

# **ECUMENICAL WORSHIP SERVICE**

## **Notes for the Worship Service**

As an island nation, boats are an important part of Maltese life. Australia is also an island continent where trading boats visit and fishermen work. In recent times refugee seekers have made perilous journeys on leaky boats escaping from war ravaged countries – many of them have attempted to reach Australia. The Scripture reading in this service describes a perilous sea voyage by the Apostle Paul. A boat can be symbolic of the sometimes tempestuous journey Christians make towards unity. It is suggested that prior to the service, something from the sea – a fishing net, sea shells, lobster baskets, a ship anchor or life jacket or images of refugee seekers is placed in the worship space. A data projector could also be available to be used with the petitions (and possibly the songs and structure of the service – eliminating the need for a printed order of service).

Given its length and technical nautical language, the reading from the Acts of the Apostles requires very careful proclamation. Consideration may be given to dividing the speaking roles among a number of readers, or using drama or other media to aid the proclamation.

## **Prayers for use during a Catholic Mass held during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**

The Lectionary (Collins Liturgical, 1981) and Roman Missal (2010) contain a group of MASSES FOR VARIOUS NEEDS AND OCCASIONS. Under the heading FOR THE CHURCH, there is a prayer titled FOR THE UNITY OF CHRISTIANS. Go to

- LECTIONARY (AUSTRALIAN EDITION), VOL. 2, MASS FOR VARIOUS NEEDS AND OCCASIONS - FOR THE UNITY OF CHRISTIANS, c. p. 508.
- ROMAN MISSAL (2010) MASS FOR VARIOUS NEEDS AND OCCASIONS: FOR HOLY CHURCH – FOR THE UNITY OF CHRISTIANS, p. 1336.

# Order of Service

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

L Leader  
C Congregation  
R Reader

## The Gathering

### Introductory Hymn

*During the singing of the introductory hymn, church leaders and representatives enter the venue for the ecumenical service of prayer for Christian Unity. These prayer leaders might include members of the local Stella Maris, or equivalent groups that support merchant sea farers. They are led by a participant carrying the Bible for all to see. The Bible is placed in a place of honour in the centre of the worshipping assembly.*

### Words of Welcome

L The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with you all.

C **And also with you.**

L Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, we have assembled here to pray for unity among Christians and reconciliation in the world. Divisions among Christians have existed for many centuries. This causes great pain and is contrary to God’s will. We believe in the power of prayer. Together with Christians all over the world, we offer our prayers as we seek to overcome separation.

The resources for this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity have been prepared by different Christian Churches in Malta. The history of Christianity in this small island nation dates back to the time of the apostles. According to tradition, St Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, reached the shores of Malta in the year 60. The narrative describing this eventful and providential episode is conveyed to us in the final two chapters of the Acts of the Apostles.

This text signals the beginning of Christianity in Malta – a small country made up of two main inhabited islands, Malta and Gozo, as well as other islets – at the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, halfway between the southern tip of Sicily and Northern Africa. This biblical land lies at the crossroads of societies, cultures and religions.

Our prayers and reflections, today, and during this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, are centred on the hospitality shown by the islanders towards those who had just been shipwrecked: “They showed us unusual kindness” (*cf. Acts 28:2*). May the love and respect we show each other today as we pray for Christian unity be with us throughout the whole year. May we go from here to show this unusual kindness to visitors to our country who often arrive by boat, be they migrants, refugees, asylum seekers or merchant seamen and women.

## Invocation of the Holy Spirit

*The response to each prayer may be sung by a cantor and repeated by the whole congregation.*

- L Spirit of love, come upon this assembly and dwell among us.  
C **Come, Holy Spirit! (or Veni Sancte Spiritus!)**
- L Spirit of unity, show us the path towards Christian unity.  
C **Come, Holy Spirit! (or Veni Sancte Spiritus!)**
- L Spirit of hospitality, teach us to welcome each other and especially strangers.  
C **Come, Holy Spirit! (or Veni Sancte Spiritus!)**
- L Spirit of compassion, instill within us an attitude of respect to all those whom we meet.  
C **Come, Holy Spirit! (or Veni Sancte Spiritus!)**
- L Spirit of hope, open our hearts to embrace our ecumenical journey.  
C **Come, Holy Spirit! (or Veni Sancte Spiritus!)**

## Prayers of Pardon and Reconciliation

*The response to each prayer may be sung by a cantor and repeated by the whole congregation.*

- L Forgive us, Lord, for past mistakes, mistrust and misdeeds between Christians from different Churches and traditions.  
C **Lord, have mercy! (or Kyrie eleison!)**
- L Forgive us, Lord, for remaining in the darkness rather than seeking the path of Light; for you, O Lord, are the only true Light.  
C **Lord, have mercy! (or Kyrie eleison!)**
- L Forgive us, Lord, for our lack of faith and for our failure to be people of expectant hope and authentic charity.  
C **Lord, have mercy! (or Kyrie eleison!)**
- L Forgive us, Lord, for having caused pain, hardship and anguish to others.  
C **Lord, have mercy! (or Kyrie eleison!)**
- L Forgive us, Lord, for isolating ourselves and remaining indifferent, especially to refugees and asylum seekers, instead of showing generous hospitality to all.  
C **Lord, have mercy! (or Kyrie eleison!)**
- L The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. As the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us (Ps 103:8,11-12).  
C **Amen.**

## Song of praise

## Listening to the Living Word of God

- L Father in heaven, open our hearts and minds to your Word.  
C **Your words are spirit and life!**
- L Lead us to grow closer to each other in unity and charity.  
C **Your word is a lamp on our path!**

**Reading** Acts 27:18 – 28:10

- R This is the Word of the Lord.  
C **Thanks be to God who saves and who heals.**

**Psalm** Ps 107:8-9,19-22,28-32

*A cantor may sing this Psalm and the congregation is invited to sing the Response.*

**Response: The Lord has delivered us from the mighty waves.**

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,  
for his wonderful works to humankind.  
For he satisfies the thirsty,  
and the hungry he fills with good things. **R/.**

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,  
and he saved them from their distress;  
he sent out his word and healed them,  
and delivered them from destruction. **R/.**

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,  
for his wonderful works to humankind.  
And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices,  
and tell of his deeds with songs of joy. **R/.**

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,  
and he brought them out from their distress;  
he made the storm be still,  
and the waves of the sea were hushed.  
Then they were glad because they had quiet,  
and he brought them to their desired haven. **R/.**

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,  
for his wonderful works to humankind.  
Let them extol him in the congregation of the people,  
and praise him in the assembly of the elders. **R/.**

*An Alleluia acclamation may be sung before (and after) the Gospel reading.*

**Gospel** Mark 16:14-20

**R** This is the Word of the Lord.

**C** **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ. You are the Good News!**

*A biblical reflection or short homily follows. This might be delivered by a chaplain to seafarers.*

**Hymn**

## **The Nicene Creed**

**L** Dear brothers and sisters, as we are united in the Lord Jesus Christ, let us proclaim our common faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**C** **We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.  
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father;  
through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation  
 he came down from heaven,  
 was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary  
 and became truly human.  
 For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
 he suffered death and was buried.  
 On the third day he rose again  
 in accordance with the Scriptures;  
 he ascended into heaven  
 and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
 He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
 and his kingdom will have no end.  
 We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
 who proceeds from the Father,  
 who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,  
 who has spoken through the prophets.  
 We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.  
 We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
 We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
 and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

## **The Prayers of the People**

*If a data projector is available each slide presents a virtue we call for – Reconciliation, Enlightenment, Hope, Trust, Courage, Hospitality, Conversion and Generosity – the slide is projected, and a time of silent prayer follows. A reader then announces the corresponding petition and all respond.*

**L** We cannot face the storms of life alone. A boat moves forward when all row together. In the face of difficulties we recognise the need to pull together and to unite our efforts. Let us pray.

*In silent prayer, the first slide is projected, followed by the others.*

**R** Gracious God, heal the painful memories of the past which have wounded our churches and continue to keep us apart.

**C** **Hear our prayer for Reconciliation.**

**R** Gracious God, teach us to fix our course on Christ, the True Light.

**C** **Hear our prayer for Enlightenment.**

**R** Gracious God, strengthen our confidence in your providence when we feel overwhelmed by the storms of life, whether they be sickness or misfortune for ourselves or our loved ones.

**C** **Hear our prayer for Hope.**

**R** Gracious God, transform the many separations amongst our churches and faiths into harmony and our mistrust into mutual acceptance.

**C** **Hear our prayer for Trust.**

**R** Gracious God, give us the courage to speak the truth with justice in love and so be the voice of those in our community who have no opportunity to speak out.

**C** **Hear our prayer for Courage.**

**R** Gracious God, dismantle the barriers, visible and invisible, that prevent us from welcoming our sisters and brothers who are seeking refuge from persecution, hunger and starvation.

**C** **Hear our prayer for Hospitality.**

**R** Gracious God, change our hearts and the hearts of our Christian communities, that we may speak out on behalf of those held in detention by Australia, and so be agents of your healing love.

**C** **Hear our prayer for Conversion.**

**R** Gracious God, open our eyes to see the whole of creation as your gift, do all we can to stop the exploitation of our land and preserve our natural resources.

**C** **Hear our prayer for Generosity.**

## **The Lord's Prayer**

L One in Jesus Christ, let us pray together in the words he taught us.

C **Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.**

L The people of Malta welcomed Paul and his companions with unusual kindness. Let us greet each other and share the peace which is Christ's gift to us.

## **We are sent out together to proclaim the Good News**

L We have come together as Christians,  
and therefore as fellow disciples.  
As we yearn for Christian unity,  
let us commit ourselves anew  
to work for this common goal. *(Pause for silent prayer)*

*Church leaders who are present may join in proclaiming the Prayer of Blessing.*

L/Ls May God the Father, who called us from darkness into light,  
make us true bearers of God's light.

C **Amen.**

L/Ls May God the Son, who redeemed us by his precious blood,  
empower us to follow his example in serving others.

C **Amen.**

L/Ls May God the Holy Spirit, who is Lord and giver of life,  
strengthen us to endure the shipwrecks of life and reach the shores of salvation.

C **Amen.**

L/Ls May the Almighty and Merciful God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless and protect us now and forever.

C **Amen.**

C **We will set out together, to proclaim the wonders of God's love.  
Amen! Alleluia! Amen!**

## **Concluding hymn**

# ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

The hymn "Unusual Kindness" was especially composed in Malta for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2020.

A video is accessible on Youtube at the following address:

<http://thechurchinmalta.org/en/posts/325/ecumenical-commission>

## UNUSUAL KINDNESS

JOE C AQUILINA

♩ = 115  
**Allegro** Em

Kind-le a fi re, build a fi re, in the  
7 hearts of peo - ple, young and old. Kind-le a fi re, build a fi re, it's  
11 get-ting dark - er it's get-ting cold! Don't just stay there but show them you care, don't just  
15 stay there but go out and share don't just stay there but go out and serve the  
19 peo-ple of the wo - rld. And the peo-ple of the world may one day sing out with joy  
24 a-bout the love they have been shown in Je-sus' name. They  
29 showed us un-us-ual kind - ness. They showed us they real-ly cared. They  
33 showed us un-us-ual kind ness ev-ery time and ev-ery where. They  
37 showed us un-us-ual kind ness They gave us a help-ing hand. They

Chord symbols: Em, Em/B, Cmaj7, D(sus2), Cmaj7, D(sus2), Am, Em/B, C, Am, Em/B, C, B7, Bsus4/7, B7, Em, Cmaj7, Em/A, Bsus4/7, B7, Am7, D7, Am7, D7, Am7, B7, Am7, D7, Am7, D7.

41 Am<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> Em B<sup>7</sup>  
showed us un-us-ual kind - ness in each and ev-ery land We

45 C D G F#m Em C D  
don't de - serve this song Ky-ri - e - le - i - son, our love is not that strong Ky-ri - e

51 Bsus4/7 B<sup>7</sup> C D G F#m  
le - i - son Help us to rise be yond Ky-ri - e - le - i -

56 Em C Am D Bsus4/7  
son be yond words to let the fi-re of your love change our hearts

62 B<sup>7</sup> Em/B  
Kin-dle a fi - re, build a fi - re, in the hearts of peo - ple,

66 Em/B Cmaj7 D(sus2) Em/B  
young and old Kin-dle a fi - re build a fi re, it's get-ting dark er, it's

70 Cmaj7 D(sus2) Am Em/B C Am Em/B  
get-ting cold! Don't just stay there but show them you care don't just stay there but

74 C Am Em/B C B<sup>7</sup> Bsus4/7  
go out and share, don't just stay there but go out and serve the peo-ple of the world

78 B<sup>7</sup> Em Cmaj7  
In His love we were im - mersed in His grace we found our strength,

82 Em<sup>11</sup>/A Bsus4/7 B<sup>7</sup>  
in His mer-cy we have found the source of pow - er He

87 Am<sup>7</sup> Am<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup>  
showed us un-us-ual kind - ness He showed us He real-ly cared He

91 Am<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> Em B<sup>7</sup>  
showed us un-us-ual kind - ness ev-ery time and ev-ery where that we may

95 Am<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> Am<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> Am<sup>7</sup>  
show un-us-ual kind - ness and give a help-ing hand to show un-us-ual kind

100 D<sup>7</sup> Em B<sup>7</sup> Em  
- ness in each and ev-ery land UN-US-UAL KIND-NESS

# THE ECUMENICAL SITUATION IN MALTA\*

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Malta, an island in the Mediterranean Sea, received the Christian faith through the efforts of the Apostle, Paul, after he was shipwrecked there while travelling to Rome. In Acts 27 and 28, we read the detailed narrative describing the terrible storm at sea, the 'providential' shipwreck and the subsequent welcome afforded to the 276 individuals on the vessel who all made it safely to shore. Paul's healing ministry in Malta is also briefly described in the same New Testament text.

During its long and chequered history, Malta was ruled by various powers: the Carthaginians, the Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, Swabians, the Aragonese, the Knights of the Order of St John, the French and the British. Malta became an independent nation within the British Commonwealth in 1964. In 2004, it joined the European Union.

The Christian faith is deeply rooted in the culture of the inhabitants of Malta and its sister island of Gozo. Although the current population of about 430,000 is predominantly Roman Catholic, there are significant groups of Christians belonging to other traditions. Ecumenism is not a new experience to the local population. Being at the crossroads of civilizations, religions, trade and migration, has made the people of Malta always open to others, and markedly hospitable. The Maltese people recognize that the proper handling of current differences can lead to the mutual appreciation of the respective richness found in the different Churches.

The first permanent and numerically significant presence of members from other Churches dates back to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The strong military and naval presence of British servicemen and their accompanying pastors eventually led to the construction of suitable and dignified places of worship for the members of the Church of Scotland (St Andrew's Scots' Church, founded in 1824, completed in 1857), the Anglican Communion (St Paul's Pro-Cathedral founded in 1839, completed in 1844) and the Methodist Church (completed in 1883). The Crimean War and the opening of the Suez Canal made Malta a strategic naval base as well as the hub of trade and an important shipyard.

A Greek Orthodox community was established in 1816 by Greeks and Cypriots living in Malta. From the 1990s, there was an exponential growth of members of different Orthodox Churches. The majority consist of Eastern Europeans settling in Malta in order to find work. This includes Serbian and Russian Orthodox, as well as Romanian and Bulgarian Orthodox. At the same time, a substantial number of Oriental Orthodox faithful, especially from Egypt, Ethiopia and Eritrea, have found refuge in Malta, after fleeing their respective countries on account of persecution. The same can be said about small groups of Orthodox Christians from the Middle East, particularly from Syria and Iraq.

This wide kaleidoscope of Christian Churches makes the ecumenical scene a vibrant one indeed. The first ecumenical encounters in Malta took place in the mid-1960s when a small group of Roman Catholic clergyman regularly met a number of chaplains from the British forces stationed in Malta. They discussed matters of common interest and prayed together. Collaboration between Maltese biblical scholars and clergy from different Christian traditions was also frequent and fruitful. It is known that many of these ecumenical contacts were based on deeply rooted friendly relationships. The Malta Bible Society worked with the clergy from a number of different Christian communities.

The first formal ecumenical services in Malta were held in the late 1960s and the early 70s. Furthermore, the first meetings of ARCIC and of the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue were held in Malta. In October 1977, the Catholic Archbishop of Malta, Most Reverend Joseph Mercieca, instituted a Diocesan Ecumenical Commission. Its task was to encourage prayer for Christian unity, and to promote Catholic awareness and understanding of the presence of other Christian communities.

In 1995, Father Maurice Eminyan, SJ founded the Malta Ecumenical Council, today referred to as *Christians Together in Malta*. The Council includes representatives of the various Churches. It meets every two months to discuss ecumenical matters, to organize public dialogue meetings and, in collaboration with the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission, to finalize the content and the logistical arrangements of ecumenical services. The main ecumenical service is held in January, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Another service is held in the days preceding or following the feast of Pentecost.

The members of *Christians Together in Malta* are the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Seventh Day Adventists are also part of the Council.

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In Malta, ecumenical relations thrive. The working relationship is marked by deep respect and authentic collaboration. The Roman Catholic Church in Malta has been instrumental in assisting the various Orthodox Churches in finding a suitable venue for worship. Similarly the Roman Catholic diocese of Gozo has opened its doors to provide worship venues for Anglicans and other Christians from the Reformed traditions.

Besides the customary Ecumenical Services, other regular ecumenical gestures of note, in Malta, include the following:

- a common project of *diaconia*, either locally or abroad, which receives financial support from across the Christian communities;
- the Christmas Festival of Nine Lessons, at St Paul's Anglican Pro-Cathedral, Valletta, involving the participation of ecumenical partners;
- an ecumenical reception hosted by the Catholic Archbishop of Malta, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity;
- common initiatives, such as visiting the sick and the elderly, carol singing, and events on the occasion of the World Day of Prayer for Creation;
- the mutual participation of Christian leaders in Malta at special patronal feasts;
- collaboration with St Andrew's, Church of Scotland, in supporting a Food Bank;
- the Lighthouse Network which brings Christians together on a monthly basis for prayer and praise;
- ministers from different Christian traditions collaborate in teaching a Higher Education award in Ecumenism organized by the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission in collaboration with the Pastoral Formation Institute of the Archdiocese of Malta;
- the President of the Republic of Malta annually invites Church leaders to a round table discussion and a Christmas meal, some days prior to Christmas.

Ecumenical collaboration at various levels has been instrumental in promoting the cause of Christian unity in Malta. The ecumenical climate in Malta is indeed a positive one and may truly serve as a microcosm of ecumenical dialogue on a universal level.