

# Churches Uniting in Christ - Acts of Worship

## An Outline of the Service

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Festive Music

# National Act of Worship Inaugurating

## Churches Uniting in Christ

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### Introductory and Penitential Rites

*[Suggestions about music and ceremony are included as endnotes.]*

#### **Festive Music<sup>1</sup>**

##### **The Call to Assemble** [seated]<sup>2</sup>

*Leader:* Do not fear, says God the Holy One,  
for I have redeemed you,  
I have called you by name, you are mine.

*Representatives call out the names of their churches sequentially:*

*Leader:* Do not be afraid, says God, the Holy One.  
I will bring you from the east  
and from the west I will gather you.  
I will say to the north, "Give them up,"  
and to the south, "Do not withhold,  
Bring my sons from afar  
and my daughters from the end of the earth-  
everyone who is called by my name,  
whom I have created for my glory,  
whom I have formed and made,"  
You are my witnesses, says the Holy One.  
and my servant whom I have chosen.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Processional Hymn of Praise<sup>4</sup>** [standing]

##### **Declaration of Purpose** [seated]

*Leader:* We gather to praise God who in Christ Jesus  
chose us before the world was founded.  
We gather because God has dedicated us  
to be without blemish and full of love.<sup>5</sup>

*People:* **We come to ask God's Holy Spirit to be with us  
as we seek forgiveness for the sin of division.  
We come to pray for the full, visible unity  
of the one Body of Christ.**

*Leader:* Led by the Holy Spirit,  
we will become Churches Uniting in Christ.  
In this new relationship with one another,  
we can speak the Christian faith more clearly.  
With fresh courage, we can oppose the powers

that divide our churches and oppress the people of our land.

*People:* **We ask for wisdom and perseverance  
as we work to reconcile our separated ministries  
so that they will be united as one ministry of Jesus Christ.**

**Prayer of Confession** [kneeling]

Leader: Let us confess our sin before God and one another,  
Holy God, we have promised to love you  
with heart, mind, soul, and strength,  
and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

*People:* **We confess to you and to each another  
that we break the promises  
and violate this covenant of love.**

*Representatives of each participating church name one way  
that it manifests the sin of division:*

*People:* **We confess that we are diminished by pride and separation.  
We acknowledge the sinful divisions of our churches  
which keep our ministries unreconciled.  
We admit our failures in mission of justice and love.  
We confess that we support systems of racism and other oppression  
that despoil your incarnate image and violate creation.**

**Merciful God, forgive us.  
In Jesus Christ, transform our hearts  
to obey your commandments,  
restore our love for one another,  
and proclaim your glory.  
Ever-living God, our Judge and Healer,  
have mercy on us.**

**Lord, Have Mercy (Kyrie Eleison)**<sup>6</sup> [kneeling]

**Declaration of Forgiveness** [kneeling]

Leader: Everyone who is in Christ has become a new creation.  
The old is gone, the new has come  
God, through Christ, has reconciled the world  
and gives us the ministry of reconciliation.  
Friends, believe the Good News that comes from God:  
In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.<sup>7</sup>

*People:* **Thanks be to God. Amen.**

**Glory to God (Gloria in Excelsis)** [standing]

## Liturgy of the Word

### Prayer for Illumination *[seated]*

Leader: Eternal God:

Proclaim your word in the reading of scripture.  
Speak to us in the meditations of our hearts.  
Reveal yourself in the faithfulness of our lives.  
Through Jesus Christ we pray.

All: **Amen.**

### First Reading from the Bible *[seated]*

\*Reader's Introduction: *The Word of God from ...*

\*Reader's Conclusion: *Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.*

\*People's Response: **Thanks be to God.**

### Psalm *(Sung by cantor and people) [seated]*

### Second Reading from the Bible *[seated]*

\*As above

### A Reading from the Gospel *[standing]*

\*As above

### Sermon *[seated]*

### Sermon Hymn<sup>8</sup> *[standing]*

## Inaugurating a New Relationship

### Introduction *[standing]*

Leader: Let us give thanks to God for prophets and martyrs  
who have called our churches to a closer unity in Christ Jesus.

People: **God, we praise you for the vision, intelligence, and courage of leaders in the  
Consultation on Church Union who have brought us to this day:**

*Worshippers may say aloud the names of persons whom they remember.*

Leader: Let us ask God to bring us together in a new relationship with one another.

People: **Holy God, through the waters or baptism  
you create one holy, catholic, and apostolic church.  
Bring us together as Churches Uniting in Christ.  
Renew in us the one Church of Jesus Christ,  
truly catholic, truly evangelical, and truly reformed.  
Through Jesus Through Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.**

### Affirmation *[standing]*

*The congregation affirms the Christian Faith using the words of the Nicene Creed.<sup>9</sup>*

## The Nicene Creed

*All:* 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:  
by the power of the Holy Spirit  
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man.  
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.  
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.  
He 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.

## Declarations *[standing]*

*Leader:* With gratitude to God, we affirm:

*People:* **The one baptism**

that makes our members one people in Jesus Christ;  
the apostolic faith as expressed in Scripture and Tradition  
that marks our churches as authentic expressions  
of the one church of Jesus Christ;  
the one ministry, called by the Holy Spirit,  
that unites us in worship and mission.

*Leader:* As members of Churches Uniting in Christ, we will establish a new relationship that transcends our divisions imbedded in worship, doctrine, polity, language, race, and communion.

People: **We promise:**

**to welcome each another in our churches as Christ has welcomed us;**  
**to conduct regional festivals of baptism and to celebrate the Eucharist together with intentional regularity;**  
**to carry out Christ's mission in unity and wholeness;**  
**to join together in overcoming racism;**  
**to break down the dividing walls of hostility;**  
**to hear and respect the voices of those long silenced;**  
**and to work with others for justice, freedom and peace.**

*Leader:* In a process of theological dialogue we will endeavor;

*People:* **to clarify and deepen our witness**

**to the unity of Christ's church;**  
**to reform our separated churches until we are fully catholic, until we are fully catholic, fully evangelical, and fully reformed;**  
**to provide the foundation for mutual recognition and reconciliation of ordained ministries so that these ministers serve together as one ministry in all our churches.**

**Prayer for the Holy Spirit** [standing]

*Leader:* We give you thanks, O God,  
for calling us into this new relationship in Jesus Christ.  
Grant us your Holy Spirit so that our promises may be confirmed and brought to completion according to your will.  
By your Spirit, ignite our witness that your gospel of love may be openly revealed.  
Strengthen our ministries of compassion for your world and all who live in it.  
Through Christ Jesus,

People: **Amen.**

**Peace** [standing]

*As a sign of the new relationship in Christ, the people exchange signs of Christ's peace.*

**Prayers of the People** [seated]

*Leader:* Holy God, the earth you created in beauty now languishes in pain, waiting for its redemption.  
The peoples of the earth whom you created, to live together in peace and joy, now experience violence and despair.

Transform us and our *Churches Uniting in Christ*  
that we may become your ministers to this world and its people.

*People:* **Make us bold in our struggle against cruelty.  
Give us courage and endurance to accept no peace  
where there is oppression, and to work for justice,  
God's Shalom, and the common good.  
Help us speak to the conscience  
of our country and its institutions.  
Use us to heal the brokenness in life.  
Renew our joy so that all creation can sing  
the glad songs with which the world began.**

*Leader:* All this we pray through Jesus Christ  
through whom you make all things new,

*People:* **Amen.**

**Hymn**<sup>10</sup> [standing]

## Liturgy of the Table

### **Offering and Preparation of the Table** [*seated*]

*Leader:* My sisters and brothers, we have confessed the gospel of Christ  
and the new life that God has lavished upon us.  
Let us now glorify God with gifts that we share  
with one another and with the whole world.

*With music and dance, gifts are brought forward to the table: gifts of money received  
from worshippers; symbols from each participating church — historic documents, chalice  
and paten, shield or logo, and objects from a mission of justice and mercy; bread and  
wine for the Eucharist. The table is prepared for the prayers and the Eucharistic meal.*

### **Great Thanksgiving Prayer** [*standing*]

*Leader:* God be with you,

*People:* **And also with you.**

*Leader:* Lift up your hearts.

*People:* **We lift them to God,**

*Leader:* Let us give thanks to God most high.

*People:* **It is right to give God thanks and praise,**

*Leader:* All praise to you, God our Creator,  
for by your Word and Spirit  
you made the heavens and the earth,  
filled them with life,  
and declared everything good.  
All praise to you, God our Redeemer,  
for sending prophets, apostles, teachers, and martyrs,  
inspired by your Spirit to speak the word of life,  
and, when the time was right,  
for becoming fully human in Jesus Christ.

All praise to you, God our Helper;  
as wisdom, you inspire us to speak the truth;  
as power, you strengthen us to do justice.  
With your sons and daughters of faith,  
in all times and places,  
and with all the heavenly hosts,  
we praise you with joy.<sup>11</sup>

*All:* **Holy, holy, holy God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory,  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of our God.  
Hosanna in the highest!**<sup>12</sup>

*Leader:* Loving God, in gratitude we remember  
that on the night before the crucifixion,  
Jesus took bread and after giving thanks to you  
broke it and gave it to the disciples, saying:  
“This is my body which is given for you.  
Do this in remembrance of me.”  
In the same way after supper  
Jesus took the cup and after giving you thanks,  
gave it to them and said:  
“This cup is the new covenant in my blood.  
Do this, as often as you drink it,  
in remembrance of me.”  
In gratitude for what Christ has done for us,  
we proclaim our hope.

*All:* **Dying you destroyed our death,  
rising you restored our life,  
Jesus, come in glory.**

*Leader:* Holy God, send your Holy Spirit upon us and these gifts,  
that all who eat and drink at this table  
may be one body and one people,  
a living sacrifice in Jesus Christ.  
Through this meal unite us with the risen Christ  
so that we may give ourselves for the life of the world.  
Through us bring good news to the poor,  
release to the captives,  
recovery of sight to the blind,  
and freedom to the oppressed.  
Give us the power to work for justice  
that all the world may be filled with peace and joy.  
This sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving we offer you,  
eternal God, through Jesus Christ,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God for ever and ever.<sup>13</sup>

*All: Amen.*

*Leader:* With the confidence of the children of God, let us pray:

*All:* **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.**

### **Breaking the Bread** *[standing]*

*Leader:* The bread we break  
is the communion of the body of Christ.

*All:* **We who are many are one body  
for we all share in the one bread.**

*Leader:* The cup of blessing  
for which we give thanks  
is a sharing in the blood of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

*All:* **We who are many are one body  
for we all share in the one cup.**

### **Communion of the People** *[seated]*

*As the people make their communion, hymns are sung.*<sup>15</sup>

### **Prayer after Communion** *[seated]*

*All:* **God of glory,  
you nourish us with bread from heaven.  
Fill us with your Holy Spirit,  
that through us your light may shine  
into all the world.  
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.**<sup>16</sup>

## **Concluding Rites**

### **The Commission and The Blessing** *[seated]*

Let us go from this place in the unity of the Spirit  
and the bond of peace. **Amen.**

May God bless us with strength  
to seek justice. **Amen.**

May God bless us with wisdom  
to care for the earth. **Amen.**  
May God bless us with courage  
to live together in unity. **Amen.**<sup>17</sup>

May the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God,  
and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. **Amen.**

**Recessional Hymn**<sup>18</sup> [standing]

**Festive Music**

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<sup>1</sup>The Festive Music calls the assembly to order and establishes the emotional theme for the liturgy. It is vibrant in character and joyful in tone. It signals the racial and cultural inclusivity that will characterize the Churches Uniting in Christ.

<sup>2</sup>Indications of the congregation's posture are provided as suggestions and are based on common practice among churches participating in the liturgy.

<sup>3</sup>This Call to Assemble is taken from Isaiah 43:1-10.

<sup>4</sup>Suggestions: "Sing Praise to God, Our Highest Good" (*New Century Hymnal*, 6); "The God of Abraham Praise" (*New Century Hymnal*, 24). The Procession is planned so that People come together from different parts of the church and across traditional divisions of age, gender, race, and denomination. It includes groups of people including: a) People carrying the Bible, processional cross, and other liturgical signs; b) leaders of the liturgy; c) representatives of the participating churches; d) officers of COCU.

<sup>5</sup>Based on Eph. 1:3-5, NEB.

<sup>6</sup>Both "Lord, have Mercy" and "Glory to God" that follows the Declaration of Forgiveness are sung by the congregation with musical settings by African American composers, such as Clarence Jos. Rivers.

<sup>7</sup>Based on 2 Cor. 5:17-18.

<sup>8</sup>This hymn is chosen to respond to the sermon; it would be given greater impact if it also is identified with one of the major commitments of the Churches Uniting in Christ. An example is "Lift Every Voice and Sing" by James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosmond Johnson.

<sup>9</sup>Consistent with the practice of removing the *filioque* clause (and the Son) in other ecumenical settings, it has been removed.

<sup>10</sup>This hymn completes the prayers for the world and prepares the way for the Liturgy of the Table that follows. Examples are: "Lord, You Give the Great Commission" (*Chalice Hymnal*, 459); "We Are Called to Follow Jesus" (*Chalice Hymnal*, 465).

<sup>11</sup>This prayer is adapted from "Prayers of the People" published in "A National Service," 1988.

<sup>12</sup>This version of the "Sanctus" has been translated by the International Consultation on English Texts. It is common practice in many church traditions for this and other congregational portions of the eucharistic prayer, including the Lord's Prayer, to be sung by the congregation. A musical setting can be chosen from existing sources or developed for this occasion. The music can draw from Hispanic, Asian, or African American sources.

<sup>13</sup>The prayer for the Holy Spirit uses language from *The Book of Alternative Services* of the Anglican Church of Canada, 1985, 195.

<sup>14</sup>These sentences from I Corinthians 10:16-17 have been rearranged so that the words related to pouring the wine follow the sentences related to the breaking of the bread.

<sup>15</sup>Examples of hymns to be considered for the communion time are: "One Bread, One Body" (*Chalice Hymnal*, 393); "Sheaves of Summer" (*Presbyterian Hymnal*, 518); "Let Us Break Bread Together on Our Knees"; "Bread of the World, in Mercy Broken," (*Chalice Hymnal*, 387).

<sup>16</sup>*The Book of Alternative Services*, 351 (alt).

<sup>17</sup>This commission includes material from "Building a New World," quoted in Janet Morley (ed.), *Bread of Tomorrow: Prayers for the Church Year* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992), 168.

<sup>18</sup>Examples: "God of Grace and God of Glory" (*Presbyterian Hymnal*, 420); "O Christ, the Great Foundation," (*Presbyterian Hymnal*, 443).