



Week of Prayer 2015

"Let us pray together"

Introductory

"Rejoice always. *Pray without ceasing*. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is what God in Christ Jesus expects of you" (5: 16-18), Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica, the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia.

Jude wrote his lesser-known letter to unidentified Christians all over the known world of that time. They and their faith in Jesus Christ, was strongly opposed, as we also often experience today. The Message translation of Jude's encouragements (1:20,21) says: "But you, dear friends, carefully build yourselves up in this most holy faith by *praying in the Holy Spirit*, staying right at the center of God's love, keeping your arms open and outstretched, ready for the mercy of our Master, Jesus Christ. This is the unending life, the real life!".

Paul writes to Timothy (1st letter, 2: 1). "The first thing I want you to do is pray. *Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know*. Pray especially for rulers and their governments to rule well so we can be quietly about our business of living simply, in humble contemplation. This is the way our Saviour God wants us to live. "

Here are three important prayer perspectives. Pray continually. Focus on the Holy Spirit when you pray. Pray for everyone you know (another translation: 'for all people'). Let's keep this in mind as we bend before our Lord during the 2015 week of prayer and thereafter.

During the Week of prayer, we focus together on all the work that congregations and the denomination do. For example as we reflect on the worship service, theological training and current affairs are also on our hearts. In Congregational ministry we focus specifically on the youth but also pray for all the ministries of men, women, children, for pastors and the equipping of the believers for a missional life. Similarly we pray for all service and witness ministries that reaches beyond the boundaries, for the ecumenical church, the country and the world, as well as for the ministries that support us to do it all of this. May the Lord graciously and lovingly hear our collective prayers and supplications.

We thank the members of the Uniting Presbytery of Wesland in the Cape region and co-workers for their fresh approach with the guidelines they developed. May the Lord bless the Week of prayer 2015 abundantly.

Johan Botha, Eddie Orsmond, Donald Gantana, Gideon van der Watt, Victor Pillay and Andries Hofmann (On behalf of the Task Group of the United Ministry for Service and Witness of the DRC family)

Vantage Points of the writers

The following points undergird the drafting of the guidelines for the Week of Prayer 2015.

- The goal of the Week of Prayer is *to pray together*. We bring in prayer before God's face the work of the congregation and the church for the year ahead.
- We deliberately choose to place our focus on prayer in the guidelines. The devotional guidelines are very short in order to make more room for us to pray together.
- Prayer is not one of a variety of spiritual activities among many others. Prayer is first and foremost a mindset and attitude that fills and determines our whole way of life. In our private room we make sure that we are focused on God, so that we may live focused on God in our public room. In this way our entire life becomes prayer.
- The Week of Prayer is an intensive "private room" for the congregation with a view to address the year with a deliberate focus on and commitment to God. The prayer meetings wish to assist us, to be busy with God's things in such a way that God will always be in the center. Therefore openness and availability to God is emphasised.
- We put these meditations within a liturgical framework to give context to them, to cultivate focus and to increase the participation of everyone in the congregation. The same liturgy can be used for all five meetings and can be used with a variety of songs and Scripture readings (The framework is an adaptation of older and younger Celtic liturgies which motifs and styles from the ecumenical church, Taizé and Africa. Also refer to the e- book, "*Gebedsritmes*", by DP Botha at Communitas www.communitas.co.za; Language editing by E Botha).
- By repeating the liturgy continuity and depth can grow in our fellowship before the Lord. The liturgy deliberately links with the Liturgical Year's season after Epiphany. God's incarnation is fresh in our memory, with a strong emphasis on the theme of light.
- We also focus consciously on the fact that the congregation and the church as the "body of Christ", continues Jesus' humanity in this world, in our operations during 2015.

Our prayer is that the Lord will use the operations of our congregations and broader church in 2015 to bring about the kingdom of heaven also on the earth.

Richard Holloway, David Botha and Eugene Beukes from the Wesland Uniting Presbytery of the DRC Family

LITURGY

Leader Tonight Christ, the One who became human, greets his people.

All We who are his hands and feet,
 together with all creation,
 greet Him as our King.

Leader Grace, love and peace to you
 from God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit –
 One God who Mothers us all.

THANKSGIVING

There may be singing.

Leader The earth belongs to God,
 as do all things and people who live on it.
 Out of the fluid cosmos God created its firmness.

First Who may ascend to the high dwelling of God?

Second Whoever is clean of heart
 and whoever does not cling to what is false
 will receive the Almighty's blessing
 and the Saviour's embrace.
 Such are those who seek the face of our forbears' God.

All Open up the gates that the King of glory may come in!

First Who is the King of glory?

Second The Immortal God, mighty and strong,
 is the King of glory.

All Open up the gates that the King of glory may come in!

First Who is the King of glory?

All The eternal and all-powerful God
 is the King of glory.
 [Ps 24]

Leader Let us recollect the presence of the incarnate God with us now.

Short silence.

CONFESSION

The following or other words of confession and forgiveness may be used.

Leader Christ Jesus, you are the light of the world
 and you want to shine through us.
 In union with your first frail apostles,
 we say sorry:

All For not weighing your words,
 for not sharing your trials,
 for not believing your promises.

Leader O loving Son,
 who came to us as Mary's first-born baby,
 scatter the sin from our souls
 as the mist from the hills.
 Begin what we do,
 inform what we say.
 redeem who we are.

All In you we place our hope, now and for evermore. Amen.

There may be singing.

Leader Jesus, you are the light of the world.

All You break the power of sin and darkness.

Leader You are the bread of life.

All You feed and fill the hungry.

Leader You are the true vine.

All You bring us life everlasting.

CREED

Leader We believe, O God of all gods,
that you are the eternal Maker of life.
We believe, O God of all gods,
that you are the eternal Maker of love.

All We believe, O Ruler and God of all people,
that you are the Creator of the skies above,
that you are the Creator of the oceans below,
that you are the Creator of the eternal realms.

Leader We believe, O Ruler and God of all people,
that you are the One who created our souls and set their course;
that you are the One who created our bodies from earth;
that you gave to our bodies their breath
and to our souls their possession.

All God, bless to us our bodies.
God, bless to us our souls.
God, bless to us our living.
God, bless to us our goals. Amen.

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Reader *The reading of the day,
This is followed by a short teaching.(See below)*

INTERCESSION

The following prayer may be offered:

Leader God our Master, thank you for bringing us to the beginning of this new year.

All Keep us from falling into sin.

Leader By becoming human

You overcame the sinful separation between God and creation.

All Transform us in all our ways.

Leader Christ: light, bread en living water for the world,
bring newness of life

All into our stale routines,
into our wearied spirits,
into our tarnished relationships.

Different perspectives on the ministries of the congregation and wider church may be offered each evening. This may be followed either by prepared prayer or by informal intercessory prayers in small groups for these ministries.

Intercession is then concluded with the following collective prayer:

Leader We pray for believers.

All May their lives be signs of joyful service.

Leader May our churches bring honour to you,
and faith to the people.

All May they be places of healing and welcome.

Leader We pray for people in authority.

All May they strive for justice and peace.

Leader May our congregation this year bring new light to those who see only darkness.

All May our homes be places of hospitality and hope.

There may be singing.

Leader We now dedicate ourselves to you.

Help us to see the face of Christ in everyone we meet.

May everyone we meet see the face of Christ in us.

All The God of life go with us,
the Son of man lives through us,
the vibrant Spirit within us. Amen!

Devotions

Worship Service

Hebrews 10: 19 -25

In many of our people's minds the worship service is what church is all about. We also speak of worship, as having church. It's not so wrong to think about church in this way, because the worship service is core of all the activities of the church.

Indeed, this is at once the object to which and the source from which the church's ministries operate. We work in the church through proclamation, acts of compassion and through visits to people to call them to honour the Lord in worship. From the worship service, with the Word, we again are sent forth to proclaim, to be merciful and to visit and encourage our neighbours.

Our text says the worship service did not just happen from nowhere. It did cost Jesus his life that you and I now can draw near to God in the worship service. As the curtain of the OT temple separated us from God and caused us not to approach God in the sanctuary, so sin separated us from God. Christ died on the cross and there this curtain was torn in two. As saved people we now have free access to God.

It is especially in the worship service, the gathering of the congregation, where we approach God. Therefore our text commands we should not stay away from the gatherings of the congregation. Our fellowship literally cost Christ his life.

We pray that the congregations will once again grasp the seriousness and significance of the worship service.

We pray that everyone will comprehend what it cost so that we can go to church.

We pray for the ministry group that cares for the maintenance of the worship service.

We pray that church services will again be filled with the grateful redeemed, seeking equipment for their daily life of service and witness.

Congregational Ministry

2 Timothy 3: 14 -17

The congregation of the Lord are those whom he took for himself, those who believe in Him - men, women and children, through the generations. However, we are all people with different backgrounds, education, even cultures. In practice it is not easy to have all of us as believers together in one congregation. Training and equipment are needed to let everyone pull together in one yoke.

The unity of the congregation, the church is a priority to the Lord Jesus. Therefore in John 17 He earnestly prayed for the unity. For a congregation to live and work practically we need to be of one mind. Our text says the Scripture provides the basis for us to be of one mind.

Scripture corrects wrongs in our views and actions, teaches us the truth and combats delusion. Diligent study of Scripture is therefore indispensable for a congregation. Bible study groups small groups are the backbone of the ministry to equip the congregation. Congregational Ministry actually is about the equipment of the congregation's men and women and children for their service and witness..

The Bible says in Ephesians 4:11, 12 that the Lord gives people like prophets, pastors and other leaders as gifts to equip the church. Behind this equipment of the congregation from Scripture, in small groups or through the programs offered by the congregation, our equipment is based on the Giver, on the Lord himself. It is He who gives us the people to lead us as gifts, to equip us. In this way God prepares the congregation and equips us to be of one mind as we serve Him.

We pray seriously to the Holy Spirit for the up building ministries in our congregations and church relation.

We pray for those who teach us the Word, and cultivate the right attitude towards life.

We pray that the Lord will make us all sensitive and receptive towards His Word.

We praise and thank the Lord who in this way prepares and equip us for every good work.

Youth

Psalm 78: 1 -4

In the introduction of this song Asaph displays a special dedication to convey the message of God to the children - so that the next generation may know. He says: "what we know, what our fathers have told us, we will not conceal for our children." He is totally committed to this task. And Like Asaph, the church has always been committed to the education and equipment of our children to know God. We know the health of our society basically depends on this.

In this text, it is very clear what the content of the education of the children entails. It's the old truths that we know, which Asaph narrates. It is knowledge that is certain, about which there is no doubt. It's the story of the praiseworthy acts of God. And this also includes the most glorious act of God in Jesus Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

In essence the content of the education of our children is the knowledge that God is in control – and that He is the Saviour, the Creator and Sustainer. This, says Asaph, is the mystery of life that must be passed on to the children, from one generation to the other - from the parents and grandparents to the children.

The text also very clearly shows how this knowledge and faith are to be transferred. In this Psalm Asaph chooses to convey it in a poem, says the 1983 (Afr) translation. The message of the Lord God must indeed be transferred to young people in a creative way. Even in the time of Asaph, it is a requirement if you want to get to the youth. Our methods today requires wisdom and creativity, but do remember Asaph's poem narrates God's history with his people.

We ask God the Creator and source of creativity, to give to us who are parents, grandparents and educators, the wisdom to reach our youth with the gospel.

We pray that the Lord will lead us as fathers and mothers, and educators to commit ourselves to this task, just like Asaph, so that we will never withhold God's grace from our children.

We acknowledge that our children and youth are employed with us by Christ. We therefore pray with commitment for the youth's ministry of the gospel, along with all of us, near and far.

Witness

2 Corinthians 5: 17 -21

It is remarkable how the mission task to spread the Gospel, is described by the term ministries. To witness is indeed a ministry. Our Scripture describes it as the ministry of reconciliation.

God reconciled Himself with us through Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross. God had already done it there. We are now God's children. We belong to the Lord. We were united with Him and also recreated, there on the cross, with new eyes and a new attitude toward all other people and towards God's creation of which we are part.

The text says it's now up to us to go and minister this truth, this reconciliation to all other people, to whom we now look with new eyes. This is not bad news that makes you get scared of hell. No, this is good news! This is the good news that God in Christ reconciled us to God self and with one another.

Witness means exactly what it says. One should tell one's version. Just as witnesses in a court will. Therefore, witness also means the story of your personal reconciliation with God, others and creation. It is through this story of God with you that you serve reconciliation to others and to creation.

Witness is definitely also not only an individual task. Reconciliation is our joint ministry, as it is required by all of us in this congregation and the church of God that are reconciled to Him. Witness, mission, evangelism is at the heart of the congregation's activity. This is the ministry of reconciliation that is assigned to us. We must not neglect it, but live it and exemplify it in the power of our Lord.

We pray for the congregations' and broader church's life and all its witness activities, all the outreaches with the gospel.

We pray for each other to be trustworthy ministers of reconciliation.

We pray for the ministry group that coordinates our witness from within the congregation..

We pray for each one to whom you and I will bring the gospel of reconciliation.

Mercy

2 Samuel 9: 1 to 13

The story of David and Mephibosheth demonstrates the compassion that God asks of us.

Mercy is not only confined to the act that is done. It's also not about how much land and how much food David gave to Mephibosheth. Mercy is also not driven by pity, though one could have had pity for Mephibosheth on his crippled feet.

Mercy here stems from David's conviction that this person in need is a child of the king, to whom mercy and restoration must be rendered. The nature of our own compassion is strongly linked to how we perceive the other, and the destitute. They are people whom God loves. They are children and creations of the King. Do we look to our neighbours in this way?

We often have the tendency to choose to whom we want to show mercy. Mephibosheth was not the one to whom King David should or would want to render mercy. He was the direct descendant of the last king, Saul, and therefore a threat to the throne of David. But David looked at him with different eyes. He understood true righteousness (God's merciful justice) and therefore showed mercy and restoration to the grandson of his former persecutor.

Our relationship with the Son of the King, determines our understanding of compassion and compassionate justice. Reconciled with the King ourselves, we now look at other people differently. This applies to all of us in the congregation of Jesus. Exactly our relationship with Him, who was himself so extremely compassionate, makes us to care about our neighbours, to visit people in prison, to treat the sick, to feed the hungry and to give clothes to people. Jesus says if we do this, we do right, and it is as if we do it unto Him.

- Motivated by love and grace we pray for the Mercy ministries in and around the congregation.
- We also pray for the Mercy ministries of our denomination inside and outside South Africa.
- We pray that a deep caring and the higher law of the Lord will firmly take root and grow across our society also through the examples that we set.

Justice and Peace

2 Chronicles 7: 14-16

We reflect on and pray for our country on the basis of two OT perspectives.

What is our own context in for example Southern Africa after several decades of freedom? We know the wonderful blessings of human and natural resources and some encouraging stories. But there is also great suffering by people among us who are poor, hungry, homeless, unemployed and grossly abused. There are the evils of corruption, bribery, selfishness, the unbridled mismanagement of funding, resources, power and growing disbelief. Where is the church, the congregations, the people of God on this today? Are we cherishing our freedom and blessings, but forget the plight of the destitute and turn away from wickedness and unbelief in our societies?

The writer of Chronicles in chapter 7 tells about the dedication of the temple when the worship of God in Israel was confirmed publicly. One night the Lord said to king Solomon (2 Chronicles 7:12) his prayer was answered. However, he as king and God's people should know that disasters and calamities may come on them, if they are unfaithful to and would turn away from God. He therefore expects a spirit of repentance if the people of God would transgress, that they will turn back to seek God's will. The consolation is that God will listen to those who pray and will again grant forgiveness and restoration and care and love to them.

Many generations later the prophet Isaiah (58: 5-12) again spoke to the people of God on their prayers and fasting practices in relation to their public lives. The disaster did come. The Temple was destroyed, their land was taken. The message was straight and clear. God hears our prayers, our religion and sees our public life with each other and with others as one cause.

If God's people are mutually disagreeing when we fast and pray, says Isaiah, the Lord will not answer our prayers. How low we bow or how pious we may pray, says the prophet, must specifically concur with our deep concern for justice, for the oppressed, the hungry, the poor, the homeless and naked. God wants to see you and me not leave our neighbours to their fate.

Then the light will break through for us like the dawn in congregations and communities, church and country, with the Lord who Himself leads his people. When we meet each other's and other people's needs, that which may be night to us will become like noon, we will be like spring water that does not dry up, and our ruined walls will be rebuild and our streets repaired, says the Lord.

- As the Lord's people we pray for an identity in which our prayers and service to our Lord and our caring for the destitute among us will be one and the same.
- We confess our own blindness and pray for humility and willingness to us all in order to pursue and cultivate justice for our neighbours.
- We pray that the Lord will heal our country and the world around us and that He will convert us all to be Christ to one another, our neighbours and to the world.