

THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

The origins of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity can be traced to an initiative in 1908 for an octave of prayer for the unity of Christians. This initiative came from Episcopalian minister Paul Wattson from the society of sisters and brothers of the Atonement at Graymoor. Pope Pius X gave his official blessing to this octave of prayer in 1909. From 1968, the Catholic Church has worked with the World Council of Churches in the preparation of the resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity each year.

The Week of Prayer is an example of spiritual ecumenism. It recognises that the unity of Christians will not come about through a “negotiated settlement”, as it were. Rather, it will be the work of the Spirit. Christians join together in prayer during this week to listen to the Spirit and to discern the movement of the Spirit. Prayer, rather than negotiation, is the strongest impetus to conversion.

Pope John Paul II wrote of the importance of prayer for ecumenical relations: “Precisely because [Christians] are separated from one another, they meet in Christ with all the more hope, entrusting to him the future of their unity and their communion. ... The change of heart which is the essential condition for every authentic search for unity flows from prayer and its realisation is guided by prayer” (*Ut unum sint*, 28).