

Resources for World Communion Sunday: October 7, 2012

Prepared by the Council on Christian Unity, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)



A Reflection on World Communion Sunday by John P. Mobley, regional minister, Alabama-Northwest Florida Region, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Established in 1936, when the world was deeply fragmented by the conflict that would be later known as World War II, World Communion Sunday (originally called World Wide Communion Sunday) has been an observance to help Christians all over the world affirm their unity in Jesus Christ as it is expressed so beautifully at the Lord's Table. Originating in the Presbyterian Church in 1936, the idea of World Communion Sunday was embraced and promoted by the Federal Council of Churches (now the National Council of Churches) in 1940. Other denominations, including the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), began to join in this annual witness to Christian unity, which takes place on the first Sunday in October.

Those Christians who started World Communion Sunday saw the Table of the Lord as a place where the wounds in Christendom, many the result of a brutal war, could begin to find healing. At the Lord's Table, Christians in all nations, of many ethnicities and languages, could remember their kinship in Christ and be encouraged to live more fully as brothers and sisters in God's family. What a remarkable vision!

When I think of the context out of which the first World Communion Sunday was born, I cannot help but think of the Disciples identity statement, "*We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us.*" As Disciples of Christ, our motivation is similar to those who originated World Communion Sunday. We believe, as Disciples, that the wholeness of our fragmented world is best achieved at the Lord's Table, where we remember who God is and what God has done for us, and where we remember who we are to God and to one another as Christ's followers. We are all family, unconditionally loved and bound together in our Lord Jesus Christ. As our movement – the Disciples of Christ movement – invites and welcomes others to Christ's table, we will be agents of healing for the brokenness that continues to exist in the world.

World Communion Sunday was intended as an occasion when persons would be invited to the Lord's Table on the same Sunday in many different churches and denominations, regardless of how often those churches and denominations normally observe communion. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) participates in this witness and celebrates the fact that many other denominations are also inviting persons to the Lord's Table on the first Sunday in October.

As Disciples, we proclaim the message of unity at Christ's Table every Sunday of the year, not just on World Communion Sunday. We gather with other Christians every Sunday and declare our oneness in Christ as we take our place at the Table of our Lord. There are many different approaches to the serving and partaking of communion. Different elements are used. Different liturgies exist for communion in

different churches. Communion is placed in a variety of positions in different orders of worship. But the message of God's love for us, made known in Christ, is proclaimed boldly through our worship at the Table. It is this love that we proclaim at the Table that has the power to heal wounds, whether they are the wounds within our own spirits, within our families, within our communities, and between nations. God's love makes us One. In my view, we are not being truly faithful in our worship unless we are proclaiming that message.

May we find joy in proclaiming that message with passion on World Communion Sunday and on all of the other Sundays of the year. Come to think of it, why be restricted to Sundays? Let us proclaim this good news every day that God gives us breath.

Worship Resources (*Prepared by Ron Allen and Linda McKiernan-Allen)

- **Call to Worship***

L: Praise the Lord!

P: How good it is to sing praises to our God

L: For God is gracious. God heals the brokenhearted and binds us together.

P: Great is our Lord, and abundant in power

All: Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving, and praise God's holy name!

- **Opening Prayer***

God of mercy and of grace, you alone are God! This day, your people who follow Jesus gather around a table which stretches 25,000 miles, around the whole of Earth. Open our eyes, our minds and our lives that we might welcome one another, even as you continue to welcome us through the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup. Fill us as we worship you. Then send us out to be the Body of Christ alive with the Good News of the Gospel. AMEN

- **Litany**

L: On this World Communion Sunday, we thank our Creator God for calling us as stewards. We see and feel the textures of the world. We pray for reconciliation among God's people. We listen that we may hear God's Word and know that God is full of grace, even now;

A: Even now, O God, even in Africa.

L: Africa. Where the church grows rapidly. Where faith is exuberant. Where a bright mosaic of culture shows the world the vibrancy of God's love.

A: Even now, O God, even in Asia.

L: Asia. So vast, so deeply rooted in tradition. Where the church may be small but where religion is great. Gentle Asia, beautiful Asia, divided Asia.

A: Even now, O God, even in the Middle East.

L: Middle East. The cradle of the church; the birthplace of Jesus; the land we call holy. Where the pain of the cross is so vivid; where the pain of war is so relentless; where the dry earth is watered by the tears of its children.

A: Even now, O God, even in Europe.

L: Europe and its Christian heritage. Where art, music, and architecture inspired generation upon generation and empty church buildings now stand as monuments to a faith of yesterday.

A: Even now, O God, even in Latin America.

L: Latin America. Where the church struggles valiantly for the weak and the poor. In Latin America, so rich in the bounties of creation, so misused by outsiders.

A: Even now, O God, even here in North America.

L: North America. Where so much affluence hides so much poverty and disease. North America, the sometimes hollow land, with so much to give. May we be bold in the Spirit, but humble in our work. May we share God's grace in Word and deed. May we assume the servant's role as Jesus did. May we share our blessings as the Samaritan did.

A: Even here, O God, even here at _____ Christian Church.

L: At _____ Christian Church, in a denomination that seeks to be "a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world," a church inspired by the prophet Micah to "do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God."

Prayer:

L: Here, O God, and throughout all the earth, we trust in your abiding care. God of wisdom, teach us respect. Help us to learn from those who express their faith in different ways. Deepen our understanding of tradition, serenity, and prayer.

A: Lift us above strife. Show us the places of injustice. Point us toward the pathway of peace. Show us your grace, even now;

L: God of grace, help us to believe and trust in your eternal promise. Answer Jesus' prayer that all may be one in him, even now;

A: Even now. *Amen.*

[You may want to use "A Litany for the World" by John Bell, Iona (*Chalice Hymnal*, 664)]

- **Children's moment***
Invite children to be seated around a flat world map and asked if they know where their ancestors came from. As each child responds (or as parents of the children are invited to respond), the leader lights a votive candle and places it on that country. Children are then invited to recognize their church family represents the world family.
- **Invitation to the Table***
On this World Communion Sunday, when we gather in this familiar place, we recognize and remember the great cloud of witnesses who also participate in this meal! Across time and space,

the table extends to include people we may never know, yet with whom we are connected. And as we commune, we find our faith increasing, just as the disciples found so long ago.

When Jesse M. Bader, a Disciples minister who served as Executive Director of the Department of Evangelism in the Federal Council of Churches, began to promote the idea of World Communion Sunday, his idea was a mustard seed, but that idea moved the mulberry trees of the world's churches. When Martin Luther King, Jr., and the ministers conceived of the Montgomery bus boycott, the idea was a mustard seed when compared to the massive structures of racism in that city. When we face the reality of hunger and poverty around the world, we can imagine Jesus' followers taking bread and cup, finding ways to plant seeds of food and seeds of hope. When we taste these elements, we can taste the goodness of well-fed sisters and brothers, and step forward to share from our abundance.

Just as Jesus assured his disciples that their faith (the size of a mustard seed) was sufficient to move a massive tree into the sea, so today we take this tiny bit of bread and small sip of juice (wine) and believe it is sufficient for great ministry in Jesus' name.

So come, for the feast is prepared and you are invited. "Come take the bread, come drink the wine, come, share the Lord" (from *CH 408, Come Share the Lord*).

- **Closing Prayer***

You have nourished us at this Table, God of abundance. So now send us out to live abundantly, sharing your love, your grace and your peace, through the power of Jesus Christ we pray, AMEN.

Suggestions for Celebrating World Communion Sunday

- A. Preparing and serving breads from around the world is a wonderful way to bring the symbolism of World Communion Sunday to life. It also provides an object lesson that makes more real to us the concept of the basic food for human life in each culture. While the churches in the United States may recognize a loaf of bread, wafers or tiny crackers as our communion staple, these items would be quite unusual to Mexicans, Indians, Asians or Africans. And though many U.S. grocery stores are beginning to carry a variety of food staples of other cultures, these items may not be readily available in your area. You may be able to get tortillas, pitas or rice cakes, but why not increase the adventure and bake your own international breads?

With a little research you may find recipes from the cultural heritage of your congregation members and beyond. You may be able to provide several different types of bread for the worship service, or have them available during Sunday School or Coffee Hour with artifacts and information about the country the bread originates from. Recipes are available in a variety of places, cookbooks, the library, grocery stores, friends, family and the Internet. The following link may have just what you are looking for: The Free Internet Bread Recipe Archive-
<http://upword.com/bread/>

Some recipes are for traditional, common ethnic or national breads. Others are more modern breads made by people from different countries. You'll find unleavened bread, Sardinian Parchment bread, Indian (Native American) Fry Bread, Indian Puris bread, Indian Roti, Swedish

rye, Irish soda bread, Irish brown bread, Portuguese Sweet Bread, Latvian Sourdough, Chinese Pan Bread, Ancient Essene Bread, Norwegian Landbroed, Challah and many more.

B. Use songs and anthems sung in other languages

(Numbers in parenthesis are from the *Chalice Hymnal*)

- “Halle-Halle-Halleluja” (41)
- “Dona Nobis Pacem” (297)
- Spanish language hymns (indexed on page 831)
- Use songs from the Taize songbook available from GIA Publishing (<http://www.giamusic.com>, search for “Music Editions from Taize”) or Cokesbury (<http://www.cokesbury.com>). These songs are written or translated into 43 languages, including Latin.

C. Use instruments from other cultures: drums, whistles, flutes, maracas, stringed instruments, etc.

D. Read the scripture aloud in two or three languages. Get those who are studying foreign languages to practice and then read the scripture aloud in worship. If you have people in your congregations for whom your worship language is not native, ask them to read in their own tongue.

E. Invite a missionary (or former missionary) to attend worship and tell of their experience. What does “communion” mean where they minister? What elements correspond to the bread and wine?

F. Have a pulpit exchange with another church in your community. Exchange preachers or invite members to visit each other’s congregations for the day.

***** Please let us know how you celebrated World Communion Sunday:** I would love to hear about what you did and what unique observances you have in your community. Send any ideas, suggestions and stories to Robert Welsh, Council on Christian Unity, PO Box 1986, Indianapolis, IN 46206-1986 or e-mail to rwelsh@ccu.disciples.org.