

BIBLICAL TEXT FOR 2018

Exodus 15: 1-20

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: ‘I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name.

‘Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he cast into the sea; his picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea. The floods covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone. Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power— your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your adversaries; you sent out your fury, it consumed them like stubble. At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up, the floods stood up in a heap; the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, “I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them. I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.” You blew with your wind, the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

‘Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendour, doing wonders? You stretched out your right hand, the earth swallowed them.

‘In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode. The peoples heard, they trembled; pangs seized the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; trembling seized the leaders of Moab; all the inhabitants of Canaan melted away. Terror and dread fell upon them; by the might of your arm, they became still as a stone until your people, O Lord, passed by, until the people whom you acquired passed by. You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own possession, the place, O Lord, that you made your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, that your hands have established. The Lord will reign for ever and ever.’

When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea, the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground.

Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them: ‘Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.’

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

The Caribbean Region

Bearing the name of one of the groups of its indigenous peoples- the Kalinago people, formerly called the Caribs- the contemporary Caribbean region is a complex reality. The region's vast geographical spread includes both island and mainland territories containing a rich and diverse tapestry of ethnic, linguistic and religious traditions. It is also a complex political reality with a variety of governmental and constitutional arrangements, ranging from colonial dependencies (British, Dutch, French, and American) to republican nation states.

The contemporary Caribbean is deeply marked by the dehumanizing project of colonial exploitation. In the aggressive pursuit of mercantile gains, the colonisers codified brutal systems which traded human beings, and their forced labour. Initially, these practices enslaved and decimated and in some cases exterminated the region's indigenous peoples. This was followed by the enslavement of Africans and the "indentureship" of people from India and China.

At each stage, the systems of the colonisers attempted to strip subjugated peoples of their inalienable rights: their identity, their human dignity, their freedom and their self-determination. The enslavement of Africans was not simply a case of transporting labourers from one location to another. In an affront to God-given human dignity, it commodified the human person, making one human being the property of another. With the understanding of the enslaved as property, went other practices that further sought to dehumanize the African. Included among these was the denial of the right to cultural and religious practices and to marriage and family life.

Very regrettably, during five hundred years of colonialism and enslavement, Christian missionary activity in the region, with the exception of a few outstanding examples, was closely tied to this dehumanizing system and in many ways rationalized it and reinforced it. Whereas those who brought the Bible to this region, used the scriptures to justify their subjugation of a people in bondage, in the hands of the enslaved, it became an inspiration, an assurance that God was on their side, and that God would lead them into freedom.

The Theme for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2018

Today Caribbean Christians of many different traditions see the hand of God active in the ending of enslavement. It is a uniting experience of the saving action of God which brings freedom. For this reason the choice of the song of Moses and Miriam (Ex 15: 1-21), as the motif of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2018 was considered a most appropriate one. It is a song of triumph over oppression. This theme has been taken up in a hymn, *The Right Hand of God*, written in a workshop of the Caribbean Conference of Churches in August 1981, which has become an "anthem" of the ecumenical movement in the region, translated into a number of different languages.

Like the Israelites, the people of the Caribbean have a song of victory and freedom to sing and it is a song which unites them. However, contemporary challenges again threaten to enslave and again threaten the dignity of the human person created in the image and likeness of God.

While human dignity is inalienable it is often obscured by both personal sin and social structures of sin. In our fallen world societal relationships too often lack the justice and compassion that honour human dignity. Poverty, violence, injustice, addiction to drugs and pornography, and the pain, grief and anguish which follow, are experiences that distort human dignity.

Many of the contemporary challenges are themselves the legacy of a colonial past and slave trade. The wounded collective psyche is manifested today in social problems related to low self-esteem, gang and domestic violence, and damaged familial relationships. Although a legacy of the past, these issues are also exacerbated by the contemporary reality that many would characterize as neo-colonialism. Under existing circumstances it seems almost impossible for many of the nations of this region to pull themselves out of poverty and debt. Moreover, in many places there is a residual legislative framework that continues to be discriminatory.

The right hand of God that brought the people out of slavery, gave continued hope and courage to the Israelites, as it continues to bring hope to the Christians of the Caribbean. They are not victims of circumstance. In witnessing to this common hope the churches are working together to minister to all peoples of the region, but particularly the most vulnerable and neglected. In the words of the hymn, “the right hand of God is planting in our land, planting seeds of freedom, hope and love”.

Biblical - Pastoral reflection on the text (Ex 15:1-21)

The Book of Exodus takes us through three periods: the Israelites’ life in Egypt (1:1-15:21); Israel’s journey through the wilderness (15:22-18:27); and the Sinai experience (19-40). The passage chosen, the ‘Song at the Sea’ led by Moses and Miriam, details the events leading up to the redemption of the people of God from enslavement. It closes the first period.

“This is my God, and I will praise him” (15: 2)

Verses 1-3 of chapter 15 emphasize the praise of God: "The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him" (15: 2). In the song, led by Moses and Miriam, the Israelites sing the praises of the God who has freed them. They realize that the plan and purpose of God to set the people free cannot be thwarted or frustrated. No forces not even Pharaoh’s chariots, army and trained military power could frustrate the will of God for his people to be free (15:4-5). In this joyful cry of praise, Christians from many different traditions recognize that God is the Saviour of us all, we delight that he has kept his promises, and continues to bring his salvation to us through the Holy Spirit. In the salvation that he brings we recognize that he is our God and we are all his people.

"Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power" (15:6a)

The liberation and salvation of God’s people comes through the power of God—The right hand of God can be understood both as God’s sure victory over his adversaries, and as his unfailing protection of his own people. In spite of the determination of Pharaoh, God heard the cry of his people and will not let the people perish because God is the God of life. By his control of wind and sea God shows his will to preserve life and to destroy violence (Ex 15:10). The purpose of

this redemption was to constitute the Israelites as a people of praise recognizing God's steadfast love.

The liberation brought hope and a promise for the people. Hope because a new day had dawned when the people could freely worship their God and realize their potential. It was also a promise: their God would accompany them throughout their journey and no force could destroy God's purpose for them.

Does God use violence to counteract violence?

Some Church Fathers interpreted the narrative as a metaphor for the spiritual life. Augustine, for example, identified the enemy which is cast into the sea not as the Egyptians, but as sin.

“All our past sins, you see, which have been pressing on us, as it were from behind, he has drowned and obliterated in baptism. These dark things of ours were being ridden by unclean spirits as their mounts, and like horsemen they were riding them wherever they liked. That’s why the apostle calls them ‘rulers of this darkness.’ We have been rid of all this through baptism, as through the Red Sea, so called because sanctified by the blood of the crucified Lord...” (Sermon 223E).

Augustine saw the story as encouraging the Christian to hope and persevere, rather than despair, at the pursuit of the enemy. For Augustine saw baptism was the key constitutive event in establishing the true identity of each person as a member of the Body of Christ. He draws a parallel between Israel’s liberating passage through the Red Sea and that of the Christian people in baptism. Both liberating journeys bring a worshiping assembly into being. As such Israel could freely praise the saving hand of God in the victory song of Miriam and Moses. Their redemption constituted the enslaved Israelites as members of the one people of God, united with one song of praise to sing.

Unity

Exodus 15 allows us to see how the road to unity must often pass through a communal experience of suffering. The Israelites’ liberation from enslavement is the foundational event in the constitution of this people,. For Christians this process climaxes with the incarnation and Paschal mystery. Although liberation/salvation is an initiative taken by God, God engages human agencies in the realization of his purpose and plan for the redemption of his people. Christians, through baptism, share in God's ministry of reconciliation, but our own divisions hamper our witness and mission to a world in need of God's healing.

THE PREPARATION OF THE MATERIAL FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2018

The Churches of the Caribbean were chosen to draft the material for the 2018 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Under the leadership of His Grace Kenneth Richards, Catholic Archbishop of Kingston and bishop with ecumenical responsibilities for the Antilles Episcopal Conference, together with Mr Gerard Granado, General Secretary of the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC), an ecumenical team of women and men were invited to draft the material.

Gratitude is extended in particular to the leaders of CCC, to the Antilles Episcopal Conference, and to those who contributed to these resources:

1. Most Rev. Kenneth D. Richards - Coordinator of the Drafting Team on behalf of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (AEC), Chairman of the AEC Ecumenism Commission, Archbishop of Kingston (Roman Catholic) [Jamaica]
2. Mr. Gerard A.J. Granado, M.Th. (Edinburgh) - General Secretary, Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC), Convener of Drafting Team (Roman Catholic) [Trinidad and Tobago]
3. Prof. Luis N. Rivera-Pagan – Prof. Emeritus of Ecumenics, Princeton Theological Seminary, N.Y. (Baptist) [Puerto Rico]
4. Rev. Kirkley Sands, Ph.D. – Chaplain, Codrington Theological College, (Anglican) Church in the Province of the West Indies [Bahamas]
5. Rev. Patmore Henry – Secretary, Connexional Conference, Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas (MCCA) [Antigua]
6. Oluwakemi Linda Banks, Ph.D. - A President of CCC & Clinical Psychologist (Anglican) [Anguilla]
7. Ms. Nicole Poyer – Leader, Taizé (ecumenical) Group, Trinidad and Tobago and Matriculating Masters student in Theology (Roman Catholic) [Trinidad and Tobago]
8. Right Rev. Glenna Spencer – Bishop, Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas (MCCA) & former member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) [Guyana]
9. Right Rev. Kingsley Lewis, Ph.D. – Bishop, Moravian Church (East West Indies Province), and President Emeritus of the CCC [Antigua]
10. Rev. Elvis Elahie, M.Th. (Edinburgh) – Moderator Emeritus, Presbyterian Church in Trinidad and Tobago (PCTT) and Principal Emeritus of St. Andrew's (Presbyterian) Theological College [Trinidad and Tobago]
11. Rev. Marjorie Lewis, Ph.D. – President Emeritus, United Theological College of the West Indies (UTCWI) (United Church of Jamaica & Grand Cayman) [Jamaica]

12. Rev. George Mulrain, Ph.D. – Connexional President Emeritus, Connexional Conference, Methodist Church in the Caribbean & the Americas (MCCA) [Trinidad & Tobago]

The local drafting team presented the texts, prayers and reflections they had chosen or prepared to an international team sponsored jointly by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). At this meeting, held at Emmaus House in Nassau, Bahamas, 3-7 September, 2016, the draft text was edited and finalised. The international team had the opportunity to visit the Pompey Museum of Slavery and Emancipation at Vendue House, a visit which helped the editorial team honour the struggles for freedom of the Bahamian and wider Caribbean people.

The international team would like to thank Archbishop Patrick Pinder and the Archdiocese of Nasau for their generosity in hosting us at the Emmaus Centre and to the staff who work there and made our stay so comfortable. We also wish to express our gratitude for the support of local ecumenical Church leaders, Rev. Dr. Ranford Patterson, President of the Bahamas Christian Council, and the Rt. Rev. Laish Boyd, Diocesan Bishop - Anglican Diocese of The Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Island, who joined the group to share their knowledge and experience of the local church.

INTRODUCTION TO THE WORSHIP

The Bible and three sets of chains are integral to the celebration of this Worship Service. The Caribbean writing group suggests that these symbols are prominently placed in the worship space.

The Bible is especially important in the experience of the Caribbean Churches. Historically, indigenous and enslaved peoples experienced atrocities perpetrated by colonizers who, at the same time, brought Christianity. Yet, in the hands of the oppressed peoples of the region, the Bible became a primary source of consolation and liberation. This dynamic of reversal makes the Bible a particularly potent symbol in itself. Therefore, in this service, it is important that a visually significant Bible be placed in the midst of the gathered assembly and that the readings be proclaimed from this same Bible rather than from other books or booklets.

Chains are a very potent symbol of enslavement, dehumanization and racism. They are also a symbol of the power of sin which separates us from God and from each other. The Caribbean writing group encourages the use of real iron chains during the Prayers of Reconciliation in this Worship Service. If iron chains are not feasible, alternative visually strong chains should be used. During the Worship Service, the iron chains of enslavement are replaced by a human chain expressing bonds of communion and united action against modern slavery and all kinds of individual and institutionalised dehumanisation. Inviting the entire assembly to participate in this gesture is an integral part of the worship.

For the song after the proclamation of the Word, the Caribbean writing group suggests the hymn *The Right Hand of God*. Reflecting the song of Miriam and Moses in praise of the liberating action of God in the Book of Exodus, it is associated with the ecumenical movement in the Caribbean, as the Churches work together to overcome the social challenges facing the people of the region.

OPENING WORSHIP SERVICE

Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power (Ex 15:6)

GATHERING

Song

During the singing of the song, those leading the celebration enter. They should be led by an assistant carrying the Bible. The Bible is placed in a place of honour in the centre of the worship space. The Scripture readings during the service should be proclaimed from this Bible.

Words of Welcome

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

Dear friends in Christ, as we gather for this service of prayer for unity, we thank God for our Christian heritage, and for his liberating and saving action in human history.

The resources for this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity have been prepared by the churches of the Caribbean. The history of Christianity in that region contains a paradox. On one hand, the Bible was used by colonizers as justification for the subjugation of the original inhabitants of these lands, along with others who were transported from Africa, India and China. Many people suffered extermination, were put in chains and enslaved, and were subjected to unjust labour conditions. On the other hand, the Bible became a source of consolation and liberation for many who suffered at the hands of the colonizers.

Today, the Bible continues to be a source of consolation and liberation, inspiring the Christians of the Caribbean to address the conditions that currently undermine human dignity and quality of life. As the iron chains of enslavement fall from our hands, a new human bond of love and communion emerges in the human family, expressing the unity prayed for by our Christian communities.

INVOCATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The response to the invocation may be sung.

With the Christians of the Caribbean, let us call upon the Holy Spirit to set our hearts on fire as we pray for the unity of the Church.

Unite your servants in the bond of unity.
Come, Holy Spirit!

Teach us to pray.
Come, Holy Spirit!

Liberate us from the slavery of sin.

Come, Holy Spirit!

Help us in our weakness.

Come, Holy Spirit!

Restore us as your children.

Come, Holy Spirit!

Song of praise

PRAYERS OF RECONCILIATION

We have not received a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Let us call upon the mercy of God, confident in the saving power of God's Right Hand.

Three members of the assembly come forward, each carrying a chain. After each petition and response, one of the chains is allowed fall to the ground. The Kyrie response may be sung.

From structures that undermine human dignity and enforce new forms of enslavement, deliver us, O God.

Kyrie eleison.

Kyrie eleison.

From decisions and deeds that impose poverty, marginalisation or discrimination on our brothers and sisters, deliver us, O God.

Kyrie eleison.

Kyrie eleison.

From the fear and suspicion that separate us from each other and place limits on hope and healing, deliver us, O God.

Kyrie eleison.

Kyrie eleison.

The Lord is our strength and our might, and has become our salvation. May God, who has redeemed us, lead into the abode of holiness. **Amen.**

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

Redeem us, O God, from human oppression,
that we may keep your precepts.

Make your face shine upon your servants,
and teach us your statutes. (cf Ps 119: 134-135)

Exodus 15:1-21

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:

‘I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name.

‘Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he cast into the sea; his picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea. The floods covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power— your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your adversaries; you sent out your fury, it consumed them like stubble. At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up, the floods stood up in a heap; the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, “I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them. I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.” You blew with your wind, the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

‘Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendour, doing wonders? You stretched out your right hand, the earth swallowed them.

‘In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode. The peoples heard, they trembled; pangs seized the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; trembling seized the leaders of Moab; all the inhabitants of Canaan melted away. Terror and dread fell upon them; by the might of your arm, they became still as a stone until your people, O Lord, passed by, until the people whom you acquired passed by. You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own possession, the place, O Lord, that you made your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, that your hands have established. The Lord will reign for ever and ever.’

When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea, the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them: ‘Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.’

Listen and you will be set free.

Thanks be to God.

It would be preferable for the psalm to be sung.

Psalm 118: 5-7, 10-24

R/ O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures for ever!

Out of my distress I called on the Lord;
the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place.
With the Lord on my side I do not fear.
What can mortals do to me?
The Lord is on my side to help me;
I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.

R/

I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,
but the Lord helped me.
The Lord is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.
There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: **R/**

The right hand of the Lord does valiantly;
the right hand of the Lord is exalted;
the right hand of the Lord does valiantly.'
I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the Lord. **R/**

Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the Lord.
This is the gate of the Lord;
the righteous shall enter through it. **R/**

I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.
This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvellous in our eyes.
This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it. **R/**

Romans 8:12-27

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Listen and you will be set free.

Thanks be to God.

A suitable Alleluia acclamation may be sung and after before the proclamation of the Gospel.

Mark 5:21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered round him; and he was by the lake. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, ‘My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.’ So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, ‘If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.’ Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched my clothes?’ And his disciples said to him, ‘You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, “Who touched me?”’ He looked all round to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.’

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, ‘Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?’ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, ‘Do not fear, only believe.’ He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, ‘Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.’ And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, ‘Talitha cum’, which means, ‘Little girl, get up!’ And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Listen and you will be set free.

Thanks be to God.

Homily

Song

The right hand of God
is writing in our land,
Writing with power and with love;
Our conflicts and our fears,
Our triumphs and our tears,

Are recorded by the right hand of God.

The right hand of God
is striking in our land,
Striking out at envy, hate and greed;
Our selfishness and lust,
Our pride and deeds unjust,
Are destroyed by the right hand of God.

The right hand of God
is lifting in our land,
Lifting the fallen one by one;
Each one is known by name,
And rescued now from shame,
By the lifting of the right hand of God.

The right hand of God
is healing in our land,
Healing broken bodies, minds and souls;
So wondrous is its touch,
With love that means so much,
When we're healed
by the right hand of God.

The Apostles Creed

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

With thanks for our liberation from slavery to sin, let us place our needs before the Lord, asking him to shatter the chains that enslave us and to join us instead with bonds of love and communion.

Each intercession is read by a different reader. As they finish, the readers each join hands or link arms with members of the assembly, thus creating a human chain.

God of the Exodus, you led your people through the waters of the Red Sea and redeemed them. Be with us now and free us from all forms of slavery and from everything that obscures human dignity.

Lay your hands on us, O Lord, that we may live.

God of abundance, in your goodness you provide for all our needs. Be with us now, help us to rise above selfishness and greed and give us the courage to be agents of justice in the world.

Lay your hands on us, O Lord, that we may live.

God of love, you created us in your image and have redeemed us in Christ. Be with us now, empower us to love our neighbour and to welcome the stranger.

Lay your hands on us, O Lord, that we may live.

God of peace, you remain faithful to your covenant with us even when we wander from you, and in Christ you have reconciled us to yourself. Be with us now and put a new spirit and a new heart within us that we may reject violence and instead be servants of your peace.

Lay your hands on us, O Lord, that we may live.

God of glory, you are all-powerful, yet in Jesus you chose to make your home in a human family, and in the waters of Baptism have adopted us as your children. Be with us now and help us to remain faithful to our family commitments and our communal responsibilities, and to strengthen the bonds of communion with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Lay your hands on us, O Lord, that we may live.

God, One in Three Persons, in Christ you have made us one with you and with one another. Be with us now and by the power and consolation of the Holy Spirit, free us from the self-centredness, arrogance and fear that prevent us from striving towards the full visible unity of your Church.

Lay your hands on us, O Lord, that we may live.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Let us join our hands, bound not by chains but by the love of Christ that has been poured into our hearts, and pray to the Father in the words that Jesus taught us.

The Lord's Prayer may be sung.

Our Father.....

After the Lord's Prayer, still holding hands, the assembly may sing a familiar song that celebrates their unity.

After the song, the Sign of Peace may be exchanged.

COMMISSIONING

Redeemed by the Right Hand of God, and united in the One Body of Christ, let us go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit.

**The Spirit of the Lord is upon us,
because the Lord has anointed us
to bring good news to the poor.
to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.
Amen! Alleluia!**

Song

EIGHT DAYS

DAY ONE

You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt

Leviticus 19.33-34

You shall love the alien as yourself

Psalm 146

The Lord watches over the strangers

Hebrews 13.1-3

Some have entertained angels without knowing it

Matthew 25.31-46

I was a stranger and you welcomed me

After becoming the first independent black republic, Haiti extended hospitality to other enslaved peoples in search of freedom. Recent times have brought severe economic hardship to Haitians, many of whom have left home, making perilous journeys in hope of a better life. In many instances they have been met with inhospitality and legal barriers. The Caribbean Council of Churches has been involved in advocacy to challenge those nations that are restricting or stripping Haitians of citizenship rights.

Reflection

The Israelites' memory of being strangers in the land of Egypt lay behind the Law's instruction that God's people were to welcome the stranger in their midst. The memory of their own exile was expected to prompt empathy and solidarity with contemporary exiles and strangers. Like Israel, our common Christian experience of God's saving action goes together with remembering both alienation and estrangement - in the sense of estrangement from God and from his kingdom. This kind of Christian remembering has ethical implications. God has restored our dignity in Christ, and made us citizens of his kingdom, not because of anything we did to deserve it but by his own free gift in love. We are called to do likewise, freely and motivated by love. Christian love is to love like the Father, that is to recognize dignity and to give dignity, and thereby to help bring healing to the broken human family.

Prayer

Eternal God,

You belong to no culture and land but are Lord of all,
you call us to welcome the stranger in our midst.

Help us by your Spirit,
to live as brothers and sisters,
welcoming all in your name,
and living in the justice of your kingdom.

This we pray in Jesus' name,
Amen.

*The right hand of God
is planting in our land,
planting seeds of freedom, hope and love;
in these many-peopled lands,
let his children all join hands,
and be one with the right hand of God.*

DAY TWO

No longer as a slave but a beloved brother

Genesis 1.26-28	God created humankind in God's own image
Psalm 10.1-10	Why, O Lord, do you stand far off?
Philemon	No longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother
Luke 10.25-37	The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Human Trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery in which victims are forced or tricked into sex work, child labour and the harvesting of organs for the profit of the exploiters. It is a global, multimillion-dollar industry. It is also a growing problem across the Caribbean. Reformed Churches in the Caribbean have joined with the Council for World Mission and the Caribbean and North American Council for Mission to educate Christian communities to end the scourge of human trafficking.

Reflection

One of the first things we learn about God in the Hebrew and Christian Bible is that God created humankind in his own image. However, this profound and beautiful truth has often been obscured or denied throughout human history. For instance, in the Roman Empire, the dignity of those enslaved was denied. The Gospel message is entirely different to this. Jesus challenged the social norms that devalued the human dignity of Samaritans, describing the Samaritan as the 'neighbour' of the man who had been attacked on the road to Jericho – a neighbour to be loved, according to the Law. And Paul, made bold in Christ, describes the once-enslaved Onesimus as 'a beloved brother', transgressing the norms of his society and affirming Onesimus's humanity.

Christian love must always be a courageous love that dares to cross borders, recognising in others a dignity equal to our own. Like St Paul, Christians must be 'bold enough in Christ' to raise a united voice in clearly recognising trafficked persons as their neighbours and their beloved brothers and sisters, and so work together to end modern-day slavery.

Prayer

Gracious God,
draw near to those who are victims of human trafficking,
assuring them that you see their plight and hear their cry.
May your Church be united in compassion and courage to work for that day
when no one will be exploited
and all will be free to live lives of dignity and peace.
This we pray in the name of the Triune God
who can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine.
Amen.

*The right hand of God
is lifting in our land,
lifting the fallen one by one;
each one is known by name,
and rescued now from shame,
by the lifting of the right hand of God.*

DAY THREE

Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| Exodus 3.4-10 | God frees those who are in human bondage |
| Psalm 24.1-6 | Lord, we are the people who seek your face |
| 1 Corinthians 6.9-20 | Therefore glorify God in your body |
| Matthew 18.1-7 | Woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes! |

Many Christian churches in the Caribbean share a concern about the issue of pornography, especially via the internet. Pornography has destructive consequences for human dignity, particularly for children and young people. Like slavery, it commodifies human beings, ensnares those addicted to it and damages wholesome loving relationships.

Reflection

The book of Exodus demonstrates God's concern for people in human bondage. God's revelation to Moses at the burning bush was a powerful declaration of his will to free his people. God observed their misery, heard their cry and so came to deliver them. God still hears the cry of those who are subject to enslavement today, and wills to deliver them. While sexuality is a gift of God for human relationships and the expression of intimacy, the misuse of this gift through pornography enslaves and devalues both those caught up in producing it and those who consume it. God is not impervious to their plight and Christians are called to be similarly concerned.

St Paul writes that we are called to give glory to God in our own bodies, which means that every part of our lives, including our relationships, can and should be an offering pleasing to God. Christians must work together for the kind of society that upholds human dignity and does not put a stumbling block before any of God's little ones, but, rather, enables them to live in the freedom which is God's will for them.

Prayer

By your heavenly grace, O God,
restore us in mind and body,
create in us a clean heart and a pure mind
that we may give glory to your Name.
May the churches attain unity of purpose
for the sanctification of your people,
through Jesus Christ
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

*The right hand of God
is healing in our land,
healing broken bodies, minds and souls;
so wondrous is its touch,
with love that means so much,
when we're healed*

by the right hand of God.

DAY FOUR

Hope and Healing

Isaiah 9.2-7a	His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace
Psalm 34.1-14	Seek peace, and pursue it
Revelation 7.13-17	God will wipe away every tear from their eyes
John 14.25-27	Peace I leave with you

Within the Caribbean, violence is a problem to which the churches are called to respond. There is an alarmingly high rate of murder, much of which stems from domestic abuse, gang warfare and other forms of criminality. There is also a rising rate of self-harm and suicide in some parts of the region.

Reflection

The kingdom which God promised, the kingdom which Jesus proclaimed and made manifest in his ministry, is a kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. What does this Good News mean for those trapped in the darkness of violence? In the prophet's vision, light shone on those who lived in a land of deep darkness. But how can Christians bring the light of Jesus to those living in the darkness of domestic and gang violence? What sense of hope can Christians offer? It is a sad reality that division among Christians is a counter-sign, which hampers the communication of hope.

However, the quest for peace and reconciliation between the different churches and confessions is the opposite of that. When Christians strive for unity in a world of conflict, they offer the world a sign of reconciliation. Christians who refuse to enter a logic of privilege and status, who refuse to demean others and their communities, give witness to the peace of God's kingdom, where the Lamb guides the saints to springs of the water of life. This is a peace the world needs, and one which brings healing and comfort to those afflicted by violence.

Prayer

God of all comfort and hope,
your resurrection defeated the violence of the cross.
As your people,
may we be a visible sign
that the violence of the world will be overcome.
This we pray in the name of our risen Lord.
Amen.

*The right hand of God
is pointing in our land,
pointing the way we must go;
so clouded is the way,
so easily we stray,
but we're guided by the right hand of God.*

DAY FIVE

Hark, the cry of my poor people from far and wide in the land!

Deuteronomy 1.19-35 The Lord God goes before you and carried you

Psalm 145.9-20 The Lord upholds all who are falling

James 1.9-11 The rich will disappear like a flower in the field

Luke 18.35-43 Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!

The Caribbean economies have traditionally been based on the production of raw materials for the European market and so have never been self-sustaining. As a consequence, borrowing on the international market became important for development. The requirements of such borrowing impose a reduction of spending on transport, education, health and other public services, which impacts most severely on the poor. The Caribbean Conference of Churches has launched an initiative to address the current debt crisis in the region and through their international networks to come to the aid of the poor.

Reflection

We can imagine the noise of the crowd as Jesus enters Jericho. Many voices shout down the cry of the blind beggar. He is a distraction and an embarrassment. But through all this tumult Jesus hears the blind man's voice, just as God always hears the cries of the poor in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Lord who upholds the falling not only hears, he responds. Thereby, the beggar's life is radically transformed.

The disunity of Christians can become part of the world's tumult and chaos. Like the arguing voices outside Jericho, our divisions can drown out the cry of the poor. However, when we are united we become more fully Christ's presence in the world, better able to hear, listen and respond. Rather than increasing the volume of discord, we are able to truly listen and so discern the voices that most need to be heard.

Prayer

Loving God,
you lift up the poor and distressed
and restore their dignity.
Hear now our cries for the poor of our world,
restore their hope and lift them up,
that all your people may be one.
This we pray in Jesus name.
Amen.

*The right hand of God
is lifting in our land,
lifting the fallen one by one;
each one is known by name,
and rescued now from shame,
by the lifting of the right hand of God.*

DAY SIX

Let us look to the interests of others

Isaiah 25.1-9	Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation
Psalm 82	Maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute
Philippians 2.1-4	Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others
Luke 12.13-21	Be on your guard against all kinds of greed

Changing international banking regulations continue to have a negative impact on the trade and commerce of the Caribbean and threaten the economic survival of many families. It has become increasingly difficult for Caribbean people working abroad to send money back to their families. The Churches in the Caribbean introduced the Credit Union movement in order for the poor to have access to finance for economic activity.

Reflection

The witness of the Scriptures is consistent that God always makes a preferential option for the poor: the right hand of God acts for the powerless against the powerful. Similarly, Jesus consistently warns against the dangers of greed. Despite these warnings, however, the sin of greed often infects our Christian communities and introduces a logic of competition: one community competing against the next. We need to remember that insofar as we fail to differentiate ourselves from the world, but conform to its divisive competing spirit, we fail to offer ‘a refuge for the needy in distress, a shelter from the storm’.

For our different churches and confessions, to be rich in the sight of God is not a case of having many members belonging – or donating – to one’s own community. Rather, it is to recognise that as Christians we have countless brothers and sisters right across the world, united across the economic divisions of ‘North’ and ‘South’. Conscious of this fraternity in Christ, Christians can join hands in promoting economic justice for all.

Prayer

Almighty God,
give courage and strength to your church
to continually proclaim justice and righteousness
in situations of domination and oppression.
As we celebrate our unity in Christ,
may your Holy Spirit help us
to look to the needs of others.
Amen.

*The right hand of God
is striking in our land,
striking out at envy, hate and greed;
our selfishness and lust,
our pride and deeds unjust,
are destroyed by the right hand of God.*

DAY SEVEN

Building family in household and church

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| Exodus 2.1-10 | The Birth of Moses |
| Psalm 127 | Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain |
| Hebrews 11. 23-24 | Moses was hidden by his parents ... because they saw that the child was beautiful |
| Matthew 2.13-15 | Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt |

In the Caribbean the family continues to be adversely affected by the legacy of enslavement and by new factors such as the migration of parents, financial problems and domestic violence. Facing this reality, the churches of the Caribbean are working to give support to both nuclear and extended families.

Reflection

Families are of central importance for the protection and nurture of children. The Bible accounts of the infancies of both Moses and Jesus, who were in mortal danger from the moment they were born because of the murderous orders of angry rulers, illustrate how vulnerable children can be to external forces. These stories also show how action can be taken to protect such little ones. Matthew presents us with a model of fatherhood that is in loving fidelity to the Lord's command, especially in turbulent times.

The Scriptures view children as a blessing and as hope for the future. For the Psalmist, they are 'like arrows in the hand of a warrior'. As Christians, we share a common calling to live as supportive family networks, relying on the strength of the Lord for the task of building strong communities in which children are protected and can flourish.

Prayer

Gracious God,
you sent your son to be born in an ordinary family
with ancestors who were both faithful and sinful.
We ask your blessing upon all families
within households and communities.
We pray especially for the unity of the Christian family
so that the world may believe.
In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen.

*The right hand of God
is writing in our land,
writing with power and with love;
our conflicts and our fears,
our triumphs and our tears,
are recorded by the right hand of God.*

DAY EIGHT

He will gather the dispersed... from the four corners of the earth

Isaiah 11.12-13	Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not be hostile towards Ephraim
Psalm 106.1-14, 43-48	Gather us to give thanks to your holy name
Ephesians 2.13-19	He has broken down the dividing wall
John 17.1-12	I have been glorified in them

The Caribbean churches work together to heal the wounds in the Body of Christ in the region, which are a legacy left by colonization. Reconciliation often demands repentance, reparation and the healing of memories. One example is the acts of apology and reparation between Baptists in Britain and the Caribbean. Like Israel, the Church in its unity is called to be both a sign and an active agent of reconciliation.

Reflection

Throughout the biblical narrative of salvation history, an unmistakeable motif is the unrelenting determination of the Lord to form a people whom he could call his own. The formation of such a people – united in a sacred covenant with God – is integral to the Lord’s plan of salvation and to the glorification and hallowing of God’s Name.

The prophets repeatedly remind Israel that the covenant demanded that relationships among its various social groups should be characterized by justice, compassion and mercy. As Jesus prepared to seal the new covenant in his own blood, his earnest prayer to the Father was that those given to him by the Father would be one, just as he and the Father were one. When Christians discover their unity in Jesus they participate in Christ’s glorification in the presence of the Father, with the same glory that he had in the Father’s presence before the world existed. And so, God’s covenanted people must always strive to be a reconciled community - one which itself is an effective sign to all the peoples of the earth of how to live in justice and in peace.

Prayer

Lord,
we humbly ask that, by your grace,
the churches throughout the world
may become instruments of your peace.
Through their joint action as ambassadors
and agents of your healing, reconciling love
among divided peoples,
may your Name be hallowed and glorified.
AMEN.

*The right hand of God
is planting in our land,
planting seeds of freedom, hope and love;
in these many-peopled lands,
let his children all join hands,
and be one with the right hand of God.*

THE ECUMENICAL SITUATION IN THE CARIBBEAN

The Caribbean region stretches from the Bahamas in the north to Suriname, Guyana and French Guiana (Cayenne) on the South American mainland, and from Barbados in the east to Belize in Central America in the west. The common identity of the Region is based on geographical considerations as well as on a shared history of colonialism, exploitation and resistance against foreign domination, and on a common cultural awareness.

The presence of some of the churches in the Region – e.g. the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches - coincides with the beginning and early period of the colonial enterprise. Other churches came later as part of the 18th, 19th and early 20th century missionary movement. Even more recently, the evangelical and pentecostal movements have spread throughout the Caribbean. Consequently, evangelical alliances or fellowships can be found in many countries and territories of the Region.

The Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC) grew out of a dynamic precursor of ecumenical activity in the 1960s and was formally established during the socio-cultural and political ferment of the early 1970s. This was the immediate post-colonial period of the Region during which many countries gained their political independence. It was a time when the Region as a whole was enveloped in a movement towards self-determination, development and new forms of self-expression. The joint response and contribution of several churches to this new regional awareness was the formation of an organisation called Christian Action for Development in the Caribbean (CADEC). This organisation is the precursor of the CCC, and would later become one of two major departments of the CCC. The other department was known as the Agency for Renewal of the Churches (ARC).

The founding assembly of the CCC took place in 1973, in Kingston, Jamaica. The preamble of its constitution reads:

We, as Christian people of the Caribbean, because of our common calling in Christ, covenant to join together in a regional fellowship of churches for theological reflection, inspiration, consultation, and cooperative action, to overcome the challenges created by history, language, culture, class and distance. We are therefore deeply committed to promoting peace, the holistic development of our people and affirming social justice and the dignity of all persons. We pledge to journey together in Christ and to share our experiences for the strengthening of the kingdom of God in the world.

The thirty three member churches of the CCC represent a vast diversity of people and cultures, spread over many islands and mainland territories of South and Central America and belonging to four major linguistic groupings – Dutch, English, French and Spanish. Included in this grouping are: Cayenne (French Guiana), Cuba, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Martinique and Puerto Rico. The CCC's member churches share the common conviction that, despite the divisiveness of the long colonial heritage, there is an authentic, unifying Caribbean identity through which Caribbean people must articulate God's will for them and make their response to it.

As one of six Regional Ecumenical Organisations (REOs), the CCC is historically unique, being the first instance in the world in which the Roman Catholic church – formally through its bishops' conference - was a founding member of an REO. The involvement of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (AEC) as a founding member of the CCC was held up as an example in the preparatory document – “Lineamenta” – for the Roman Catholic Church's 1997 Synod of

the Americas. In the section of the document entitled “Areas and ways of Communion,” the document states: “One example of greater possibility for dialogue with other confessions is demonstrated by the work of some bishops of the Caribbean, who contributed to the founding of the only ecumenical organisation present in the region.” (Section IV, Art. 42).

Over the forty three years of its existence, the CCC’s member churches have together taken many initiatives in the areas of theology, Christian education, integral development, youth and women’s concerns, family life, human rights, and communications. Some of the significant achievements of the CCC have been the media channels *Contact* and *Caribbeat*, the *Caribbean Contact* monthly newspaper and the Christian education series - *Fashion Me a People*.

In 1983, the CCC’s mandate was re-formulated to read: "promoting ecumenism and social change in obedience to Jesus Christ and in solidarity with the poor". Since then, the Conference has developed a strategic approach and implemented an integrated programmatic response to the many socio-economic issues and social ills impacting the Caribbean. Among these are endemic poverty, a high incidence of HIV/AIDS infection, drug-trafficking and addiction, and uprootedness as persons are displaced for various reasons – including natural disasters, violence and the search of work and a better life.

The policy of the CCC is a deeper ecclesial engagement with, and mutual accompaniment of the member churches, through their existing agencies and institutions, and right down to the local congregations. The major programme initiatives are:

- Priority Regional Initiatives (HIV/AIDS, drugs, violence, family, food, uprooted people)
- Sustainable Socio-economic Development (poverty reduction, project funding, disaster preparedness)
- Advocacy and Communications (public awareness, information, dialogue and exchange)
- International Relations (regional integration, solidarity visits), and cultural affairs.

In addressing some of these issues, the CCC works very closely with major Regional intergovernmental organisations, chief among these being the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). It has also engaged over the years with various departments of the United Nations (UN) and European and North American governments.

In addition to the above initiatives, the CCC established a Regional Forum of National Councils of Churches (NCCs), as a space for greater networking and mutual accompaniment of these councils in the region. This was in recognition of the critical role played by NCCs, some of which significantly pre-date the CCC, in several parts of the Region. The Forum was first convened in 2001 under the theme, *Sing a New Song*. It met annually thereafter until 2008. Like some other initiatives, the Regional Forum had to be curtailed because of significantly reduced funding to the organisation.

In recent times, a greater emphasis on the theological basis of Ecumenism is being pursued by the CCC’s Secretariat in conversation with member churches. This is in an effort to strengthen

the fundamental issue of *koinonia* which, it is felt, has been somewhat obscured by an over-emphasis on *diakonia*.

There has also been a new engagement by the CCC with other ecumenical expressions and configurations such as the Taizé movement and the Caribbean ‘chapter’ of the Global Christian Forum (GCF). The latter is an important means of outreach and dialogue with Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians. The CCC has acted as convener and facilitator of the Caribbean GCF.

Apart from the CCC, there are other institutional expressions of ecumenism in the Caribbean. Two such outstanding manifestations are the United Theological College of the West Indies (UTCWI), located in Jamaica, and the Caribbean and North American Council for Mission (CANACOM). Both are Protestant institutions, the latter being specifically of the Reformed tradition. Interestingly, the UTCWI is located next door to the Roman Catholic Theological College (and former seminary). The lecturers and students of both institutions have had a very amicable and mutually edifying relationship over the several years of their existence.

On a wider Regional level, there is also the Caribbean Association Theological Schools (CATS). This organisation brings together in a collaborative manner the three major theological colleges of the Anglophone Caribbean: the UTCWI; Codrington (Anglican) College, Barbados; and the Roman Catholic Seminary of St. John Vianney and the Uganda Martyrs, Trinidad.

No consideration of the ecumenical situation in the Caribbean would be complete without noting that the Caribbean made a tremendous gift to the wider ecumenical movement in the person of the Rev. Dr. Philip Alford Potter – the celebrated third General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Dr. Potter, now of sacred memory, was a Methodist minister and a native of the Commonwealth of Dominica. During his tenure as the General Secretary of the WCC (1972 – 1984), Rev. Potter fought the immoral apartheid regime of South Africa. It was also during his tenure of office that Pope John-Paul II – in response to an invitation of the WCC - made his historic visit to the headquarters of the WCC in Geneva, Switzerland. This was a major milestone in ecumenical relations between the Vatican and the WCC. It is estimated that there are currently thirteen member churches of the WCC in the Caribbean, representing 1.4 million Christians.