

2020 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

“They showed us unusual kindness” (Acts 28:2)

THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY CELEBRATED IN SCHOOLS

As Christians around the world will celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we invite you to share this celebration with your school community so that children and young people of all ages may come to recognize the need for a strong Christian witness in society, and the blessing this can be for the world.

We encourage you to share *The Story of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* (found below) with your students so they may better understand the purpose of our prayer. This may be shared during morning announcements or in individual classes. You can learn more about the week by visiting the website www.weekofprayer.ca. There are pictures and stories of past celebrations of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity across Canada, too. Perhaps your school will have photos to add to the collection! When sharing on social media, use the hashtags **#WeekofPrayer**, **#WPCU2020**, and (for French posts) **#SemainedePrière** and **#SPUC2020**.

The Story of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

What is it?

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an annual *ecumenical* celebration. What that means is that Christians around the world are invited to pray for the unity of all Christians, to reflect on scripture together, to participate in jointly-organized inclusive services, and to share fellowship. In our churches and throughout our communities, Christians will gather during this week to study the word of God together, to consider ways in which we can work together as disciples of Christ, and to join in fellowship and prayer.

In our schools, we can take time during this week to pray for one another and to recognize how we are called to work together.

When does it take place?

In Canada, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is traditionally observed between January 18th (the Feast of the Confession of Saint Peter) and January 25th (the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul). We have been celebrating this week in Canada for over 50 years.

Why does it matter?

In the Gospel of John, Christ prays for his disciples before going to the cross. He asks that his followers “may all be one,” as he and the Father are one, “so that the world may believe” and have life in his name (John 17). In this prayer of Jesus, Christian unity is central to the very being of the church and to its mission and witness.

Through the worldwide celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity we strive for “unity in diversity”. This time of shared prayer, reflection, and fellowship invites Christians of different traditions to deepen our relationships and to live and witness together throughout the year.

You may choose to highlight the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity on a single day during the week that is most appropriate in your context, or you may choose to pray each day during the week using the suggestions for daily prayer. In either case, the prayer is followed by a question for reflection or a suggestion for action, so that we can reflect on concrete ways to witness to our shared faith.

As teachers and staff, your shared prayer is also a powerful witness to the desire for “unity in diversity”.

Prayer for a single day

Begin with the *Story of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*. Then say:

The Christian community in Malta worked together to make the prayers for this week. On February 10th each year, many Christians in Malta celebrate the Feast of the Shipwreck of St. Paul. This feast reminds us of a great journey at sea when St. Paul was being taken as a prisoner to Rome. There was a storm and the boat was shipwrecked (see Acts 27:18 – 28:10). Even still, God’s mission continued through Paul because the people on board the ship were saved and welcomed onto the island of Malta. That is how the Christian faith spread in that part of the world. In Malta, there are parades in the streets and fireworks to celebrate! The story reminds us of how we need to trust God, even in times of difficulty, and how by welcoming others and being generous, we can learn more about the Christian faith.

Let us remember all of the Christians in our own community of _____ (*name of city or town*). And let us remember that Jesus prayed that we may all be one so that the world may believe (John 17:21).

Let us pray for the gifts of hospitality, which is the gift of welcoming, and the gift of generosity. +

God, giver of life,
we thank you for the gift of your love
which soothes and strengthens us.
Help us to be people of welcome.
Grant us a spirit of generosity to all
as we journey together in the path of Christian unity.
We ask this in the name of your Son
who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Suggestion for action: Find another Christian community, school, or church in your area. How can you show hospitality and generosity? You may find an activity as a class or as a whole school, such as: writing notes to introduce yourselves and say that you are happy to be praying together in this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; inviting some members of another Christian group to your school for a time of shared prayer or social gathering; donating to a cause that is important to a Christian group in your community, etc.

You may also want to find out more about St. Paul in Malta.

Here is a website showing the grotto or cave where St. Paul stayed on Malta:

http://www.wignacourtmuseum.com/about/test?fbclid=IwAR1bw4hEOEznySLx_1M4Yy8MpPXGgR3jch7BINWsWPnMjUNENyF95K_FU38

Here is a YouTube video from inside the church that was built in honor of St. Paul in Malta:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2RVht7j40c>

Daily Prayers for the Week

Day 1: Hospitality and Generosity

Begin the week using the prayer for a single day found above.

Day 2: Christ, Our Light

Throughout this week, we will hear the story of the shipwreck of Paul in Malta. Paul was being taken to Rome as a prisoner by boat but a huge storm came and all the sailors were afraid. We hear that the sky was dark – no sun or stars could be seen for days – and the storm was fierce. They thought all hope was lost. (Acts 27:20)

We can sometimes feel that all is dark and we might be afraid. Without the light and guidance of Christ, we can lose our way and get separated from one another. Remember that Christ is our light and our guide. As we seek the light of Christ, we are drawn closer to one another. As we come together, others can see this light more clearly. Together, we can truly become a sign of Christ, the light of the world.

Let us pray +

God, your word is a light to our steps
and without you we are lost.

Give us your light so that, through your word, we may walk your path.

Help us to recognize when we make it difficult for others to see your light,
and give us the grace we need to share your light with others.

We ask this in the name of your Son,
who calls us, his followers, to be light to the world. Amen.

Question for Reflection: What can our school community do to let Christ's light shine?

Day 3: Hope

Paul spoke to the people on the boat and told them not to lose hope! He said, “I urge you now to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship ... none of you will lose a hair from your heads ... ” (see Acts 27:21-34).

Sometimes, as Christians, we may lose hope. In this week, when all Christians are asked to pray for our unity, we can remember that all of us being together as one is the Lord’s prayer for the Church. The Lord is always with us on our journey. We will not be lost.

Let us pray +

God of mercy,

When we are lost or discouraged, we turn to you.

Give us your gift of hope.

May we, as Christians, be people of hope and work for the unity for which your Son, Jesus, prayed “may they be one”.

We ask this through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

Question for Reflection: How do we show we are people of hope?

Day 4: Trust

Paul had to trust that God would care for him and everyone in the boat. He had to trust God would keep them safe. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to trust in God’s love. The Bible tells us “God’s steadfast love endures forever.”

Let us pray +

Almighty God,

Sometimes we are hurt and we cry out to you.

Sometimes we experience sickness or worry or even the death of a loved one.

Teach us to trust you.

May the churches we belong to be signs of how you care for us.

Make us true disciples of your Son, Jesus,
who taught us to listen to your word
and to serve one another.

In confidence we ask this in the name of your Son,
and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Suggestion for Action: Even today, there are people in danger on the seas around Malta. Learn more about the difficulty these refugees face. How can our community be a sign of God’s care?

Day 5: Strength

Paul encourages the people on the boat to eat finally. They had been many days at sea in the storm with nothing. He knows they will need strength for the journey ahead.

In our church communities, we share the Lord's Supper that provides us with food for the spiritual journey. We are made strong. It builds us up as we commit ourselves to Christian service.

Let us pray +
Loving God,
your Son Jesus Christ broke bread
and shared the cup with his friends on the eve of his passion.
May we grow together in closer communion.
Give us strength and food for our spiritual journey.
In the power of the Holy Spirit,
we ask this in the name of your Son,
who gives his life that we might live. Amen.

Suggestion for Action: We know we need food to stay strong and healthy but many people in our communities lack good food. Find ways to participate in the important mission of feeding those who are in need in your own community.