and a public conference was held in March 2014. The ACK also held a consultation with the Finnish Ecumenical Council on the same topic.

Articles 10 and 11 of the *Charta Oecumenica* recommend intensifying dialogue with representatives of the Jewish faith, and they encourage encounters between Christians and Muslims. Accordingly the ACK has worked together with one Jewish and two Muslim organizations in an initiative called "*Weißt du, wer ich bin?*" ("Do you know who I am?"). This initiative offered advice and financial support in encouraging people of all three faiths to get to know each other and to engage in common activities at a grassroots level. A young Muslim woman was employed to coordinate this effort. Funding was also given by German and European state institutions.

The ACK has also given much thought to the document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World”, and has set up a task force to coordinate work on the subject. In 2014 a conference was held that gave representatives of the member churches of the ACK and of the Evangelical Alliance (EA) the opportunity to discuss matters relating to witness and interreligious dialogue. As a result, the EA and the ACK have developed closer ties, and the EA has asked to join the ACK with observer status.

Ecumenical Challenges

One of the main ecumenical challenges Germany faces is maintaining a platform on which churches that are smaller in number can meet with the two large churches face to face. The Roman Catholic Church and the EKD are about the same size and have the same kinds of resources at their disposal. For that reason their cooperation comes naturally and covers a wide variety of topics – everything from inter-church marriage to questions concerning the relationship between state and church. Many times, however, they work together on a strictly bilateral basis, the result being that other churches and even the ACK itself often do not have their due say in ecumenical matters. Doing justice to the fact that there are more than two churches in Germany and encouraging and enabling multilateral discourse and cooperation are some of the ACK’s central goals.

Another challenge is the frustration that many people feel, especially those who have laboured for a long time at the grassroots level, when they cannot see any progress in ecumenical matters. This frustration is felt most sharply when it comes to sharing the Lord’s Supper across confessional boundaries, known as Eucharistic sharing. In Germany there are vast numbers of couples who belong to different churches. They not only yearn to be able to take communion together, but many also feel deeply that the ecumenical movement should be bearing more fruit than it is, and are dissatisfied when they see stagnation instead of bold steps forward.

Many people in Germany today have no real knowledge of the Christian faith, and they do not seem interested in understanding, let alone embracing it. If the churches take their mission seriously to “go to all nations and make them my disciples” (Mt 28:19) it should be a priority for them to engage these people in dialogue. Instead of dealing with this challenge individually, the churches should face it together, learning from each other’s experience and encouraging each other. Focusing on their common faith can only strengthen the bond among the churches. Also, trying together to communicate the Christian faith in an understandable way can lead the churches themselves to a deeper understanding of their own faith. The 500th anniversary of the Reformation can be seen as an opportunity to remind the public – Christians and non-believers alike – of what the Christian faith is all about: God’s love in Christ for us humans and for all creation. That is why the churches in Germany have decided to make the anniversary a celebration of Jesus Christ (“*Christusfest*”).

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

Themes 1968-2017

In 1968, materials jointly prepared by the WCC Faith and Order Commission and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity were first used.

- 1968 To the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:14)
- 1969 Called to freedom (Galatians 5:13)
(Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)
- 1970 We are fellow workers for God (1 Corinthians 3:9)
(Preparatory meeting held at the Monastery of Niederaltaich, Federal Republic of Germany)
- 1971 ...and the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:13)
(Preparatory meeting in Bari, Italy)
- 1972 I give you a new commandment (John 13:34)
(Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1973 Lord, teach us to pray (Luke 11:1)
(Preparatory meeting held at the Abbey of Montserrat, Spain)
- 1974 That every tongue confess: Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:1-13)
(Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1975 God's purpose: all things in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-10)
(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
(Material from Caribbean Conference of Churches.
Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)
- 1977 Enduring together in hope (Romans 5:1-5)
(Material from Lebanon, in the midst of a civil war.
Preparatory meeting held in Geneva)
- 1978 No longer strangers (Ephesians 2:13-22)
(Material from an ecumenical team in Manchester, England)
- 1979 Serve one another to the glory of God (1 Peter 4:7-11)
(Material from Argentina – Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)

- 1980 Your kingdom come (Matthew 6:10)
(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)
(Material from Graymoor Fathers, USA – Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1982 May all find their home in you, O Lord (Psalm 84)
(Material from Kenya – Preparatory meeting held in Milan, Italy)
- 1983 Jesus Christ - the Life of the World (1 John 1:1-4)
(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 Corinthians 2:2 and Colossians 1:20)
(Preparatory meeting held in Venice, Italy)
- 1985 From death to life with Christ (Ephesians 2:4-7)
(Material from Jamaica – Preparatory meeting held in Grandchamp, Switzerland)
- 1986 You shall be my witnesses (Acts 1:6-8)
(Material from Yugoslavia (Slovenia) – Preparatory meeting held in Yugoslavia)
- 1987 United in Christ - a New Creation (2 Corinthians 5:17-6:4a)
(Material from England – Preparatory meeting held in Taizé, France)
- 1988 The love of God casts out fear (1 John 4:18)
(Material from Italy – Preparatory meeting held in Pinerolo, Italy)
- 1989 Building community: one body in Christ (Romans 12:5-6a)
(Material from Canada – Preparatory meeting held in Whaley Bridge, England)
- 1990 That they all may be one...That the world may believe (John 17)
(Material from Spain – Preparatory meeting held in Madrid, Spain)
- 1991 Praise the Lord, all you nations! (Psalm 117 and Romans 15:5-13)
(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)
(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)
(Material from Ireland – Preparatory meeting held in Dublin, Republic of Ireland)
- 1995 Koinonia: communion in God and with one another (John 15:1-17)
(Material from Faith and Order – Preparatory meeting held in Bristol, England)
- 1996 Behold, I stand at the door and knock (Revelation 3:14-22)
(Material from Portugal – Preparatory meeting held in Lisbon, Portugal)
- 1997 We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20)
(Material from Nordic Ecumenical Council – 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
(Material from France – Preparatory meeting held in Paris, France)
- 1999 He will dwell with them as their God, they will be his peoples (Revelation 21:1-7)
(Material from Malaysia – Preparatory meeting held in Monastery of Bose, Italy)
- 2000 Blessed be God who has blessed us in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14)
(Material from the Middle East Council of Churches – Preparatory meeting held La Verna, Italy)
- 2001 I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (John 14:1-6)
(Material from Romania – Preparatory meeting held at Vulcan, Romania)
- 2002 For with you is the fountain of life (Psalm 36:5-9)
(Material CEEC and CEC – Preparatory meeting near Augsburg, Germany)
- 2003 We have this treasure in clay jars (2 Corinthians 4:4-18)
(Material churches in Argentina – Preparatory meeting at Los Rubios, Spain)
- 2004 My peace I give to you (John 14:23-31; John 14:27)
(Material from Aleppo, Syria – Preparatory meeting in Palermo, Sicily)

- 2005 Christ, the one foundation of the church (1 Corinthians 3:1-23)
(Material from Slovakia – Preparatory meeting in Piestaň, Slovakia)
- 2006 Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them
(Matthew 18:18-20)
(Material from Ireland – Preparatory meeting held in Prosperous, Co. Kildare, Ireland)
- 2007 He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak (Mark 7:31-37)
(Material from South Africa – Preparatory meeting held in Faverges, France)
- 2008 Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:(12a) 13b-18)
(Material from USA – Preparatory meeting held in Graymoor, Garrison, USA)
- 2009 That they may become one in your hand (Ezekiel 37:15-28)
(Material from Korea – Preparatory meeting held in Marseilles, France)
- 2010 You are witnesses of these things (Luke 24:48)
(Material from Scotland – Preparatory meeting held in Glasgow, Scotland)
- 2011 One in the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer
(cf. Acts 2:42)
(Material from Jerusalem – Preparatory meeting held in Saydnaya, Syria)
- 2012 We will all be Changed by the Victory of our Lord Jesus Christ
(cf. 1 Corinthians 15:51-58)
(Material from Poland – Preparatory meeting held in Warsaw, Poland)
- 2013 What does God require of us? (cf. Micah 6, 6-8)
(Material from India – Preparatory meeting held in Bangalore, India)
- 2014 Has Christ been divided ? (1 Corinthians 1:1-17)
(Material from Canada – Preparatory meeting held in Montréal, Canada)
- 2015 Jesus said to her: Give me to drink (John 4, 7)
(Material from Brazil – Preparatory meeting held in São Paulo, Brazil)
- 2016 Called to proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord (cf. 1 Peter 2:9)
(Material from Latvia – Preparatory meeting held in Rīga, Latvia)
- 2017 Reconciliation - The Love of Christ Compels Us (2 Cor 5: 14-20)
(Material from Germany – Preparatory meeting held in Wittenberg, Germany)

KEY DATES IN THE HISTORY OF THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

- c. 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 First 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 (Lyons, 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.
- 1966 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, which links the major Christian groupings in that country.
- 1994 International group preparing text for 1996 included representatives from 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).
- 2008 Commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. (Its predecessor, the Church Unity Octave, was first observed in 1908).