



WEEK OF PRAYER
13-20 January 2019

Unity in Diversity

This year WOP materials are developed by:



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Discovering and celebrating diversity to build unity

There is great richness and diversity among Evangelicals, which needs to be celebrated and not only be a cause for concern. One way to celebrate our diversity and in fact use it as acceleration for more complete unity is through the Week of Prayer of the World Evangelical Alliance.

There is no better way to celebrate this than to come together in worship, thanksgiving, confession and bringing together our needs to God.

Many local churches in Europe take this week of prayer as an opportunity to organise joint prayer meetings, which we would like to encourage. Here a few suggestions for you to keep in mind when you plan:

1. Please make sure that ALL Evangelical churches are invited and included in your prayer gatherings. Make an extra effort to also reach out to the migrant churches. Do you have Roma churches that you could invite? Including everyone will make your unity richer and more diverse.
2. It's always a richer experience to go to various places, don't forget about the smaller ones? Each place is different and adds colour to your unity.
3. How can you practically express the vast diversity in your country? Do you make room for that? Opening up, making room adds surprising perspectives to unity.
4. Is your event relevant and appealing for youth as well? We encourage you to allow youth to participate and even help you plan and prepare. Unity across generations is really important for the church.
5. Plan a creative, relevant and appealing prayer meeting? Double check to make sure that prayer has the bulk of time? Unity is best expressed in spending time praying together.
6. We urge you to keep a gender balance. Have both men and women working together to create a program that will help express diversity? God has made diversity and rejoices when his body expresses this in unity.
7. Consider the future. Imagine seeing this event grow throughout the years. How can you create this year's prayer event that will draw people back and bring their friends with them? Love is the glue which brings together diverse people in unity.

God has blessed us with a wide range of ways to worship him! Let this week of prayer be the opportunity to celebrate this! Let this week of prayer be the spring board to make unity visible in our communities and show the world that diversity means being made rich as a united body in Christ.

Praying that we will discover the vast richness of diversity in ways which will build and add to our unity as never before.



Thomas Bucher

General Secretary European Evangelical Alliance

Introduction by the Spanish and the Portuguese EAs

In the past fifty years, our world has changed so much that if you fly half way around the world you will feel a strange sensation when you see very different things but, at the same time, you recognize franchises and brands that you see every day in your country. We encounter the same feeling with the Universal Church. We share many core beliefs that unify us while maintaining distinctions that sometimes make it seem like we don't belong to the same family. The question we, as evangelical Christians, should ask ourselves is: If God is our father, the Holy Spirit our compass, and the Bible our life map, why are we so different in so many ways? The answer depends on various factors:

1. Our limited intellect that must interpret the eternal Word of God.
2. Our worldview affected by the culture in which we live, which makes us read the Bible with glasses that we do not even know we are wearing.
3. The different ways of externalizing and applying what we understand of the same revealed Truth.

The question I have been asked many times in Spain by non-believers is the following: How can you keep Unity in your Creed, your vision, your standards of faith and your form of expression in your worship without having a Pope, a person to "govern and direct" you? How can it be that you go to an evangelical church in Indonesia and there is so much in common with an evangelical church in Europe?

The answer lies in the Bible: Everyone who believes in Christ is a child of God. We share the same Father; we belong to the same family. Siblings must look alike.

The creed we share is taken from the Bible, the word of God. We all seek to follow the example of Christ and the apostles and the way we behave in life is reflected in the Book we all follow.

May God help us to recognize our unity in Christ and, at the same time, to maintain our enriching diversity, so that God's grace may be manifold and the light of the gospel may reach the most remote corner of our beloved world.

During the present week of united prayer, we will see how, within diversity, there is Unity in the Church of Christ. Ephesians chapter 4 helps us to understand our common ground as a church. Throughout the Week of Prayer we will recall eight truths that give us unity as the Church of Christ:

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|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Unity in love | 5. Unity in one body |
| 2. Unity in Spirit | 6. Unity in mission |
| 3. Unity in faith (creed) | 7. Unity in vision |
| 4. Unity in Baptism | 8. Unity in Christ.... |

May Unity prevail over Diversity and be evident in the Church of God in Europe and the whole Earth!

Israel Montes

DAY 1 – UNITY IN LOVE

As words are used today, to «love» a person or to «bear with» them are attitudes which are mutually exclusive. I *love* a person who makes me feel good: if I *bear with* (= *put up with*) someone this isn't love yet, or it is no longer love.

To our surprise, the Apostle Paul exhorts the Ephesian Christians to *bear with one another, in love* (Ephesians 4:2). Love isn't just a feeling, it isn't egocentric, it isn't given conditionally. And to *bear with* a difficult person for a long time, because I am committed to him/her, may be an expression of pure Christlike love. I don't give up on a person because he/she is stubborn or bad. C.S. Lewis said: "Love is not affectionate feeling, but a steady wish for the loved person's ultimate good as far as it can be obtained".

Today the word «love» is used in a way that tends to reject moral restrictions. According to this way of thinking, if I refuse to consent in the sin my brother is caught up in, I am being «intolerant»: I am not being loving with him.

But Paul exhorts the Ephesian believers to *follow the truth in love* (Ephesians 4:15). So, he isn't trying to set aside or relativize clear doctrinal or ethical definitions. And, if I call «love» my hesitation in being clear and forthright with a person who is in sin, this shows that in fact I may be «loving» my own feelings more than the person's true interests.

The unity *of the Spirit* (Ephesians 4:3) is a glorious gift that God has given to all Christ's disciples for them to maintain. But the unity *of faith* (v. 13) is an aim to strive towards, ardently and persistently, even when my brother's habits or way of speaking tend to put me off. The growth of the body (v. 16), in all its parts – is an aim for which Christ gave His life (cf. Ephesians 5:25-27).

Alan Pallister

Thanksgiving:

- Thank you for Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, through which we receive free salvation, in no way dependent on our works or our efforts.
- Thank you for the fact that the Church of Christ exists in the most varied localities and cultures of the world, with the common aim of announcing salvation through Jesus.
- Thank you for the fellowship we enjoy and live with our brothers and sisters from every kind of background.

Confession:

- Forgive us for the social, racial and denominational barriers which have often prevented us from valuing and loving the brothers and sisters Christ redeemed by His blood.

Requests:

- Help your churches to value more highly the essential truths of the Gospel, and not to allow secondary questions to divide them, and even to consider that these differences may be positive. (Thinking of an evangelical congregation in your locality which belongs to a different denomination and/or with which you don't have much contact). Help, Lord, church x, with its pastor or leader, to grow in You and to fulfil the aims You have entrusted to it.

DAY 2 – UNITY IN THE SPIRIT

Something strange had been going on in the church in Corinth: it was rich in knowledge and spiritual gifts, yet its members little by little had grown apart from each other, in a sad process of division. This resulted in the formation of four different groups, around four leaders (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:4-17). Writing years later to believers in another church, Paul spoke of the need to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, but in Corinth the unity had been broken, and there could no longer be peace. Instead of one Lord, there were four «lords»; instead of one body, there were four little «bodies» (cf. Ephesians 4:1-6).

To combat this lamentable situation, Paul explained to the Corinthian Christians the powerful reality of the body of Christ, of which all believers are part, under His headship. In this body all the members are valuable, independently of their nationality, their social standing or their spiritual gifts, and all come to be part of it in the same way: through regeneration by the Holy Spirit. He plays a crucial part in the working of the whole body, because it is He who distributes gifts and concerns Himself with their working together. Nevertheless, we are expected to cooperate with the Spirit, «drinking» from Him (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:4-31). And this was where the Corinthians went wrong....

It isn't enough that we have been regenerated by the Spirit: we also need to walk in Him (Galatians 5:25), be filled with Him (Ephesians 5:18-21) and reveal His «fruit», with characteristics that are so important for the unity of believers like love, peace and goodness, avoiding the «works of the flesh», so harmful to that unity, like enmities, wrath and dissensions (cf. Galatians 5:16-23).

Only like this will we be able to fulfil Jesus' desire: "that all may be one, as You, the Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they may also be one just as We are one so that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:21).

João Filipe Silva

Thanksgiving:

- Thank You because, by Your grace, we were saved, and through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit we came to belong to the body of Christ.
- Thank You for the gifts the Holy Spirit has given us, for the edification of the church.

Confession:

- Forgive us for all the «works of the flesh» we are guilty of, which have been harmful to the unity of the Spirit.

Requests:

- Help us to be enthusiastic in developing the gifts the Spirit has given us.
- Help us to walk in the Spirit and be filled with Him, living in an attitude of praise and thankfulness before You and of mutual submission in our relationship with our brothers and sisters in the faith (Ephesians 5:18-21).
- Help us to be one with You and with our brothers and sisters, as Your Son wishes, so that those who are lost will be attracted towards Him.

DAY 3 – UNITY IN THE FAITH (CREED)

Andrew woke up one day to find out that he had some worrying symptoms. He spoke to some friends about it and realized that they were all having the same problem. So, they went to the doctor. This doctor had taken care of people in the same situation, and so he knew exactly what to do. The surprise came when Andrew and his friends started arguing about the best pills and the best way to recover. That argument led them away from the realization that the one who could cure them was right there.

Ephesians 4 addresses the unity of Jesus' followers. One of the aspects of that unity is faith. But what is this one faith? I think the author's focus in verse 13 gives us a clue: "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." The true unity in faith is in the person of Jesus. The unity of the faith is in the God we put our faith in. However, many important doctrines there may be, I think we will all agree that, when we meet in Jesus, we all manage to be united. When we meet in the God who became man to communicate with us (to the point of entrusting His revelation to a book written by men – the Bible) we can accept the challenge to be united. If God became one with us, we can be one with other people. Even though medicines and rest may be important, the doctor is the one we need. In the same way, the challenge to us is that our faith is grounded solely on the one we need: God himself.

Paul continues: "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (Eph. 4:14-16)

The challenge for us is to discern where our faith is: in God, or in doctrines that, even though they may be important, aren't God?

Pedro Wagner

Thanksgiving

- Thank you because you invite us to a faith that is centred in You alone.
- Thank you because there is no salvation anywhere else beyond Your Son Jesus.
- Thank you because we have a Saviour who invites us to grow to be like Him.

Confession

- Forgive us for trusting more in certain doctrines than in you, forgetting that You are our only Redeemer. (Suggestion: think of doctrines you defend the most earnestly and discern if your faith depends more on the truth of those doctrines than on God).

Requests

- Give us the courage to raise You up above anything else.
- Help us to be people who are well grounded in our faith in Jesus Christ.

DAY 4 – UNITY IN BAPTISM

It is fantastic to think that, despite our differences, when we enter any evangelical church and hear the word «Lord» it is exactly the same Person we are speaking about (Jesus Christ) and we identify ourselves in the same way (His servants). And it is exactly the term «Lord» that the Apostle Paul uses on which to base our unity in baptism. In the words of John Stott: “there is one hope which belongs to our Christian calling, one faith and one baptism because there is only one Lord”.

It would be easy to jump to the conclusion that it would never have entered Paul’s head that, in the future of the church, there would be different forms of baptism. But it is important to realize that Paul wasn’t talking about the form by which baptism is ministered when he said there is only one baptism. The apostle speaks of baptism as a public confession of «one faith» and «one Lord», that is, the initiation of the believer in Christ, as also the initiation in His one body (the church).

The baptism we one day received, declaring the same faith in the same Lord, places us all on equal footing. In this there is no difference between Jew and Greek, or slave and free, or man and woman (cf. Galatians 3:26-28). But this does not mean that we are not different in anything, men and women from different cultures (and often from the same culture) continue to be different from each other. Yet these differences don’t annul the fact that we were all equally saved by grace, by means of the same faith in the same Lord – a fact which we came to confess in the same symbol of baptism.

Rodolpho Lima

Thanksgiving:

- Thank you, Lord, for giving us an external symbol to express that which you have done within us.
- Thank you, Lord, for calling us to equality in salvation and not to the pride of being more than others or the dissatisfaction of wanting to be like others.
- Thank you, Lord, for the joy we were able to experience when we made our public profession of our faith.

Confession:

- Forgive us, Lord, for sometimes having given more attention to the symbols we receive from our culture than to the symbol You have given us: baptism.

Requests:

- Lord, give us eyes to see beyond our denominational and theological differences, eyes to see a brother or sister who identify themselves with You in the same way as we identify ourselves.
- Lord, use each act of baptism which we carry out to transmit the truth that we are all one body and that it makes complete sense to live under Your Lordship.

DAY 5 - UNIT IN A BODY

There is a well-known joke in which different parts of the body argue over who is the most important one. In the end, the one which seemed more insignificant proves that all are, in fact, connected. Although each plays its role, if any of them is sick or does not work, the whole body suffers and is incapable of functioning. The body of Christ works the same way.

In 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31, Paul describes it very illustratively: we are all different, but we are all members of the same body. We all possess different traits and perform different functions, but we are one in Christ. God is a wonderful creator, and He has granted us a unique individuality, which is complemented by others. This renders all of us necessary so that His body can operate properly and His work can be done (Rom. 12: 3-5). Paul says we need each other, whether we are feet, hands, ears or eyes. In English, when somebody is very clumsy, we say they have two left feet. God does not want a clumsy body, and that is why He provides the church with teachers, artists, musicians, idealists, pragmatists, and a long etcetera. Every gift, every personality, every passion, is necessary and works with all the rest to fulfil our purpose as a body. And we all function by being connected to the head, which is Christ, who unifies and guides us (Col. 2: 19; Eph. 4: 15-16).

However, being one body goes beyond merely working together: it also talks about the relationship we should have with our brothers and sisters. A body cannot be divided; it should rather take care of itself and all of its parts. When a member is hurting or is glad, the whole body experiences it with them. We edify and help each other grow in love (Eph. 4: 16)

Quoting U2: "We are one, but we are not the same. We carry each other". May God help us be one and celebrate our differences for His Glory.

Miriam Borham

Thanksgiving:

- Thank you, Lord, for being a very large body around the world; with our own characteristics and with the appropriate gifts that you have given us, since with them we contribute to the growth of your church and to the extension of your glorious gospel.
- It is a pleasure to see how You work in your body and through your body. We praise you and we recognize you as our Lord. We are grateful to have such a patient Lord.

Confession:

- So many times we want to shape things to fit our own understanding... We ask, O God, that your body may be that which you want us to become.

Petition:

- Help each one of us to work with our gifts and talents. May we know how to use our differences to enrich the body and not to make it suffer.
- Let your church work well! And may this bring Glory to our head: Christ.

DAY 6 – UNITY IN MISSION

In Ephesians 4:1 and 4 we are told of the vocation or mission to which we have been called, in unity with those who share our same hope. That is, all believers have the ministry of reconciliation by which, as ambassadors in Christ's name, we must plead with others to become reconciled with God (2 Co. 5: 18-20).

In order to accomplish any joint mission, there must be a team of people working in unity, order and coordination so that everything works. An example would be a team of medical staff who is going to perform difficult surgery. Their mission is to save a life and, to do so, there usually is a surgeon, several assistants, someone in charge of the medical equipment, an anaesthetist, an assistant anaesthetist, and a rotating nurse. All the members of this team will work united and coordinated, each fulfilling their role until the operation has concluded.

What would happen if the medical team started to argue over the different protocols halfway through the operation, if hours went by and they reached no agreement? Or if the person in charge of the equipment did not perform his job due to these discrepancies or the surgeon decided to leave in the midst of surgery? If any of these situations took place in a delicate operation, the patient could die and the staff would be held accountable. Unfortunately, instead of working as part of a team in order to achieve the mission of creating disciples, we Christians often argue, breaking unity because of not accepting the diversity that exists among ourselves. As described by the composer Marcos Vidal, "some believe in prophecies and others don't, some preach faith and others love, one speaks in tongues and another brags of his virtue, and the world dies without seeing the light". We are not indispensable in order to fulfil God's mission, but He has given us the privilege and the command to be a part of it. In John 17:18, Jesus says "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world". All Christians are sent with a mission: that people believe in Jesus Christ and by believing they have life in His name. This mission is compulsory, it's transcendental, and it's common to all God's people. The unity of God's people is not an option or an alternative. It's necessary to reach the lost. And the Devil is always trying to destroy the unity that Jesus longs for: that believers become one as He is one with the Father (John 17: 21).

May we leave aside our denominational differences, our diverse opinions and ways of doing things! May we respond in unity to our calling in order to complete our mission as a Church: to make the Gospel of salvation and eternal life in Jesus Christ reach those who are lost!

Natanael Montes

Thanksgiving:

- Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of being able to work in the best company in the world. Thank you for your call, your training and encouragement when we need it.

Confession:

- Sorry for not being up to the task and not fulfilling the mission faithfully entrusted.

Petition:

- Help us to leave "what is ours" to seek the good of the universal church. May we be the united church in the mission that you want us to be.

DAY 7 – UNITY IN VISION

Many Christian organizations and churches have undertaken defining their vision as a priority in order to reach success. Often, this task is done with great difficulty because of the existing differences amongst the people concerned. The perspective of what it means to be united in vision according to Paul, in chapter 4 of his Epistle to the Ephesians, draws out from his plea that we may live a life worthy of the calling we have received in Christ Jesus (v.1) and is framed in three fundamental aspects.

First (v.1-2), our vision must aim to our heart, to the way we ought to be. Paul urges us to care for our character in relation to our fellowship as a body: humility, gentleness, patience and forbearing.

Second (v. 7-16), our vision must aim to our hands, to the way we ought to do. Paul, specifically, exhorts us to use the gifts that have been given to us. The call in Christ leads to action in service and for the building up of the body to attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (v.13).

Third (v.17-29), our vision must aim to our mind, to the way we ought to think. Paul insists that we must live the teachings that we have received; the fruit is seen in a renewed mind and also in a new self that reflects in a transformed behaviour.

According to the designs of the world, Paul's life could be seen as a failure, since he is in prison at the time of writing, and, consequently, his petitions are useless. We could say the same of our lives and churches. Nevertheless, the promise is that, if we live as a body in unity of vision, caring mutually for our hearts, hands and minds "we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ (v.15)", "a perfect humanity" (v.13). There is no greater success. There is no greater reward.

Edith Vilamajó

Thanksgiving:

- We appreciate your promise that if we live with a vision of unity and growth as a church, there will be a wonderful reward.

Confession:

- We are lacking in vision, Lord. We need you by our side, always.
- We ask your forgiveness, beloved Father, for the times we do not see as you see, we do not love as you love, nor do we feel as you feel.

Petition:

- Help us to improve our heart and take care of our character in relation to our coexistence as a church. Give us more humility, patience and tolerance.
- Help us improve our way of seeing our gifts to serve you better.
- Help us to think as you think, so that this leads us to a proper vision of you, of your kingdom, of ourselves, of humanity and of our mission in this world.

DAY 8 – UNITY IN CHRIST

The first creed that sprang in the early church took the shape of a short statement: “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2: 11). Paul saw as God’s wish that a day came in which all humanity made this confession. There is only one Lord, and he is Jesus Christ the Saviour. Only one Lord reigns over the church, all believers are under the authority and at the service of the same Lord.

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe in Me through their word, that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.” John 17: 20, 21

This is the most moving prayer of the Teacher, which reveals to us the most intimate part of His heart. He was a victim on the altar of sacrifice, and in his last moments the Saviour does not only wish for the salvation of His people, but he intercedes for the unity of those saved, so that being saved, they can be united.

Unity was so close to the Saviour’s heart in times of such suffering that we should consider it something inestimable and invaluable. Unity is not automatic, we must work on it, and it is not easy to achieve. Attaining unity requires intentionality, effort, and maturity.

He wants all the sheep to be gathered in one flock under His own care. Those who have been vivified by the Holy Spirit and led to a vital union with the Lord must build unity. The love of Christ constrains us not to consider our brother a stranger, but a fellow citizen of the saints.

We must ensure unity based on the love that the Lord Jesus asks we have for each other, doing what we can to love others as Jesus loved us. Christ prays for the unity of His Church, so that all the saints are led to the unity of a life in Him. Be it so!

Manuel Díaz

Thanksgiving:

- Father, thank you for your son Jesus Christ.
- Thank you because Jesus is and will be the person most interested in the unity of the church. We trust in his eternal plan and we appreciate his work.

Confession:

- We want to confess that we do not always live with the conviction that you are the Lord of all areas of our life. Help us to long for your lordship.

Petition:

- We ask that your church, around the world, recognize the true unity that lies in Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.
- May we remember that, despite our diversity, we are one and may the world see it.