



The Sword of the Spirit
Week of Prayer for
Christian Unity

January 18-25, 2019

Psalm 122:6
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

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Introduction

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is actually an eight-day observance or “octave” of prayer. It has been this way from the beginnings of this international movement in 1908. This year in the Sword of the Spirit we want to take a fresh approach to our participation in the octave of prayer.

In some of our communities we have used a prayer for Christian unity that begins with the phrase: *“let us pray now on behalf of the whole people of God.”* The intention of this prayer is for us to intercede broadly, to pray for all the various streams of the body of Christ. We’d like to follow this orientation this year in our participation in the week of prayer and encourage ways to grow in understanding, appreciation and intercession for the *‘whole people of God’*.

Accordingly, each day of the octave of prayer we will focus on a different stream of Christianity. For example: Messianic Judaism, Orthodoxy, Catholicism, the historic Reformation Churches Anabaptists, Pentecostals, etc.

There are many potential ways to group the worldwide body of Christ into 8 parts and none of them would be perfect. Doubtless we have overlooked or undervalued some important elements. You will also note that in the descriptions that follow we focus only on the *positive* historical development and contributions of each stream and do not discuss critiques or controversies. This is intentional. In this exercise we want to look only with charity on our brothers and sisters and pray for their good. We hope this approach will give us both a broader understanding as well as open our hearts to appreciate and pray for our brothers and sisters around the world.

Each day will feature a short description of one stream of the Christian people, looking at its roots and some of its distinctive gifts and contributions. We have also included several focused intercessions for each day. Finally, you will find several short essays

and ecumenical testimonies from Sword of the Spirit members from around the world.

Unity begins with understanding each other and appreciating the distinctive gifts God has distributed in the broader body of Christ. Please see the enclosed articles from Dan Keating and John Yocum in this regard. May the Holy Spirit lead us and give us grace as we seek to understand, appreciate and intercede for the 'whole people of God'.

We have also included a short Lord's Day prayer that can be inserted in the section following the blessing of the wine which can be used like the other seasonal variations in the Lord's Day prayers.

Please use these materials in any way you find most helpful in your personal and family worship times during this season of prayer.

Note: The Psalms listed in this booklet follow the numbering of the Hebrew tradition.

Friday, January 18

Messianic Judaism

We begin the octave of prayer for the ‘whole people of God’ with considering one of the deepest roots in our family tree: Messianic Judaism. Indeed Peter, Paul and most of the figures of the New Testament church were Messianic Jews: observant Jews who heard the gospel and placed their faith in Yeshua (Jesus) as Messiah.

In the book of Romans, Paul uses the image of the Gentile church being grafted onto the ancient root of Judaism: *“If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you”* (Romans 11: 17-18). Extending the analogy, he also speaks of a future day when the broader Jewish people awaken to the gospel in a new way: *“how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!”* (Romans 11: 24)

Throughout the history of the Christian people, Jews who became Christians often joined existing churches—they became Lutheran or Catholic or Baptist, for example. But there is an important stream of Christianity where Jewish Yeshua believers form congregations to sustain their Jewish identity and religious expression as intrinsic to their faith in Yeshua. That is, they fully embrace the gospel while still maintaining their Jewish heritage, identity and practices.

What are some of the distinctive gifts and contributions of this stream of God’s people? For us in the Sword of the Spirit one simple example is clear: our celebration of the Lord’s Day was originally developed in part by Messianic Jews among us. Our understanding of worship forms and seasons has also been similarly enriched.

There is also a deeper and more spiritual importance to Messianic Judaism—their presence among us is a prophetic sign of the ultimate faithfulness of God to his covenant promises and a hope for the glorious culmination of God’s work in this age. Going back to Romans once again: *“how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!”* (Romans 11: 12)

Intercessions:

Let’s pray for the life and growth of Messianic Jewish congregations around the world. Let’s pray for their congregational leaders, their evangelistic mission, their families and work with youth.

Let’s pray for the many dialogues underway between leaders of Messianic Judaism and various Christian bodies. May these lead to growth in understanding and help chart a charitable and gracious way forward.

Drawing on the Riches of our Traditions

Dan Keating

The week of praying for Christian unity is once again upon us. This year we are focusing on—and praying for—the main streams of Christianity in the world today. Here I would like to ask the question: How can we better appreciate the riches of grace found in other Christian traditions, and how can we (and do we) draw upon those riches in our Sword of the Spirit communities?

Sometimes, “ecumenism” is criticized for promoting a “lowest common denominator” Christianity, a kind of decaffeinated faith that has little body or flavor. In fact, almost no one promotes a lowest-common denominator ecumenism. In our own ecumenical approach in the Sword of the Spirit, we say:

We do not practice a “lowest common denominator” ecumenism. At times we introduce into our common life elements drawn from one tradition that are not found in another, such as the celebration of Christian seasons. We want to draw on the rich resources of our traditions, and we assume that there is much that each of us can learn from our brothers and sisters in other churches.

In the ecumenical language of our churches, this is usually called “an exchange of gifts.” Ecumenism is not just talking to one another or learning about one another: at its core, it is an exchange of gifts, inspired by the Spirit, as we together walk the long, hard road to unity. Pope Benedict XVI gives testimony to this exchange of gifts when he says, “the mutual exchange of gifts from our respective spiritual patrimonies serves as an enrichment to us all.”

What does this mean in practice? It means that we are ready and eager to receive things that will build up our common life together, even when these elements are not present in all our traditions. One example of this is the celebration of the Christian seasons, including Advent and the 40 Days of Lent. We together embrace these seasons that are observed in only some of our traditions.

Another prime example is the Pentecostal gift of being baptized in the Holy Spirit and the exercise of the spiritual gifts. Of course, these are witnessed to in the New Testament which we all hold in common, but this gift of grace came to us in part through direct contact with those from the Pentecostal stream of Christianity. Through this gift many have been enriched.

A third example is the prominent place of the Scriptures in our common life and a focus on reading the Bible in personal prayer. Of course, all our traditions revere the Bible as the inspired Word of God, but it is especially in the Protestant world where the daily practice of reading and studying the Bible is strong, and we are heirs of this blessing in our communities.

Strikingly, we are also beneficiaries of the riches of Messianic Jews in our midst. How so? By adapting the Jewish sabbath prayers for celebrating the Christian Lord’s Day—the day of the resurrection. This practice of celebrating the Lord’s Day has greatly enriched our life together across the globe.

The Lord has blessed our communities as places where the “exchange of gifts” from our various traditions has been richly expressed. Let’s give thanks for this richness, let’s pray for the



various streams of Christianity, and let’s beseech the Lord to bring us, step-by-step, into ever greater unity in Christ.

Dr. Dan Keating is an elder in the Servants of the Word and teaches at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit, Michigan, USA.

Saturday January 19

Worldwide Orthodoxy

Orthodoxy is a rich stream of Christianity with roots back to the earliest days of the church. There are various expressions of Orthodoxy, many based in national or cultural identities. For example: the Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, to mention only a few.

There are two main branches of Orthodoxy: the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox. (Eastern Orthodoxy includes the Orthodox Churches of Russia, Greece, Serbia, Ukraine, Antioch, and several other self-governing jurisdictions. Oriental Orthodoxy includes the Coptic Church of Egypt, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and

several other self-governing jurisdictions.) While there are significant theological and historical differences between the two branches, they share much in common.

Because of history and geography, Orthodox theology and practice developed along different lines than Christians of ‘the west’, relying in particular on a set of influential Eastern Church Fathers. Theologians sometimes speak of distinct ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ spiritualities as a result.

Orthodoxy places a strong emphasis on remaining faithful to the earliest traditions of the church. At the same time the Orthodox speak much of the ‘mysteries’ of faith, leaving room for lively debate around these mysteries but not attempting to define particulars of theology that are not clear from scripture and tradition.

What are some of the particular gifts of Orthodoxy? Orthodox spirituality is a rich celebration of the work of the Holy Spirit to transform the believer and make him holy. The Orthodox refer to this process as the “deification” or “theosis” of the believer—participating in the nature of God through the work of the Holy Spirit. They also have a very rich Trinitarian focused liturgical life and a strong culture of spiritual disciplines such as contemplation and asceticism.

Intercession

Many of our Orthodox brothers and sisters live in countries that are not friendly to Christianity—countries such as Egypt, Syria, Turkey. Let’s pray for protection and a special grace for these brothers and sisters to continue in faithfulness and mission.

There are various dialogues or attempts at dialogue underway both between various Orthodox churches as well as with other church bodies. Some of these have proven challenging to launch. Let’s pray for a new season of grace and openness for these dialogues.

Prayer for the Lord's Day

This prayer may be used after the blessing of the Wine, similar to the other seasonal variations in the Lord's Day Opening Ceremony.

Leader: Let us thank Him this day especially for the unity we enjoy in the Body of Christ and for our call to Ecumenical Life in the Sword of the Spirit. May we all become perfectly one, so that the world may know and believe. Lord our God, You are bringing us into the fullness of unity through the work of Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Group: Now we live with Him through the Holy Spirit, and we look for the day when we will dwell with Him in Your everlasting kingdom.

Struggling Towards Unity

Elyssa Fawaz

I was born in Lebanon to a Greek Orthodox father and a Greek Catholic mother who baptized me in the Greek Orthodox Church with a Roman Catholic priest and a nun as Godparents. I was raised in Catholic schools and was part of Maronite choirs and communities. I was, hence, accustomed to many churches in which I attended, depending on the season of service.

Although I was spending most of my time in the Maronite church, I couldn't but notice that the objective of the different Christian traditions and churches was to help people become a living testimony to God's work and purpose. This observation was further confirmed when I became more involved in the People of God Community, a member of the Sword of the Spirit, which aims at helping Christians to live their lives united as brothers and sisters by supporting each other in being faithful to the core calling of Christian

living. While focusing on this core calling, it became clear to me that the Sword of the Spirit encourages its members to be fully immersed in their respective Church traditions drawing on the unique wealth of each. It was then, that I realized that I only had a very little experience in and exposure to the Greek Orthodox Church, the Church in which I accepted the sacrament of baptism. In addition to this realization, along with the encouragement I received from the brothers and sisters, I decided to rediscover the Church of my father by starting to attend some of its services, although my attendance was not exclusive during that period.

I struggled my way through by attending services at different Churches until, one day, at the Dalej Kairos conference held in Poland, I felt the Lord speaking to me while listening to a talk about ecumenical pilgrimage: *Walking Together, Working for Unity*. I recall being deeply moved when the speaker explained that God's plan from the beginning was that we be one to reflect the unity of the Trinity. I further understood that the Holy Spirit is working to enrich our lives together by sharing the distinguishing riches of the different Church traditions. However, I thought, how can I actively contribute to this end and share the riches of my Church if I did not know them well enough? So, with a renewed will, I decided to start loving and knowing "my Church" with an undivided heart and desire. I began, from that day on, to attend the Greek Orthodox Liturgy more faithfully, to meet people there, to read books and ask tons of questions, all of which led me to a deeper understanding of the ecumenical call within the Sword of the Spirit and my humble contribution to it.



Now, more than ever, as an Orthodox Christian, I praise the Lord for His work in the Sword of the Spirit, our ecumenical call and cooperation, all leading to the glory of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Sunday, January 20

Catholicism

The word “catholic” means “universal” or “all embracing”. Indeed, Catholicism sees itself as embracing all of humanity, and representing all of humanity to God through Jesus Christ. The common bond of Catholicism is a common communion under the headship of the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, who is recognized by all Catholics as the successor of Peter in the church established by Jesus.

Often, we think of Catholicism as consisting simply of the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, Catholicism includes a much wider set of particular churches which are in full communion with Rome. Going back to our discussion of yesterday, there is one “western” Catholic Church--the Roman Catholic Church--and 23 Catholic Churches of “the east” organized under different rites. For example, we could speak of Maronite Catholics, Ukrainian Catholics or Melkite Catholics. All of these different particular churches form the one Catholic Church and contribute to a rich expression of different liturgical forms within Catholicism.

What are a few of the particular gifts and distinctive contributions of this stream of God’s people? As the largest stream in the body of Christ, there is much we could consider here but a couple of things stand out in particular. The long and thoughtful development of Catholicism has resulted in a very rich and comprehensive moral theology— “how one is to act” (as compared to dogmatic theology— “what one is to believe”). This moral theology covers key areas of concern in the modern world such as medical and sexual ethics. This gift of Catholicism is an excellent resource for thoughtful Christians everywhere. Another fruit of this well-developed moral theology is a strong concern within Catholicism for caring for the poor and disadvantaged. There is a rich worldwide heritage of Catholic hospitals, orphanages, schools and other works of mercy.

Intercessions:

True to her nature and calling the Catholic Church is at the forefront of many ecumenical dialogues. Let's pray for all those who labor in these dialogues that they may have the requisite patience, charity and spiritual insight.

As the largest stream in the body of Christ, the Catholic Church is also often the target for many attacks on Christian moral life and beliefs. Let's pray for wisdom, courage and fortitude for all the leaders of Catholicism that they may stand strong in defending God's truth.

Monday, January 21

Lutheran and Reformed Churches

In the early decades of the 16th century, a period known as the Reformation began. This was a reform movement affecting the western half of the Christian church—there was little or no impact on the eastern churches. The movement began in Germany as a theological reform movement within Catholicism but for various reasons the reforms did not take root and new church bodies were formed as a result.

Today we are looking at two of the main families of churches that came from this period of reform: Lutheran and Reformed. The Lutheran churches were founded by Martin Luther and his associates in Germany and then spread to other parts of Northern Europe and around the world. The Reformed churches were largely given theological shape from the work of Jean Calvin and his work in Geneva, Switzerland and then spread to places such as the Netherlands, Scotland, and England with the founding of new

families of churches such as Presbyterian and Congregational. Reformed theology has also had influence on other churches such as parts of the Baptist, Methodist and Anglican traditions.

What are some of the particular gifts we can enjoy from this stream of the Body of Christ? One of the key features of the Reformation was a deepened appreciation for scripture as a source of wisdom, authority and life in God. Concurrent with the advent of the printing press, the scriptures were translated into the common language of the people and made widely available. This emphasis on daily reading and submission to the scriptures remains a key feature of these churches and has been a blessing to our life in the Sword of the Spirit as a key element of growing as a disciple. This stream has also historically placed a high theological emphasis on the grace of God—one of the rallying cries of the Reformation was “sola gratia”: “by grace alone”. Reliance on God’s grace is a common tenet for *all* Christians but the special emphasis in these churches has served as a steady counter over the years to our common human tendency toward legalism.

Intercessions:

Like many Christian bodies these days, the historic churches of the Reformation are under pressure from modernity—pressures to adopt worldly approaches to human sexuality and other social mores. Let’s pray for wisdom and courage for our brothers and sisters in these churches that they may stand firm in their faith and the revealed truths of the scriptures.

These churches have also historically been a strong source of missionary zeal. Let’s pray for a strengthening and renewal of missional activity and evangelistic zeal in their midst.

Surprised by Ecumenism

Joel Laton

I'm a Southern Baptist and work on staff for a majority-Catholic community in Jacksonville, Florida called 'Spirit of Christ'. About three years ago, I married a young Catholic woman. And two years ago, I began studying at a prominent evangelical seminary. But I haven't always been this confused!

I grew up in a conservative Baptist environment. At 16, the Lord opened my heart to conversion at a Christian concert. Oh, happy day! Having a relationship with Jesus bore immediate fruit in my life: I began reading the Bible every day, making positive changes in my relationships, and serving in my church.

Less than a year later, my discipleship ventured down an unexpected path—at least by Baptist standards. I was invited to an informal Life in the Spirit course with a few friends from school who were Catholic. Being prayed over to be filled with the Spirit was revolutionary for us. We'd never experienced God's presence like this before. We became very close, worshipping together, practicing the gifts of the Spirit, even starting a small prayer meeting in our high school. Looking back, these early experiences sowed the value of ecumenical, charismatic community deep into my heart.

I was introduced to the Sword of the Spirit as a freshman in college, attending a few UCO conferences over the next couple of years. When I graduated and moved back to Jacksonville the Lord gave me a clear calling to community life, along with a few of those friends. Now, I've been a member of the Spirit of Christ community for nearly 10 years. My life has been enriched—and my heart and mind stretched—by my Catholic brothers and sisters.

I met my wife in the community. We've had to sort through the complications of an ecumenical marriage together, and our approach is still evolving. But I treasure her witness to me. Her Catholic faith is alive, and the Spirit's activity is pronounced in her life.

During my time at seminary, I've gotten a deeper understanding of our church's theological differences, which remain real and



significant. There has been ecumenical progress in Christ's body, but a spirit of division lingers. Still, I haven't lost my heart for ecumenism. I won't soon forget how the Spirit has moved in so many of my Catholic friends. And I firmly believe that the Lord is raising up the SOS for such a time as this.

Tuesday, January 22

The Anabaptists

The Anabaptists are perhaps less well known to many of us but are an important part of the Christian people. Their history also begins at the time of the Reformation, but they followed a different line in their theological development. The name Anabaptist simply means 'those who baptize again'. A key theological tenet of Anabaptism is that those who are baptized must have an understanding of the faith and give free assent to their baptism. This approach does not agree with infant baptism as practiced in most of the other Christian churches.

As a result of this theological understanding the Anabaptists were strongly persecuted from all sides at the time of the Reformation and beyond: both Protestants and Catholics were against them. Many of them fled persecution in Europe and took up new lives in the United States and Canada. We would recognize some of their names today as the Mennonites, the Amish or the Hutterites.

What are some of the gifts of this stream of the body of Christ? Anabaptists generally live out a strong communal life. Indeed, it is

their strong community experience that has allowed them to survive the many difficulties they have faced. We in the Sword of the Spirit would feel at home in some of their communal practices if a bit overawed with the radical nature of their common life. They also stress simplicity, freedom from worldly pursuits, non-violence and the attempt to live out the Sermon on the Mount in a literal way. Their worship includes strong lay participation and can include long times of quiet listening to the Lord together as a congregation.

Intercessions:

Let's simply pray for God's blessing on these brothers and sisters. Their way of life is under great pressure in modern times. May God richly bless the life of their communities, their mission and the witness of their common life in the modern world.

Given the early persecution of the Anabaptists, there is much need for dialogue and restoration of relationships. Many of these dialogues are underway. Let's pray for God's blessing on these efforts.

So why are we praying this way?

John Yocum

The approach we're taking this year to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity might raise for some of us a strong objection. The objection would run something like this: Aren't we supposed to mourn our disunity, not celebrate it? In offering appreciation for the strengths of various Christian traditions, and praying for those distinct traditions, are we heading down that dangerous path of "celebrating diversity" for its own sake, and ignoring disagreements on matters of truth?

The objection has substance if we approach our prayer for the various traditions in the wrong way. Diversity may indeed be a beautiful thing; difference and distinction are woven into the fabric of creation, rooted in the Triune God Himself: Father, Son and Spirit in irreducible distinction and inseparable unity. Nevertheless, the Christian people are deficient in unity, and that's what brought about this week of earnest prayer. We certainly do not want to pray for the perpetuation of division, so what are we about?

First, in offering some appreciation for the strengths of the traditions, we want to acknowledge with gratitude those elements of them that we can all applaud, and that, in fact, belong to the Christian people as a whole. Appreciating the zeal for mission in the Evangelical tradition, for example, has actually fed zeal for preaching the gospel in the last century among Catholics and Orthodox. Second, in praying for each of the traditions, we don't mean to pray for the vindication of perpetuation of theological positions that are in dispute. Instead, we want to pray for renewal of knowledge and love



for Christ, for increase of faith, hope, and love, that will enable all of us to draw nearer to the One who is Truth itself, and so nearer to one another.

Dr. John Yocum is a Regional Elder in the Servants of the Word and teaches at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit, Michigan, USA

Wednesday, January 23

The Anglican Communion

The Anglican Communion is sometimes referred to as a 'middle way' between Catholicism and Protestantism in that it includes recognizable features of both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Anglican Communion churches recognize the Archbishop of Canterbury as their nominal head but operate autonomously and

flexibly in different locales. For example, some Anglican churches would practice a more traditional and liturgical form of worship (High Anglicans) and others would practice a less formal style of worship (Low Anglicans).

The Church of England was formed in a second stage of the Reformation and was highly influenced by the broader Reformation in Europe. At the same time there were specific political and cultural dynamics at work in its formation that resulted in a unique theology and practice. The separation between the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England was complicated by these political dynamics and played out over a long period of time with much back and forth development. The Anglican Communion then propagated around the world in concert with the spread of the British Empire. For example, the main expression of the Anglican Communion in the United States is known as the Episcopal Church.

What are some of the special gifts and contributions from this stream of God's people? As a "middle way" between the Protestant and Catholic worlds, there is a rich liturgical and seasonal tradition within Anglicanism that is accessible for many of us. For example, the Anglican Book of Common Prayer has much to offer all Christians. The historical development of the Anglican Communion as noted above has also resulted in a collegial and brotherly approach that accepts a broad range of theological positions on non-essential matters. In this respect the Anglican model of theological convergence can serve as a helpful model for working towards Christian unity.

Intercessions:

There is important evangelistic mission underway within the Anglicanism. For example, the Alpha Course which has spread around the world as an effective evangelistic tool, began in an Anglican church in London. Let's pray for these kinds of mission to grow and strengthen.

Let's pray that the Lord safeguard the brotherly and collegial approach noted above. We live in an intolerant age. May the Anglican Communion point us all to a charitable approach to understanding and appreciation of our brothers and sisters.

Ecumenical Testimony

Philip McKinley

My name is Philip, I am a young Anglican guy from Northern Ireland and this is my experience of ecumenism. Growing up I didn't know many Catholics, in the town where I'm from Catholics and Protestants don't live in the same areas and generally don't get on very well. I didn't know much about the Catholic church or Catholic people. I only came into contact with Catholics when I went to university in Belfast. There I met a group called UCO on my 4th day of university and there were Catholics there, I was a little uneasy at first because I had only heard negative things about Catholics previously.

However, I decided to stick around with UCO, I found a lot of life there despite all my preconceived notions of Catholics. I began to see Catholic men and women who were clearly on fire for God, more so than me at that stage; this didn't match my prejudice towards Catholics. I learned more and more as I continued to go to UCO, more about the Holy Spirit and charism, about mission and discipleship and it made me a better Christian, I was baptized in the Holy Spirit and really came into a deeper relationship with God.

I found so much life in this ecumenical environment, I began to realise after time that some of the reason I found life in this place was in part because it was ecumenical. It is Christ's prayer that we be one in unity, John 17:20-23. The words of Psalm 133 also come to mind, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell

together in unity ... for there the Lord commanded the blessing," these words suddenly garnered new meaning, they became real, I was living in that blessing.

I really have been blessed through UCO and through ecumenism, I have many friends who are Catholics that are dear to me and their friendship will last a lifetime. I have grown so much spiritually. I have learned so much about other denominations, not only Catholic but other Protestant denominations too, especially my own. I am a much more devout Anglican and Protestant now than I was before. I



know what separates us and what unites us and there is a lot more in common than you'd think. My prayer is the same as Christ's; that one day we will be united in one Church. We can live church unity now. Yes, we have differences that are important, but we also have one God and one Saviour Jesus Christ that we can all glorify together, and I plan to do just that.

Thursday, January 24

Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Churches

In 1906 in a house on Azusa Street in Los Angeles California, a small group of people gathered to pray for more of the Holy Spirit and an experience of the Christian life that they read about in the Acts of the Apostles. They came from various denominations and races. As they continued to pray, the Holy Spirit was poured out in a powerful way. Thus, began a remarkable revival of the Holy Spirit which continues to spread around the world to this day.

The revival on Azusa Street continued for many years and people came from all over to be 'baptized in the Holy Spirit'. Those who came took the revival with them back to their home churches but were not welcomed with open arms in most cases. After many years of being rejected, they decided to form a new denomination and

Pentecostalism was born. Today we know this stream through denominations such as the Assemblies of God and the Four-Square Gospel churches. There are also many expressions of Pentecostalism that operate independently, outside a denominational framework and in more recent years, charismatic churches such as Vineyard have developed outside the framework of classic Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism has been one of the fastest growing Christian movements of the last century. It has a presence in all parts of the world with especially rapid growth occurring in the 'global south'—parts of Africa, South America and Asia. Our own history as the Sword of the Spirit has a direct linkage to this outpouring of grace: the Pentecostal gifts began to enter the mainline Protestant and Catholic churches in the 1960's, leading to the founding of Charismatic communities in the early 1970's.

What are some of the distinctive gifts and contributions of this stream of God's people? Clearly the openness to the gifts and leadership of the Holy Spirit is a major contribution from this stream: Pentecostals place a special emphasis on direct personal relationship with and an active experience of God. Pentecostalism has also brought new gifts of worship freedom and an expectation for healing to the broader Body of Christ, a gift for all Christians.

Intercessions:

Let's simply pray a blessing on the Pentecostal movement around the world. May the Lord continue to help our Pentecostal brothers and sisters to grow in love, wisdom and zeal. May the Lord grant their desire to know him in a deep and personal way.

Let's also pray for open doors for dialogue between the Pentecostal churches and the other streams of the Body of Christ. The early history of the emergence of these churches was marked by exclusion and judgment. In the days to come, may there be an open door for understanding and deepened brotherhood.

Friday January 25

Evangelical/Non-denominational Churches

In this our final day of the octave of prayer we will consider a very important current stream of Christianity but also one that is the hardest to define. It is more of a movement or set of movements than a single defined stream.

Coming out of the turbulence of the 20th century which saw many of the mainline churches under both theological and cultural pressure, a variety of Christian leaders saw a need to return to certain fundamentals of the faith and to develop new models of association and mission. Several factors in particular have marked the development of these new churches:

The desire to establish a more 'evangelical' faith with a major focus on conversion of non-believers

The desire to re-center on the basic gospel and core disciplines of bible study, preaching and prayer

These churches are often united in small informal networks as opposed to formal denominations

We have used the heading of "Evangelical/Non-Denominational" but as you can imagine, this is hardly an adequate or accurate descriptor of the rich variety of this stream. In many cases, these new churches also include charismatic and communitarian elements in their worship and piety. There are expressions as varied as mega churches in the US and small house churches in rural China. Clearly there is a great breadth of expression and flexibility within this part of the Christian people.

What are some of the particular gifts for this stream of the body of Christ? The focus on the need for personal evangelism is certainly admirable and can be an inspiration for all Christians. Without a formal denominational and liturgical structure they have also been

free to develop new innovative and entrepreneurial ways to reach non-believers. In some sense this stream serves as something of a 'laboratory' for creative ways to engage our modern world with the gospel.

Intercessions:

Here again, let's simply pray the Lord's blessing on these brothers and sisters. May the Lord lead them to fruitful mission and service. May the life of their churches be an inspiration and source of gifting for all Christians.

The Witness of an Ecumenical Marriage *Franciny Jimenez*

My name is Franciny Jimenez, I'm 28 years old and part of the Arbol de Vida Community in Costa Rica. I'm a devout Catholic. This past July I married a man who is not a Catholic, his name is Uriah Wilson. He is a Baptist. You may wonder how has this worked for us? Well, the Lord has been great and merciful with us.

We joined CEM (the university outreach in Costa Rica) when we were friends and students in the same university. The feelings we had for each other grew in that time, but it was difficult for me to think about the fact that he wasn't a Catholic. I asked myself how could this work in the long run? I doubted. We were invited to join the community and from then on, we were greatly blessed both individually and as a couple. We found a place where we could share our Christian faith, and which focused on the things we had in common, not in the differences of our Christian backgrounds.

As we discerned our call to marriage, the community became a key instrument of the Lord. In it we met another ecumenical couple

where he is an Evangelical and she is a Catholic. We heard their testimony of life as a family, how they raised their children and how they dealt with differences. We got to know other couples like this in our community and were very encouraged to believe that it was possible and pleasing to the Lord that we should start a family coming from different backgrounds.

A community couple gave us a course preparing for marriage and this was very important since they understood the doctrinal differences we had to deal with. It was very enriching since people outside our communities often don't understand this kind of unity and many leaders and pastors in our churches may be very closed to ecumenism. The community was therefore a help, supporting us and guiding us as we sought for God's will for our lives.

The Lord has spoken to our heart through community brothers and sisters, through prayers from them and prophecy, to confirm that our union is a blessing and a witness to the peoples about the unity he wants for the Christian people.

It's incredible when you see how God places the pieces in our lives and, even when circumstances seem to make no sense, He gives a purpose to our lives. The Lord has shown me his love and fidelity, and has blessed me with a Christian man, who is serious about his relationship with God, and has allowed us to be part of a community of brothers and sisters who support us in growing and being a testimony of His love to us.



As we close the octave of prayer, let's take time today to ask the Lord for unity of the 'whole people of God'. While we have celebrated and prayed this week for the great diversity of gifts we see around us, let us remember that there will be only one, unified bride for the Son.

May the Lord bring us to the perfect unity that He has always intended for us and may we be instruments in this work.



The Sword of the Spirit

Communities of Disciples on Mission