

IN GOD'S HANDS

Edited by Hugh McCullum and Terry MacArthur

COMMON PRAYER FOR THE WORLD

Prayer is central to the Christian life, and therefore to the ecumenical movement. Jesus himself prayed that we "all may be one" (John 17:21), offering the basis and goal of our search for common confession, witness, service - and prayer.

In God's Hands offers valuable aids for *intercessory prayer*, prayer on behalf of and in solidarity with others. This book includes prayers and other worship materials from many Christian traditions and communities, enabling the reader to journey in prayer through each week of the year and through all the regions and countries of the world. Descriptions of these nations and peoples help us to pray for others in an informed way, knowing something of their local situations, possibilities and challenges.

This book is the long-awaited, complete revision of the Ecumenical Prayer Cycle last issued in 1989. The worship material has been gathered anew, and the country descriptions take into account the momentous religious, cultural and political changes of recent years. Produced under the auspices of the WCC's Faith and Order team, and drawing on all the WCC's worship and editorial resources, this is a rich resource for all who want to be linked in prayer with other Christians, in all their diverse needs and in every land.

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Ecumenical Prayer Cycle

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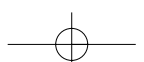
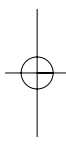
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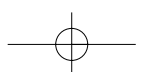
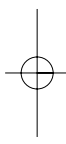
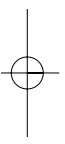
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World Council of Churches

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T a b l e o f C o n t e n t s

v

- ix **Foreword** *Samuel Kobia*
- xi **Introduction to the Countries** *Hugh McCullum*
- xiii **Introduction to the Prayers** *Terry MacArthur*
-
- 1 **Week 1:** Egypt, Israel and the Occupied Territories, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria
- 16 **Week 2:** Arabian Peninsula: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen; Iran, Iraq
- 30 **Week 3:** Cyprus, Greece, Turkey
- 40 **Week 4:** North Africa: Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Western Sahara, Tunisia
- 51 **Week 5:** Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden
- 59 **Week 6:** Ireland; United Kingdom: Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales
- 73 **Week 7:** Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands
- 80 **Week 8:** Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain
- 90 **Week 9:** France, Germany
- 101 **Week 10:** Andorra, Austria, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino, Switzerland
- 114 **Week 11:** Myanmar, Thailand
- 122 **Week 12:** Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam

129	Week 13: China, Hong Kong, Macau
138	Week 14: Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore
147	Week 15: East Timor, Indonesia, Philippines
160	Week 16: Japan, South Korea, North Korea, Taiwan
171	Week 17: Djibouti, Somalia
177	Week 18: Eritrea, Ethiopia
184	Week 19: Sudan, Uganda
192	Week 20: Kenya, Tanzania
201	Week 21: Malawi, Zambia
208	Week 22: Botswana, Zimbabwe
219	Week 23: Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland
233	Week 24: Angola, Mozambique
240	Week 25: Brazil
248	Week 26: Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay
259	Week 27: Bolivia, Chile, Peru
271	Week 28: Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela
280	Week 29: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama
290	Week 30: Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico

Table of Contents

vii

- 302 **Week 31:** The Caribbean
- 316 **Week 32:** Canada, United States of America
- 329 **Week 33:** Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia
- 339 **Week 34:** Oceania
- 351 **Week 35:** Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania
- 358 **Week 36:** Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia
- 369 **Week 37:** Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia
- 378 **Week 38:** Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania
- 391 **Week 39:** Belarus, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine
- 401 **Week 40:** Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia
- 412 **Week 41:** Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
- 420 **Week 42:** Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal
- 427 **Week 43:** India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka
- 438 **Week 44:** Indian Ocean Islands: Comoros, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles
- 449 **Week 45:** Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda
- 458 **Week 46:** Republic of Congo, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe

466	Week 47: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea
474	Week 48: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger
482	Week 49: Liberia, Sierra Leone
491	Week 50: Cape Verde, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal
498	Week 51: Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo
507	Week 52: Ghana, Nigeria
515	Sources and Acknowledgements
533	Subject Index
544	Biblical Index
547	Calendar 2007 - 2014

F o r e w o r d

At the heart of the ecumenical movement is prayer. Jesus prayed that all should be one, united in God, the goal of our search for unity. Prayer is the pathway to that unity. It is through prayer that we both seek and celebrate that communion.

Intercessory prayer is the essence of the church's vocation. We raise our hearts and minds to God in worship and adoration, and we intercede on behalf of all with whom we share in the world and all its joys and sorrows. In prayer we also affirm our solidarity with Christians all over the world, sisters and brothers living in diverse situations and experiencing diverse problems.

The WCC has always affirmed, especially after the 1983 Vancouver assembly, that common prayer is central and that there we find spiritual power. We have interceded for churches everywhere and for the nations and peoples of the world. It is out of such worship experience that this 2006 edition of the Prayer Cycle has been prepared. This volume represents an attempt to identify with God's people everywhere and in every place and to present before God their specific needs and aspirations.

In God's Hands includes prayers and intercessions. With each of the 52 weeks, we concentrate on the history and life of every country in an attempt to identify with God's people in each place. The volume includes prayers from many different countries. It enables us to journey in prayer through all regions of the world and through every week of the year. It enables us to pray together *with* all God's people and *for* all God's people, focusing on concrete contexts as we consider the profiles of the many nations we hold in prayer.

Many member churches and Christian groups have their own prayer cycles which follow their liturgical tradition and calendar. They have litanies and other resources organized around denominational and congregational concerns. These provide an important service. But there is also need to develop an ecumenical quality of prayer. Commending one another to God, we draw closer to one another and we grow in unity together.

In the process of preparing this volume, we were conscious of the first edition of the Ecumenical Prayer Cycle, *For All God's People*, published in 1978 and later translated into some

twenty languages. *In God's Hands* continues that tradition: it seeks to inform our public worship and private prayer with ecumenical concerns and content.

We have received a great variety of worship material from many sources. This variety indicates the richness of the liturgical traditions within our member churches, and the many themes and styles of Christian prayer.

We are indebted to students of Eden Theological Seminary in the USA, under the instruction of Michael Kinnamon and the coordination of Karen Farthing. Working in conjunction with the WCC's Faith and Order secretariat, they began the immense job of collating this volume by drawing up the country introductions and collecting prayers from a wide variety

of books and web sites, thus providing a sound basis upon which the two editors could build.

The WCC offers this book to member churches and Christian groups in the conviction that it responds to a demand for a spirituality that is contextual, local and at the same time ecumenical.

Where there is no prayer for unity there can be no vision of unity. Let the Spirit so guide us that our human voices, lifted to God for the salvation of the world and the unity of the church and the whole people of God, may be heard and answered.

Geneva, summer 2006

Samuel Kobia
General Secretary
World Council of Churches

Introduction to the Countries xi

This book enables us to journey in prayer through every region of the world and through every week of the year. Each country has its own unique being, and in order for us to pray intelligently, it is best if we know something of the country, no matter how few churches or Christians it may have. A nation or region is a unique unit. It has politics, economics, culture, geography and, above all, history. Its people came from somewhere. Nations are part of larger regions in many cases, yet each has its own particulars.

In this Ecumenical Prayer Cycle, we have followed a factual format for each country and region, giving basic statistics and up-to-date demographics; we have continued with historical narrative, highlighting the evolution of peoples into nations and the major events that shaped their modern manifestations. Countries little known beyond their regions have ancient roots, and often today their history forms the basis for global geo-political strategies and tensions.

Religion has always played a role, for good or ill. In many areas of the world Christians are a tiny minority. In others, where missionary zeal brought European culture and language as part

of the colonial enterprise, established churches no longer hold the sway they once did. They have evolved into indigenous expressions of faith unheard of even 17 years ago when the predecessor to this volume was published, and emerging religious communities play a new and different role in these societies. The story of such developments of faith is part of a country's heritage and evolution.

There are said to be about 194 countries in the world, but that is not an immutable figure. Some are hardly recognized by all, or even most, of the international community. Some are not members of the UN. Wars, political upset, changes in many geo-political conditions make some nation states fluid and unstable. In the last volume, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was the largest country in the world. Russia still is the biggest, but there is no USSR, nor are there two Germanys. By the time this book is published, geo-political events may have increased or decreased the number of nations.

The first Ecumenical Prayer Cycle, *For All God's People*, was widely used by many churches, groups and individuals all over the

world. The second edition, *With All God's People*, was the successor and was published in 1989.

This volume, *In God's Hands*, is offered to the member churches of the WCC as one method of enabling Christians to broaden and also to focus their prayer and concern, and to familiarize themselves with, and bring into the immediate family, people of different parts of the world.

Each WCC member church or conference of churches, many of which transcend borders and represent congregations or regional bodies in several nations, is listed in the statistics of the country where its central administrative office is located. Care has been taken to check the accuracy of the information, but the compilers apol-

ogize for any mistakes that have crept in. Population figures are from one standard source, taking the latest official data. Religious statistics are rather more difficult to acquire, but local councils of churches as well as the *World Christian Encyclopedia* have been used as sources of statistics.

This resource for common prayer is offered in the spirit of the psalmist's universal call to worship:

*Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength!*
(Ps. 96:7)

Hugh McCullum
Editor of the Country Profiles

Introduction to the Prayers

xiii

Prayer is a danger zone. Blessings can fall like bombs, putting into question who we are and to what God calls us. Prayer is particularly risky in an ecumenical context. In our own traditions we often learn how to tame our experience of God. We have found ways to make God safe, keeping God's presence from revealing our fractured lives or transforming a stony faith. But prayers from another tradition come as a gift, without demand. God uses the words of another to open us up to the Spirit which transfigures us, remaking us as wonderfully human because God has entered in. The showers of blessing can swamp the boat, but rather than drowning in fear, we discover the gracious waters which buoy us up. Prayer is more treacherous than we had supposed – and at the same time more life-supporting.

While most religions would insist on the importance of prayer, the way of praying varies considerably: kneeling, eyes closed, listening to a bell, lighting a candle, repeating phrases over and over, kissing an icon, remaining silent. For many Christian traditions, the idea of a prayer written down means it is no longer a prayer. For them true prayer can come only from the heart. But our hearts are not the same, nor is the rela-

tionship we have with God in prayer. The written word cannot bring the gestures, the atmosphere of a worshipping community, the sound of the praying voices or the silences which make wordless space. Still, these prayers offer the vocabularies used by others when they pray. They give our hearts the possibility of discovering the hearts of others as they speak with God. We can overhear others when they pray. Maybe their prayer confirms our own. Maybe their prayer reshapes our prayer, changing our heart. Maybe God speaks to us when we speak to God using the words of another. That's where the danger comes. Because in the end, it matters less what we say to God than what we experience God saying to us.

The Ecumenical Prayer Cycle attempts to focus the prayers of Christians week by week, so that over the course of a year all the countries of the world are prayed for. This discipline ensures that our prayers of intercession are not ruled by the headlines in the news. There is nothing wrong with praying for those in the headlines, but many peoples are never mentioned there. As Christians, we know that those unmentioned people matter to God. They celebrate and suffer.

They believe and doubt. Christians also affirm that we can support one another with our prayers. We can ask God to be where we cannot be. Since Jesus was born in the small and seldom heralded Bethlehem, maybe the new movement of God's Spirit will begin in a place often overlooked by globalized media: Mongolia or Malawi or Tuvalu. Our prayers connect us as a human family to the hope of God's Spirit bringing new life. Even if we don't understand one another, God understands.

To the collection garnered, under the auspices of the WCC's Faith and Order secretariat, from a wide variety of books and web sites by the students of Eden Theological Seminary there have been added other material and new prayers. These were solicited with congregational worship in mind, so they also include calls to worship and affirmations of faith. Since many congregations throughout the world follow the common lectionary, prayers were requested related to the biblical texts chosen by the lectionary week upon week. For those who do not follow the lectionary, a biblical index has been included to assist in worship planning, connecting prayers not only to country of origin but also to the Bible. Although this relationship with the lectionary did not come about in many of the weeks, the effort has resulted in the inclusion of many prayers inspired by biblical passages.

Some of the prayers have startlingly new imagery. Others repeat theologies familiar to some Christians, and obviously vibrant for others. Prayers can still jar even when they are centuries old. "Do not assign, blessed Lord and Saviour, a wild beast to guide your sick sheep, but grant me health," wrote St Gregory of Narek of Armenia a thousand years ago. For many who have prayed, death was close at hand, but so too was the presence of God. To pray is to enter the door to that space where death and life spar, where the depths of who we are meet the multifaceted and yet perfectly unified depths of the Trinity. Sometimes "the Presence too quickly forgotten", the phrase from a prayer by Isabelle Graesslé, confronts us, offering a radical demand alongside comfort. Sometimes we get caught by a prayer because God in Christ Jesus wants to reshape our human desires. As in the gospels, Jesus the Christ keeps searching for the lost sheep, gone astray, and keeps denouncing pieties too long closed or self-serving. To talk with God is death and life. The prayers in this book await your praying, and that of your community, so that together, as people praying around the world, we encounter a dangerously loving God who sets us free.

Terry MacArthur
Editor of the Prayers

Egypt, Israel and the Occupied Territories, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria

It is in the midst of the Roman occupation that the incarnation took place;
it is in spite of the occupation that Mary and Joseph found joy and love in the birth of Jesus;
it is in spite of the occupation and in the midst of economic hardships that the shepherds came to visit a family of modest means and discovered great joy and peace;
it is in spite of the occupation that the Magi came to offer their gifts to the child.

We celebrate in the midst of the occupation and in spite of it. Through our celebration we defy the occupation;
we defy the injustice;
we defy the oppressors;
we defy the powers.

They do not possess the last word;
they can build high walls,
but they cannot take away our hope;
they can put us in jail,
but they cannot take away our joy;

they can prevent us from visiting family,
but they cannot take away our love;
they can stop us at checkpoints and impose all kinds of restrictions,
but they cannot take away our pursuit of freedom and liberation;
they can prevent us from going to Bethlehem,
but they cannot prevent the spirit of Bethlehem from reaching us;
they can treat us as non-humans,
but they cannot crush our spirit;
nor can they take away our God-given human worth and dignity;
they can act with hate and disgust but, by the grace of God, we can always refuse to stoop to the level of hate and maintain our love of God and neighbour that includes them.

Therefore, Christmas makes us defiant.
We defy the evil-doers because we believe in the goodness
which they are capable of doing;

we defy hate because we believe in the power of love
and forgiveness;

we defy despair because we believe in life and hope;

we defy violence and terror – both state
and individual –

because we believe in the power of peace and non-
violence;

we defy war and the occupation of other people's
lands because we believe in the power of
peaceful methods based on international law
and legitimacy;

we defy and challenge those who humiliate and
degrade others,

because we believe in the dignity of every human
being.

The incarnation took place when God took on our
humanity, when the Word became flesh and dwelt
among us. This happened in Palestine under
Roman occupation. Then, as now, and in spite of
all the hardships, we celebrate Christ's birth –
Emmanuel, God with us – giving us hope, joy,
peace and love.

We are defiant. We are full of hope. We will continue
to work for peace through justice.

Glory to God in the Highest and on Earth, Peace.

Naim Ateek

Egypt

(Arab Republic of Egypt)



Statistics

Population: 76.1 million

Government: Republic

Language: Arabic (official), English and French
by educated classes

Literacy: 57.3% (men 68.6 %, women 46.9%)

Religion: Muslim (mostly Sunni) 94%, Coptic
Christian 6%

WCC member churches: Coptic Orthodox
Church, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of
Alexandria and All Africa, Synod of the Nile of the
Evangelical Church, Presbyterian Church of Egypt

History

Egypt is located in North Africa, bordering the
Mediterranean Sea, between Libya and the Gaza
Strip, and the Red Sea north of Sudan. It includes
the Asian Sinai Peninsula.

The regularity and richness of the annual Nile
River flood, coupled with semi-isolation provided
by the deserts to the east and west, allowed for the
development of one of the world's great civiliza-
tions. A uniform empire grew up around 3200 BC
and a series of dynasties ruled Egypt for the next
three millennia. The last dynasty fell in 341 BC to
the Persians, who in turn were replaced by the
Greeks, Romans and Byzantines. It was the Arabs
who introduced Islam and Arabic in the seventh
century and who ruled for the next six centuries.

A local military caste, the Mamluks, took con-
trol about 1250 and continued to govern after the
conquest of Egypt by the Ottoman Turks in 1517.
After the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869,
Egypt became an important world transportation
hub, but also fell heavily into debt. Ostensibly to
protect its canal investments, Britain seized con-
trol of Egypt's government in 1882, but nominal
allegiance to the Ottoman empire continued until
1914. Partially independent from Britain in 1922,
Egypt attained full sovereignty after the second
world war.

The completion of the Aswan High Dam with
funding from the Soviet Union in 1971 and the
resultant Lake Nasser altered the time-honoured
place of the Nile River in the agriculture and
ecology of Egypt. A rapidly growing population

(the largest in the Arab world), limited arable land and dependence on the Nile all continue to overtax resources and stress society.

Following the establishment of Israel in 1948, Egypt supported its Arab allies and fought three wars with Israel. Under the presidency of Anwar Sadat (1970–81) the Camp David accords were signed during the US presidency of Jimmy Carter, bringing peace between Egypt and Israel and the return of the Sinai to Egypt. Since then an uneasy peace has prevailed, marked by the assassination of Sadat in 1981.

Tension in Egypt stems from poverty and sharp divisions between rich and poor. Illegal (but nonetheless powerful) religious parties exist. The Muslim Brotherhood constitutes the strongest opposition to the government, although it has been illegal, and its activities are aggressively curtailed.

Although Islam is by far the largest and most cohesive of the religions of Egypt, the Copts have a long and honourable tradition politically, economically and spiritually. It is an ancient tradition in Egypt that St Mark visited Alexandria and preached the gospel throughout the country, and there has been a Christian presence in Egypt from the apostolic age. Egyptian Christians died in their thousands in the bitter persecution of the third and fourth centuries and formed the nucleus of the great desert communities, an experience which fortified the Coptic church for years to come. The Copts (descendants of the ancient Egyptians) preserved the Coptic language in their liturgy and held fast to “the faith of their fathers”. The Copts maintained and renewed the great ascetic monastic traditions that originated in the Egyptian deserts. They remain the largest Christian community in the Arab world. Protestant churches established in the nineteenth century by British, American and European missionaries are relatively small in comparison, yet their numerous social and educational institutions play a key role beyond the borders of their communities.

Israel and the Occupied Territories



Statistics

Population:

Israel: 6.19 million, including East Jerusalem
West Bank and Gaza: 3.7 million Israeli residents in Occupied Areas, including the West

Language:

Israel: Hebrew, English, Russian and immigrant languages and Arabic

West Bank and Gaza: Arabic, English, Hebrew

Government:

Israel: Parliamentary state

West Bank and Gaza: Interim self-government under elected Palestinian Authority

Religion:

Israel: Jews 85%, Muslims 12%, Christians 2%
West Bank and Gaza: Muslims 90%, Christians 6%, Jews 2%, Other 2%

WCC member churches:

Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East (Anglican), Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem

H i s t o r y

Israel and the Occupied Territories are located along the Mediterranean Sea between Egypt in the south, Lebanon to the north and Jordan to the east. The area's theological and traditional complexities, as well as political, human rights, cultural and religious concerns, require sensitivity and understanding.

From the nineteenth century, the Zionist movement dedicated itself to the creation of a Jewish state and the physical return of Jews to Palestine. Given impetus by the Holocaust in Europe and increasing immigration (legal and illegal) of Jews into Palestine, the state of Israel came into being in 1948, after the British surrendered their mandate over Palestine. Most Palestinians rejected this arrangement and the majority of the population – some 750,000 Palestinian Arabs – fled or were expelled. In 1967 the annexation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank of the Jordan River and Gaza produced further waves of refugees amid great violence. There are now some 4 million Palestinians scattered throughout the Middle East and Palestine, many of them living in permanent refugee camps. Dispossessed and suffering from severe discrimination and harassment, they are the victims of the Jewish return. For them, the situation worsens daily and represents a betrayal by the world community.

Following the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty, Israel withdrew from the Sinai in 1982. In 1994 the Israel-Jordan peace treaty resolved disputes between the two countries. In 2000 Israel withdrew unilaterally from southern Lebanon after 18 years of occupation, and in 2005 Israel quit Gaza.

Bilateral negotiations commenced in 1992 under the Oslo accords between Israeli and Palestinian representatives (from the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza) to achieve

a permanent settlement and establish a Palestinian state. In 1993 an Israeli-PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) Declaration of Principles (DOP) provided for a transitional period of five years to establish Palestinian interim government and transfer certain powers and responsibilities to the Palestinian Authority, which includes the Palestinian Legislative Council elected in 1996. The DOP gave Israel all powers over internal and external security. Direct negotiations to determine the status of the West Bank and Gaza did not begin until 1999, but have continued only fitfully since 2000 due to violence, instability and Israel's constant military incursions into the Occupied Territories. Both sides blame the other for many deaths and the massive destruction of civilian life.

In 2002 US President George W. Bush presented a "road map" towards achieving an independent Palestinian state (a "two-state solution"), but little progress has been made. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon proceeded to separate the two entities with a huge fortified barrier which Palestinians and their supporters claim encroaches on West Bank land belonging to Palestine. Massive attacks on Gaza led to the collapse of the "road map" initiative. Late in 2004, Sharon promoted Gaza's independence along with small sections of the West Bank, in place of a negotiated independent Palestine.

In late 2004, long-time liberation leader and President of Palestine, Yasser Arafat, fell ill suddenly and was evacuated from his Ramallah compound to hospital in Paris where he died within ten days. His death, while mourned by Palestinians, paved the way for presidential elections in January 2005. Mahmoud Abbas, a long-time associate of Arafat, was elected and shortly thereafter he and Sharon began a process towards negotiations, subsequently slowed when Sharon suffered a stroke and Hamas won a majority in the Palestinian parliament.

Local Christians, concentrated in Galilee and the Occupied Territories, are mostly Arab and belong to a wide variety of religious communities,

worshipping together Sunday by Sunday, running clinics and schools, and involving themselves in social service and reconciliation projects. They sometimes express puzzlement at the preoccupation of tourists with holy places and their lack of interest in the living church. The decline in numbers of Christian Arabs is serious. Many of them believe they have no future and leave for Europe and North America. Less than 2 per cent – perhaps no more than 25,000 people – are Christians in Israel and the Occupied Territories. Fifty years ago Christians comprised 10 per cent of stateless Palestinians.

For more than 4,000 years, the “chosen city of God” (Ps. 48:2) has been Jerusalem for all three Abrahamic faith communities. The city is central to their sacred geographies. It has been controlled at various times through all these years by all three faiths. It has been destroyed many times. After Israel declared itself a state in 1948, it proclaimed Jerusalem the “restored and eternal capital”. For religious Jews, it is the holiest of geographical sites.

For Muslims, Jerusalem is the last of the three holiest cities, after Mecca and Medina. They believe that on the mount where Abraham offered to sacrifice his son Ishmael and where the former Jewish temple had stood, Muhammad ascended to the throne of Allah. The Arabs prefer to call the city al-Quds (the Holy) and claim it as the capital of the new Palestine.

Christian medieval maps place Jerusalem at the centre of the earth, indeed of the universe. The city witnessed the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Jerusalem birthed the “mother church” (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22) and the mother of all churches of all nations: “every Christian is born in Jerusalem”.

As elsewhere in the holy land (Israel/Palestine) the number of Christians is declining, largely due to forced or voluntary emigration. In 1948 they numbered about 32,000 or 19 per cent of the population; at the beginning of 2000, they were only 12,000, of the 650,000 city-dwellers. Some are concerned that Jerusalem and nearby

Bethlehem will become bereft of Christian “living stones” and a mere museum for pilgrims. Today, 62 per cent of Jerusalem’s population is Jewish, 36 per cent Muslim Palestinians and only 2 per cent Christian Palestinians.

Christians may be small in number, but they are many in churches: Orthodox – Greek (including Russian and Romanian), Armenian, Syrian, Coptic, Ethiopian; Catholic in full communion with Rome – Melchite, Syrian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Maronite, Latin; Protestant – Anglican, Lutheran, Baptist, Pentecostal; non-denominational – Messianic Jews and foreign Zionist fundamentalists. Eighty per cent are members of Eastern churches, 15 per cent Latin Catholic. Although there is no local council of churches, twelve church leaders, including three patriarchs – Greek, Armenian and Latin – try to meet regularly. Christians are in need of encouragement and assurance. It is they who, at no small cost, maintain a Christian presence in the land in which Jesus lived.

Jordan

(Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan)



Statistics

Population: 5.6 million

Government: Constitutional monarchy

Language: Arabic (official), English widely

Literacy: 91.3% (male 95.9%, female 86.3%)

Religion: Muslim (Sunni) 92%, Christian (mostly Orthodox) 6%, Other 2%

WCC member churches: None

History

Jordan is bordered by Israel and the Occupied Territories to the west and Syria to the north. Saudi Arabia is on Jordan's southeast border. The country is mostly arid desert.

For most of its history since independence from Britain in 1946, Jordan was ruled by King Hussein (1953-99), a pragmatic ruler who successfully navigated the complex and competing forces facing his sparsely populated kingdom. These competing forces included the USSR, the US, the UK, various other Arab states, Israel and a very large Palestinian population. Hussein was plagued by wars and attempted coups, and he was subject to several assassination attempts. In 1989 he reinstated parliamentary elections and gradually liberalized his Bedouin society, always watching over his shoulder the Palestinian majority and the still unresolved border separating Jordan from Israel and the West Bank. In 1994, much to the consternation of Palestinian leaders, he signed a formal peace treaty with Israel. After his death in 1999 he was succeeded by his eldest son, King Abdallah II. He has followed his father's policies and Jordan is now an economic and political powerhouse. Amman, its capital, has largely replaced Beirut as the business centre of the region.

Jordan is a Muslim nation, but it embraces the region traversed by Jesus in his earthly journeys, where Jacob wrestled with the angel, the mountain from which Moses saw the Promised Land, and the country of Ruth. The majority of Christians are Greek Orthodox, but there are sizeable Armenian, Latin, Greek Catholic and Anglican communities and some small but thriving Protestant groups. Christians enjoy freedom of worship and have contributed greatly to education and social service.

Lebanon

(Lebanese Republic)



Statistics

Population: 3.8 million

Government: Republic

Language: Arabic (official), French, English, Armenian

Literacy: 87.4% (male 93.1%, female 82.2%)

Religion: Muslim 60%, Christian 39% (Maronite, Melkite, Armenian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant), Other 1%

WCC member churches: Armenian Apostolic Church (Cilicia), National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East

History

Lebanon is on the Mediterranean Sea, with Israel to the south, and the remainder of the country surrounded by Syria.

Lebanon became independent from France in 1943 and has been characterized by great religious and cultural diversity. It features the closest juxtaposition of different communities within a small area of any country in the Middle East. When the republic was established, the various communities agreed on a system of power-sharing based on their relative populations, a system which worked well for many years. The influx of

Palestinian refugees from the wars and deportations in Israel and the Occupied Territories, and the higher growth rate of Muslim communities, changed population ratios. Israeli reprisals for Palestinian resistance led to an invasion and massacres in two refugee camps (Shabrah and Chatilla). A vicious and destructive civil war broke out in 1976, exacerbated by Syria's involvement. The war lasted until 1991, with Syria virtually holding Lebanon to ransom.

The devastating war almost destroyed the capital, Beirut (once known as the Paris of the Middle East), and ended its economic domination of the region. The city and country are now making progress in rebuilding shattered political institutions and infrastructure. Under the 1991 blueprint for national reconciliation there is a more equitable distribution of power, giving Muslims a greater say in the political process while institutionalizing sectarian divisions in the government. Since 1991 the Lebanese have held several successful elections and gradually weakened the power of most factional militias. The Lebanese Armed Forces have extended the central government's authority over about two-thirds of the country. Syria maintained about 16,000 troops in Lebanon, mostly east of Beirut and in the Bekaa Valley. Syria's troop deployment was legitimized by the Arab League during the civil war and justified as ensuring that the Lebanese government fulfils all aspects of the 1991 ceasefire. Israel's withdrawal from the security zone it maintained for decades in the south emboldened some Lebanese leaders to insist on Syria's withdrawal, and this intensified after the assassination of former prime minister Hariri in February 2005. Hizballah, the Shia organization which has been allowed to keep its weapons as well as its widespread social service network, gained a share in government in 2005 elections following the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon.

The majority of Christians in Lebanon are Maronite Catholics who trace their roots to the early church at Antioch and claim unbroken communion with the Vatican. Maronites settled

in the mountains of Lebanon for protection in the ninth century. There are many other Christian communities, amongst which the Greek Orthodox, Armenian Apostolics and Greek Catholics are the largest. Lebanon is an important centre for the Armenian community.

Syria

(*Syrian Arab Republic*)



Statistics

Population: 18 million

Government: Socialist republic

Language: Arabic (official), French, Kurdish, Armenian and others

Literacy: 76.9% (male 89.9%, female 64%)

Religion: Sunni Muslim 74%, Alawite, Druze and other Muslim sects 15%, Christian (mostly Oriental Orthodox) 10%, Jewish less than 1%

WCC member churches: Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East

History

Modern Syria is on the Mediterranean Sea between Lebanon and Turkey; to the south it is bordered by Jordan and Iraq. Ancient Syria covered a much wider area and included Antioch, where "the disciples were first called Christians" (Acts 11:26). Antioch became one of the great centres of the early church associated with St Peter and St Paul, St Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus occurring within today's capital of Syria.

After the breakup of the Ottoman empire, modern Syria was administered by France until 1946, when it became independent. It declared itself a socialist republic in 1973. Syria is unique among Arab countries: despite a large majority of Muslims, it is a secular state. It has long been associated with Lebanon and intervened for many years during that country's civil war. During the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Syria lost control of the Golan Heights and in recent years it has held desultory talks with Israel over their return. About 40,000 Syrians, many of them Druze, live there along with some 20,000 Israeli settlers.

There are Armenian and Syrian Orthodox communities in Syria, and the Syrian Orthodox

Church has its see in Damascus. The church, which has suffered greatly through the centuries, has remained close to the Jerusalem tradition of the ancient church. The (Greek) Orthodox Church of Antioch, whose membership is Arab and whose liturgical language is Arabic, is now the largest Christian body. Catholics belong to six different rites. Most Protestants are members of either the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, or the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East. These churches are doing lively work in the field of Christian education. Foreign missionaries were expelled in 1963 and Syrian nationals are not allowed to change their legal registration from Muslim to Christian.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The Middle East Council of Churches and its efforts towards Christian unity and justice.
- o The efforts of the various churches in Syria to work together to find a common witness, particularly their engagement in finding a common date for Easter for all Christians.
- o The endless source of inspiration that pilgrims of Islam, Christianity and Judaism find in the sacred places in the land called holy.
- o Peace-makers.
- o Rebuilders of Lebanon after the destructive war.
- o Olive trees that have survived many generations and still produce fruit.
- o People replanting olive trees.
- o The Nile and its life-giving water.
- o The pyramids, hieroglyphic writing and other wonders of ancient Egyptian civilization.
- o The ancient churches in these countries which have faithfully transmitted the Gospel from generation to generation, even when severely threatened or persecuted.
- o Monks and nuns who give themselves to a life of prayer and service.

Pray for:

- o Peace in the region, especially between Palestinians and Israelis.
- o Respect for human rights and an end to unjust imprisonment and extra-judicial killing.
- o Solutions for refugees, who still yearn to return home.
- o Efforts to confront corruption.
- o The hungry and homeless.
- o Those whose homes are in the slums, the cemeteries, the garbage dumps, the refugee camps.
- o Those who insist on violent solutions and who see force as the primary means of solving conflicts, that they might find more humanitarian methods.
- o The democratically elected officials of each state.

PRAYERS

(1)

Lord, hear us.

Awaken in us the desire for the unity of all Christians,
and convert our hearts.

Purify our faith, removing all merely human interpretations,
and make us open to your word, entrusted to your church.

Teach us, O Lord, to discern the ways
you are now opening up for us
to enable your churches to come together in fellowship.

Make us ready, O Lord, from now on,
to do together all the things
that our beliefs do not force us to do apart.

(2)

For the presence of children among us and for the gifts which you bestow on us
through them,

we pray to you, O Lord.

For all the poor in Spirit who have accepted joyfully your word of life,

we pray to you, O Lord.

For those ministers of the gospel who, in their poverty, become witnesses
allowing your love to shine through,

we pray to you, O Lord.

For those children who cannot be as children, who lack bread and who are
deprived of love,

we pray to you, O Lord.

(3)
 Pray not for Arab
 or Jew
 or Palestinian
 or Israeli
 but pray rather
 for ourselves
 that we might not
 divide them in our
 prayers but keep
 them together
 in our hearts.

(4)

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH: HOUSE OF BREAD

The light of God has come into this world
 to the House of Bread –
given for the world.

It started in Bethlehem –
broken for all.

Bethlehem – in the Hebrew language,
"House of Bread".

Womb of our hope,
let all people be fed
as we share bread in the House of Bread.

From our neighbours in the mosque next door –

I hear the call to prayer,
 as a candle of hope is lit in the House of Bread.

Eating bread together means eternal bonds of love and friendship.

In Bethlehem, where God visited our world,
 we still hear God through echoes of the angels' songs,

and our high calling is still to give glory to God
and still to be peace-makers.

In the House of Bread the spirit of the living God rejuvenates us
 to work in love

for peace with justice
and never to despair.

In the House of Bread the Spirit of the living God
has refreshed us to commit ourselves to each other
in joy and pain
to work for healing and reconciliation.

In the House of Bread broken for all,
the Spirit of the living God has renewed us.
God has become our liberator –
our Sabeel –
our way and our living water.

The light of God has come into this world
to the House of Bread –
given for the world.
It started in Bethlehem –
broken for all.
Bethlehem –
House of Bread.

(5)

O Lord, I am standing today in front of a 25-foot, 8-metre high concrete wall in Abu Dis, on the Mount of Olives. As I look at it, I see how small I am and how powerless I am. I raise my face toward the blue skies and ask, "Does the Holy Land need a wall?"

When you, Lord, were crucified on the cross in Jerusalem, weren't you disturbed by the sins of animosity that were well-established in the hearts of human beings?

When at the peak of your suffering on that Friday, an earthquake took place at the time of your death, yet the only thing you tore away was the barrier that divided people from God and from each other.

We thank you, our Crucified Lord, that your death on the cross gave us hope, showing us that no walls are needed, either between you and us or between us and our neighbours. Instead, we need to find the humanity of others and accept it.

I pray:

Lord, forgive us for the walls of hate and animosity which human beings so easily create.

Lord, forgive us for being deaf to your holy word and help us to remember that you came to reconcile us to yourself, taking down all barriers.

Lord, forgive us for misusing your precious and sacrificial blood by reaching out only to our friends and dear ones, and not to our enemies.

Lord, I feel powerless, angry and discouraged in front of this concrete, grey barrier of separation. Please do not let hatred penetrate my heart. Do not allow fear to paralyze me in all my difficulties, in my powerlessness.

I pray that the walls may disappear and that animosity will be exchanged for neighbourliness, hatred will be exchanged for love, death will be exchanged for life, despair will be exchanged for hope, and war will be exchanged for reconciliation.

Help me, Lord, as a powerless Palestinian Christian, to experience and share with the world the sacrificial love and forgiveness I receive every day through your death on the cross.

In the name of Jesus.

(6)

We, your servants, offer you, O God, prayers and intercessions on behalf of the peace of the churches and the tranquillity of the monasteries; keep your ministers in righteousness, forgive sinners who turn to you, make the rich rich in almsgiving, provide for the poor, support the widows, educate the orphans, sustain the aged, guard the youth by your cross, gather the dispersed, convert those in error; and let our prayers and intercessions prevail with you, and we will offer praise and honour to your high Trinity, now and always and forever.

(7)

BLESSING

Blessed are those who have eaten from the bread of love which is Jesus.

This is the wine that gladdens human hearts.

This is the wine which the lustful have drunk and they have become chaste,

the sinners and they forgot the ways of unrighteousness,

the drunkards and they became fasters,

the rich and they became desirous of poverty,

the poor and they became rich in hope,

the sick and they became courageous,

the fools and they became wise.

(8)

The poor and the needy will praise you, O Lord.

Glory to the Father,

glory to the Son,

glory to the Holy Spirit, who spoke through the prophets.

God is my hope,

Christ is my refuge,

the Holy Spirit is my shelter.

(9)

Pray for the rising of the waters of the rivers this year,

that Christ our Lord may bless it and raise it to its measure.

and grant a cheerful touch unto the lands, support their people,

save the cattle and forgive us our sins.

Lord, have mercy.

Pray for the trees, vegetation and the planting of the land this year,

that Christ our Lord may bless them to grow and bring forth plentiful fruit,

and have compassion upon his creation and forgive us our sins.

Lord, have mercy.

Pray for the winds, the crops, the vine

and every fruit-bearing tree in the whole world,

that Christ our Lord may bless them, to reach harvesting without harm

and forgive us our sins.

Lord, have mercy.

Accord, O Lord, a cheerful touch to the earth,

water it and dispose our life as you deem fit.

Crown this year with your goodness,
 for the sake of the poor of your people, the widow, the orphan, the stranger
 and for our sake.
 For our eyes are focused upon you, our hope, and we seek your holy name.
 You provide us our food in due course.
 Deal with us, O Lord, according to your goodness.
 We call you the One who feeds everybody.
 Fill our hearts with joy and grace, so that,
 always having all things sufficiently,
 we may grow in every good deed.

(10)

How can a womb contain him whom nothing can contain?
 How can he remain in his father's bosom, yet rest in his mother's arms?
 It is his good pleasure to accomplish this.
 Having no flesh, he purposely assumes it for our sake.
 He who is becomes what he never was.
 He shares our substance without forsaking his own nature.
 Desiring to make us citizens of the world on high, Christ, the Only-begotten
 of the Father, is born on earth as a man

(11)

My Egyptian heart longs, O my God, for the redemption of my people.
 It has been our shame
 that the oppression of the Pharaohs
 drove the children of Israel to the sea.
 But you, my God,
 who free us from our sins,
 and make all things new,
 chose this same country as a shelter for the holy family
 and a home to that One who was persecuted and oppressed,
 that we might have life and have it abundantly.

Thank you, my Saviour, for the greatest gift you have given me.
 When I was a little girl my heart bubbled with joy
 every time I was taken to play under the tree in Materialah
 where you rested with Mary, your mother, and Joseph.
 I loved to touch the stone upon which your crib was placed
 in that dark underground church in old Cairo.

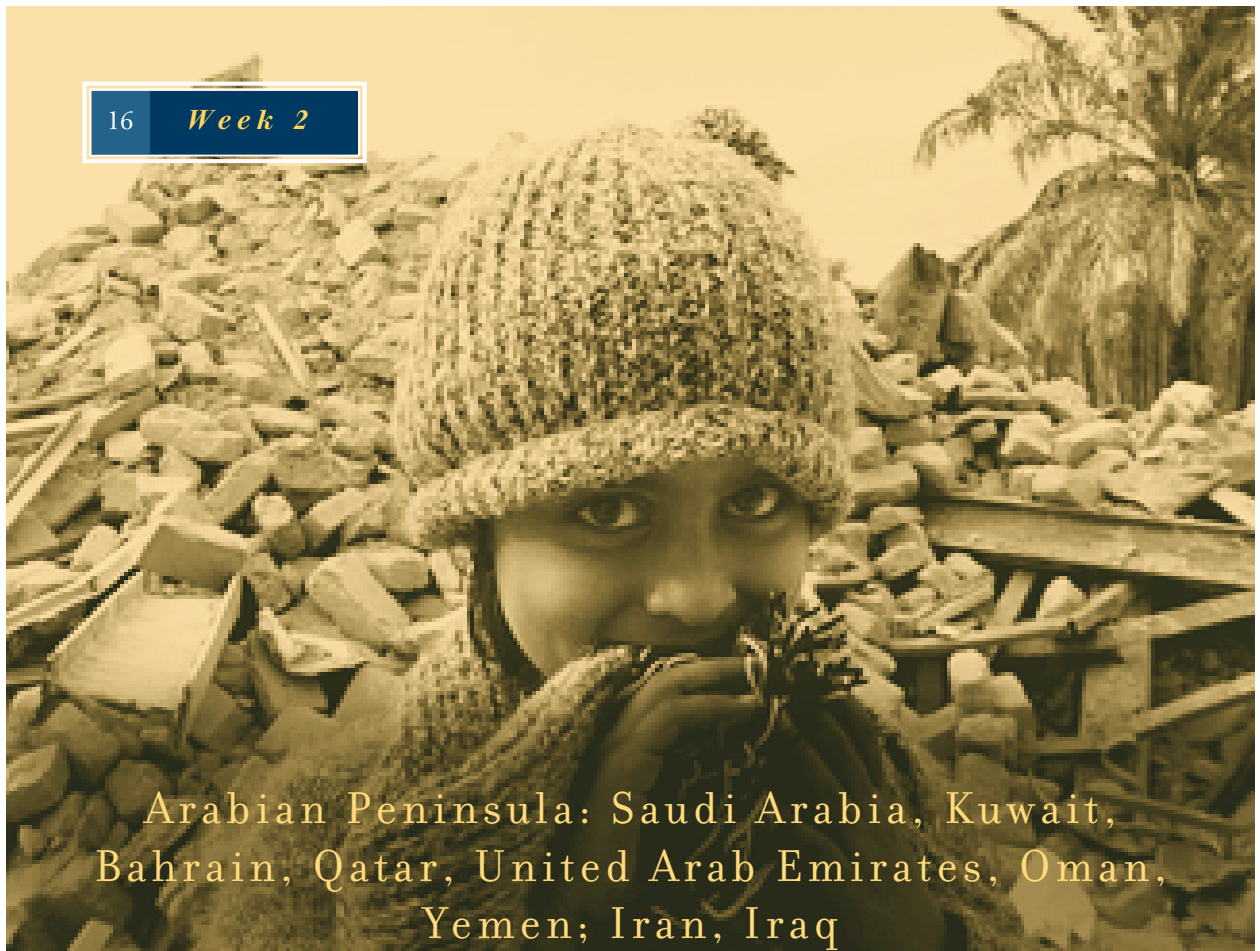
I felt your presence.
I heard your cry and laughter.
I wept with the mothers whose children were killed by Herod.
I rejoiced over your safety.
I praised and continue to praise you, my Saviour and Redeemer,
who take us out of darkness into your marvellous light.

(12)

Heavenly Father,
in the life and ministry of your Son, Jesus Christ,
you showed us how to live together;
give this sense of unity to the peoples of the Holy Land today.
In the death of your Son on the cross,
you showed how great was your love for us
as well as your readiness to forgive;
you brought new hope to your people
and a desire to work for peace and justice;
renew that hope in your people today
and give them a burning desire to find your peace in this time.
In the resurrection of Jesus
and in the outpouring of your Holy Spirit
you showed the disciples
they had power and authority to conquer in your name;
convince your people today of the gifts you have entrusted to them
and so help them to transform their land to your greater glory.
We ask this in Jesus' name.

(13)

Spirit of the Living God, come afresh on your Holy Land.
Help your people to restore broken relationships.
Give them patience to break down barriers of suspicion and mistrust;
ability to discern personal prejudice and the courage to overcome fear.
Teach them to respect each other's integrity and rights
so that your kingdom may be established on earth.
For Jesus' sake.



Arabian Peninsula: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait,
Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman,
Yemen; Iran, Iraq

Arabian Peninsula

History

The Arabian Peninsula is located in southwestern Asia, in what is now called the Middle East. It is bounded to the east by the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, to the south by the Arabian Sea, to the west by the Red Sea, and to the north by Jordan and Iraq. Seven countries share the peninsula: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman and Yemen. The land of Arabia is mostly desert and sparsely populated; fresh-water supplies are extremely limited. With the exception of Oman, the area is rich in oil reserves, which provided for rapid economic development during the twentieth century and a high material standard of living.

The Arabian Peninsula has been populated for thousands of years. Arabs are the dominant ethnic group in the region. They were originally nomadic, semi-nomadic and tribal peoples, often at war with one another until Islam arrived in the late sixth century. Islam took root rapidly

My heart is becoming capable of
welcoming each form,

It is a pasture for the gazelle and an abbey
for the monk.

It is a temple for idols and the Kâaba for
making pilgrimage.

It is the tables of the Torah and also the
pages of the Koran.

The religion I profess is that of love.

Love is my religion and my faith.

Ibn Arabi

throughout the region and served as a unifying force for the Arabian people, who soon spread throughout the Middle East and the Mediterranean. From the sixteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, much of Arabia was part of the Ottoman empire.

According to tradition, Christianity came to Arabia with the apostle Bartholomew. Scripture tells us there were Arabs present at Pentecost (Acts 2:11). There was a bishopric during the third century in what is now Bahrain, and Christian communities are known to have existed along the mainland coast by the fourth and fifth centuries. However, during the seventh century, when Islam became the dominant faith in the region, only small, isolated pockets of Christians remained. One legend tells how the chaplain of a Portuguese ship that came to port at Muscat (now the capital of Oman) in the fifteenth century was welcomed by a small Christian community that had continued without a priest for a thousand years. Western Protestant and Catholic missionaries have worked in this area since the latter part of the nineteenth century, but since the governments of all these countries forbid evangelization of Muslims, foreign mission personnel have been generally restricted to medical and educational work.

The development of the oil trade in the Gulf states has led to an important influx of foreign workers: in Qatar and UAE the foreign workers outnumber the native population. While there are some Christians among the native populations of these small countries, the church there is comprised mainly of Christians who have come from other countries as part of the foreign labour force. Most of these Christian communities are led by laypersons; very few have resident ordained ministers, though in recent times some governments have allowed periodic visits from bishops, priests and ministers from immigrants' home churches.

Saudi Arabia

(Kingdom of Saudi Arabia)



Statistics

Population: 22 million

Government: Absolute monarchy since 1932

Language: Arabic; also Persian (Farsi), Hindi, Chinese, English and others

Literacy: 62% (male 71%, female 50%)

Religion: Muslim 94%, Christian 3% (mostly Roman Catholic), Hindu 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Saudi Arabia comprises most of the landmass of the Arabian Peninsula, with shorelines on both the Red Sea to the west and the Persian Gulf to the east. It is bordered to the north by Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait, and to the south by the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Yemen.

The present-day monarch is not only the political leader of the country, but also the absolute religious head. The strictly orthodox Wahhabi movement, dedicated to the reform of Islam, originated here and was the centre of the first Sa'udi kingdom. The law does not permit the practice of any other religion besides Islam, and clergy from other faith traditions are not allowed into the country. However, in recent years, with the influx of foreign workers from other faith traditions, informal meetings for Bible study and prayer do occur. Language, rather than denomination, tends to be the basis for the formation of such groups.

Islam is at the heart of Saudi Arabia. The Prophet Muhammad (570-632) was born and died there. The Holy Shrines at Mecca and Medina attract millions of Muslims annually to the Hajj, which every devout Muslim hopes to undertake at least once in a life-time.

K u w a i t

(*State of Kuwait*)



Statistics

Population: 2.2 million

Government: Constitutional monarchy since 1990

Language: Arabic; also Persian (Farsi), English, Kurdish and others

Literacy: 78%

Religion: Muslim 85%, Christian 13% (mostly Roman Catholic), Hindu

WCC member churches: None

History

Kuwait is at the northeastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, on the Persian Gulf. Iraq lies to the north and west, while Saudi Arabia forms its southern border.

The country gained its independence from Britain in 1962, at which time it formed a monarchy and established Islam as the state religion. In 1990 Kuwait was invaded by Iraq, which had long considered the country part of its precolonial

territory. Iraq was driven out in 1991 by a US-dominated international force after six weeks of fighting in what is known as the first Gulf war. During the war, many of Kuwait's oil fields were set on fire, leading to disastrous air pollution throughout the region, and much of Kuwait's infrastructure was destroyed.

In March 2003, during the second Gulf war, a coalition of more than 250,000 troops led by the US used Kuwait as a launching pad to attack Iraq. Fierce fighting has continued in Iraq ever since.

The majority of Kuwait's population is Muslim. Christianity is practised generally only by foreign workers in the Kuwaiti oil fields. The largest Christian presence is the Roman Catholic Church, following Eastern rites (Melkites, Maronites, Chaldeans and others). Several different Orthodox churches represented, including the Greek, Armenian, Coptic and Syrian.

B a h r a i n

(*Kingdom of Bahrain*)



Statistics

Population: 675,000

Government: Absolute hereditary monarchy since 1971

Language: Arabic; also Persian (Farsi), English, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and others

Literacy: 85%

Religion: Muslim 82%, Christian 11%, Hindu 6%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Bahrain consists of 33 islands in the Persian Gulf east of Saudi Arabia and west of Qatar.

Bahrain has been a trading centre for thousands of years, and during the seventeenth century came under the influence of Iran. In 1783 the al-Khalifa family came to power and continues to rule today. As in the rest of the Arabian Peninsula, Islam is the dominant religion, but unlike other Arabian countries the majority of Muslims are Shi'a rather than Sunni. There has been tension between these two groups, particularly during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Christians were first in Bahrain in the third century, but disappeared as the population converted to Islam. Today, Christianity is generally practised by foreigners working in the country, and Bahrainis are forbidden to convert. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest Christian denomination. The National Evangelical Church of Bahrain evolved from the Reformed Church in America and is the main Protestant denomination.

Qatar

(State of Qatar)



Statistics

Population: 840,000

Government: Absolute monarchy since 1971

Language: Arabic; also English, Persian (Farsi)

Literacy: 79%

Religion: Muslim 83%, Christian 10% (mostly Roman Catholic), Hindu 3%, Buddhist 2%, Other 2%

WCC member churches: None

History

Qatar is located on a peninsula that juts out from Saudi Arabia into the Persian Gulf.

Islam has been the state religion of Qatar since its independence from Britain in 1970. Due to revenues generated by its natural gas reserves, it has one of the highest standards of living in the Arab world. Christianity is practised openly only by expatriates and foreigners living in the country, most of whom are Roman Catholics and Anglicans.

United Arab Emirates



Statistics

Population: 2.5 million (including 1.6 million non-nationals)

Government: Confederation of monarchies since 1971

Language: Arabic; also Persian (Farsi), English, Hindi, Baluchi, Urdu and others

Literacy: 79%

Religion: Muslim 76%, Christian 11%, Hindu 8%, Baha'i 2%, Buddhist 2%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of the seven Trucial states on the southeastern part of the Arabian Peninsula on the Persian Gulf. Oman borders the UAE to the east and Saudi Arabia lies to the south.

The UAE obtained independence from Britain in 1971, since when it has weathered external conflict with Saudi Arabia and Oman, as well as internal disputes between the different emirates. Like its neighbours, it is a Muslim country and since 1975 evangelization and missionary activities by Christians have been forbidden. There is, however, a significant Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican presence among expatriates and foreign workers. The UAE's generosity with oil revenues and a cautiously moderate foreign policy make it an important player in the affairs of the region.

Oman

(Sultanate of Oman)



Statistics

Population: 2.9 million

Government: Absolute monarchy since 1741

Language: Arabic; also Persian (Farsi), Baluchi, Hindi, Tamil, English and others

Literacy: 59% (male 71%, female 46%)

Religion: Muslim 88%, Hindu 6%, Christian 5%, Buddhist 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Oman is at the southeastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula on the Arabian Sea. Yemen borders it to the southwest, Saudi Arabia to the west, and the UAE to the northwest.

Lacking the oil resources of its neighbours, Oman is the least developed state in the Arabian Peninsula, and continues to have a high percentage of nomadic peoples. Islam is the state religion, and only foreigners follow Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church accounts for about half of the Christians in the country. There are also several Orthodox churches, Anglicans and Pentecostals.

Yemen

(Republic of Yemen)



Statistics

Population: 20 million

Government: Multiparty republic since 1990

Language: Arabic; also Somali, Hindi, Persian (Farsi) and many others

Literacy: 46% (male 68%, female 23%)

Religion: Muslim 99%, Hindu 1%, Christian less than 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Yemen is at the southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, with Saudi Arabia to the north and Oman to the east, the Arabian Sea to the south, and the Red Sea to the west. Across the Red Sea in Africa lie Eritrea and Djibouti.

The Republic of Yemen was created from the merger of North Yemen (the ancient biblical kingdom of Sheba) and South Yemen (a single-party Marxist state) in 1990. Tension between the two flared up into a brief civil war in 1994. Yemen held its first open presidential elections in 1999.

Islam is the state religion and accounts for 99 per cent of the population. There are just a few thousand Christians in the country, all foreign workers, about evenly split between Catholics and Orthodox. There are several Catholic and Protestant missions: Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity run four homes for the aged in Yemen and a number of other Christian bodies have been assisting in clinics and hospitals at the request of the government. Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the Arab world.

Iran

(Islamic Republic of Iran)



Statistics

Population: 69 million

Government: One-party Islamic republic since 1979

Language: Persian (Farsi); Azerbaijani, Turkic Kurdish, Arabic, Turkish, Armenian, English and more than 30 others

Literacy: 72% (male 78%, female 65%)

Religion: Shi'a Muslim 89%, Sunni Muslim 9%, Zoroastrian 3%, Baha'i 2%, Jewish, Christian less than 1%

WCC member churches: Synod of the Evangelical Church of Iran

History

Iran is located in southwestern Asia on the Persian Gulf. Afghanistan and Pakistan form its eastern border, and Iraq and Turkey lie to the west. To the north, Iran shares its border with Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Caspian Sea and Turkmenistan.

Iran was settled over 2000 years ago by the Aryan peoples, from which the country's name is derived, although until 1935 the country was better known as Persia. For almost five centuries, from 1501 to 1978, Iran was ruled by a shah, or king. In 1978 the monarchy was overthrown and an Islamic theocratic republic was established under the leadership of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Ultimate political authority is vested in a learned religious scholar and associates, although in recent times pressure for reform has sometimes been manifested due to popular dissatisfaction and a massive change in demographics. In 1979 Iranian students took control of the American embassy in Tehran, taking hostages who were not released until 15 months later. During this time, Iran was invaded by Iraq, leading to a war that lasted until 1988; the war ended indecisively, caused thousands of deaths, and over 2 million people were forced to flee their homes. In recent years, regions in Iran have been devastated by earthquakes, and the government has come under international pressure due to its nuclear policy.

Most of Iran is mountainous and dry. Air pollution in urban areas and water pollution in the Caspian Sea have become serious problems.

Shi'a Islam has been the official religion of Iran since the sixteenth century. While the rest of the Islamic world is primarily Sunni, Shiites form the majority of the Muslims in Iran. Zoroastrians, also called Parsis, are the largest non-Muslim minority: Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic religion that began in Iran during the sixth century BC. The next largest minority group is the Baha'i, which arose out of Shiite Islam in Iran in the 1840s under the leadership of Bab Al Din and has since spread around the world, although its members are heavily persecuted at home.

While Christians form less than 1 per cent of the population, the church has a long history in Iran. The Armenian Apostolic Church is the largest church in Iran, and traces its roots back to the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew in the first century. The Assyrian or Ancient Church of the East has existed since the third century. During the nineteenth century, Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic (both Latin and Eastern rites), Anglican and Protestant churches were established in Iran, although their members are almost entirely foreigners. After the revolution in 1978, most church properties and hospitals were confiscated and educational institutions were required to teach Islam. Muslims who convert to Christianity are generally imprisoned and often martyred. During the 1990s the Bible Society was banned, and the government shut down many Protestant and Evangelical churches.

Iraq

(*Republic of Iraq*)

Statistics

Population: 25 million (estimate)

Government: Former dictatorship; since March 2003 occupied by US coalition forces and subsequently ruled by interim administrations

Language: Arabic; also Kurdish, Chaldean, Persian, Turkish and others

Literacy: 58% (male 70%, female 45%)

Religion: Muslim 96%, Christian 3%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East



History

Located in southwestern Asia in the Middle East, Iraq has only a tiny outlet to the Persian Gulf, and is otherwise surrounded by Iran to the east, Kuwait to the southeast, Saudi Arabia to the south and southwest, Jordan and Syria to the west, and Turkey to the north.

Traditionally the site of the Garden of Eden, for thousands of years Iraq, with approximately the same borders as ancient Mesopotamia, was the centre of civilization, including the Sumerian, Assyrian, Babylonian and Alexandrian empires. In the seventh century the area became dominated by Muslim Arabs, and from the seventeenth century it was part of the Ottoman empire. Both Britain and Germany controlled some of the land during the nineteenth century, and after the first world war the British invaded. In 1920 Iraqis began an armed uprising, which led to the establishment of an Iraqi monarchy in 1921. In 1932 Iraq gained full independence from Britain. In 1958 a coup led to the dismantling of the monarchy and the establishment of the Republic of Iraq. There followed a succession of military governments and

coups until 1979, when Saddam Hussein came to power. Until 2003 he ruled the country as a Baath socialist dictatorship, killing and imprisoning many of his rivals and political enemies.

Iraq has often been aggressive towards its neighbours. In 1948-49 it invaded the newly founded state of Israel. It fought against Israel again in 1967. In 1960 it invaded Kuwait, pulling out when the British intervened. In 1980 Iraq invaded Iran in a war that lasted until 1988.

In 1990 it invaded Kuwait, leading to the first Gulf war. Internally, Iraq fought against Kurdish nationalists who lived in the northern parts of the country for decades. During the late 1980s and early 1990s this conflict took on genocidal proportions, with thousands of villages and towns burned to the ground, half a million people deported to camps, and a quarter of a million people massacred. By the end of the first Gulf war in 1991 almost the entire Kurdish population had become refugees. As a result of these episodes, Iraq was isolated by the international community through economic sanctions, and parts of the country were subject to almost daily air strikes by international forces. This destroyed the economy and impoverished the people of Iraq; many faced severe malnutrition and even starvation. In March 2003 the US

invaded Iraq, claiming the country had nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction and was a haven for terrorism. While none of these charges has been proved, the US and British, with a small coalition, brought destruction on the Iraqi people and their economic potential (Iraq has the second largest oil reserves in the world.) By the end of 2004 fighting raged between various religious and political groups and US forces. Tens of thousands of Iraqis have been killed and wounded. Saddam Hussein was captured, but as the third year of the war and occupation approached, violence, destruction and corruption continued. Sectarian divisions emerged.

Jewish communities in Mesopotamia were evangelized in the first century, traditionally by St Thomas. The church was later strengthened by Assyrian missions. Islam rose in importance in the seventh century, but the church continued. A split in the Assyrian Church in 1552 led to a large segment joining the Roman Catholic Church. The Chaldean Catholic Church is by far the largest Christian community in Iraq today, where it faces persecution from extremist Islamic elements. Christians have been fleeing the violence in Iraq, but are thought to number about half a million.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Christians who practise their faith in countries where they are a small minority; those who meet in house churches and those who provide links to Christians worldwide.
- o Muslims who live up to the ideals of their faith and advocate tolerance and peace.
- o Those who work for democracy and human rights.
- o The graceful architecture of minarets and the sounds of the oud.
- o The preservation of the art of these ancient cultures.

Pray for:

- o Peaceful relationships between different tribes, religions and ethnic groups.
- o Those who come from other countries to work, and are separated from their families.
- o Clean water for those who thirst in the desert.
- o Women, who have far fewer opportunities for education and employment than do men.
- o Those who are persecuted for their faith.
- o Healing for wounded bodies and crushed spirits caused by conflict and strife.
- o Muslims who make the pilgrimage to Mecca, that they might be safe during their devotion.
- o The grieving, the families torn apart, the homes destroyed, the businesses no longer functioning.
- o An end to terrorism, lawlessness, and state oppression.
- o International peace-keepers and monitors of treaty obligations.

PRAYERS

(1)

You, Lord of all, we confess;
 You, Lord Jesus, we glorify;
 For you are the life of our bodies
 And you are the Saviour of our souls.

(2)

**THE ORDER OF THE HALLOWING OF THE APOSTLES
 WHICH WAS COMPOSED BY MAR ADDAI AND MAR MARI, THE BLESSED APOSTLES**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father,
 and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
 be with us all, now, always, and for ever and ever.

Amen.

Let your minds be above.

**With you, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Israel,
 O glorious King.**

The oblation is offered to God, the Lord of all.

It is meet and right.

Deacon: Peace be with us.

Worthy of praise from every mouth,
and confession from every tongue,
and adoration and exaltation from every creature
is the worshipful and glorious name of your glorious Trinity,
O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
for you created the world in your grace
and its inhabitants in your mercifulness;
you saved men in your compassion,
and showed great grace unto mortals.
Thousands upon thousands of those on high bow down
and worship your majesty, O my Lord,
and ten thousand times ten thousand holy angels and spiritual hosts,
the ministers of fire and spirit,
glorify your name,
and with holy cherubim and spiritual seraphim
offer worship to your Lordship,
crying and singing praise without ceasing,
calling, one to another, and saying,

**Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts,
for heaven and earth are full of his praises,
and of the nature of his being,
and of the excellency of his glorious splendour.
Hosanna in the heights. Hosanna to the son of David.
Blessed is he who came and comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the heights.**

And with the heavenly hosts we give thanks to you, O my Lord,
even we, your feeble, unworthy, and miserable servants,
for you have brought about great grace in us
which we cannot repay,
for you clothed yourself with our humanity,
that you might make us alive by your Godhead.
You have exalted our humble state,
raised up our fallen condition,
given new life to our mortality,
forgiven our debts,

set right our sinfulness,
 enlightened our minds,
 and, our Lord and our God,
 you have condemned our enemies,
 and granted victory to the feebleness of our unworthy nature
 in the abundant mercies of your grace.

And for all your aids and graces towards us
 we will lift up to you praise, honor, confession, and worship,
 now, always, and for ever and ever.

Amen.

Deacon: Pray in your minds. Peace be with us.

O my Lord, in your many ineffable mercies,
 make a good and acceptable memorial
 for all the just and righteous fathers
 who were well-pleasing before you
 through the commemoration of the body and blood of your Christ
 which we offer you upon your pure and holy altar,
 as you taught us.
 Bring to pass your tranquillity and peace in us
 all the days of the world.
 Yea, our Lord and our God,
 bring to pass your tranquillity and peace in us all the days of the world,
 that all the inhabitants of the earth may know you –
 that you alone are God, the Father of truth,
 and that you sent our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son and your Beloved,
 and he, our Lord and our God, came and taught us
 in his life-giving gospel
 all the purity and holiness of the prophets and apostles,
 of the martyrs and confessors, of the bishops and teachers,
 of the presbyters and deacons,
 and of all the children of the holy catholic church –
 who have been signed with the living seal of holy baptism.

We too, my Lord, your feeble, unworthy, and miserable servants
 who are gathered in your name and stand before you at this hour,
 and have received by tradition the example which is from you,

while rejoicing, glorifying, exalting, and commemorating,
perform this great, fearful, holy, life-giving, and divine Mystery
of the passion, death, burial, and resurrection
of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

And may there come, O my Lord, your Holy Spirit,
and may he rest upon this oblation of your servants.
May he bless it and hallow it,
and may it be for us, O my Lord,
for the pardon of debts,
the forgiveness of sins,
the great hope of resurrection from the dead,
and for new life in the kingdom of heaven
with all who have been well-pleasing before you.
And for all this great and marvellous dispensation towards us
we will give thanks to you
and praise you without ceasing in your church,
which is saved by the precious blood of your Christ
with unclosed mouth and open face,
while lifting up praise, honour, confession, and worship
to your living, holy, and life-giving name,
now, always, and for ever and ever.

(3)

All that we ought to have thought and have not thought,
all that we ought to have said, and have not said,
all that we ought to have done, and have not done,
all that we ought not to have thought and have thought
all that we ought not to have said, and have said,
all that we ought not to have done, and have done,
for thoughts, words and works pray we, O God, for forgiveness.

(4)

Make my prayer, O my Lord, a fountain of living waters
whereby I may live as long as thy sovereignty endureth,
and may make mention of thee in every world of thy worlds.

(5)

My God, whom I worship and adore!
 I bear witness unto your unity and your oneness,
 and acknowledge your gifts,
 both in the past and in the present.
 You are the All-bountiful,
 the overflowing showers of whose mercy
 have rained down upon high and low alike
 and the splendours of whose grace
 have been shed over both the obedient and the rebellious.

O God of mercy,

 before whose door the quintessence of mercy has bowed down,
 and round the sanctuary of whose cause loving-kindness,
 in its inmost spirit, has circled,
 we ask you, entreating your ancient grace,
 and seeking your present favour,
 that you have mercy upon all
 who are the manifestation of the world of being,
 and to deny them not the outpourings of your grace in your days.

All are but poor and needy,
 and you, truly are the All-possessing, the All-subduing,
 the All-powerful.

(6)

THE PRAYER BEFORE THE EPISTLE READING

O our Lord and our God,
 enlighten for us the impulses of our thoughts,
 that we may give heed to
 and understand the pleasant sound
 of your life-giving and divine commands.
 Grant us in your grace and mercies
 to acquire profit from them – love, hope, and salvation,
 which are useful for the soul and body.
 May we sing continual praise without ceasing
 to you at every hour,
 O Lord of all, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for ever.

(7)

PRAYER BEFORE THE READINGS

May God the Lord of all
make you wise in his holy teaching,
and may his mercies and compassion be upon the readers
and those who are listening.
May you be a shining mirror to all
who give heed to and obey the word of teaching from your mouth,
through the kindness of his compassion.



Cyprus, Greece, Turkey

Cyprus

(Republic of Cyprus)

Do everything in common;
 unite in one prayer, one petition,
 one mind, one hope,
 in love and faultless joy.
 All this in Jesus Christ,
 and there is nothing better than he.
 So make haste, all of you,
 to come together as to one temple of God,
 around one altar,
 around the one Jesus Christ,
 who came forth from the one Father,
 while still remaining one with him,
 and has returned to unity with him.

St Ignatius of Antioch



Statistics

Population: 775,000

Government: Republic divided since 1974 –
South: Republic; North: Turkish Federated State

Language: Greek, Turkish, English

Literacy: 95%

Religion: Christian 77% (mostly Orthodox), Muslim 18%

WCC member churches: Church of Cyprus

H i s t o r y

The island of Cyprus is nestled in the eastern Mediterranean Sea among Turkey to the north; Syria, Israel and Lebanon to the east; and Egypt to the south in the cradle of ancient cultures and civilizations.

Its strategic location has made it both vulnerable to powerful empires and a centre of trade through the ages. Since 1500 BC it was occupied in succession by the Hittites, the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Persians, the Hellenic descendants of Alexander the Great, and the Romans. Its population became Christian under Byzantine rule in 395 AD and was caught on the frontier between the warring empires of Byzantium and Islam before being conquered by the Ottoman Empire that ruled it for three centuries from 1571. It was administered by Britain after the decline of the Ottomans and became a British colony in 1925 before gaining independence in 1960.

For centuries the dominant populations were a majority community of Greek Orthodox Christians and minority community of Turkish-speaking Muslims who lived together in relative harmony, and the constitution of the new Republic of Cyprus provided for a sharing of power between them. Global tumult once again had its impact on this crossroads nation. Greek military officers overthrew President (Archbishop) Makarios in 1963 with the intention of uniting Cyprus with Greece, and in retaliation, Turkey invaded the northern part of the island in 1974, leaving it divided ever since, with a semblance of peace maintained by UN peacekeepers. At the time of division some 200,000 Greek Cypriots and 55,000 Turkish Cypriots were subsequently displaced and the communities, including many families, were separated. Negotiations between the two sides were undertaken under United Nations aus-

pices but were repeatedly frustrated. Direct talks between the two sides resumed in 1999 to attempt to reach a comprehensive settlement by referendum of all Cypriots. The decision of the European Union to proceed with accession negotiations with the Greek portion of the island accelerated the pace of the talks and gave new hopes for a final agreement.

A viable peace is urgent for the people of Cyprus together to work for solutions to pressing, shared problems. High on the agenda of concerns is the still-unanswered question about the fate of refugees and missing persons after years of fighting that followed the Turkish occupation of the north. Peace is also essential to strengthen the Cypriot economy that relies heavily on tourism in both the north and south. Environmental concerns are also pressing and critical, especially those having to do with water: pollution of water sources, a chronic lack of drinking water, and degradation of the island's coastal areas.

Despite all its problems, Cyprus has provided safe refuge over the years especially for people from the Middle East, whose lands were torn by civil and international wars and violence. Peace here is essential, therefore, not only for the Cypriot people but for all those round about who have found here a haven.

The northern part of Cyprus is almost entirely Muslim, while the south is mostly Eastern Orthodox. The apostles Paul and Barnabas founded the Church of Cyprus (Acts 11:19, 13:4), which has been an autocephalous Orthodox church called the Church of Cyprus since the fifth century. More than 90 per cent of Christians on the island belong to this church. The Armenian Apostolic Church was formed in the eleventh century and the Maronite Church has been present since the Crusades.

Greece

(Hellenic Republic)



Statistics

Population: 11 million

Government: Parliamentary republic since 1974

Language: Greek; also Turkish, Albanian, English

Literacy: 95%

Religion: Christian 95% (mostly Orthodox), Muslim 3%, Other 2%

WCC member churches: Church of Greece, Greek Evangelical Church

History

Greece is located in southeastern Europe in the southernmost part of the Balkan Peninsula, bounded by the Aegean Sea and Turkey to the east, the Mediterranean Sea to the south, the Ionian Sea to the west, and Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Bulgaria to the north. It also includes more than 150 islands.

Greece was a centre of ancient civilization. When Paul and Timothy brought Christianity to Greece (Acts 16:3-10) the region was part of the Roman Empire. The Byzantine and Ottoman Empires followed. The country regained its autonomy from the Ottoman Empire in 1829, when three "protecting powers", Britain, France

and Russia, imposed a foreign absolute monarchy and restricted Greece's autonomy. It was occupied during the Second World War by the Axis powers of Germany and Italy. Widely regarded in the West as the cradle of democracy, the foundations of liberalism and democracy in modern Greece were shaky. Military intervention and military coups, authoritarianism, and dependence on foreign patrons have marked its modern history. Greece joined NATO in 1952 early on in the Cold War. A military dictatorship, which in 1967 suspended many political liberties and forced the king to flee the country, lasted seven years. The 1974 democratic elections and a referendum created a parliamentary republic and abolished the monarchy. Since then, the country has stabilized politically, although it has been beset by challenging economic conditions and ongoing conflicts with neighbouring Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey. Greece's accession to the European Union in 1981 opened new perspectives and has contributed significantly to both its economy and political stability.

The Greek Orthodox Church is the established religion of Greece and has had a profound influence throughout the centuries. Monastic communities play an important part in the country's spiritual life, particularly the community at Mount Athos, which has existed since the ninth century. Non-Orthodox Christians and human rights groups complain about discriminatory measures against other religious denominations, including restrictions against proselytism, and the issuing of national identity cards that list religious affiliation, although the latter procedure has now been abolished. Recently there has been an easing of some restrictions and increasing freedom of religion. There are Roman Catholic churches and several small Protestant groups. The Jehovah's Witnesses in Greece are more numerous than any of the Protestant churches.

Turkey

(*Republic of Turkey*)



Statistics

Population: 68 million

Government: Multiparty republic since 1982

Language: Turkish; also Kurdish, Arabic and others

Literacy: 82% (male 91%, female 72%)

Religion: Muslim 97%, Christian 1% (mostly Orthodox)

WCC member churches: Ecumenical Patriarchate

History

Turkey spans both southeastern Europe and southwestern Asia. Its neighbours to the east and southeast include Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Iraq and Syria, while its neighbours to the west include Greece and Bulgaria. The Black Sea lies to the north, the Mediterranean Sea to the south, and the Aegean Sea to the southwest.

Turkey is sometimes known as the Second Holy Land, since much of Paul's missionary journeys took place in the territory and it contains the seven churches described in Revelation. The city of Istanbul was known as Constantinople in the Roman Empire and was a great centre of Christianity. The Ecumenical Patriarchate located at Istanbul dates back to 330, when the

Emperor Constantine moved his seat of empire from Rome to the small town of Byzantium, which became a great ecclesiastical centre, second only to Rome. After the great schism in the eleventh century, the patriarch became *primus inter pares* ("first among equals") among all the patriarchs of the Orthodox churches.

Muslim invasions and the establishment of the Ottoman Empire (at the heart of which was Turkey) greatly reduced the Christian presence. As the empire spread throughout the Middle East and parts of Europe, its massacre of Armenians and Chaldeans constituted one of the first genocides in history. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War, the Republic of Turkey was established in 1923. A process of modernization began, but religious and ethnic tensions led to violence and loss of life, and there were periods of repressive military rule. Turkey was a member of the allied forces in the war with Iraq in 1991, but stayed away from the US coalition in 2003. In the aftermath of the first Gulf war, millions of Kurdish refugees fled to Turkey to escape Iraqi forces.

Approximately half of Turkey's population is involved in agriculture. Water and air pollution are serious problems, as is the threat of oil spills from cargo ships. The northern part of the country is prone to earthquakes, and in 1999 two devastating earthquakes hit the region, killing 18,000 people, injuring thousands more, and leaving many people traumatized.

Turkey is the only predominantly Muslim country in the world that has no state religion; the country's constitution guarantees religious freedom, and tolerance is the rule. Dispute continues, however, over what part Islam should have in Turkish life.

INTERCESSIONS***Give thanks for:***

- o The Christian church and its continued presence in these lands associated with the early churches of the apostles.
- o Christians who have remained strong in their faith and continue to be a witness to the gospel.
- o The wonders of the Church of St Sophia, the chants on Mount Athos, the frescoes of early churches in Cyprus.
- o The blue sea and the mountains.
- o Baklava, stuffed vine leaves, moussaka, feta cheese.

Pray for:

- o Peace and the healing of entrenched hatred between Greeks and Turks.
- o Comfort for those who grieve and strength for those who work for justice.
- o Survivors of earthquakes and those who assist in bringing long-term relief.
- o Refugees who seek shelter and the possibility of new life.
- o Kurdish people, and all who face discrimination as minorities.
- o An end to the division of Cyprus.

PRAYERS

(1)

When you, O Lord, were baptized in the Jordan,
 the Holy Trinity was made manifest.
 For the voice of the Father bore witness unto you,
 calling you the beloved Son,
 and the Spirit in the form of a dove
 confirmed your word as sure and steadfast.
 O Christ, our God who has appeared and enlightened the world, glory be to you.

(2)

Great are you, O Lord,
 and wondrous are your works,
 and no word will suffice to sing your wonders.
 For you by your will
 have out of nothingness brought all things into being
 and by your power sustain all creation,
 and by your providence direct the world.

You from the four elements have formed creation
and have crowned the cycle of the year with the four seasons.
All the spiritual powers tremble before you;
the sun praises you; the moon glorifies you;
the stars in their courses meet with you;
the light hearkens unto you;
the depths shudder at your presence;
the springs of water serve you.
You have stretched out the heavens as a curtain;
you have founded the earth upon the waters;
you have bounded the sea with sand;
you have poured forth the air for breathing;
the angelic powers minister unto you.
The cherubim and seraphim,
as they stand and fly around you,
veil themselves for fear of your unapproachable glory.
For you, being boundless and beginningless and unutterable,
came down on earth,
taking the form of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
For you, O Master, through the tenderness of your mercy,
could not endure the human race tormented by the devil,
but you came and saved us.
We confess your grace;
we proclaim your beneficence;
we do not hide your mercy.
You have set free our mortal nature.
All creation sings praises to you
who have revealed yourself.
For you, our God, have appeared upon earth
and have dwelt among us.
You have sanctified the Jordan streams.

(3)

Creation is now known to be free,
And they who were once in darkness are now made sons and daughters of light.
Alone, the prince of darkness groans.
Let the inheritance of nations that was previously in misery now bless in
eagerness the author of this change.

(4)

O Lord, the nurse of all, let us not die of starvation because of our greediness and contempt for our needy brothers and sisters.

Therefore, fountain of goodness, send upon the earth peaceful and seasonable rains to bring forth fruit for our nourishment.

Ocean of compassion, cease the drought and the barrenness which distress and afflict us.

Mingle together with the warmth of the sun the dew of your kindness on us and your beasts.

Do not neglect us because we neglect your commandments, nor turn your face away from us and shut your ears against us because we disobey your ordinances.

For you are a God of mercy, compassion and love to humankind,

And to you, the Father who is without beginning, we send glory, together with your only-begotten Son and your all-holy, good and life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages.

(5)

Christ our God,

Sun of righteousness,

by your divine touch you gave light to the eyes of the blind man who had been deprived of light since birth.

Enlighten also the eyes of our souls,

and make us sons and daughters of light so that we cry out to you in faith: great and beyond words is your compassion towards us!

Loving Lord, glory to you.

(6)

Eternal Son and Word of God, spring of healings,

you found the Samaritan woman by Jacob's well and asked her for water.

What a wonder!

He who is enthroned upon the cherubim speaks with a sinful woman.

He who has set the earth upon the waters asks for water.

He who pours forth fountains of waters asks her who was caught in the snares of the adversary for water that he may draw her to him.

He who is merciful seeks to give living water to her who is burning with sins.

Therefore let us praise him.

Loving Lord, glory to you!

(7)

O you, beyond all

(is this not the only permissible praise with which to address you?),

how can the word sing praise to you,

since no word can express you?

How can the mind perceive you,

since no mind can perceive you?

You are the only unutterable,

For all that is uttered comes from you.

You are the only unknowable,

for all that is conceived comes from you.

All beings – those who are endowed with speech

and those who are deprived of word –

proclaim you.

To you is raised a silent hymn

by all those who perceive your complexity.

For you alone everything exists,

to you all tend in a single block.

You are the end of all things.

You are one, you are all, and you are none.

You are not one, and you are not all.

O you who have all the names, how shall I name you?

You the only unnameable.

What celestial mind can penetrate your veil

which is far beyond even the clouds?

(8)

Have mercy on me, O Lord.

Strengthen my soul;

Govern the rest of my life towards your will,

As your compassion and love for humankind know best.

(9)

Our spirit seeks you in the early dawn, O God,

for your commandments are light.

Teach us, O Master, your righteousness

and make us worthy to follow your commandments with all our strength.

Take away from our hearts every darkness.

Grant to us the Sun of Righteousness

and protect our lives from any bad influence
with the seal of your most Holy Spirit.
Direct our steps to the way of peace
and grant to us that this present morning may be peaceful
so that we may send up the morning hymns
to you the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
the only God,
who is more than without beginning
and Creator of all.

(10)

O Jesus, Word with infinite names,
show me what and how
I should ask from you in my requests.
O Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me.

(11)

Shine within our hearts, loving Master,
the pure light of your divine knowledge
and open the eyes of our minds
that we may comprehend the message of your gospel.
Instil in us, also, reverence for your blessed commandments,
so that having conquered sinful desires,
we may pursue a spiritual life,
thinking and doing all these things that are pleasing to you.
For you, Christ our God, are the light of our souls and bodies,
and to you we give glory,
together with your Father, who is without beginning,
and your all-holy Spirit, good and life-giving Spirit,
now and forever and to the ages of ages.

(12)

Lover of humankind,
keep unharmed the environment that clothes the earth,
through which, by your will,
we who inhabit the earth live and move and have our being,
that we, your unworthy suppliants,
may be delivered from destruction and ruin.

Verse: For with the Lord there is mercy, and with him abundant redemption, and he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities. (Psalm 130:7)

Fence round the whole creation, Christ Saviour,
with the mighty strength of your love for humankind,
and deliver the earth we inhabit
from the corruption which threatens it;
for we, your servants, have set our hopes on you.

Verse: Praise the Lord all nations! Extol him all peoples. (Psalm 117:1)

Put an end, O Saviour, to the evil designs
which are being devised against us by senseless intent,
and turn aside from the earth
every destructive action of the works of human hands
which contrive corruption leading to perdition.

Verse: For great is God's mercy to us, and the truth of the Lord endures for ever. (Psalm 117:2)

(13)

PRAYER FOR GOOD FRIDAY

Jesus, each of us is both the thief who blasphemes
and the one who believes.

I have faith, Lord; help my lack of faith.

I am nailed to death, there is nothing I can do but cry out:
"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus, I know nothing,

I understand nothing in this horrific world.

But you, you come to me with open arms, with open heart,
and your presence alone is my paradise.

Remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Glory and praise to you.

You welcome not the healthy but the sick.

Your unexpected friend is a criminal cut off by human justice.

Already you are going down to hell and setting free those who cry out to you:

Remember us, Lord, when you come into your kingdom.



North Africa: Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Western Sahara, Tunisia

But even now you have the Lord's sayings, as examples taking away from you all excuse. For what is it you say? "I shall be in need."

But the Lord calls the needy "happy".

"I shall have no food." But "think not", says He, "about food"; and as an example of clothing we have the lilies.

"My work was my subsistence."

Nay, but "all things are to be sold, and divided to the needy."

"But provision must be made for children and posterity."

"None, putting his hand on the plough, and looking back, is fit" for work.

"But I was under contract."

"None can serve two lords."

If you wish to be the Lord's disciple, it is necessary you "take your cross, and follow the Lord."

James and John, called by the Lord, do leave quite behind both father and ship;

while Matthew is roused up from the toll-booth;

while even burying a father was too tardy a business for faith.

None of them whom the Lord chose to Him said, "I have no means to live."

Tertullian

North Africa

History

Once one of the most significant areas of Christianity in the Roman Empire, North Africa is now almost entirely Muslim, even though Christianity persisted until the sixth century. Over the centuries the region's indigenous

nomadic Berber peoples were invaded and settled by Phoenicians, Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs and Europeans, many of whom integrated the local population into their way of life along the Mediterranean coastal plain. However, the indigenous Berbers remained in the mountains and deserts as pastoralists, carrying out frequent raids on the invaders from their mountain redoubts. During the thirteenth century Christian work in the region led to martyrdom among Franciscans and White Fathers, who returned in the nineteenth century and attempted to carry on missionary work. Protestants provide Bible correspondence courses and broadcast radio programmes from outside the region.

Algeria

(People's Democratic Republic of Algeria)



Statistics

Population: 32 million

Government: Multiparty republic since 1991

Language: Arabic, Berber, French

Literacy: 61% (men 73%, women 49%)

Religion: Muslim 97%, Other 3%, Christians less than 1%

WCC member churches: Protestant Church of Algeria

History

Algeria is a huge country (the second largest in Africa after Sudan), bordered in the north by the Mediterranean Sea. To the west is Morocco, to the east are Tunisia and Libya, and to the south is Niger. Despite its active maritime coastline, about 80 per cent of Algeria is desert; the Sahara covers most of its southern regions.

It is believed that the Al Hajjar region of Algeria was initially inhabited as early as 10,000 years ago. The first Algerian kingdom was established by the Berbers between the third and second centuries BC, and eventually flourished under Roman rule. With the decline of the Roman Empire in the third century AD, Arab influence took hold and Islam was quickly embraced. While key districts of Algeria remained influential in the Islamic community for many years, the eventual demise of the Almohad Empire led to a general lack of leadership in government and to a rise in piracy along Algeria's Mediterranean coast. European and western resistance to this piracy led to Christian infiltration and occupation of the ports, and ultimately to French occupation of Algiers from 1830 to 1962.

From the beginning of their colonial rule, the French regarded the Muslim Berbers in Algeria as an inferior class. Government restrictions were imposed and citizenship for Muslims was revoked. Over time a widening gulf developed between the French colonials and Algerian nationalists, until in 1939 a formal, militant, anti-French party was established. French leaders attempted to repair the broken relationship between France and Algiers, but the damage had already been done, especially the rigged (by France) 1948 elections to reverse the sweeping victory of a Muslim party in 1947. Following 12 years of bitter civil war, native Algerians regained independence from France in 1962. The National Liberation Front (FLN) has dominated politics ever since, although a surprising first-round electoral success for the fundamentalist Islamic National Front (FIS) in December 1991 spurred the army to intervene to prevent the Islamists from forming a government.

Algeria has since struggled through continuous low-level civil conflict between Islamic activists and the secular state apparatus. This terrorism has had a profound impact on the Algerian population, of whom nearly 100,000 were killed before the FIS's armed wing was disbanded in January 2000. While progress towards peace is slowly being made, it continues to be Algeria's greatest challenge and hindrance to growth. In April 2004 new elections were held, but there is continuing Berber unrest, large-scale unemployment, housing shortages and a need to diversify Algeria's petroleum-based economy.

Despite 130 years of French rule, few native Algerians became Christians. After 1962 there was a mass exodus of Europeans from Algeria, leaving it overwhelmingly Muslim, with a negligible Christian influence. While freedom of worship exists in Algeria, evangelism and proselytism are prohibited. After 1962 the Roman Catholic Church redirected its work, and is now committed to providing services and education to all segments of the Algerian population. Because of this, working relations between Muslims and Christians are today stronger than they once were.

Libya

(Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)



Statistics

Population: 5.6 million

Government: Nationalist military rule

Language: Arabic

Literacy: 76% (men 87%, women 63%)

Religion: Muslim 96%, Christian 3% (mostly Orthodox), Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Libya borders the Mediterranean Sea in North Africa, with Chad and Niger to the south, Egypt and Sudan to the east, and Algeria and Tunisia to the west. Ninety per cent of the country's population lives on a narrow Mediterranean coastal strip, the remainder of the country being a vast arid desert.

The region now known as Libya was first colonized by the Phoenicians, followed by the Carthaginians until the city of Carthage fell to Rome in 106 BC, after which it continued to prosper until the fall of the Roman Empire. An Arab invasion in 643 introduced Islam to Libya and it remains the official state religion to this day. Libya was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in the mid-sixteenth century, and by the Italians in the early 1900s as the Ottoman Empire collapsed. By 1943 the country was fully under Italian control. The subsequent years were devastating for native Libyans, as half the indigenous population were either exiled or executed. Libya continues to deal with the ramifications of landmines that were placed throughout the country during the first half of the twentieth century.

Libya became independent in 1949, and in 1951 was officially named the United Kingdom of Libya, under the rule of its first king, Idris I. Libya enjoyed great prosperity as a result of the oil boom in the 1960s. During the latter part of that decade, anti-western sentiments began to grow, culminating in a military coup by Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi. While initially lauded for his commitment to a more equitable distribution of wealth within his own country and to unity among Arab nations, Qaddafi has in recent years been at the

centre of controversy for allegedly supporting international terrorism. Faced with embargoes and sanctions imposed by the international community, Libya has recently begun to renew ties with formerly hostile countries. Libya is ruled by "direct democracy" and benefits greatly from high oil production and its small population.

Despite the Italian influence during the first half of the twentieth century, today there are very few Christians in Libya, except foreigners. The Libyan state protects freedom of worship, and Libya has been more receptive to foreign missionaries that provide services to its people.

M o r o c c o

(*Kingdom of Morocco*)



S t a t i s t i c s

Population: 32 million

Government: Constitutional monarchy since 1956

Language: Arabic, Berber, French

Literacy: 43% (men 56%, women 31%)

Religion: Muslim 98%, Christian 1%

WCC member churches: None

H i s t o r y

Located on the Mediterranean Sea near the Straits of Gibraltar, Morocco is the westernmost

country in North Africa. Its neighbours are Algeria to the east and Mauritania to the south. Spain lies across the Straits of Gibraltar. Much of the country is mountainous, while the southeastern part is covered by the Sahara Desert.

The original inhabitants of Morocco are the Berbers, who have lived there for more than 3,000 years. Today, approximately three-quarters of the citizens of Morocco are ethnically Berber. Islam came to the country at the end of the seventh century.

Over the centuries, Morocco has often been influenced by neighbouring Europe, particularly France and Spain. During the nineteenth century the French and Spanish fought for control of Morocco. In 1904 they partitioned the country into French and Spanish areas, with France controlling most of today's kingdom, and Spain in control of the southwest portion, now known as Western Sahara. During the Second World War Morocco was occupied by the US to replace administration from Vichy, after which it returned to French rule. The country's long struggle for independence from France ended in 1956. In 1962 King Hassan II modified the absolute monarchy with the establishment of a constitution granting limited powers to parliament. In the 1970s Morocco exercised its long-held sovereignty over Western Sahara and a low-level war has continued ever since.

More than half the population of Morocco is illiterate, and approximately 20 per cent live in dire poverty. Other problems include huge international debt and lack of potable water, exacerbated by periodic drought.

Islam is the state religion. Roman Catholicism came with the French and Spanish colonizers, and it continues to be practised by their descendants. The largest Protestant denomination in Morocco is the Evangelical Church of Morocco, which is related to the Reformed Church of France.

Western Sahara

Statistics

Population: 267,000

Government: Legal status and sovereignty unresolved

Language: Arab, Berber, Spanish

Literacy: Figures unavailable

Religion: Muslim

WCC member churches: None

History

This disputed territory is surrounded by Mauritania and Morocco and faces the northern Atlantic Ocean. In 1976 Morocco annexed the northern two-thirds of former Spanish Morocco, and the rest of the territory in 1979, following Mauritania's withdrawal. A guerrilla war with the Polisario People's Liberation Front contesting Morocco's sovereignty ended in a 1991 UN-brokered ceasefire, but a UN-organized referendum on final status has been repeatedly postponed.

Literacy: 66% (men 78%, women 54%)

Religion: Muslim 99%, Christian 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Tunisia borders the Mediterranean Sea between Algeria to the west and Libya to the south. Throughout the centuries it has been part of successive empires, beginning with the Phoenicians, then followed by the Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs and Ottomans. From the sixteenth to the late nineteenth century it was part of the Ottoman Empire. In 1881 the country became a French protectorate, gaining independence from France in 1956. The following year Tunisia became a republic and elected Habib Bourguiba as president. Over the next 30 years Bourguiba worked to reform the country, prioritizing the emancipation of women, the abolition of polygamy and compulsory free education. Drought and limited freshwater resources are problems in Tunisia, as are desertification and deforestation.

Christianity came to Tunisia near the end of the first century, and two early Christian leaders, Tertullian and Cyprian, were from Tunisia. Since the seventh century, however, the country has been predominantly Muslim. Today, Islam is the state religion, professed by over 99 per cent of the population. Even so, Muslim fundamentalists have sometimes been violently opposed by the government. Most Christians in the country are Roman Catholic expatriates.

Tunisia

(Republic of Tunisia)



Statistics

Population: 9.9 million

Government: Multiparty republic since 1956

Language: Arabic, French

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The testimony of St Augustine and other theologians of the early church.
- o The harsh beauty of the desert.
- o The tiny minority of Christians who live faithful lives of love and witness.

Pray for:

- o An end to civil unrest and terrorism in Algeria.
- o An openness that recognizes and values differences, especially among religious faiths.
- o Children and youth, who comprise more than half the population of these countries.
- o Those who must live with the presence and impact of landmines, particularly in Libya.
- o Those who risk their lives to cross the sea for entry into Europe.

PRAYERS

(1)

INVOCATION

You, I invoke, O God, the Truth,

**in whom and from whom and through whom all things are true
which anywhere are true.**

God, the Wisdom,

**in whom and from whom and through whom all things are wise
which anywhere are wise.**

God, the true and crowning Life,

**in whom and from whom and through whom all things live
which truly and supremely live.**

God, the Blessedness,

**in whom and from whom and through whom all things are blessed
which anywhere are blessed.**

God, the Good and Fair,

**in whom and from whom and through whom all things are good and fair
which anywhere are good and fair.**

God, the intelligible Light,

**in whom and from whom and through whom all things intelligibly shine
which anywhere intelligibly shine.**

God, from whom to go forth is to die,
to whom to return is to revive;
in whom to have our dwelling is to live.
 God, whom no one loses, unless deceived;
whom no one seeks, unless stirred up,
whom no one finds, unless made pure.
 God, whom to forsake is one thing with perishing;
towards whom to tend is one thing with loving;
whom to see is one thing with having.
 God, towards whom faith rouses us,
hope lifts us up,
with whom love joins us.
 God, through whom we overcome the enemy, you we entreat.
 God, through whose gift it is that we do not perish utterly,
God, by whom we distinguish good from ill,
God, by whom we flee evil and follow good.
 God, through whom we learn those things to be another's which before we
 accounted ours,
 and those things to be ours which we used to account as belonging to another,
God, through whom it is that diminished possessions leave ourselves complete,
 God, through whom our better good is not subject to a worse,
God, through whom death is swallowed up in victory,
 God, who turns us to yourself,
God, who makes us worthy to be heard,
 God, who leads us into all truth,
God, who leads us to the door of life,
 God, who causes it to be opened to them that knock,
God, who gives us the bread of life,
 God, through whom we thirst for the draught, which being drunk we never
 thirst,
God, who cleanses us and prepares us for divine rewards,
come, O God to us.

Whatever has been said by me, you the only God,
come to my help,
 the one true and eternal substance,
 where there is no discord, no confusion, no shifting, no indigence, no death,
 where is supreme concord, supreme evidence,
 supreme steadfastness, supreme fullness, and life supreme,

where nothing is lacking, nothing redundant,
where Begetter and Begotten are one.

God, above whom is nothing,
beyond whom is nothing,
without whom is nothing,

**God, under whom is the whole,
in whom is the whole,
with whom is the whole.**

You have made all your people after your own image and likeness,
which they discover when they come to know themselves.

Hear me, hear me, graciously hear me,

my God, my Lord, my King, my Father, my Cause, my Hope, my Wealth,
my Honour, my House, my Country, my Health, my Light, my Life.

Hear, hear, hear me graciously,

in that way, all your own, which though known to few
is, to those few, known well.

Direct, I pray, and command whatever you will,
but heal and open my ears that I may hear your utterances.

Heal and open my eyes that I may behold the meaning of your commands.

Instruct me, show me, give me my provision for the way.

If it is by faith that those find you who take refuge with you,

then grant faith;

if by virtue,

virtue;

if by knowledge,

knowledge.

**Augment in me faith, hope, and charity, your goodness,
utterly unique and most to be admired!**

(2)

With frail words, we give you thanks, O God,
for all the work accomplished in our country [Algeria]
by your Spirit in the name of your Son.

Women, men, children, large and small, are touched,
day after day, by your powerful word.

They commit themselves to spread the Gospel.

You sent other brothers and sisters

from the four corners of the world

to shoulder this task, which for many reasons

becomes more and more difficult.

Lord, we pray that you help our sisters and brothers in Algeria to
become open to a spirit of unity,

to walk together with the same heart, as one humanity,

to receive the land which was promised to them.

We pray that you accompany the leaders of the different churches
so that they find the compromises necessary

to advance the transmission of the Gospel

to a land which in the past sheltered a man of faith,

whose name is engraved in the history of the church,

Saint Augustine.

We place in your hands, O God, those coming from afar

to edify your church and to evangelize this vast country

which is in such need of divine help.

God, we pray that you lead the churches to work together

respecting each other's differences and sensibilities

to show the love of Jesus Christ, your Son.

(3)

DISMISSAL

All shall be Amen and Alleluia.

We shall rest and we shall see.

We shall see and we shall know.

We shall know and we shall love.

We shall love and we shall praise.

Behold our end which is no end.

(4)

My Father, I abandon myself to you.

Do with me as you will.

Whatever you may do with me, I thank you.

I am prepared for anything, I accept everything.

Provided your will is fulfilled in me and in all creatures

I ask for nothing more, my God.

I place my soul in your hands.

I give it to you, my God,

with all the love of my heart

because I love you.

And for me it is a necessity of love,
this gift of myself,
this placing of myself in your hands
without reserve
in boundless confidence
because you are my Father.

(5)

For all the women and men whom the Lord has called
throughout all the centuries in our country
we give you thanks, Lord Jesus,
thanks for your faithfulness,
and for your marvellous plan for Algeria.
We thank you Lord, for all those who continue to serve you today.
Guard them, bless them,
give them that wisdom which you gave to Solomon.
Grant them that strength to bear adversity,
and to endure the loneliness which can meet them each day.
Hold them through the difficult times
so they can finish the race with honour
because of your presence and your grace.

In the Old Testament we read, "Without vision the people perish."
Lord, bring education and spiritual formation to the leaders of the churches
in Algeria, so that they can be faithful to you,
and faithfully preach and teach your word
to your faithful people.

We pray that our leaders be people who belong to you,
searching after justice, a spiritual life, faith, love, patience,
gentleness and the unity of your people.

The doors that you open, Lord, no one can close.
We are convinced that you are opening the door of Algeria
for the proclamation of your word
and we believe that you call us
and lead us on our way.
Thank you.

(6)

BIDDING PRAYER

Pray for the unity of Christians in Algeria
who are often divided by material questions
and sometimes by doctrinal ones.

Silence

Pray for all those missionaries coming to Algeria
from different countries,
with different doctrines,
may they discern the call of God
and respect the spirit of the communities they serve.

Silence

Pray for all those thirsting in their religious quest
that they might find the one, who can give them living water
and follow him.

Silence

(7)

For behold, you were within me, and I outside;
and I sought you outside
and in my ugliness
fell upon those lovely things that you have made.
You were with me and I was not with you...
You called and cried to me and broke upon my deafness;
and you sent forth your light and shone upon me,
and chased away my blindness;
you breathed fragrance upon me,
and I drew in my breath and did not pant for you;
you touched me, and I have burned for your peace.



Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden

Forgiveness is the answer to the child's dream of a miracle by which what is broken is made whole again, what is soiled is again made clean. The dream explains why we need to be forgiven, and why we must forgive. In the presence of God, nothing stands between him and us – we are forgiven. But we cannot feel his presence if anything is allowed to stand between ourselves and others.

Dag Hammarskjöld

History

The Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland, make up the Nordic countries. They have many historical, cultural and confessional ties. Although foreign policies differ, the Nordic people work to promote worldwide justice and peace. In all five countries there is a strong commitment to disarmament.

With virtually full literacy and universal medical care, the Scandinavian people have a long life expectancy and high standards of living. Basic human rights are guaranteed and protected. There are no restrictions on freedom of speech or expression, although in recent years anti-immigrant tension has escalated, and the increasing number of Middle Eastern and Asian refugees entering these countries has become a heated political issue. The publication of cartoons in Danish and other European newspapers, depicting the prophet Mohammed, led in 2006 to demonstrations throughout the Islamic world and tested inter-religious relations everywhere.

Christianity came to Norway, Denmark and Sweden from the British Isles and Germany. The best known of the apostles to Scandinavia was Ansgar, later archbishop of Hamburg and Bremen, and Henrik of England. Henrik and the Swedish king also carried the gospel into Finland as Orthodox Christianity was extending from Russia. Western tradition prevailed except in Karelia, the easternmost province of Finland. Henrik, eventually martyred, became the patron saint of Finland. Women played a major role in spreading the faith, especially to Iceland. By the twelfth century Christianity had spread through all these countries.

After the Reformation reached northern Europe, formerly Catholic dioceses quietly became Lutheran. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, devastating wars between Sweden and Russia brought severe persecution to the Orthodox in Karelia. During the twentieth century the Nordic churches were influential in the development of ecumenism, particularly in the work of Archbishop Nathan Söderblom of Uppsala in the life and work movement. The strongly predominant tradition since the sixteenth century has been Lutheran, with about 90 per cent of the Scandinavian population still claiming membership, although actual church participation is far less. Early eighteenth century Pietism, an individually oriented Lutheran revival movement, influenced the development of the Lutheran confirmation and church schools. In addition, Orthodox Christianity, an extension of the Orthodox Church in Russia, has grown considerably in the region since the Second World War.

The Porvoo Agreement of 1993 established a relationship of full communion between the Anglican churches of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland and the Lutheran churches of Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Finland, Estonia and Lithuania.

There is a diverse spiritual quest evident in the Nordic countries today. For many Christians, the way of true faith lies in personal piety and devotion; for others, active involvement in the struggles and needs of the global community meet their spiritual needs. There are new fora emerging to

provide dialogue on theological issues. While there is no national ecumenical council of churches in Norway (in contrast to Sweden, Finland and Denmark), the Church of Norway is a member of both the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches. A more inclusive ecumenical collaboration exists at the parish level. The Centre for Ecumenical Theology is an interdenominational research institute where theologians work together to promote spiritual and social ecumenism in Norway. In Denmark, the Institute of Ecumenical Theology and Missiology has significant library resources at the University of Copenhagen.

Judaism is a strong minority presence in the region. During the Second World War Denmark was the only occupied country to save all its Jews from extermination, by smuggling most of them out of the country. Norse pagan religion has also been reintroduced to Iceland. Recent immigrant workers and refugees have brought Islam and other faiths. Under the continuing influence of secularism and disenchantment with the institutional church, Christian affiliation is expected to continue to decline during the early twenty-first century.

Denmark

(Kingdom of Denmark)



Statistics

Population: 5.3 million

Government: Constitutional monarchy

Language: Danish; also German, Swedish, English, Norwegian, Turkish, Faroese and others

Literacy: 100%

Religion: Christian 91% (mostly Protestant), Muslim 1%, Jewish and others 8%

WCC member churches: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, Baptist Union of Denmark

History

Located between the North Sea and the Baltic Sea on the Jutland Peninsula, Denmark is the smallest of the five Nordic countries. It shares a border with Germany to the south, and Sweden lies to the east across an arm of the Baltic Sea. Denmark is low lying and ideal for agriculture, traditionally undertaken on small farms. Cooperative associations are another important part of agriculture in Denmark.

Greenland, the largest non-continental island in the world, has been a self-governing part of Denmark since 1979. Most of Greenland lies above the Arctic Circle; its land and ice mass is the main influence on weather patterns in the Atlantic. Its 56,000 people (called Greenlanders) are part Inuit and part white, and still largely live off the land. Denmark retains control over Greenland's foreign policy.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark, the country's state church, is also the state church of Greenland. While secularization is widespread in Denmark, the bonds between church and culture are close, even though the number of children baptized has fallen drastically, especially in the cities. Indigenous persons from Greenland share in church leadership.

Finland

(Republic of Finland)

Statistics

Population: 5.2 million

Government: Parliamentary republic since 1917

Language: Finnish and Swedish; also Russian, Lapp, Romany and others

Literacy: 100%

Religion: Christian 93% (mostly Protestant and some Orthodox), Muslim and others 7%

WCC member churches: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, Orthodox Church of Finland



History

Finland borders the Baltic Sea. Russia lies to the east and Sweden to the west, with a land border at the northern parts of each country. Norway borders Finland on the north. The country is heavily forested and with extensive marshland, numerous rivers and thousands of lakes.

Finland's history has been a struggle to establish independence from powerful neighbours: Sweden, which ruled the country from the 1550s until 1809, and Russia, which had control from 1809 until 1917. During the Second World War Finland successfully defended its independence and resisted invasion by the Soviet Union, although there was some loss of territory. In the last fifty years the country has made a remarkable transformation from a farm-forest economy to a diversified modern industrial economy.

Iceland

(Republic of Iceland)

Statistics

Population: 293,000

Government: Parliamentary republic since 1944

Language: Icelandic, Danish, Norwegian, English

Literacy: 100%

Religion: Christian 97% (mostly Protestant), Spiritist and others 3%

WCC member churches: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland



History

Iceland, the westernmost country of Europe, is an island in the North Atlantic just below the Arctic Circle. The population is descended from the Scandinavian Vikings and Celtic immigrants, and is quite homogeneous, with very insular institutions and traditions. Iceland has the world's oldest functioning legislative assembly, founded in 930. Independent for over 300 years, the country was subsequently ruled by Denmark and Norway until it was granted limited home rule in 1874 and full independence in 1944. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland is the state church.

Norway

(Kingdom of Norway)

Statistics

Population: 4.5 million

Government: Constitutional monarchy

Language: Norwegian; also Nynorsk, Lapp, Swedish, Finnish, English, Danish, German

Literacy: 100%

Religion: Christian 94% (mostly Protestant), Buddhist 2%, Muslim 1%, new religionists and others 3%

WCC member churches: Church of Norway



History

Norway, the northernmost country in Europe, has been a constitutional monarchy since 900 and embraced Christianity in 994, when the Norwegian-born Viking, King Olav Tryggvason, knelt at a baptismal font in London. Throughout much of its history Norway was aligned with Denmark and Sweden. In 1905 it declared its independence from Sweden. Although nominally neutral during the Second World War, the country was invaded by the Nazis and occupied for five years. The government of Norway has been instrumental in peace negotiations from the former Yugoslavia to central Africa to Sri Lanka. The best-known of Norway's effort is the Oslo accords for peace in Israel and Palestine. The Church of Norway is the state church. Traditionally, because of its scattered population, church attendance has never been widespread, but membership and belief are strong.

Sweden

(Kingdom of Sweden)

Statistics

Population: 8.9 million

Government: Constitutional monarchy

Language: Swedish; also Finnish, Sami, German, Norwegian, Lapp and others

Literacy: 100%

Religion: Christian 86% (mostly Protestant), Muslim 2%, Jewish and others 12%

WCC member churches: Church of Sweden, Mission Covenant Church of Sweden

History

Sweden is the largest of the Scandinavian countries, with Denmark to the south, Finland to the east and Norway to the west. It is a flat tableland with forests and many lakes.

As the cradle of social democratic ideology, Sweden, one of the Europe's major military powers in the seventeenth century, has not participated in a war for more than 200 years. It has an advanced political and economic system geared to meeting all the social needs of its people. However, an economic recession during the 1990s caused Sweden to scale back on some services, privatize others and restructure its tax sys-

tem. The Church of Sweden ceased to be the state church on 1 January 2000.



INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Snow and skiing, woods and mountains, lakes and fiords.
- o The white nights of summer and the bare winter light.
- o The rich and varied heritage of the churches, large and small, in these Nordic countries.
- o Ecumenical and spiritual renewal movements that bring new intensity and depth to the Christian faith.
- o A witness for justice and peace that may become a strong example to the rest of the world.
- o The example of giving towards the development of other peoples.

Pray for:

- o Efforts to overcome violence, racial/ethnic discrimination, and the abuse of children and women.
- o Refugees and migrants who seek a better life in these countries.
- o Those churches trying to find new vitality, so they can be faithful witnesses to the Gospel.

PRAYERS

(1)

Lord, be before us to guide us,
 be behind us to push us,
 be beneath us to carry us,
 be above us to bless us,
 be around us to protect us,
 be in us so that in body and soul
 we serve you for the glory of your Name.

(2)

Merciful God,
 Come to the aid of people who no longer know you,
 who ignore your precepts
 and are tempted by a system of frenetic consumption.
 In a time of great change, raise up men, women and children
 who are guided by you, O Lord Jesus.
 Give to those who know you the gifts which encourage them
 to convey their hope and their faith.

(3)

Lord, you were rejected by your own people,
 who should have been proud of you and supportive.
 Instead, they sneered, "Is not this Joseph's son?"

When those around you turned their backs,
 threatened somehow by the very fact that you came from their midst,
 did you know the loneliness, the paralysis we feel –
 those of us from small nations, small communities,
 where one is not judged by ability and experience,
 but by family history and preconceived ideas?

Rejection goes deep, and we end up lost and helpless.
 However, you walked away through the middle of the crowd,
 hurt,
 but with dignity.

Give us strength when we are rejected
 to see you clearly in our company,
 walking with us in the face of the crowd,
 knowing our hurt,
 giving us dignity.

When powerful nations are not even aware that they have rejected those of us
 from smaller countries,

when they do not see their indifference to our requests,
 or their lack of interest in our contributions,
 when they do not pay attention to our struggle to be taken seriously,
 our pain at being treated as nobodies,
 you know how we feel.

You know the desperate sighs of those of us who have been classed unacceptable
 merely because the colour of our skin, our sexual orientation
 or our limited physical abilities
 do not meet the standards set by the powerful.

Walk with us, Lord, against the crowd,
 showing your hurt,
 granting self-respect against the taunts,
 dignifying us by your presence
 until the strong can no longer hide from what they do.

Then lift us high,
 different but also beautiful,
 small, maybe unusual,
 but part of your creation and precious to you.

Lift us high, belonging to one another even if we are not many.

Then do not let us forget what we endured,
 those of us from small nations or discarded groups,
 so that we never become abusers or violators of any part of your creation,
 nor allow the ultimate rejection you faced on Golgotha to be repeated.

(4)

Father, you see all the enmity which grows
 because we behave wrongly and unforgivingly.
 We create distances where we should create closeness.
 We hide behind ideologies and doctrines instead of coming closer to one another.
 Thank you for giving us reconciliation
 through your Son, Jesus Christ.
 Thank you for forgiving all those who sin.
 Let your church break through all differences and live reconciliation.
 Help us to take the first step.

(5)

We share a common earth.
 We share the common joy of living,
 of the grieving and of the pain.
 We share the wonder of the sowing
 and the harvest of our common soil.

We share the common bread in our homes.
 We share the feast of the wine.
 We share our common faith in Christ, our Saviour.
 But we still cannot share the common table in our churches.
 Why, God, why?
 God of unity, let the table of reconciliation
 become the true table of unity for the sake of your kingdom.

(6)

O God, my God,
 it is so dark today, so cold a morning light.
 It is winter in my icy land.
 My soul feels lonely and isolated.

Grant me grace to see your light,
 to sense its warming rays.
 Your light, O God, is always here.
 Inspire me today and let me sense that you are always near.

(7)

From the very beginning
 you made us understand
 that building up God's kingdom
 is not a one-man show.
 Voicing the song of liberation
 is no solo performance.

You went and called.
 You walked near and took the hand.
 You needed a team
 and you got one.

Let me remember
 this legacy
 when I am called into your team.

Let me leave the closed rooms and
 walk to the sea shore,
 find new colleagues,
 not wait for them to find me.

Let me trust ordinary people,
 make them participate,
 needed and wanted
 in the team of God's kingdom.
 Let me see
 the others in your way,
 empowering, forgiving, confiding way.
 Your first team members
 misunderstood, misbehaved, often missed
 the whole point,
 and yet they had their space
 in the core group of God's kingdom.

Let me remember
 your compassion, energy and
 freedom from any prejudice
 when you call me along my own sea shore
 or when you send me
 to look for new co-workers...



Ireland; United Kingdom: Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales

Ireland

(Republic of Ireland)

Our congregations miss the zest of the early Christian church because we have forgotten the glorious emancipation of our true humanity that was the Incarnation. Jesus the carpenter, the friend of shepherds and fishermen, showed us God by being human – and in three days set at naught the complex temple that was forty years in building. He made risen humanity his temple. We must be human.

George MacLeod



Statistics

Population: 3.9 million

Government: Unitary multiparty republic

Language: Irish and English

Literacy: 100%

Religion: Christian 97% (mostly Roman Catholic), Muslim and others 1%

WCC member churches: Church of Ireland, Methodist Church in Ireland

History

The Republic of Ireland comprises 85 per cent of the island of Ireland, which lies in the Atlantic Ocean to the west of the United Kingdom. The northern part of the island is part of the United Kingdom. Recently, the Republic – known as Eire in the Irish (Gaelic) language – has been experiencing a period of considerable confidence. After years of emigration, people are now returning to Ireland. The economy has been booming, enough to give the nation the epithet of “Celtic tiger”. The changes have not, of course, been without problems. The movement of people away from rural areas to the cities continues, and Dublin, the capital city, is increasingly dominant. Rural culture is particularly important to the survival of the remaining communities where Irish is spoken as the first language; the language continues to be under threat.

Ireland was settled by Celtic tribes between 600 and 150 BC. Christianity arrived in about AD 200. During the Roman occupation the faith spread unevenly for the next 500 years. Its acceptance owed much to the missionary work of Celtic and Roman saints, whose contribution to Christian spirituality continues to be important.

English invasions began in the twelfth century and set off more than seven centuries of Anglo-Irish struggle, marked by fierce rebellions and harsh repression. The failed 1916 Easter Monday Rebellion touched off several years of guerrilla warfare that in 1921 resulted in independence from the UK for 26 southern counties, while six northern (Ulster) counties remained part of Great Britain. In 1948 Ireland withdrew from the Commonwealth and in 1973 joined the European Union. Irish governments and the armed revolutionaries – the Irish Republic Army – fought bitterly for reunification of Ulster and the Republic. Many people lost their lives in Ulster, both from

Catholic and Protestant militias and the British army, before a peace settlement (known as the Good Friday Agreement) was signed in 1998. It is slowly being implemented by Britain, Ulster and the Republic, but with some difficulties.

During the Reformation, most of Britain became Protestant while most of Ireland remained Roman Catholic, though the process was confused and painful. Today, church collaboration is effected through Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, and through its commissions on mission, racial justice, interfaith relations and international students.

For most of the Republic’s history, the Roman Catholic Church played a key role in creating identity and influencing the moral and political climate. Now, however, the Catholic Church has declined in status and participation. Those training for the priesthood or the religious life are few, attendance at services has declined sharply and the public image of the church has been dented in a number of ways. Ireland’s small Protestant minority has been less affected by such trends, but shares the Catholic Church’s concern that Ireland’s rush to consumerism should not lead to its loss of soul.

Church structures do not distinguish between the Republic and Northern Ireland; all are organized on a whole-Ireland basis. This is also true for ecumenical life. The Irish Council of Churches includes almost all Christian communities in Ireland except the Roman Catholics. There is, however, a less formal Irish Inter-Church Meeting where Catholics and Protestants share in dialogue.

United Kingdom

(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)

Statistics

Population: 61 million

Government: Parliamentary constitutional monarchy



Language: English; also Welsh, Gaelic and others

Literacy: 94%

Religion: Christian 83% (mostly Anglican, Roman Catholic and Free Churches), Muslim 2%, Jewish 1%, Sikh, Buddhist and others 1%

WCC member churches: Baptist Union of Great Britain, Church of England, Methodist Church, Moravian Church British Province and EFBU, United Reformed Church

History

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland has been a unified entity for centuries. The union between England and Wales took place in 1284 and Scotland joined in 1707, with the legislative union of Great Britain and Ireland implemented in 1801. Today, the political union of the three countries on the island of Great Britain – Wales, Scotland and England – involves differing degrees of self-government. Northern Ireland, for example, is under direct rule, its parliament having been suspended under UK protection, whereas the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands are largely independent.

Great Britain, the dominant industrial and maritime power of the nineteenth century, played a leading role in developing parliamen-

tary democracy and advancing religion, literature and science. At its zenith, the British Empire stretched over one-quarter of the earth's land-mass. However, the first half of the twentieth century saw the UK's strength seriously depleted by two world wars and waves of independence by its colonies. Today, it is a member of the European Union.

England has become a multicultural society, but one seemingly unable to end its class divisions. Significant immigration over the last half century from the Caribbean, Africa and the Indian subcontinent – mainly from former colonial territories – has brought many different cultures and faiths to English cities. In London, for instance, one person in three belongs to an ethnic minority, and in inner London one churchgoer in two is black. Racial justice has been a key theme for the churches and for society as a whole.

The religious situation has also been changing fast. Nearly all the mainstream churches have faced numerical decline. The Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church are by far the largest churches, but there are also a number of sizeable Free Churches. Twenty-six Anglican bishops sit in the Upper House of the UK parliament by right. Many new churches have sprung up in recent decades, often under the influence of charismatic renewal, and these – together with the large number of mainly Pentecostal black-majority churches – represent an area of growth and vitality.

Ecumenical life in England is organized through Churches Together groups, under the leadership of Churches Together in England. The Roman Catholic Church is fully involved. There are hundreds of local ecumenical projects through which Christians of different denominational backgrounds cooperate and worship together locally.

Northern Ireland

History

Northern Ireland is in the northeastern part of the island of Ireland, to the north of the Republic of Ireland. Since 1923 there has been a complex struggle between those who wish to reunite and create a single Irish republic, and those who wish to remain part of the UK. Slightly over half of the population is Protestant, most of whom wish to retain their British citizenship and are opposed to unification with the Republic of Ireland. Roman Catholics make up about 40 per cent of the population, and a high percentage of them aspire to a united Ireland. Paramilitary organizations, particularly the IRA, but also including the Protestant Ulster Defence Force, have resorted to violence and terrorism as a means of promoting their ends. Between 1969 and 1997 over 3,200 people were killed in the Troubles, and thousands more were injured or fled. Peace talks began in the 1970s, but were unsuccessful until 1994, when the IRA called a ceasefire. In spite of setbacks, a peace agreement signed on Good Friday in 1998 has given the opportunity for a fresh start. In this situation the reconciling role of the churches is vital, and both Protestants and Catholics have become involved in peace-making through a host of community organizations.

Scotland

Statistics

Population: 5 million

Government: Governing functions are exercised by the UK parliament in London and the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh, established in 1999

Language: English, Gaelic and the languages of immigrant communities

Religion: Predominantly Christian, with small communities of Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Buddhists

WCC member churches: Church of Scotland, Scottish Episcopal Church, United Free Church of Scotland,

History

Scotland has a renewed sense of national identity following the establishment of its parliament in 1999. The Scottish churches, along with other partners in Scottish society, played a key role in the campaign which led to the establishment of the parliament and the Scottish Civic Forum, a permanent expression of the vibrancy of civil society. The sense of national renaissance is celebrated with fresh energy in the arts.

The challenge posed to the new institutions and to the broader culture has emerged quickly. What does it mean to be an inclusive society open to the wider world? The persistence of religious sectarianism and bigotry (particularly in the industrial centres of the west), and resistance to the reality of a multi-ethnic society evidenced in racial attacks and the uncertain welcome extended to asylum seekers, set the context for the churches' social witness, as do the familiar problems posed by the effects of globalization on a small, increasingly specialized economy.

The churches' immediate response to these challenges began in 2001 with the first Scottish Ecumenical Assembly, in a process called Breaking New Ground. Ecumenical life is facilitated by Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS), which brings together the two largest churches, the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church, with six smaller denominations. ACTS, like its sister bodies in the United Kingdom, operates on the Churches Together model, which emphasizes what the churches do with one another what is not done for them by a council structure.

Wales

Statistics

Population: 3 million

Government: Governing functions are shared between the Welsh assembly in Cardiff and the UK parliament in London

Language: Welsh, English and languages of immigrant communities

Religion: Predominantly Christian, with small

minorities of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Jews

WCC member churches: *Church in Wales, Presbyterian Church of Wales, Union of Welsh Independents*

History

Wales is a nation with its own history of kings, princes and saints. In the thirteenth century it lost its independence and institutions (but not its language) and was merged into an all-powerful “English” state. At the end of the twentieth century, however, it regained a measure of autonomy through devolution and now has its own National Assembly. Today, Wales is a nation of two official languages (Welsh and English), which can be

heard alongside each other on the street and in church, on radio and television. Many churches and chapels worship only in Welsh, but a number worship in both languages.

The ecumenical movement has a long tradition in Wales, and is active both in matters of life and mission and of faith and order. Along with the other ecumenical instruments in Britain and Ireland, the former Council of Churches in Wales evolved in 1990 into CYTÛN (a Welsh word for “Together”). The Episcopal and some of the Free Churches have worked within a covenant to unite for over a quarter of a century. Some of the Free Churches are also continuing the pursuit of a long-held vision to create a united church.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The witness of saints and missionaries, who faithfully proclaimed the gospel to these and other lands.
- o Ecumenical initiatives to bring Christians closer together.
- o The work for justice and peace in which Christians join with others to imagine a better world.
- o Centres of Christian renewal.
- o Tartans, bagpipes and boys’ choirs singing in ancient cathedrals.
- o Poetry and song.

Pray for:

- o Immigrants and asylum seekers who seek a better life in these countries.
- o Reconciliation and an end to enmity between peoples.
- o Strength for those who combat racism.
- o Churches which try to be faithful to Christ in the midst of secularization and change.
- o Those who feel they have been left behind: the homeless and unemployed, those whose education seems inadequate or their skills out of date, and those who are long-term patients in mental hospitals.
- o Those whose industry has been ravaged: the coal miners and slate workers who know of pit and quarry closures and who suffer emphysema and pneumoconiosis, the farm and land workers who have lost their livelihoods and have seen their communities changed dramatically, the factory workers who have lost their jobs, the young who cannot find work, and the elderly who depend on support in residential homes.

PRAYERS

(1)

Unsleeping friend,
 when I come to the end of my strength,
 and my work has no blessing in it,
 help me to remember you,
 to reach for the hand of a friend
 and find your love is here.

(2)

But, Lord, remember me and mine
 Wi' mercies temporal and divine,
 That I for grace an' gear may shine
 Excell'd by nane;
 And a' the glory shall be Thine –
 Amen, Amen!

(3)

We celebrate today, Lord, the unity we already have,
 not an empty hope, not a fool's dream,
 but the sure fact of our faith: there is one body.
 For the unity of your body, the church
 in all its variety of tradition and practice,
 of language and culture,
 of history and circumstances,
 we thank you, Lord.

(4)

Lord, we praise your name for those holy men and women
 whom you gave to Wales:
 David, whose humble and devotional life inspired many
 over the centuries;
 Illtud, who encouraged those who sat at his feet to learn of you;
 Dwynwen, who sought to bless the relationship of young lovers;
 Teilo, whose conviction and courage calls all who bear the name of
 Christ to be of a strong belief and deep-rooted faith in the person of
 Jesus.
 Lord, we thank you for those saints whose names are remembered,
 and for those whose names are erased from human memory,
 but who honoured you by their loyalty and ministry.

(5)

God of compassion and mercy,
 we bring to you our divided society and our broken world,
 seeking your healing and transforming grace;
 it is easy for us to point the finger at others,
 yet we know that we all need your forgiveness;
 so we lift into your presence today, not only the victims of our conflicts,
 but also those we have called enemies.

Break down the walls of hatred, distrust and bitterness
 and open a way for us to reach one another in truth and love.
 Enable us to build a society where all can belong;
 to share our gifts in mutual respect
 and to seek for the new future which you offer us.
 Through Jesus Christ.

(6)

Lord, you made the world and everything in it;
 you created the human race of one stock
 and gave us the earth for our possession.

Break down the walls that separate us and unite us in a single body.

Lord, we have been divisive in our thinking,
 in our speech, in our actions;
 we have classified and imprisoned one another;
 we have fenced each other out by hatred and prejudice.

Break down the walls that separate us and unite us in a single body.

Lord, you mean us to be a single people,
 ruled by peace, feasting in freedom, freed from injustice,
 truly human, men and women,
 responsible and responsive
 in the life we lead,
 the love we share,
 the relationships we create.

Break down the walls that separate us and unite us in a single body.

Lord, we shall need ever new insights into the truth,
 awareness of your will for all humanity,
 courage to do what is right even when it is not allowed,

persistence in undermining unjust structures until they crumble into dust,

grace to exercise a ministry of reconciliation.

Break down the walls that separate us and unite us in a single body.

Lord, share out among us the tongues of your Spirit

that we may each burn with compassion for all

who hunger for freedom and human dignity;

that we may be doers of the word and so speak with credibility about the wonderful things you have done.

Lord, direct us in ways we do not yet discern and equip us for the service of reconciliation and liberation in your world.

(7)

CALL TO WORSHIP

Good News!

God brings the gospel to the poor;

God's liberating Christ adore.

Do not refuse to hear the Word

that tells the prisoners they are free

the jubilee

of Christ the Lord.

Good News!

God makes God's broken people whole;

God will the guilt of Zion console.

God will accuse our age-long sin,

and with a shout of holy joy

that sin destroy

and victory win.

Good News!

God calls us to proclaim God's reign;

to share God's love, to share God's pain.

As grace subdues the powers of wrong,

then with the poor, with one accord,

we praise the Lord

with freedom's song.

(8)

Loving Creator, you will pour out your blessing
 and the desert will blossom with abundant flowers;
 the wilderness will become fruitful
 so that your people may be filled with joy.
 The blind will see; the deaf will hear;
 the lame will jump around with happiness.
 From dry ground springs of living water will flow in abundance.
 For your people the time of sorrow will be over;
 they will sing songs of joy and peace.

(9)

COMMUNITY OF PEACE

Work us together as contrasting colours.
 Join us together across divides of differences.
 Bind us together with loving connections.
 Unite us together combining our strengths.
 Knit us together in patterns of worship.
 Pull us together demolishing our barriers,
 Mould us together retaining our personhood.
 Cement us together softening our bitterness.
 Design us together to be communities of peace.

(10)

Blessed Lord Jesus Christ,
 may your prayers be my example
 when I pray through you to the Father.
 Early and late,
 fill me with the spirit of peace,
 so that I may find calm in the storms of the world
 and quiet in the noise of every day,
 to be renewed for the service to which you have called me.

(11)

Creator God,
 lift the shadows of fear, of prejudice, of misunderstanding,
 from each of us,
 and let us weave together in our country [of Ireland]
 a new tapestry for living with our neighbour –
 a tapestry of new-born hope,
 woven with delicate threads of love.

May we be made as small children again,
allowing ourselves to be made vulnerable in your love,
and aware of our weakness.

And in drawing the warp and weft together,
create a tapestry of peoples that is tough and durable;
the Holy Spirit becoming the warp, strong in texture,
supporting and strengthening,
yet not so taut that the threads will break,
but pliable, giving, responsive to each other.
Release us from self, that together in peace,
we can come to you, united in your love.

(12)

Creator God, Father and Mother of all people,
may we speak freely and boldly

in your name.

May we allow ourselves to become vulnerable

in your name.

May we share our pain and our hopes

in your name.

May we honour each other

in your name.

May we know our strength and find our voice

in your name.

May we bless and be blessed

in your name.

And may we know that through all and in all,
around, about, above and below, you are with us.

(13)

DISMISSAL

Go, knowing that you possess the greatest of treasures,
not because you earned it,
but because it was freely given.

Go into this world, giving it freely to all you meet,
knowing that the more you give it away
the more it grows in value for you.

Give them God, revealed in Jesus Christ,
made ours by the Holy Spirit.

In the name of the Trinity of love.

(14)

Lord,

teach me what it is to be poor

not just poor with the absence of material wealth

but poor in spirit

the kind of poverty that

will make me empty

and create space for you.

Help me let go of the

false securities, the material props

that are so easy to cling to.

Show me what it is to be truly bereft.

Teach me what it is to be poor –

then, Lord, you will be my all

and my priorities will be in order –

then, Lord, I will know what it is to truly love.

Teach me, Lord, show me what it is

to be poor – show me, teach me now!

(15)

APPROACH

Hidden God, we worship you.

By ourselves, we could not know you;

no human wisdom can discover you,

no argument lead to you,

no enterprise reveal you;

in the wealth of its knowledge

the world fails to find you.

But you came to search for us

in the frailty of a human life;

you trusted yourself to the fragile faith

of wavering disciples.

We praise you that in our very weakness

we can know you;

that stumbling blocks become stepping stones,

and the foolishness of the cross

the very truth that quickens us to life.

Confession

We confess, O God,
 that we breathe the proud spirit of the world,
 the spirit which scorns the way of weakness,
 boasts of its cleverness,
 clings to knowledge as a means of power,
 and seeks to prove its worth by belittling others.

Lord have mercy.

Christ have mercy.

Lord have mercy.

Supplication

Hidden God,
 your wisdom unsettles our values
 and compels our love.
 Fill us with the desire to search for your truth
 that being content to be fools for Christ's sake,
 we may transform the world.

(16)

BLESSING

The peace of God be with you,
 the peace of Christ be with you,
 the peace of the Holy Spirit be with you
 and with your children,
 for an hour, for ever, for eternity.

(17)

BLESSING

May the eye of the great God be on you,
 the eye of the God of glory,
 the eye of the Virgin's Son,
 the eye of the gentle Spirit,
 the kindly eye of the Three be on you,
 to aid you and to shepherd you.

(18)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Merciful God,
you made us in your image,
with a mind to know you,
a heart to love you,
and a will to serve you.
But our knowledge is imperfect,
our love inconstant,
our obedience incomplete.
Day by day we fail to grow into your likeness;
yet you are slow to be angry with your children.
For the sake of Jesus Christ,
your Son, our Saviour,
do not hold our sins against us,
but in your tender love, forgive.

Lord have mercy.

Christ have mercy.

Lord have mercy.

Silence

The almighty and merciful Lord
grant you pardon
and remission of all your sins,
time for amendment of life,
and the grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit.

(19)

You are our breath.
You are the flight of our longing to the depths of heaven.
You are the water which flees from the wilderness of our anxiety and fear.
You are the salt which purifies.
You are the piercing wind to our pomposity.
You are the traveller who knocks.
You are the prince who dwells within us.

Despite the consumer of years,
you are the seed which does not speed to its death.

Despite the confusion of our tale and chance,
you are the moment of light,
whose aura embraces our life.
The sun breaks through the clouds –
you are its beam on the green pasture.

(20)

May the blessing of light be on you,
light without and light within.
May the blessed sunlight shine upon you and warm your heart
till it glows like a great fire
and strangers may warm themselves as well as friends.

And may the light shine out of your eyes,
like a candle set in the window of a house,
bidding the wanderer to come in out of the storm.

May the blessing of rain be on you; the soft sweet rain.
May it fall upon your spirit so that little flowers may spring up
and shed their sweetness on the air.

And may the blessing of the great rains be upon you,
to beat upon your spirit and wash it fair and clean;
and leave there many a shining pool
where the blue of heaven shines,
and sometimes a star.

May the blessing of the earth be upon you, the great round earth;
may you ever have a kindly greeting for people
as you're going along the roads.

And now may the Lord bless you, and bless you kindly.



Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands

It must become clear that church members who deny in fact their responsibility for the needy in any part of the world are just as much guilty of heresy as those who deny this or that article of faith. The unity of humankind is not a fine ideal in the clouds; it is part and parcel of God's own revelation.

Willem Visser 't Hooft

History

The first general secretary of the WCC, Willem Visser 't Hooft, was a Netherlander and the Dutch have produced many people committed to the ecumenical movement. Originally, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands were linked together and the term "Netherlands" (the Low Countries) designated the whole area, but now it applies only to the northernmost country. Highly industrialized, the three countries are all part of the European Union and are sometimes known as the Benelux countries, after a 1960 economic treaty, the Benelux Economic Union.

Christianity came to the Low Countries during the sixth and seventh centuries via Celtic missionaries, who were the first evangelists and martyrs. Utrecht was one of the earliest centres and Willibord and Boniface among the first Christian leaders.

At the end of the Middle Ages the area was a collection of squabbling principalities. One of the main causes of the separation between the northern and southern Netherlands was the

Reformation. This combined with a rebellion against the Spanish Habsburgs, who sought to impose Roman Catholicism. The northern region was a place of refuge for followers of Luther, Zwingli and Calvin. After an 80-year war, the northern provinces became an independent republic under William of Orange, while the southern provinces remained under the Habsburgs. The south, including the southernmost part of the Netherlands, remained predominantly Roman Catholic, while Calvinism became dominant in the north. After Napoleon, the Netherlands and Belgium were united into one kingdom, with Luxembourg a grand duchy, also under the house of Orange. Belgium became independent in 1830 and Luxembourg in 1890.

A number of international and European organizations use the major cities of the Low Countries as their headquarters, such as the World Court in the Hague and the EU in Brussels.

The church is predominantly Roman Catholic in Belgium and Luxembourg (89 per cent and 90 per cent, respectively). In the Netherlands, about 31 per cent are Roman Catholic and 29 percent Protestant, while the remainder claim no church affiliation.

Belgium

(Kingdom of Belgium)



Statistics

- Population:** 10.3 million
- Government:** Constitutional monarchy
- Language:** French, Dutch and German; also Italian, English and others
- Literacy:** 100%
- Religion:** Christian 88% (mostly Roman Catholic), Muslim 4%, Buddhist, Jewish and others 1%
- WCC member churches:** United Protestant Church of Belgium

History

Belgium is located in northern Europe on the North Sea. The Netherlands lies to the north, Germany and Luxembourg to the east, and France to the south and west. The two primary ethnic groups are the Flemish (who speak Dutch and live mostly in the north in a region known as Flanders) and the Walloons (who speak French and live mostly in the south in Wallonia). Belgium's constitution of 1831 has been revised a number of times (most recently in 1993), mainly to deal with tensions between Flemish and Walloons. Despite attempts to remain neutral, Belgium was invaded by Germany during both world wars. Belgium is currently part of the European Union, which was formed by the Maastricht Treaty of 1993.

Belgium has one of the highest population densities in Europe, and 97 per cent of the population is considered urban. It is highly industrialized. Flooding is a problem in the north, and the country has air and water pollution and other environmental problems stemming from urbanization and manufacturing. The use and manufacture of illegal drugs is a growing problem.

During the Reformation, Christians in Belgium were influenced by Lutheranism, but the Counter-Reformation caused many of these early Protestants to be martyred, and today most Christians are Roman Catholic. The United Protestant Church of Belgium came into existence in the 1830s as the result of a merger of four Belgian churches. It is now composed of 110 member congregations with a mainly Reformed theology. While the United Protestant Church of Belgium is recog-

nized by the state, many smaller churches often face discrimination; several churches, including the Quakers and some Evangelical churches, were labelled as cults in a 1997 government report.

Luxembourg

(Grand Duchy of Luxembourg)



Statistics

Population: 430,000

Government: Parliamentary constitutional grand duchy since 1839

Language: Luxembourgish; also French, German and others

Literacy: 100%

Religion: Christian 94% (mostly Roman Catholic), Muslim 1%, Baha'i, Jewish and others 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

A small, landlocked country in western Europe, Luxembourg is bounded by Germany to the east, France to the south and Belgium to the west and north. It was founded in the tenth century and became a grand duchy in 1839. During the nineteenth century it came under the control of both the Netherlands and Belgium before it gained independence. During both world wars it was invaded by Germany. Since then, the country has rebuilt and maintains a stable political and economic system with one of the highest standards of living in the world.

The small number of Protestant, Russian and Greek Orthodox churches are made up mostly of people from other countries who work in Luxembourg.

Netherlands

(Kingdom of the Netherlands)



Statistics

Population: 16.3 million

Language: Dutch; also Frisian, Turkish, Indonesian and others

Government: Unitary multiparty constitutional monarchy

Religion: Christian 94%, Muslim 4%, Hindu 1%, Buddhist, Jewish and others 1%

Literacy: 100%

WCC member churches: Mennonite Church in the Netherlands, Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands, Protestant Church in the Netherlands, Remonstrant Brotherhood

History

Abutting against the North Sea along its western and northern coasts, with Germany to its east and Belgium to the southwest, the Netherlands has been independent since rebelling against Spain in the sixteenth century. Flooding has been a recurring problem in this low-lying country with its system of dikes sheltering towns and farmland below sea level. International trade and colonization, from the time of the age of exploration and

the Dutch East India Company, have been formative factors in the nation's culture.

Many great artists have emerged, from medieval times through the northern Renaissance and baroque to the age of impressionism and the post-modern period. The Netherlands has been a constitutional monarchy within its current borders since the mid-nineteenth century. The nation remained neutral in the First World War but was invaded and occupied by Nazi Germany during the Second World War. The Anne Frank House in Amsterdam attracts nearly one million visitors annually.

In the decades following the Second World War freedom was granted to the former colonies of Indonesia and Suriname. Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles remain as Dutch colonies in the Caribbean. The postwar economy of the Netherlands has been robust, and the nation was one of the six founding members of the Euro, the common European currency, in 1999. Social concerns of recent years have included environ-

mental pollution, illicit drug traffic, the politics of immigration, European integration and Christian-Muslim relations.

Celtic missionaries brought Christianity to these shores in the sixth and seventh centuries. Erasmus of Rotterdam applied principles of Christian humanism to the critique of western theology. Calvinism took firm root in the sixteenth century, but in the following century Arminianism arose to challenge Dutch Reformed orthodoxies. Dissident Puritans sought refuge here before crossing the Atlantic to settle New England. The first assembly of the World Council of Churches took place in Amsterdam in 1948, and in 1968 the Council of Churches in the Netherlands was founded with the Roman Catholic Church as a full member. There are also two strong and active councils of migrant and evangelical Christians. In 2004, two large Reformed churches and a smaller Lutheran church united in the new Protestant Church in the Netherlands.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The Protestant Church in the Netherlands. May it continue to serve as a witness towards the visible unity of the church.
- o Christians who make a strong witness for justice and peace in our world.
- o Van Gogh, Rembrandt, Brueghel, Vermeer and all those who, with their art, have given us new eyes to see.

Pray for:

- o Tolerance and mutual respect between the Flemings and Walloons in Belgium.
- o Drug users and those who sell drugs, that they find comfort and strength in God instead of substance abuse.
- o The church's vitality to attract once again those who have lost interest in the faith.
- o The hundreds of asylum seekers at the borders, who are turned back to where they came from without exception, and who are deported without any hope of a better future.
- o A healthy and open discussion between those who believe and those who don't, between those born in these countries and those who came later, so that people don't let themselves be tempted to develop racial prejudices.
- o People to respect each other's identity.

- o Neighbours to live in peace with one another instead of treating each other with indifference and suspicion.
- o Young people who cannot find a job after finishing their education.

PRAYERS

(1)

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the sun that always rises, but never sets. You are the source of all life, creating and sustaining every living thing. You are the source of all food, material and spiritual, nourishing us in both body and soul. You are the light that dispels the clouds of error and doubt, and goes before me every hour of the day, guiding my thoughts and my actions. May I walk in your light, be nourished by your food, be sustained by your mercy, and be warmed by your love.

(2)

You God,
telling us to dwell
 where there is righteousness and honesty.
By your grace help us so to live our lives
 that you dwell with us
and we become a sign of your presence for all people.
God of space and freedom,
God of life and love,
hold us and make us strong
so we do not bow before those powers
which promise good fortune but bring evil.
Teach us to live
 in freedom and happiness,
 in the space which has been set out for us
 in your good words.

(3)

You,
sanctifying the meek
and raising up the broken,
make us messengers of your mercy.
Direct our eyes and hearts to the happiness of others,
so that your people do not wander alone,
but rejoice in you, Giver of life,
This day and all days unto eternity.

(4)

God, our Creator,
out of mud you have formed us
to be people of flesh and blood,
and to inhabit your world with peace and justice.

We ask you to open our eyes to see Jesus, our shepherd and guide,
who shows us the good places,
who walks before us in the desert
on the path to your land of promise
for forty days and for all our lives.

(5)

Fade away the traces of the night,
chase death away from me.
Make me clear
like the day that has dawned.
Make me see you
becoming visible,
clothed in the light of this day.
Make me laugh.
Lift up my heart.
Delight me.
Make me be here, present, aware.
Make me responsible for people
so that I keep going in contemplation and compassion,
so that I don't get numb with pain and sorrow,
so that the power to love does not leave me.
Make the day of justice come quickly.
How can you bear it
that people all over this world are tortured,
that children get killed,
that we disgrace the earth,
and deny each other the light of day?
Don't bear it any longer.

Awaken our consciousness,
our anger and shame,
so that we turn around
back to your word.

(6)

With you, nothing dies.
In you all things become alive.

You never leave,
you are always nearby.

No one knows who you are
But I know a little:
Who you are not.

The happiness of the angels and blessed ones
is just a spark compared with your happiness –
you laugh and laugh because you take delight
in all the good that gets done.

I am sad
And not yet born,
Not yet daring to live in you.

(7)

As long as people are tortured to betray their friends,
as long as prisons exist for rebels,
pagans, homosexuals, women
or simply for writers about injustice;
as long as suffering exists everywhere in the world,
we, women and men,
equal to oppressor and oppressed,
will stand up again and again.
Give us the strength, O God,
as we leave this place,
scared though we might be,
to stand up for each other.



Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain

They are knocking at my door,
 the people out there in the snow.
 They are knocking,
 the people who will be cold or thirsty,
 those who long for a caress,
 those who are looked down on,
 those who have not seen a flower for ages,
 and experience only dust on the road,
 those who do not love, and are loved by no one,
 those who have forgotten how to smile,
 those who have no mother.

They are knocking at my door,
 the unfortunate ones,
 people with calloused hands,
 the rough hands of poverty,
 those who create disturbances in bars,
 and play around with knives,
 those who have neither shelter nor friend,
 those whom fate has rejected,

those who were born in brothels,
 those who have had no childhood,
 those whom everyone passed by without looking.

Knock at my door, brothers and sisters,
 come in,
 for I have love to give you.

And if I too knock
 (for I too often weep out there,
 I too know bitter sadness,
 for I too am unfortunate)
 so, if I knock,
 come quickly and open the door to me.
 Warm me at my own fire.

Give me the bread that I have broken,
 and the love that I have given you.

Sebastião da Gama

Italy

(*Italian Republic*)



Statistics

Population: 60 million

Government: Parliamentary republic

Language: Italian; also German, French and others

Literacy: 97%

Religion: Christian 82% (mostly Roman Catholic), Muslim 1%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Evangelical Baptist Union of Italy, Evangelical Methodist Church of Italy, Waldensian Church

History

Located in southern Europe between the Adriatic Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, Italy is bounded to the north by France, Switzerland, Austria and Slovenia. Both the tiny republic of San Marino and the Vatican City lie entirely within its borders. Italy was once the economic, religious and cultural centre of the entire Mediterranean region. It was the focus of the early empire based in Rome that controlled the Mediterranean Sea. The Roman Empire remained in control long after the beginnings of Christianity and had tremendous impact on the churches started by Paul in the various provinces under Roman domination. The ancient emperors of Rome were, for the most part, worshippers of

pagan gods and often the source of persecution of the early Christians. This persecution continued until the reign of Constantine, who was converted to Christianity in the early 300s. In 324 the emperor officially recognized Christianity as the state religion and moved the capitol to Constantinople, bringing the church and the state into a precarious relationship that continues to influence Italy today.

Italy was a powerful force during the Middle Ages when many of its states were under the rule of the Roman Catholic Church, sending out explorers, missionaries and conquering armies, particularly during the Crusades. Its power declined during the sixteenth century, and for the next 300 years Italy was subject to invasions and rule from its neighbours, some lasting only months.

Italy became a nation-state in 1861 when the city-states of the peninsula, along with Sardinia and Sicily, were united under King Victor Emmanuel II. An era of parliamentary government came to a close in the early 1920s when Benito Mussolini established a fascist dictatorship. His alliance with Nazi Germany led to Italy's defeat in the Second World War. A democratic republic replaced the monarchy in 1946 and economic revival followed. Persistent problems include illegal immigration, organized crime, corruption, high unemployment and the low incomes and technical standards of southern Italy compared to those of the prosperous north.

The Vatican City, located in Rome, is the administrative centre for the Roman Catholic Church, which was also the state church until 1984. Followers of the twelfth-century reformer Peter Valdes of Lyons migrated to the "Waldensian valleys" near Turin in the middle ages and became a nucleus for the later federation of Italian Protestantism. In 1975 the Waldensian and Methodist churches united in Italy, though each group maintains its historic identity. Protestants are now outnumbered by members of the Jehovah's Witnesses and Assemblies of God. Today, the vast majority of Christians in Italy remain Roman Catholic.

Malta

(*Republic of Malta*)



Statistics

Population: 340,000

Government: Parliamentary republic

Language: Maltese and English; also Italian, Arabic and Greek

Literacy: 96%

Religion: Christian 98% (mostly Roman Catholic), Muslim and others 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Malta is a country made up of the islands of Malta, Gozo and Comino. It is located south of Sicily in the Mediterranean Sea. St Paul's shipwreck (Acts 28:1) on the island marks the coming of Christianity and is still celebrated as the greatest event in the island's history.

Malta has been host to many different civilizations, including the Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Normans, Italians, French and British. It received self-rule and a constitution from the British in 1921, but this was revoked during the Second World War, and it was not until 1964 that Malta achieved independence. In 1974 the constitution was revised and the government reorganized as a parliamentary republic.

During the Crusades, the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, gave Malta to the Knights of St John of

Jerusalem, who remained in control of the island until the nineteenth century, when it was colonized by Britain. Virtually all citizens of Malta are baptized into the Roman Catholic Church, which is the state church and which dominates the social and cultural life of the island. The Roman Catholic Church also owns over one-sixth of all property on the island, and publishes its daily newspaper. In addition, it is influential in education and health care.

Portugal

(*Portuguese Republic*)



Statistics

Population: 9.9 million

Government: Parliamentary republic

Language: Portuguese; also Spanish, English

Literacy: 90%

Religion: Christian 92% (mostly Roman Catholic), Buddhist 1%, Muslim and others 1%

WCC member churches: Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Portugal, Lusitanian Church of Portugal

History

Portugal is on the Iberian Peninsula in south-western Europe. Spain lies to the east and north, while the Atlantic Ocean is to the west and south.

Following its heyday as a world power during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Portugal

lost much of its wealth and status with the destruction of Lisbon in a 1755 earthquake, occupation during the Napoleonic Wars, and the independence in 1822 of Brazil as a colony. A 1910 revolution deposed the monarchy; for most of the next six decades, repressive governments such as that of Antonio de Salazar ran the country. In 1974 a left-wing military coup installed broad democratic reforms after overthrowing Salazar.

Subsequently, independence was also given to the African territories of Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands that had been under extremely repressive Portuguese rule for centuries. During the next twenty years Portugal struggled to stabilize itself politically and economically. Today, Portugal is one of Europe's poorest countries, and many of its young people emigrate to other western European countries in search of better opportunities.

The apostles James and Paul are said by some traditions to have visited Portugal, and by the end of the second century Christianity was firmly established. Most Christians belong to the Roman Catholic Church, which tends to be very traditional in its worship and conservative in its theology. The church was governed for many years under concordat (an agreement between the pope and the secular government), which included all the country's overseas colonies. The concordat was ended when Salazar's regime was overthrown.

Portugal is also the home of the shrine of Our Lady of Fatima, which receives many pilgrims each year. During the Reformation several Protestant denominations were established in Portugal, and during the twentieth century a number of independent evangelical churches were established. Freedom of religion has been guaranteed since the constitution of 1974.

Spain

(Kingdom of Spain)

Statistics

Population: 41 million

Government: Parliamentary monarchy

Language: Spanish (official Castilian Spanish), Catalan, Galician, Basque and others

Literacy: 97%

Religion: Christian 92.5% (Roman Catholics 92%, Protestants 0.2%), small Muslim, Jewish and Baha'i communities

WCC member churches: Spanish Evangelical Church, Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church



History

On the Iberian Peninsula, Spain is bordered to the northeast by France and the tiny country of Andorra, and to the west by Portugal. The Mediterranean Sea lies to the east and south, and the Atlantic Ocean is to the northwest. Spain has a diverse topography, with mountain ranges which separate the country into regions. The land is green and lush to the north, while along the Mediterranean the climate is temperate and dry. The centre of Spain stands on a high plateau with cold, long winters and blistering summers.

Over the centuries, the Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans and Visigoth nations colonized and traded in what is now Spain, bringing their religions to the region. By the second century, Christianity was well established. During the seventh century, Muslim Arabs entered the peninsula through the area near Gibraltar; the Moors, as they were known, settled in the southern region while the north remained Christian.

Around 800, the grave of St James was identified in the northwest corner of Galicia. The city, Santiago de Compostela, became a popular pilgrim destination. Hostels and abbeys were built along the routes from France, commerce expanded, and cultures were mixed as people travelled to worship at the shrine. Santiago de Compostela became known for the recruitment of Christians in the "reconquest" of Spain from the Muslims. These Crusades continued throughout the Middle Ages, and Muslims, Jews and Protestants were forced to accept Roman Catholicism, leave the country, or be killed. The reconquest was completed with the fall of Granada in 1492.

During the next three centuries, the Spanish Empire dominated much of the world, especially the Americas. Colonization brought Roman Catholicism, but destroyed indigenous cultures in the process. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Spain was plagued by civil wars and repressive regimes, the most recent of which was the fascist rule of General Franco from 1939 to 1975, who defeated republicans in a vicious and internationalized civil war. Since then, Spain has instituted many political and economic reforms and restored a constitutional

monarchy. Still an issue of negotiation are demands of the Basque Separatist Movement, a nationalist group in the northern part of Spain which seeks its own nation for the Basque people, and the armed wing of which often resorted to violence. Other problems include unemployment, occasional droughts, and water pollution in the Mediterranean Sea.

The Roman Catholic Church is the dominant church of Spain, although it has a conservative and repressive history. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Spanish Inquisition was responsible for the deaths of thousands of Jews, Muslims and Protestants. Under Franco's rule the Roman Catholic Church was the state church, and minority religious groups were discriminated against and persecuted. Today, however, there is a constitutional guarantee of equality of religions. The second largest religious body is the Jehovah's Witnesses, followed by the Filadelfia Evangelical Church which is growing, especially among the Roma population. One of Spain's most famous spiritual leaders was St Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order and author of the widely used *Spiritual Exercises*.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Faithful Christians who have nourished and renewed the long tradition of Christianity in these countries.
- o St Peter and St Paul, whose work for the gospel eventually resulted in the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity.
- o The Catacombs and all the other monuments where the history of early Christianity inspires a renewed faith.
- o St James, whose shrine at Santiago de Compostela is a place where contemporary pilgrims unite in prayer for a reconciled Europe.
- o Those who reinterpret the story of St James so that it is not used against Muslims.
- o Pilgrims who try to find a deeper faith and a healing of the spirit.
- o Those who welcome and care for migrants and refugees.

- o Guitars, stomping feet, castanets, the whirl of flamenco dancers, the charm of Neapolitan songs, the thrill of an outdoor opera in an ancient arena.
- o Renewers of the church, including Peter Valdes, Benedict and Scholastica, Francis and Claire, Catherine of Siena.
- o Fiestas full of family and friends.
- o Michelangelo, de Vinci, Titian, Velazquez and all who used their art to proclaim the gospel.

Pray for:

- o The Vatican, and all who hold positions of power in the Roman Catholic Church.
- o An end to terrorism and violence; solutions to the conflicts with the Basque region of Spain.
- o Better use of land, sea and air resources.
- o Wisdom and guidance in dealing with immigration issues.
- o Young people, that they may find opportunity in their homelands and renewed hope in Christ.
- o The immigrants and the victims of human trafficking.
- o The unemployed.
- o An end to corruption and crime, so that justice may exist for all people.
- o Continued struggles against intolerance and hatred.
- o A renewal of the spirit of the church, amid an increasingly secular and materialistic society.

PRAYERS

(1)

CALL TO WORSHIP

God welcomes us.

God is happy to see us all together.

We receive God's grace, joy and peace
in our hearts and in our lives.

Before we sought God,

God sought us.

Before we knew God,

God knew us.

Before we arrived here,

God already called us.

(2)

God our Father,

you come to us in weakness,

to teach us that greatness

is different from what

we imagine it to be.

In Christ, greatness

is what people call poverty,

serving our brothers and sisters,

being simple like the lilies of the field.

Teach us, so that we may open our hearts
to poverty

and know our limitations.

Teach us to walk with you,

desiring only your company.

Teach us to be free,

as Jesus of Nazareth was.

(3)

If you are rich, how is it you are naked?

If you are all-powerful, how is it you are despised?

If you are a king, how is it you are crowned with thorns?

If you are strong, how is it you are weak?

If you are light, how is it your light is extinguished?

If you are the divine sun, how is it you are eclipsed?

If you are the word, how is it you are silent?

If you are life, how is it you are put to death?

If you are God, how is it you are on that cross as a man?

If you are human, how is it that you so powerfully declare to a thief
that heaven will be his?

Ah, good Jesus, you are both human and divine,
dying for Adam as Adam
and redeeming Adam as God.

(4)

INVOCATION

As ones who are thirsty, longing for fresh water,
our souls cry out for you, O God.

We invoke your presence
so that your word strengthens us.

May your Spirit comfort us and fill us with joy.

The Word of God calls us.

We worship in spirit and in truth.

(5)

Lord!

Despite the darkness,

I can see you clearly!

Your hand has not yet touched me,

but I can feel it touching my hair,

caressing me like a perfume or a pardon.

Lord!

Despite the darkness

I can see you clearly.

(6)

CALL TO WORSHIP

The work of the Creator is visible.

We respond with praise.

The example of Jesus is clear.

We respond with obedience.

The wind of the Spirit blows.

We respond with joy.

The word of God calls us.

We worship in spirit and in truth.

(7)

A wise Rabbi was walking along a road when he saw a man planting a tree. The Rabbi asked: "How many years will it take before this tree will bear fruit?" The man answered: "Seventy years." Then the Rabbi asked: "You feel you are so strong and healthy that you expect to live so long to be able to eat its fruits?" The man answered: "I've found a world rich of fruits because my forebears planted trees for me. I will do the same for my children." (from a Jewish midrash)

Forgive us, Lord, our obsession with ourselves.
 We are not able to recognize our own limits.
 We are so concentrated on our present needs and on our own work
 that we forget to be grateful for the gifts you have given us
 through the generations who have gone before us.

Forgive us, Lord, for our closed horizon
 preventing us from looking towards tomorrow,
 preventing us from handing over to our children
 a fertile and clean earth.

Forgive us, Lord, for our greedy selfishness,
 for our closed hands
 grasping to hoard all we can
 to squeeze our natural resources dry.

Open our hands, Lord, to the joy of sharing.
 Teach them the sower's generous gesture,
 so that we may sow seeds without caring
 who will benefit from the fruits of the harvest.

(8)

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

I affirm that I believe in a God
 absolutely simple and contradictory.
 A God infinitely far away
 but at the same time infinitely near.
 I believe in a God unfathomable,
 yet inviting and urging us to investigate God's essence.
 I believe in a God, exalted, with no need for anyone else,
 but who at the same time brought into existence
 the entire created order.
 I believe in a God who establishes God's omnipotence
 by renouncing all godly claims.

(9)

CALL TO WORSHIP

The Lord comes and meets us.
God's word frees us.
 God's presence enlightens us.
God's love renews us.

(10)

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

We believe in eternity,
and because of this time for us is free.

We believe in holiness,
and because of this we ask for pardon.

We believe in justice,
and because of this we plead for mercy.

We believe in love,
and because of this we worship Christ.

We believe in God,
and because of this we respect every woman and man.

We know and have experienced that the world has been saved
through the charity of the cross,
and because of this we sense in our soul pure joy,
indestructible, that no threatening menace can overshadow.

We believe that the reign of eternity will come one day,
and because of this,
 without waiting for human institutions or revolutions,
 we transform money, intelligence and heart
 into instruments of justice, bound for service.

We believe in Christ,
born and alive within the human story,
and because of this we believe in the church,
not a closed tower, but a centre radiating truth and justice.

We believe in God, the Father, who is in heaven
and because of this we rejoice
 in the tiny things of earthly life;
because of this we are deeply touched
 and celebrate the most insignificant and humble thing,
 the birth of a child
 who carries, within, the light of God.

(11)

Lord, you are at the door and you knock.
You could as well enter without knocking
because you are the Lord of the world.
But your presence is not imposed, but proposed.

You are there, behind every door,
but to experience communion with you
we need to know
how to heed your voice,
unhitch the door
and host you at our table.
Teach us, Lord,
to open our ears to distinguish your voice
within the Babel of noise convulsing our lives;
to open wide the door of our heart
of our home,
of our church,
to welcome you
and with you, our neighbours,
to have the table ready
without being worried
about how little we have to offer you,
because you are coming to feed us
with the food of your word
and the bread and wine of your supper.

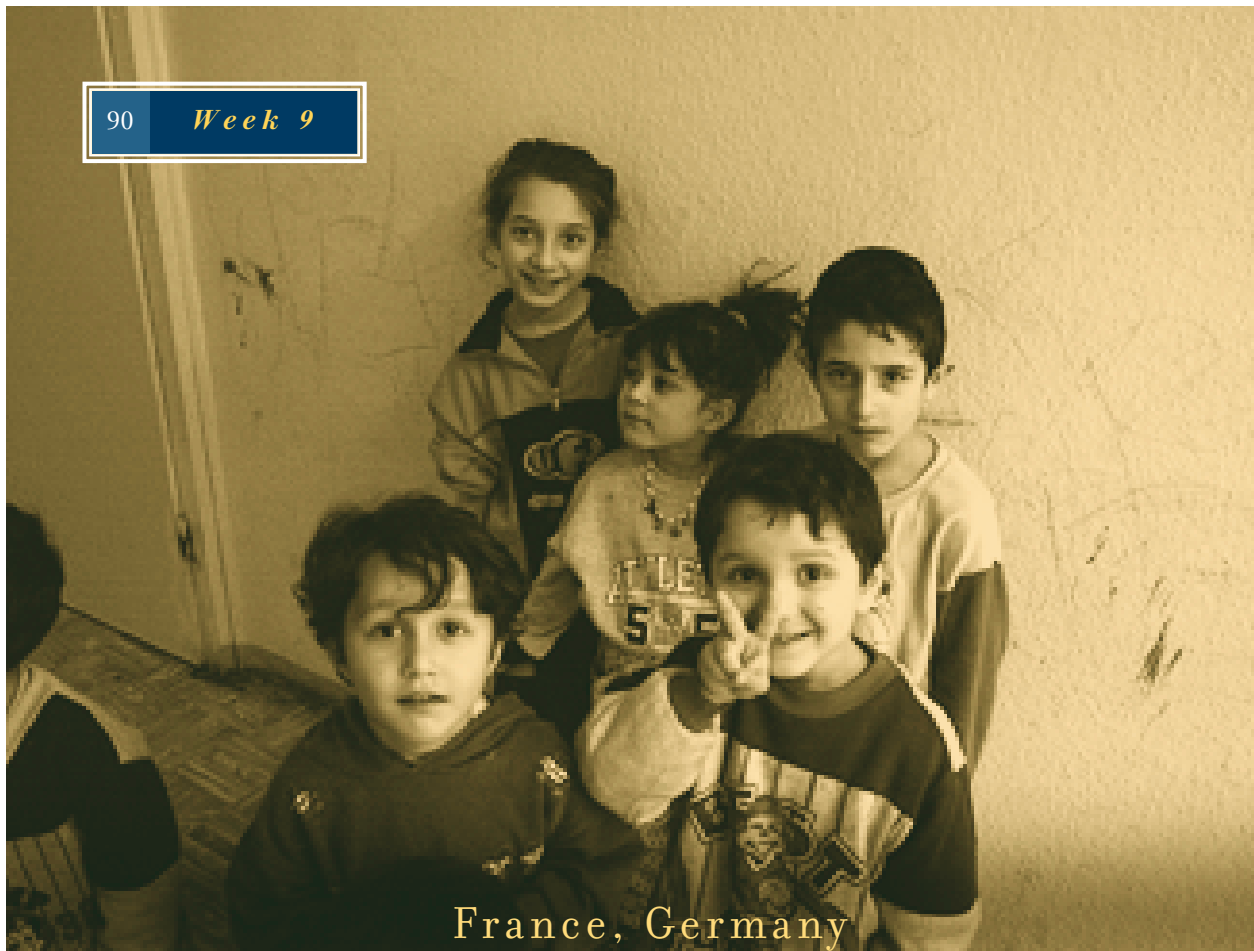
(12)

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

I believe in a Father
who so loves his children
to wait in silence for their return
in order to give them the best robe,
kill the fatted calf
and celebrate the feast of reconciliation.

I believe in a Spirit
whose power is not revealed in the thunder of the gale
nor in the dread of the earthquake
but in the still, small voice.

I believe in a Son
who broke the power of Silence
with the piercing cry,
"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
Dying on the cross
he transformed the silence of death
into the death of every silence.



France, Germany

France

(French Republic)

There is a chaos of order as there is chaos of disorder. It is not order which must be substituted for chaos, but the truth, the reality of God's plan for creation.

It is on a day-to-day basis that Christians, in their personal lives and in the communion of the church, must fashion forms of obedience and love towards brothers and sisters. In the face of chaos, there is no ready-made solution, only a life inspired by the gospel of liberation. All that is needed is to reveal to the world the truth that Jesus is the only Lord.

Madeleine Barot



Statistics

Population: 60 million

Government: Parliamentary republic

Language: French; also Alsatian, Basque, Breton, Catalan, Corsican, Provençal

Literacy: 98%

Religion: Christian 70% (mostly Roman Catholic), Muslim 7%, Jewish 1%, Buddhist 1%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Church of the Augsburg Confession of Alsace and Lorraine, Evangelical Lutheran Church of France, Reformed Church of Alsace and Lorraine, Reformed Church of France

History

France borders both the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. Belgium and Luxembourg lie to the northeast, Germany, Switzerland and Italy to the east, and Andorra and Spain to the southwest. France also still includes ten overseas territories within its jurisdiction.

Julius Caesar subdued what became modern France in 58 BC, and France remained under Roman rule for more than 500 years. A monarchy in one form or another ruled until 1793, when the French Revolution brought an end to the corrupt court and created a republican form of government based on the slogan "liberty, equality, fraternity". After the Second World War, France was reorganized under the Fourth Republic. There followed a series of short-lived governments, while the country struggled to rebuild itself. During this time, however, women earned the right to vote, and many of France's former colonies were granted independence. In 1958 the constitution was rewritten and the Fifth Republic began, since when the establishment of a welfare state has provided many benefits to citizens.

Today, France is considered one of the world's great powers. It is rich in agriculture and industry and the French enjoy many personal liberties. There have been over 5 million immigrants in the last 40 years. Most of the immigrants are marginalized in low-paying jobs and are subject to latent racism and injustice. Global competition has led to increased unemployment and forced the government to scale back on some social services. Other problems include air pollution due to the increasing number of automobiles. In recent years France's reconciliation and cooper-

ation with Germany have proved central to the economic union of Europe.

Christianity was brought from Rome to France in the first century. The Frankish King Clovis was baptized with his warriors in 496, and Christianity quickly spread throughout France. The Crusades and the monastic reforms of Benedict of Cluny and Bernard of Clairvaux marked the Middle Ages.

The Reformation brought about a rise in Protestantism, especially in the rural parts of Alsace and the Rhone Valley. The country was torn by wars of religion, followed by a period of toleration under the Edict of Nantes. During the seventeenth century the Huguenots (followers of John Calvin) again suffered persecution and many fled to other parts of Europe.

Christianity has declined in adherents since the turn of the century, but France is still a predominantly Roman Catholic country with more than 80 per cent nominal membership. The Taizé community, Pomeyrol and Reuilly have increasingly become centres of church and personal renewal for faith-seekers. The largest growing Christian denomination is the Assemblies of God. Islam is the fastest growing religious group and second largest religious community in France, due in large part to the immigration of Muslims from the former African colonies. France is also home to the largest Jewish community in Europe.

Germany

(Federal Republic of Germany)

Statistics

Population: 82 million

Government: Reunified federal republic

Language: German; also Russian, Turkish and others

Literacy: 100%

Religion: Christian 76%, Muslim 4%, Jewish, Baha'i, Buddhist and others 1%

WCC member churches: Catholic Diocese of the Old Catholics in Germany, Evangelical Church in Germany, Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad, Mennonite Church in Germany



History

Germany has sprawled across central Europe for much of its long and complex history, located for centuries at the crossroads of several trade routes. Today's Germany borders both the Baltic and North Seas, with Denmark to the north, Poland and the Czech Republic to the east, Austria and Switzerland to the south and France to the west.

Until the end of the nineteenth century local rulers, in a loose collection of states and principalities, governed the lands of Germany. In 1871 these lands were unified and Germany rapidly became a major power in the region. In the early twentieth century nationalism coalesced into a desire for domination and expansion which led to the First World War and a disastrous defeat in 1918. The country's dire economic straits intensified hatred of its wartime enemies and led to the rise to power of the Nazi Party under Adolph Hitler. Nazi belief in racial purity sent millions of people to concentration camps, where they were systematically massacred. While the Jewish people were Hitler's primary targets, Roman Catholics, homosexuals, gypsies and other ethnic groups and political dissidents were also annihilated.

As Europe's largest economy and most populous nation, Germany remains a key member of

the continent's economic, political and defence organizations. Despite two devastating world wars and occupation by the victorious Allied powers in 1945, Germany rebuilt itself. With the advent of the Cold War, two independent federal German states were formed in 1949 and the country was divided by the Iron Curtain. The western Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) embedded itself in key western economic and security organizations, while the eastern German Democratic Republic (GDR) was on the front line of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. The two Germanies went their separate ways for some forty years, until the decline of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War brought down the Berlin Wall in 1989, leading to the reunification of Germany in 1990. Since then Germany has expended considerable funds to bring eastern productivity and wages closer to those in the west. In January 1999 Germany and ten other European Union countries introduced a common European exchange currency, the Euro.

Christianity spread throughout Germany between the third and twelfth centuries, particularly after the conversion of the Frankish King Clovis in 496. In 1517 Martin Luther issued his 95 theses at Wittenberg, one of the most significant dates of the Protestant Reformation. Today, Christians in Germany are about equally divided between Roman Catholics and Protestants, with a small number of Orthodox and Independent churches. During the Second World War many Christians supported Hitler, but a minority resisted Hitler's message as the antithesis of the Gospel, leading to the establishment of the Confessing Church. Many of the leaders of this movement were sent to concentration camps, where they were killed, and the church was forced to go underground as a resistance movement.

Before and since the fall of the Berlin Wall the churches have played an important part in the reunification of the country, gaining a voice in government. Since reunification, church membership has increased in the former East Germany, while those identifying themselves as

non-religious have increased in the former West Germany.

The last two decades have seen a large influx of refugees and other migrants, which has taxed the nation's social services and led to resentment, including the rise of small neo-Nazi groups and

violence against immigrants. Other important domestic issues include unemployment, tax reform and environmental pollution. Acid rain has destroyed or weakened much of Germany's once vast forests.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany and its families.
- o The witness of such ecumenical centres as the Taizé community, which has revitalized worship, particularly among young people.
- o Those working for tolerance and support for immigrants and refugees, so that hatred and violence based on ethnicity are eliminated.
- o Chocolate mousse, croissants, French fries, sauerkraut and sausage.
- o Magnificent church art and architecture, which tell the gospel story and praise God.

Pray for:

- o The struggle to unite east and west in Germany, that the gap between the rich and poor may decrease and that all citizens be treated with justice.
- o Revitalization of the church amid increasing secularism and atheism.
- o The environment, particularly in the eastern half of Germany, with its ageing factories and lack of pollution controls.
- o Refugees and immigrants who often face discrimination and racism.
- o The unemployed and those who face economic uncertainty in the midst of globalization.

PRAYERS

(1)

O God, the Father of all,
 you ask every one of us to spread
 love where the poor are humiliated,
 joy where the church is brought low,
 and reconciliation where people are divided.
 You open this way for us,
 so that the wounded body of Jesus Christ, your church,
 may be the leaven of communion for the poor of the earth
 and in the whole human family.

(2)

When I behold the problems of our world, O Lord,
 I pray not to be tempted to quick answers.
 When every tongue declares a different truth,
 when every people praises its own righteousness,
 let me pause before I speak or praise or hope.
 Let me look inward seeking to discover eternal truths
 implanted there by you,
 truths greater than those heard in the outer multitude
 of voices and words.
 And let me remember always that to be loud is not to be right,
 to be strange is not to be forbidden,
 to be new is not to be frightful,
 to be black is not to be ugly.
 Thus let me find truths true to you,
 that I may live with them, and you, and myself in peace.

(3)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God calls us out of our security.
 God invites us to set out on the way in God's name.
 But fear, half-heartedness and laziness prevent us from following God's call.
 Therefore, let us throw off the weights that hold us back.

Sung "Kyrie eleison" or "Lord have mercy"

God, it is hard to let go.
We have settled ourselves into our lives and we feel safe.
We cling to our prosperity.

Silence

Help us to learn from our sisters and brothers,
 the landless of Latin America.
 Their lives are threatened by poverty and violence,
 and yet they praise you, filled with the power of your Spirit.
 God, our need for security prevents us from letting go and following your call.
 Help us, therefore, to throw off the weights that hold us back.

Sung "Kyrie eleison" or "Lord have mercy"

**God, it is so hard to turn our faces to what lies ahead.
 We carry with us too many experiences,
 too many prejudices against other people,
 too many expectations and pretensions.
 We keep looking back.**

Silence

Let us learn from our brothers and sisters in Africa.
 They know how many dangers and problems lie before them,
 and yet, full of courage,
 they dare to take steps towards the future.

God, many things hinder us from looking forward with courage to your future.
 Help us, therefore, to throw off the weights that hold us back.

Sung "Kyrie eleison" or "Lord have mercy"

**God, you bring us onto a hard road.
 We shrink back from it.
 We long for ease and comfortable peace.**

Silence

Let us learn from our brothers and sisters in India.
 In the midst of caste differences, political and religious conflicts, they count on you.
 God, our need to control our own lives
 prevents us from receiving everything from your hands with thanksgiving.
 Help us, therefore, to throw off the weights that hold us back.

Sung "Kyrie eleison" or "Lord have mercy"

Today we walk a part of the way together, and discover how enriching encounters can be.
 But that is only one side of the story.
 We also know how often we have let people down.
 God, in silence, we ask your forgiveness.

Silence

"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent God's only Son
 into the world, so that we might live through him."

God, you have called us to follow your way.
 Through your Son Jesus Christ you have set us free from guilt.
 Everywhere you give us people at our side.
 Thus you give us strength, security and meaning for our lives.
 By this we live.
 For this we praise and thank you.

(4)

God, we Christians in Germany and in many other parts of Europe are becoming more and more unsure of ourselves.

The fear of losing the familiar,

the fear of uncertain new developments cripple many of us.

Stand by us,

so that we can resist the apathy in our churches;

so that we can seek for an authentic lifestyle as responsible Christians,

so that we can resist hostility to foreigners and nationalism with determination and courage;

and speak with more confidence of our faith in the power of your realm.

Lead us, God, to the land you will show us.

[Modification for those outside Europe:]

Lead them, God, to the land you will show them.

(5)

SENDING FORTH

Let go of what you have.

Say goodbye and turn your face to what lies ahead.

You have a long way before you.

God says, "I will be with you."

Let us encourage one another on our way together.

Let us go in the strength which God gives us.

We will go gently into the land that you, O God, will show us.

We will go together, looking out for signs of your presence.

Christ has gone before us.

Christ is waiting for us, there where we are.

(6)

God our Father,

We know that we are sinners without always understanding why.

Therefore, every day we must remember the work of the Evil One:

the temptation to have,

rather than the sharing with others that ought to guide us;

the temptation of power,

rather than the service to others that ought to direct our ambitions;

the temptation to idolize ourselves,

rather than the Word of salvation, which alone is worthy of our praise.

The Evil One is not far. The Evil One is in us.

We pray that Jesus Christ,
 who lived conquering our temptations,
 will help us overcome the sinful nature which dwells in us,
 and that following him, the first-fruits of a new creation,
 we can walk upright as women and men bearing his grace.

(7)

God, lead me in sacred ways,
 ways inward and ways outward.
 Lead me in the ways of sanctity, ways towards places of holiness
 so that I may be transformed into a committed and faithful human being.
 With the sign of the cross on my way,
 show me afresh the proper way within myself.

For the ways of life which I have passed through, I am thankful.
 For the ways that lie ahead of me,
 and are yet to be trodden, I wait in peace.
 Even the last, tiresome part of my life's journey,
 I can endure and pass through with your help, O God.
 That is the last part of the sacred journey.
 It leads me to a final destination, a way without end,
 which is waiting for me in your shelter, your eternal home.

Ways of life are ways of my faith.
 My life is a way and a journey,
 a journey on the streets of today,
 a journey on variable streets, but with an invariable goal.
 O God, be the beginning and the end of all my ways!

(8)

God of mercy,
 you are familiar with our longing to be a reflection of your presence
 and to make life beautiful for those you entrust to us.

(9)

Jesus our joy,
 when we pray in silence,
 without words,
 the simple desire for your presence is already the beginning of faith.
 And in our life living water gushes forth:
 the goodness, the selflessness that come from the Holy Spirit.

(10)

God of all loving,
you fill us with the freshness of the Gospel
when a heart that trusts is at the beginning of everything.

(11)

Jesus, joy of our hearts,
when the desire to fulfil what you expect of us
comes welling up inside us,
we understand that you invite us to love,
just as you love us.

(12)

Christ Jesus, you call us to give our life for love.
And even if there is a greater or lesser degree of darkness in each of us,
there is also your presence, the Holy Spirit.

(13)

Risen Jesus, in the ploughed-up earth of our lives
you come to place the trusting of faith.
A small seed at first,
it can become within us one of the most unmistakable Gospel realities.
It sustains the inexhaustible goodness of a human heart.

(14)

Humanity no longer exists.
Cruelties stop at nothing,
not at lovers, women, children, the helpless.
No outcries expose the torturers.
Even those who could cry remain silent.

**Quickly we shut our eyes, God, when we see people who suffer.
But you want us to look at them and do something about it.
Therefore we ask you:
give us open eyes and hearts.
Let us have ideas, which help us realize our responsibility for others.**

(15)

Again and again they nail me down:
 my girlfriend, my boyfriend.
 They make an image of me
 and I am fixed onto this image, nailed into the frame –
 but woe, if I don't fit into this frame!
 Then the friendship comes to an end.
 Again and again they nail me down,
 tell me what I have to drink,
 what I must taste,
 which jeans are the best,
 which scent makes me smell nice,
 and how I look the cool type with the best styling.
 And others are hammering into me:
 "To hit is better than to be hit!"
 and "Hit first – ask questions later!"
 The spirit of the times is nailing and hammering my freedom into these
 damned constraints.
 These I want to nail to the cross.
 But also how I nail others down,
 how I let no opinion pass other than my own,
 how I accept no one else other than me,
 and I want to nail to the cross
 how I break down under my own burdens
 and nothing means anything anymore.
 That I want to nail to the cross so I can be free.

(People are asked to write which compulsions are nailing them down and how they are nailing others down. Without speaking they nail their notes to a cross)

My words and thoughts are hanging on your cross, Jesus.

I want to be close to you.

I beg you, hold me when it gets dark.

Stay with me when it is dark.

(16)

Let us include the world in our prayers,
 where God was lost,
 let us search for God,
 let us tell stories about a new heaven and a new earth.

Let us include the world in our prayers,
 where love has to hide,

let us lift it up,
let us discover tenderness again
in the eyes of those whom we meet.

Let us include the world in our prayers,
where justice goes to the dogs,
let us dare risk a revolt,
let us imprint God's grace
upon the hearts of the judges.

Let us include the world in our prayers,
where peace lies wounded,
let us join together,
let us spread hope throughout all of God's creation.

(18)

May the peace of God fill you and protect you.
May God bless you.
May God bless and protect you,
may God's light shine upon you and make you whole.
In weeping and in laughing,
in joy and in pain,
may the Lord God bless you.



Andorra, Austria, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino, Switzerland

It might be that you find yourself in the desert
earlier than you thought;
Don't panic.
Don't be blinded by the sandstorms.
Start digging until you find some water.

It might be that you ought to wait by the well
longer than you wanted
and that you ought to find it.
Don't lose courage, don't be deceived
by a mirage,
Continue to search for the well;
continue to dig deeper.

The desert also has a well.
The desert also has water.
The desert also has life.
And when you have found the first drop of water,
you will find soon a small creek
then a river,

and the desert will be forgotten.
But do not forget to give thanks
to the one who showed you the track
who helped you to find water,
who gave you living water
so that you could drink,
so that you could live,
and not thirst anymore.

It could be that the path leading to the well
must go through the desert.
It could be that the desert often makes you sad.
Don't forget, it hides the well.
It leads to the promised land.
Only the desert enables you to reach happiness.
The paths of the desert are also the companions
of God.

Water here, Water there
Ecumenical Community Working
on Church and Environment

History

These countries' various geographical locations in western Europe make them important links between larger nation-states. Andorra, Austria, Liechtenstein, San Marino and Switzerland are mountainous. Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco and San Marino are principalities closely aligned to their larger neighbours. They are old in terms of government – San Marino claims to be the oldest republic in Europe – and came under Roman rule early in the Christian era. Their mountainous terrain prevented the rapid spread of Christianity, but also helped isolated groups of believers to maintain their faith during the repeated invasions of the next 1,000 years. In the Middle Ages, monasteries were important centres of scholarship and mission.

Andorra

(Principality of Andorra)



Statistics

Population: 70,000

Government: Parliamentary co-principality since 1993

Language: Catalan; also Spanish, Portuguese and French

Literacy: 100%

Religion: Christian 94% (almost all of whom are Roman Catholic), Other 2%

WCC member churches: None

History

Andorra is a tiny principality in the Pyrenees Mountains, surrounded by France and Spain. It is landlocked and the terrain is a mixture of narrow valleys and rugged mountains, with cold snowy winters and warm dry summers. Established by the Emperor Charlemagne in the eighth century, Andorra has been a free state since 1278, and for the next 715 years was ruled under a unique co-principality between the French chief of state and the Spanish bishop of Seo de Urgel as co-princes. In 1993 Andorra promulgated a constitution, restructuring the country into a parliamentary co-principality, with the co-princes remaining heads of state, but holding little real power. Only Andorran citizens, who are less than 20 per cent of the population, have representation in the government.

Long isolated and impoverished, Andorra has achieved considerable prosperity since the Second World War through tourism. Many immigrants, legal and illegal, are attracted to the thriving economy. Banking is another main industry in Andorra, and the absence of income taxes provides tax shelters for the wealthy. Just over half of the country consists of permanent pastures, and a major concern is the overgrazing of mountain meadows which contributes to soil erosion. Deforestation is another environmental problem.

The Roman Catholic Church is the dominant religious institution in Andorra. Freedom of religion is guaranteed under the constitution.

Austria

(Republic of Austria)

Statistics

Population: 8.2 million

Government: Federal republic

Language: German; also Slovene, Croatian and Hungarian

Literacy: 100%

Religion: Christian 90% (mostly Roman Catholic), non-religious 7%, Muslim 2%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Evangelical Church of the Augsburg and Helvetic Confessions in Austria, Old Catholic Church in Austria



History

Located in central Europe, Austria is a mountainous country, nearly half of which is covered with forests.

Austria was once part of the Roman Empire. It then endured several centuries of invasion by various tribal groups, until it was partly unified under Charlemagne in the eighth century. From the thirteenth to the early nineteenth century the country was a centre of power for the Habsburg Empire.

Austria was reduced to a small republic after its defeat in the First World War. Following annexation by Nazi Germany in 1938 and subsequent occupation by the victorious Allies in 1945, Austria's international status remained unclear for most of a decade. A State Treaty signed in 1955 ended the occupation, recognized Austria's independence and forbade unification with Germany. A constitutional law that same year declared the country's "perpetual neutrality" as a condition of the Soviet Union's military withdrawal. After the demise of the USSR in 1991, some Austrians have called into question this neutrality. Since 1945 Austria has gained both democracy and prosperity.

Austria's history has often been tied to that of the church. Christianity dates from 174, when the region was under Roman rule, and was further spread by Charlemagne. By 955 the Roman Catholic bishop of Salzburg was sending missionaries eastward. During the Reformation of

the sixteenth century, Lutheran and Reformed Churches were established. However, during the Counter-Reformation of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Protestants were persecuted and existed primarily as "underground" communities of faith, and the Roman Catholic Church regained its dominance. With the proclamation of the Edict of Toleration in 1781, Lutheran and Reformed congregations reestablished themselves. The edict allowed similar, limited religious freedom for Orthodox Christians and Jews, faith communities which had also existed in Austria for centuries. Still greater religious freedom was gained with the national constitution of 1861. This brought the Helvetic and Augsburg Confessions into the open, later united as the present-day Evangelical Church of Austria. Under Joseph II the Roman Catholic Church was established as the national church, a claim not given up until 1952.

At present, most Austrians identify themselves as members of the Roman Catholic Church, although there has been a marked decline in active churchgoing over the last several decades. The majority of Protestants in Austria are members of the Evangelical Church. The Ecumenical Council of Churches in Austria was founded in 1958 and is the principal coordinator of ecumenical activity in the country. Members include the Lutheran, Reformed, Old Catholic, Methodist, Anglican and Orthodox (Eastern and Oriental) churches.

Liechtenstein

(Principality of Liechtenstein)

Statistics

Population: 33,400

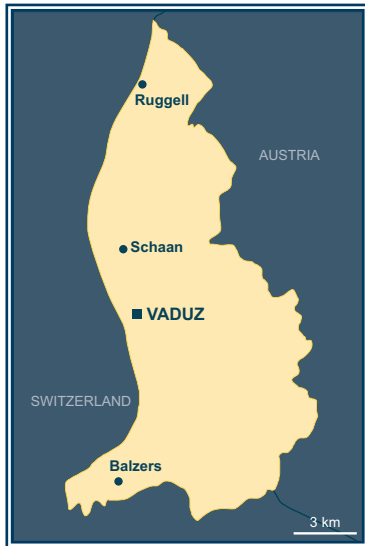
Government: Constitutional principality since 1806

Language: German

Literacy: 100%

Religion: Christian 93% (mostly Roman Catholic), Muslim 3%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: None



History

A tiny country in the foothills of the Alps in central Europe, Liechtenstein is bordered by Austria to the east and Switzerland to the south, west and north. It was first established as a monarchy within the Holy Roman Empire in 1719, and was allied with Austria's Habsburg Empire throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, until the empire's demise following the First World War. It was then aligned with Switzerland and retained its neutral status throughout the Second World War. From 1938 to 1997 Liechtenstein was run by a coalition government. In 1984 women were granted the right to vote. Today, Liechtenstein is a prosperous, heavily industrialized country with low taxes; banking and tourism are its main sources of income.

The development of the church in Liechtenstein is similar to that of Switzerland. Christianity was first brought to the area by the Roman Empire. The Roman Catholic Church is the state church and claims about 90 per cent of Christians. The largest Protestant church is the Evangelical Church in Liechtenstein, which was established in 1881 by skilled textile workers who immigrated from neighbouring countries. As in other European countries, secularization is rapidly depleting the numbers of people who attend

church. Although there are no formal ecumenical organizations, working relationships exist among the churches.

Monaco (Principality of Monaco)



Statistics

Population: 34,000

Government: Constitutional principality

Language: French; also English, Italian, Monegasque

Literacy: 99%

Religion: Christian 93% (mostly Roman Catholic), non-religious 4%, Jewish 2%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Monaco is the second smallest independent state in the world (after the Vatican City). It occupies a mountainside facing the Mediterranean Sea on the southern border of France, near Italy. It is completely urban – none of the country has arable land, permanent crops, prominent pastures, or forests and woodlands. It has mild, wet winters and hot, dry summers. Monaco relies on income from banking, services, tourism and casinos, and its citizens are far outnumbered by tourists and expatriates.

Monaco has been ruled by the House of Grimaldi since 1419. Constitutional monarchy has existed in Monaco since 1962. The minister of state is appointed from a list of three French

National candidates submitted by the French government, which is responsible for the defence of Monaco.

Christianity came to Monaco before the tenth century. Most of the population is Roman Catholic, which is also the state religion. The Anglican Church of Monaco was established in 1925 and serves mostly expatriates.

San Marino

(Most Serene Republic of San Marino)



Statistics

Population: 27,000

Government: Parliamentary republic

Language: Italian

Literacy: 99%

Religion: Christian 92% (almost entirely Roman Catholic), Non-religious 7%, Baha'i 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

The Republic of San Marino is a mountainous enclave in central Italy and one of Europe's oldest states. San Marino was established in 301 by a Christian stonemason who began a religious commune on the mountain. The first constitution for the country was in 1631. It has been aligned with Italy over the centuries, but has always retained its independent status. The Roman Catholic Church accounts for 99 per cent of Christians. The only other religious body is the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Switzerland

(Swiss Confederation)



Statistics

Population: 7.4 million

Government: Federal republic

Language: German, French, Italian, Romansch; also Spanish, English, Portuguese and others

Literacy: 100%

Religion: Christian 88%, Non-religious 7%, Muslim 3%, Other 2%

WCC member churches: Old Catholic Church of Switzerland, Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches

History

A mountainous country in west central Europe, Switzerland is bordered by Liechtenstein and Austria to the east, Italy to the east and south, France to the west, and Germany to the north. Over 70 per cent of the country is covered by the Alps. Switzerland is ethnically and linguistically diverse, with four major language communities – French, German, Italian and Romansch – and a number of minor communities.

Julius Caesar incorporated the Helvetic tribes into the Roman Empire; then they came under the influence of Germanic tribes. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Switzerland was a loose confederation of cantons that resisted inclusion into the Habsburg Empire of Austria. It first asserted a policy of neutrality in neighbour-

ing conflicts during the sixteenth century, and has maintained this status throughout numerous local conflicts and two world wars. Switzerland promulgated its first constitution in 1874. Today, it is a highly industrialized country, with one of the highest standards of living in the world. It is also prone to xenophobic tendencies.

Originally loyal to the Holy Roman Empire, Switzerland played a prominent role in the Reformation. In 1518, under the leadership of Huldrych Zwingli, the canton of Zurich asserted its independence from Roman Catholic rule. In 1536 John Calvin was welcomed into the newly Reformed church in Geneva. Throughout the centuries, there has been a rivalry between the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches in Switzerland, and today Christians in the country

are about evenly split between them. The Roman Catholic Church is the single largest denomination, followed closely by the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, which includes 18 autonomous, cantonal Reformed churches, the Free Church of Geneva, and the Evangelical Methodist Church.

Several different ecumenical and interfaith organizations have their world headquarters in Switzerland, including the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of the YMCA, the World YWCA, the Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and the Institute of Ecumenical Studies.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The high standard of living and the availability of high-quality education and health care that are enjoyed by the people in these prosperous countries.
- o Long centuries of Christian tradition and witness, especially for those Christians committed to serving others.
- o The work of the World Council of Churches and other church organizations, the YMCA and YWCA, all with offices in Geneva.
- o The many ecumenical and international agencies based in Geneva and Vienna, especially the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the agencies of the United Nations.
- o Fondue, alphorns, and cowbells.
- o The history of welcoming refugees.
- o The gifts of foreigners who bring the richness of their cultures.
- o The glorious beauty of the alps.
- o Those who are struggling to curtail the output of greenhouse gases to ease global warming, which is melting the glaciers in the Alps.

Pray for:

- o The leadership and institutions involved in struggles against the neo-Nazi movement in these countries.
- o Those involved in banking and finance, tourism, and casinos, that they engage in these activities with integrity and fiscal responsibility.

- o Christian communities in the region, both laity and clergy, that their witness may remain vital and their faith communities strong amidst materialism and secularization.
- o Those who struggle with poverty, even in the midst of such great wealth, particularly immigrants, workers in the tourist industry, and expatriates.
- o Young people who have lots of material resources but lose hope of having a meaningful life.

PRAYERS

SETTING THE TABLE

Voice 1

We are here to prepare the Lord's Supper and to celebrate it. For a celebration we need community. Each one of us is part of this community. To have community means to share life with one another. In community we experience the variety of gifts God has given us.

I bring myself. As I am I come before God and before you. Now I am here. I want to be strengthened in the company of those celebrating with me. I want to be here, to be here wholly.

Voice 2

We set the table festively. We beautify it with flowers. Flowers accompany us throughout life. Is a flower not as life is? The flower unfolds from a bud to the flower and it withers as we do.

Voice 3

We beautify the table with candles. The candles shall shine for us with their warm light. Let us be open for this light and it will be bright and warm in and around us. Light is warmth and life. Did not also Jesus give himself, as a candle is consumed by its flame?

Voice 4

We bring bread to place on our table. The baskets are filled with bread:
Bread, which we have in abundance,
bread, which we often throw away thoughtlessly,
bread, which is so scarce for many people that they go hungry each day,
Bread which we now would like to eat together in memory of the life and dying of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ says, "I am the bread of life. Those who come to me will never be hungry."

Voice 5

We bring wine to our table. Wine in jugs.
They are well-shaped jugs,

shaped from clay, from baked earth,
 from earth in which a vine can grow and bear fruit.
 The jugs are filled wine which we will now drink together.
 Jesus Christ says, "The one who believes in me will never be thirsty."

Voice 6

We put cups on our table,
 cups made from earth, shaped and fashioned by the human hand.
 We bring these cups for the wine so that we all can drink from them.
 Look, touch and taste what fills the baskets and cups.

Voice 1

The table is now prepared.
 Jesus Christ invites us to have communion just as we are;
 those tired from carrying heavy loads,
 or those joyful and light-hearted,
 the old and the young, including our children,
 natives and strangers.
 All are welcome.
 No one is excluded.
 No one should exclude herself.
 No one should exclude himself.
 The bread of life is here for all.
 The wine is the sign of the festivity to which all are invited.

Let us pray. God, you are the friend of all.
 We pray to you for the Holy Spirit,
 the Spirit which makes us free of fear and guilt,
 the Spirit which gives the strength to do good
 and bring us together in community, joy and gratitude.
 For this Spirit we pray through Jesus Christ.

(2)

With you in the far blue depth:
 Will you allow yourself to be taken into infinity?
 Are you willing to go a long way with me,
 into the unknown, into fears that, at times, take my breath away,
 to the border of insanity,
 into the suffering which will come at times,
 into the tears, which sometimes almost carry me away,
 into the darkness of my soul,
 into the wounded blood,

into the loneliness of the hungry wolf in me,
 which stands, crying, on the edge of life and death?
 Do you really want to lend me your hand,
 to save me from drowning?
 I am ready to struggle again if you go with me.

(3)

PRAYER BEFORE MEETING SOMEONE IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION

Lord,
 not my feet but your coming,
 not my hands but your friendship,
 not my emotion but your compassion,
 not my heart but your love,
 not my sentences but your word,
 not my ears but your listening,
 not my eyes but your regard,
 not my intelligence but your thought,
 not my silence but your presence,
 in the name of Jesus Christ.

(4)

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

With the first witnesses of Jesus Christ
 we confess the Christian faith, proclaiming
 with John the Baptist:
"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."
 with Andrew:
"We have found the Messiah."
 with Nathaniel:
"Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"
 with the Samaritans:
"We know that this is truly the Saviour of the world."
 with Peter:
"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. You have the words of eternal life."
 with Thomas:
"My Lord and my God."
 with Paul:
"Who are you, Lord?"
 With all the witnesses of the whole church
 we proclaim the glory of God and sing God's praise.

(5)

Happy are those who walk with Christ
step by step with the Gospel.

A new world is promised them
open to the fruits of justice.

To desire the Spirit is life and peace.

Happy are those who remain ready
to give everything for your reign.

Their thirst is great and you are aware of it.
You come to shower the poor with hope.

To desire the Spirit is life and peace.

Happy are those who fight with the armour of love
so that every person can rise up.

The prisoners can believe that the day will come
when a brother, a sister, will be there to break their chains.

To desire the Spirit is life and peace.

With our endless hope
we wait with confidence.

You announce to us a future
where no one ever expects such an immense glory.

To desire the Spirit is life and peace.

In the violence of the night
all creation is waiting.

Under its sadness its voice cries out
Tell us, Lord, what is being born.

To desire the Spirit is life and peace.

(6)

PSALM FOR THE WOMEN OF LATIN AMERICA

Lord,

you promised to fill the depths of the earth with a new blood
which washes the destiny of daughters deprived of bread
and you promised a world for us to love
without worry for the tomorrows
nor fear of the night.

Lord, remember them,

the women of Latin America,

who have let their lives become
widespread in our history and geography
who at each lunch, multiply the stale bread
and each evening receive a cup mixed with sweat and silent rage.

Lord,
remember the women of Latin America
because from south to north
they have fought to find your promises,
to find a land where milk and honey overflow.

Lord,
you have promised to fill the depths of human beings
with tenderness, closeness, equality
and a sun illuminating each face.

Lord,
I pray to you for them.
I pray to you for the grandmother on the corner of the street
with her face already hardened by life.
I pray to you for the mother facing me,
for the sister who fights,
for Marina with her body bought,
making her ill each day,
for the women of the countryside
and the women of the mountains.

Remember Lord,
the women of Latin America
those whose sadness has made them strong
those whose depths are filled with hope
those who each evening, with a big smile,
look at the strength of the moon.
Give them a new earth.

(7)
You, my Lord and my God,
Give me all that leads me to you.
You, my Lord and my God,
Take away from me, all that separates me from you.
You, my Lord and my God,
Take me away from myself and offer me entirely to you.

(8)

How wonderful are all your works, O Lord,
when everyone within the grand family of the church
makes a great effort to put their talents at the service of their sisters and brothers.

How wonderful are all your works, O Lord,
when those responsible for nations or families or communities
search to serve their brothers and sisters
with a better distribution of their riches
and good things indispensable for life.

How wonderful are all your works, O Lord,
when all those who are overworked think of sharing with the unemployed,
who would be happy to do something creative.

How wonderful are all your works, O Lord,
when the efforts and research of doctors
no longer serve only to relieve suffering.

How wonderful are all your works, O Lord,
when children and youth learn to discover and love the marvels of your creation
in nature and the simplicity of life.

How wonderful are all your works, O Lord,
when the retired and the elderly can continue
to offer the fruits of their experience to others.

How wonderful are all your works, O Lord,
when we would have given up
our insatiable desire to possess the world
and find a place fit for us in the midst of all that lives and moves on the earth.
Our work and our rest, our words and our silences honour you
and tell of your love for life in Jesus Christ,
in whom we have abundance.

(9)

Blessed are you, Wisdom divine.
You cast into the world the prophet of Nazareth,
the Son of Humanity, your envoy beckoning with tender mercies.
Blessed are you, Wisdom divine.
You were with him on the roads of Galilee

where he healed bodies and souls, wounded and sore
while his words rekindled the dying embers
of a Presence too quickly forgotten.

With him the limitations of our world receded:
Instead of a sly fox, a mother hen with sheltering wings,
as if threatening force had yielded to gentleness;
instead of the fleeing from terror,
the undertaking of one's destiny
as if the hatred of oneself and others had given way
to the calm conviction that one's own self is a gift for others.

Blessed are you, Wisdom divine.
You cast into the world the prophet of Nazareth,
the Son of Humanity, your envoy beckoning with tender mercies.

Today when brute force and hatred seem to triumph,
when there is no longer walking among us the healer, your envoy,
when our destiny seems less and less assured
you come and spread your wings over us,
beautiful Wisdom of God
You come to remind us that the only way to love God
is to love our neighbours.

You come to accompany us on our discordant pathways
unravelling them, at last, by the dancing rhythm of your word.

Blessed are you, Wisdom divine.
You propel us towards the fulfilment of each of our lives
You rekindle the dying embers
of a Presence too quickly forgotten.



Myanmar, Thailand

Myanmar

(Union of Myanmar)

(also known as Burma)

Peace is tantamount to... one of the basic necessities of life. In fact one could say that peace is life itself because a life without peace is hardly a life worth living. But by peace I do not mean a life of passivity, I do not mean a life without action because sometimes we have to act a lot to bring about peace. What do we mean actually by peace? I suppose basically we mean a sense of inner security that will give us the strength to work for others and for the community, to work for progress and development. Without a sense of inner security we cannot work for progress.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

I weep, but I weep not for myself.

I am but one of hundreds of thousands
who have suffered so.

One day our pain will end.

No, I weep not for myself, but for those
who do not yet know

that the pain they create does not destroy
humanity and dignity.

Burma Issues Staff, Thailand

Statistics

Population: 42.7 million

Government: Military regime

Language: Burmese and English; also Shan,
Karen, Kuki-Chin, Chinese and over 100 tribal
languages

Literacy: 83%

Religion: Buddhist 73%, Ethnic 13%, Christian 8% (mostly Protestant), Muslim 2%, Hindu 2%, Confucian 1%

WCC member churches: Church of the Province of Myanmar, Mara Evangelical Church, Methodist Church – Upper Myanmar, Myanmar Baptist Convention



History

Myanmar (formerly Burma) changed its name when the military took over in 1989. It has not been recognized by some countries because of its authoritarian dictatorship. Sometimes known as the country shaped like a cat with a long tail, Myanmar is located in southeast Asia on the Indian Ocean. It is bordered on the west by India and Bangladesh, on the north and east by China and on the east by Thailand and Laos.

In its early history, Myanmar was settled by several waves of immigrants from India, Tibet and China, including the Mon, Pyu, Burman, Shan, Kachin and Karen peoples. Today, over two-thirds of all people are ethnically Burman, with the other tribal groups comprising large minority communities. In 1826 the British arrived in the country and many Chinese and Indian people settled in urban areas. In 1886 Myanmar was annexed to India by the British, but reverted to a separate colony in 1937. During the

Second World War it was occupied by Japan. It became an independent state in 1948.

Violence and ethnic unrest marred Myanmar's postwar history. Following a coup in 1962, a strict socialist state was established, and from 1966 to 1978 the country was largely closed to the outside world in an effort to unite the nation. It resumed contact in 1978. The government of General New Win (1962–88) was overthrown by a military junta. Democratic elections were held in 1990, but the military junta refused to cede power and placed some 1,000 democratic leaders under arrest. One of these was Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for her work in non-violent protest, and who was kept under house arrest from 1989 to 1995, and from 2000 to May 2002.

Myanmar has been one of the major human rights violators in the post-Cold War world. Traffic in heroin and opium provides a large source of income for the military government. The government maintains a pervasive security apparatus, which punishes dissidents through imprisonment, exile, the searching of private homes and murder. There are no organizations in Myanmar dedicated to women's rights, and many women and girls are raped, driven into forced labour or prostitution, and trafficked to neighbouring countries for the sex trade. This has led to a significant increase in HIV and AIDS, which now affects approximately 2 per cent of the population. The military has also kidnapped thousands of children to use as soldiers and forced labour. Although emigration is strictly controlled, there are many refugees from Myanmar in the surrounding countries, particularly Thailand, and there are estimated to be between one and two million internally displaced people.

Buddhism is the dominant religion in Myanmar, interwoven with ethnic animism and a belief in spirits known as Nat. Christianity arrived during the tenth century with the Nestorians. The first Roman Catholic missionaries came to the region in 1544, and during the early nineteenth century several Baptist missionaries arrived from the US.

Today, Christianity is most active among ethnic tribal groups, particularly the Karen. The largest Christian denominations in Myanmar are the Myanmar Baptist Convention and the Roman Catholic Church. The Myanmar Council of Churches is an ecumenical organization that has its roots in the 1914 Regional Council for Burma, which was part of the National Christian Council of India.

Thailand

(Kingdom of Thailand)



Statistics

Population: 65 million

Government: Constitutional monarchy

Language: Thai; also English, Lao, Chinese, Malay, Khmer, Vietnamese and 40 other languages

Literacy: 93%

Religion: Buddhist 94%, Muslim 5%, Chinese folk religions 1%

WCC member churches: Church of Christ in Thailand

History

Thailand is located in southeast Asia with coastlines on both the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Thailand in the South China Sea. It is bordered

on the west and north by Myanmar, on the south by Malaysia, on the south and east by Cambodia and on the east by Laos.

Known as Siam until 1939, Thailand is the only country in southern Asia that was never under colonial rule. With ethnic roots that can be traced back 2,000 years to China, it dates its history as a national kingdom to 1238, when a strong, centralized monarchical government was established. While these monarchies have continued through to the present day, the latter half of the twentieth century was marked by a number of coups and the military held the real power. In 1995, however, a new democratic government was elected and limitations were placed on the number of seats in the House of Representatives that could be held by the military.

Thailand's traditional culture is based on a strong attachment to the nation, the monarchy, Buddhism and, until recently, the agricultural character of the people's way of life. Today, technology and secularism are increasingly influential, and corruption and crime are rampant. The illegal drugs trade is widespread, and opium poppies are grown in the northern parts of the country.

Women and children from rural areas and surrounding countries have been sold or kidnapped and forced into the sex trade, which by some estimates accounts for over 14 per cent of the country's gross domestic product and involves up to 20 per cent of Thai girls in their teens. Thailand also has the highest percentage of people with AIDS in Asia. There are large refugee populations from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. Environmentally, deforestation and flooding are problems, particularly in the northern part of the country.

As in neighbouring Myanmar, the Nestorians brought Christianity to Thailand during the tenth century. Roman Catholic priests from France arrived during the seventeenth century, and Roman Catholics continue to be the dominant Christian group. In the 1820s and 1830s Protestant missionaries from Europe and

America came to Thailand. The Church of Christ in Thailand was established in 1934 from these American Baptist, Congregational, Disciples of Christ and Presbyterian missions, and has grown to include 90 per cent of the Protestant Christian communities of Thailand.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Those who are working towards non-violent solutions to the military and ethnic conflicts in Myanmar.
- o Thailand's support for refugees from Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.
- o Those working on behalf of exploited children, particularly those in the sex trade.
- o The Myanmar Council of Churches.
- o Orchids and ching chops (a Thai instrument like brass finger cymbals), boat-shaped harps, gongs, bamboo flutes, colourful silks, graceful dancers and gentle spirits.
- o Burmese marionettes, some with 60 different strings.
- o Buddhist and Christian dialogue, which strives to break down old barriers and find common cause for hope and peace.

Pray for:

- o Children in Myanmar, especially those who are soldiers, orphans, refugees, or forced into labour and prostitution.
- o Those imprisoned unjustly and who endure spiritual and physical oppression.
- o Women and girls and their protection from rape and forced labour.
- o Ethnic groups to maintain their own rich heritage, languages and cultures.
- o The 1–2 million internally displaced people and refugees, so that they receive what they need: food, clothing, medicine, blankets, education and security.
- o Those who deliver humanitarian aid and supplies, so that they will be blessed, protected and empowered in sharing God's love and hope.
- o Families who have been separated.
- o Christians in Myanmar who undergo discrimination.
- o Those struggling to rebuild their lives after the destruction of the tsunami.
- o An end to corruption and crime, drug use and sex tourism.
- o Those suffering from AIDS.

PRAYERS

(1)

We intercede on behalf of women everywhere who despite all their efforts and work must watch their children suffer from malnutrition and disease. We pray that these

women will have the opportunities they need to learn the skills which will enable them to change the painful circumstances of their lives.

In Jesus' name we intercede on behalf of women who are not able to feed and care for their children properly.

We intercede on behalf of all those people around the world who have positions of authority in governments and corporations and as individuals. We pray that they will exercise their authority for the welfare of the people of the world and make it possible for all people to live with dignity.

In Jesus' name we pray on behalf of persons in government and business who need their eyes and hearts opened to the suffering of others.

We intercede on behalf of our brothers and sisters whose lives, families and homes have been ravaged by war. We pray to make us instruments of peace.

In Jesus' name we pray for all people seeking peace in the midst of the relentless destruction of war.

We intercede on behalf of all who pray. May our prayer become more informed, may our commitment to do justice be tireless, may our mercy and compassion grow strong and courageous. May we know in the depths of our being that you are God with us, Emmanuel.

We ask as did the disciples: "Lord, teach us to pray."

(2)

Lord God most high, may we offer you praise and thankfulness for your loving kindness in letting us hear about the precious gospel. We are happy to be called Christians, and so make us all real ones. Grant us the power to feel your presence among us. Cleanse our hearts and make them clear like crystals in order that we may see you and that the Holy Spirit may dwell in us. Dear Lord, there are many friends of ours who have not heard your precious name, nor have they seen your light. Help us all to dedicate ourselves more to your service and to shine for you. Forgive us for being selfish and letting your light grow dim. We ask these things in the name of the great Lord Jesus Christ, whose merits lift us from sin.

(3)

Eternal God, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

Your name is great and to be praised.

In you is our trust established.

Loving God, we come to your presence with fear and humility.
We know your love for us is never-ending, strong and compassionate.

**Our hearts lift in praise
as we acknowledge your presence with us.**

God, tender shepherd of the flock,
we confess that we can be like sheep led astray.
Lead us beside your healing waters,
that we may find rest from loads that are too heavy;
that we may find peace
in the midst of the turmoil and stresses of our days.

Encourage us when we feel overburdened
by the struggle for daily survival.

**O Lord, have mercy on us. Anoint our heads with oil.
Comfort us with your compassion.**

God, forgiver of our sins,
through your Son's ministry and death on the cross
you showed us how to love and forgive our enemies.
Teach us to love and forgive,
and lead us in paths of righteousness
so that your Kingdom will come
with its message of reconciliation for all.

**O Lord, have mercy on us.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**May we be open to the guidance of your Spirit
as we live in our world.**

**May we be able to discern what is truth
in the midst of the chaos and pain,
and follow its path of peace and harmony.**

(4)

Lord!

Teach my eyes to see your love,
which is not only in the church,
but also among the people.

Lord!

Teach my mouth to tell the truth
for the people who are being oppressed
by power structures.

Lord!

Teach my stomach to suffer
with people who are hungry for food.

Lord!

Teach my hand to serve,
for the people who are struggling
for their lives.

Lord!

Teach my feet to walk
with people,
who need your love.

(5)

Dear Lord,

thank you for your love.

Because you groaned for Lazarus,

we know that you also groan for us in the midst of troubles.

You shine a light on the path

so that we can walk confidently with you.

Sometimes we lose confidence in you

when we face problems, violence, discrimination, difficulties.

We say with Mary,

"If you had been here Lord ..."

Forgive us our weakness, our suspicion of your love.

Help us to trust in you,

strengthen us in faith that you are always with us

in any situation;

you will lead us through darkness to life.

Keep us close to you so that we will be a light that shines

for others to see the path that you want them to walk.

May your name be glorified through the work we do,

in Jesus' name we pray.

(6)

O God, our heavenly Father,

you are the author and source

of the great commandment and the great commission.

Grant us vision for evangelism now and into this new millennium.

We pray for the poor, the maimed and the displaced,
we pray for the theological students in our institutions –
may they be aware of the commandment and commission.

Make us to be light
and salt of the earth.

Within all the pomp and pageantry of our tradition,
make the people see that humble Galilean
in whose name we pray.

(7)

O God, our Father,
the fountain of love, power, and justice,
the God who cares,
particularly for the least,

those suffering the most
and the poorest among us.

O God, Lord of creation,
grant us today your guidance and wisdom,
so that we may see the human predicament for what it is.
Give us courage and obedience
so that we may follow you completely.

Help us, Lord,
to bear witness to the cross of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
who alone is the reason for hope,
and in whose name we pray.

(8)

Give us this day our daily bread.
All good gifts of the earth come from your generous hands, God.
Yet, this abundance is not shared equally among us.
While some are satisfied, others are starving.
Women often become the victims of exploitation
because they are desperate to feed and care for their children.
If only we would be mindful that each and every one of us must pray:
Give us this day our daily bread.



Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam

I think of my motherland, Cambodia, as an invocation I'd give to the world, dreaming that peace will truly come to this wounded nation of mass genocide and violence.

I think of her becoming a land of gardens, a rainforest of air and life, a country of forgiveness and compassion. She will represent understanding beyond borders and become a peace-maker of neighbouring conflicts with the Vietnamese, the Thais, and ourselves ...

I think of Cambodia as one nation loved, one nation healed and freed from war and hate. Imagine the earth with all nations loved and treated when sick or diseased. Imagine families of people willing to share, to understand and learn from each other. Imagine all the wisdom and the experiences that we could gather to make our planet one home and ourselves one people, united in our diversity. Imagine .

Chath Piersath

H i s t o r y

At one time, under the influence of Buddhism, this region was one of the most peaceful in the world. All three countries were predominantly Buddhist, but many other forces and influences gradually entered the various kingdoms. The missionaries and colonizers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were followed by war and devastation. The Roman Catholic Church was firmly established by 1666 in southern Vietnam, later in Kampuchea and not until 1885 in Laos. Protestant work began much later. Christians in the northern coastal region of Indochina suffered greatly in waves of persecution in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which also led to thousands being put to death in the south, motivated by religious and political considerations. Later, the kingdoms and states were colonized by France into what was known as French Indochina.

Cambodia

(Kingdom of Cambodia)



Statistics

Population: 13.3 million

Government: Multiparty democracy under a constitutional monarchy

Language: Khmer; also French, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cham, Malay, Brao, Kui, Mhong, Pear and others

Literacy: 66%

Religion: Theravada Buddhism 95%, Christian 1% (mostly Independents), Other 4%

WCC member churches: None

History

Located in southeast Asia, Cambodia is surrounded by Thailand, Laos and Vietnam to the north, east and south, and by the Gulf of Thailand to the southwest.

Cambodia's troubled modern history, including its genocide of 1975, is much better known than the centuries of peace which preceded the Vietnam War, which inexorably drew Cambodia (or Kampuchea) into its vortex. During the sixth century, people known as the Khmers established an empire that lasted for several centuries. During the colonial period the area was ruled by the French. Cambodia obtained its independence in 1953 and enjoyed a period of relative stability, but was increasingly affected by the war in neigh-

bouring Vietnam and a communist insurgency movement within the country known as the Khmer Rouge. A coup in 1970 ushered in a right-wing anti-Vietnamese government and thousands of resident Vietnamese were massacred. The ensuing civil war resulted in much loss of life and large-scale destruction.

In 1975 the Khmer Rouge captured the capital, Phnom Penh, gained control of the whole country and began a drastic programme of social change. Whole populations were moved out of the towns to work in the fields under forced labour conditions, where many died. Professional and educated people were exterminated: 75 per cent of all teaching staff and 96 per cent of university students were killed. It is estimated that at least 3 million people died during the four years of the regime. The Khmer Rouge attempted to eradicate all religion: some 90 per cent of Buddhist monks and nuns perished and an unknown number of Christians were killed.

In 1978 Vietnam, supported by a Kampuchean opposition group, invaded the country, drove the Khmer Rouge into the countryside, and touched off 13 years of civil war. UN-sponsored elections in 1993 helped restore some semblance of normality, as did the rapid decline of the Khmer Rouge in the mid-1990s. A coalition government, formed after national elections in 1998, brought renewed political stability and the surrender of remaining Khmer Rouge forces.

Christianity came to Cambodia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Several Independent churches were established during the twentieth century, and the New Apostolic Church is currently the largest Christian denomination in Cambodia.

Laos

(Lao People's Democratic Republic)

Statistics

Population: 6 million

Government: One-party communist state



Language: Lao; also French, Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese, English and 70 others

Literacy: 56%

Religion: Buddhism 49%, Ethnic 42% Christian 2%, Chinese folk religions 1%, Muslim 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Laos is entirely landlocked on the southern Asia peninsula. Myanmar and China lie to the north, with Vietnam to the east, Cambodia to the south and Thailand to the west.

Laos was first united under one government in the fourteenth century. In 1713 internal conflict led to the division of the country into three kingdoms, leaving the country vulnerable to aggression. After a long struggle to maintain independence, Laos became a French colony in 1893. Attempts were made to regain independence following the formation of the Communist Party of Indochina. This party led groups in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam in their struggles for self-determination. Laos became a constitutional monarchy in 1947, and in 1949 it was granted limited self-government within the French Union. Lao independence was recognized by the Geneva Agreement on Indochina in 1954. Despite this agreement the Laotian government remained unstable for years.

From 1954 to 1975 the struggle to retain independence caused extensive destruction of land and property. The majority of the struggles mirrored events in neighbouring countries. In essence, the battles were between village-based communism and democratic capitalism. During the American inspired civil war in Vietnam, Laos allied with the US. Consequently, when the Americans were forced to leave southeast Asia in 1975, Vietnamese forces entered Laos and established the Lao People's Democratic Republic under the communist Pathet Lao, which ended the six-century monarchy. Close ties to Vietnam and communism were replaced with a gradual return to a form of state-controlled capitalism and admission to ASEAN in 1997.

Laos is one of the least developed countries in southeast Asia. Currently, there are no railroads and just over 2,000 km of paved highways. This lack of infrastructure makes disaster relief difficult, particularly as flooding is common.

Today, average per capita income in Laos is less than \$1 per day. One lasting legacy of the war is millions of unexploded landmines, located on farmlands and in forested areas where many people live. As in other countries of southeast Asia, kidnapping of women and children for the sex industry in neighbouring Thailand is also a serious issue.

Christianity in Laos began with Italian Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century. All the major Catholic mission centres are located on the border with Thailand. Beginning in 1950, the Catholic mission shifted its focus to mountain peoples. The first Protestant missionaries – Swiss Brethren who translated the Bible into the vernacular – arrived in 1902. Overseas Missionary Fellowship workers strengthened their work after 1957. Of the Protestant groups, the most successful is the Gospel Church of Laos. During the 1970s the communist government took over all Catholic schools, orphanages, residences and churches, and eliminated religious education. All foreign missionaries were forced to leave. Though the current law allows freedom

of religion, the government controls all public meetings and requires that they be registered. Christians, in particular, are considered western and subversive.

Vietnam

(*Socialist Republic of Vietnam*)

Life is filled with suffering, but it is also filled with many wonders, like the blue sky, the sunshine, and the eyes of a baby. To suffer is not enough. We must also be in touch with the wonders of life. They are within us and all around us, everywhere, any time. If we are not happy, if we are not peaceful, we cannot share peace and happiness with others, even those we love, those who live under the same roof. If we are peaceful, if we are happy, we can smile and blossom like a flower, and everyone in our family, our entire society, will benefit from our peace.

Thich Nhat Hanh



Statistics

Population: 82.6 million

Government: One-party communist state

Language: Vietnamese; also French, Chinese, Thai, Muong, Khmer, Montagnard, English and 60 others

Literacy: 93%

Religion: Buddhist 50%, Ethnic 9%, Christian 8% (mostly Roman Catholic), atheist 6%, Chinese folk religion 1%, Muslim 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Vietnam is located on the South China Sea, with China to the north, and Laos and Cambodia to the west.

Vietnam has been populated since 6,000 BC, and was a single independent kingdom by AD 1400. In the nineteenth century the French colonized Vietnam and the rest of Indochina. During the Second World War the country was invaded by Japanese forces, and when the war ended in 1945 it was split in two to facilitate the disarmament of Japanese troops. In the south the French colonial government was restored, but in the north, nationalist forces led by Ho Chi Minh declared the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The struggle for political power led to several decades of war, first with the French until their defeat in 1954, and then between North and South Vietnam. In 1961 the US entered the war on the side of South Vietnam and remained the dominant presence until a ceasefire agreement in 1973. In 1975 North Vietnamese troops overran the South. Violence continued, with Vietnam invading neighbouring Cambodia and repelling an invasion from China.

Throughout this period, most western countries refused to acknowledge the Vietnamese government and imposed economic sanctions, leaving it isolated from much of the international community. In 1986 an economic policy known as *doi moi* (economic renovation) was instituted that encouraged a mixture of private, collective and state ownership; by 1994 international sanctions were removed and diplomatic ties with other countries resumed.

Vietnam wrote and approved its own constitution in 1992 and has a unicameral parliament elected by popular vote held every five years. There is only one political party, the Communist Party of Vietnam.

It is estimated that 13 million people were killed or displaced by the Vietnam War, and 2 million still remain outside Vietnam. The use by the US of the environmentally destructive defoliant Agent Orange devastated much of the countryside, destroying many of the forests that at one time covered two-thirds of the country. Illegal cutting of firewood and slash-and-burn agriculture have further exacerbated ecological problems.

Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism were the first religions established in Vietnam; a combination of these, along with ethnic and folk religions, is followed today by most Vietnamese. Christianity was first introduced by French Roman Catholic missionaries in 1580 and has survived and prospered, in spite of persecution over the centuries. Roman Catholics continue to

be the dominant Christian group, especially in the south, where many Christians moved when the country was divided after the Second World War. A minority of Christians attend small Protestant or Evangelical churches and unregistered house churches. All religious groups suffered during the turmoil of the war. In 1966 a Buddhist attempt to overthrow the southern government in favour of free elections and representative government was followed by severe repression by South Vietnam and the US. While conditions have improved in recent years, severe limitations have been placed on all religious groups; some Christians have been imprisoned or even killed, meetings have been disrupted and churches destroyed.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Those who help to clear landmines.
- o Caregivers for those who have lost limbs.
- o Cambodian Christians who are returning home after years in exile, preaching the Gospel and starting new churches.

Pray for:

- o Those who grieve either because of civil war and genocide, or because of floods and other natural disasters.
- o Those who suffered losses in the tragic civil wars and genocides that marked the middle years of the twentieth century.
- o Women and children who are kidnapped and taken from their countries, forced to work in the sex industry.
- o The establishment of economic justice in Southeast Asia, and the reduction and elimination of debt to wealthy foreign countries.
- o The children of Cambodia, that they may know peace, and that they be able to play and attend school instead of making war.
- o The land, that it may be green again, its trees left unharmed and its fruit shared.
- o The poor, who subsist on an average of less than one US dollar per day.
- o Christian witness to the gospel.

PRAYERS

(1)

We beg the world to stop making mines.

We beg the world to stop laying mines.

We beg for funds for clearing mines

So that we can rebuild our families,

Our village and our country again.

(2)

DISMISSAL

Live by the Way – it yields the sweetest taste.

It feeds the soul until the world ends ...

Keep not a pot of gold – keep your good name.

A slab of stone wears out – justice endures.

Hold steadfast to the Way and never swerve.

Nurse virtue – may it never wilt nor die.

(3)

We remember, O Lord,

those who suffer from any kind of discrimination,

your children, and our brothers and sisters,

who are humiliated and oppressed.

We pray for those who are denied fundamental human rights,

for those who are imprisoned,

and especially those who are tortured.

Our thoughts rest a few moments with them ...

And we pray that your love and compassion may sustain them always.

(4)

BRIDGES

God, in all our sadness and despair

it has been difficult for us to know you.

Now we are in a new era in Cambodia

where there are disparities between the rich and poor in our country.

The corrupt know only themselves and their own selfish needs.

Please, God, help us to meet the needs of the poor

and address the real social needs of our country.

God, answer our prayer.

(5)

YOUTH

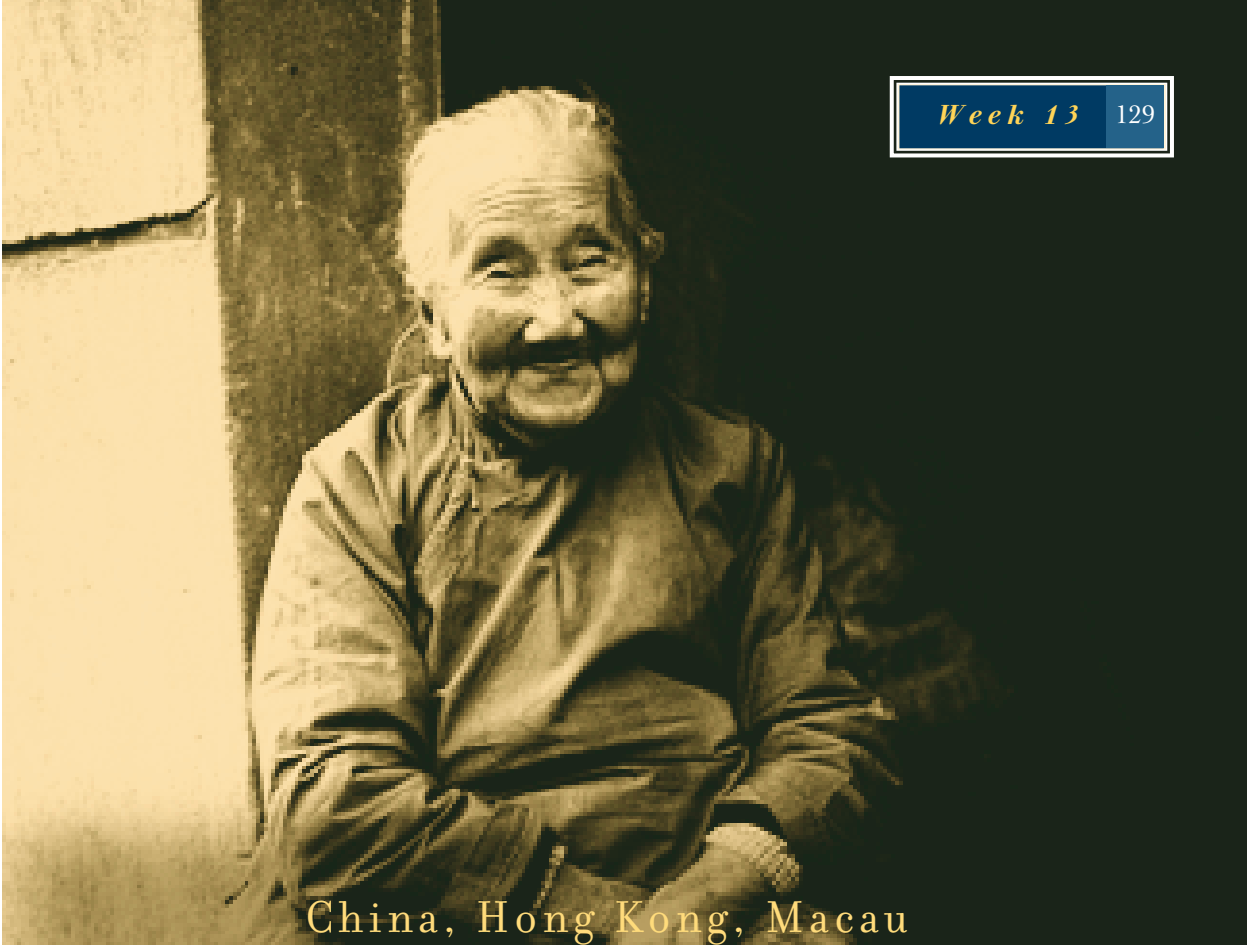
God of all genders and no gender,
 we seek your guidance for our youth in Cambodia;
 they suffer many illusions of materialism and capitalism.
 Cambodia has sold her soul to the World Trade Organization (WTO)
 and our youth and children suffer because of their individualistic policies.
 Please God, we cry as the youth of Cambodia
 to help us find practical and sustainable needs for our future.
 Give us the means to study at school
 where the system is full of corruption
 and where the teacher and the ministry of education care
 only for themselves.
 Therefore, God, give us the grace to study well among all these adversaries.
God, answer our prayer.

(6)

ENVIRONMENT

The air is full of toxins, the rivers
 and lakes carry with them the smells and stench of the dead.
 The trees in our forest are rapidly depleting at the hands
 of wealthy business men and women who seek only to get rich
 without any thought to our environment.
God, we seek your intervention.

O, Mother Nature,
 we understand your suffering.
 Please give us to the power to help you to reclaim your beauty
 so that we can all benefit from your rich resources.
 The rich and powerful build damns whilst the poor villagers
 go without water.
 Please, Mother Nature, give us hope and strength to change
 our environment
 and the attitudes of those who seek only to reap your resources and strip
 you of your dignity.
God, answer our prayer.



China, Hong Kong, Macau

Our starting point is the love of God, or the God of love. Behind all creation is love. Love is the key to all the mysteries of existence. God's love moves God to create, to teach, to forgive, to save and to sanctify so that more and more people may find the source of energy of this love. God's ultimate goal is to create a universe of love, a world of love, in which a human community lives by the principle of voluntary mutual love. God is not a steamroller or a bulldozer, crushing or clearing away people's will and freedom. God's will is love's will, a will-to-fellowship. God created humanity in God's own image. The very Trinity tells us that God is a community of love.

Bishop K.H. Ting

China *(People's Republic of China)*

The Chinese character for peace, *wa*, means harmony. It derives from the combination of two words: rice and mouth. When every mouth has enough rice and no one is hungry, then truly there is peace.



*S t a t i s t i c s***Population:** 1.3 billion**Government:** One-party communist state**Language:** Standard Chinese or Mandarin, Yue (Cantonese) and other dialects; also Tibetan, Mongolian, Manchu, Korean, Japanese, English, Russian and more than 170 other languages and dialects**Literacy:** 86%**Religion:** Officially atheist, Daoist (Taoist), Confucian, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian 9%**WCC member churches:** China Christian Council*H i s t o r y*

For most of its recorded history Chinese civilization has led the world in the arts and sciences. As a political and cultural entity, China traces its roots back to the Xia dynasty, which began around 2000 BC, after which a series of dynasties ruled parts of what became China, some of which lasted for several centuries. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, China was the most advanced civilization on earth. Portuguese explorers settled in Macau during the sixteenth century, and British colonizers arrived in Hong Kong during the eighteenth century.

Civil wars weakened China during the nineteenth century, and in 1911 the final dynasty was overthrown by nationalists who instituted a republic. Over the next decades, however, China was invaded by Japan and again torn apart by civil war.

In 1949 communist forces under the leadership of Mao Zedong took the country from the nationalists and the beginnings of the present Chinese regime were proclaimed. (Many of the nationalist leadership fled to the Chinese island of Taiwan, where they established a rival government. This is still a major source of tension with China.) Since 1949 various political, cultural and economic "reform" movements have often had disastrous results. The Great Leap Forward campaign, begun in 1958, resulted in some 20 million deaths from malnutrition. During the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76, millions were killed for ideological reasons, schools were closed, property was confiscated, and many millions more were forced to relocate or work in labour camps.

Mao died in 1976. Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1977 with a new vision for China's economic development that opened the world's largest country to market forces and a form of economic capitalism while retaining communist political ideology and institutions. In 1987 students demonstrating for democratic reforms were massacred by government troops in Tiananmen Square in Beijing.

Officially, the country is atheist, although Taoism and Buddhism are the traditional religions, and Confucianism has provided an influential philosophical world-view. Christianity was initially brought to China around the seventh century by Nestorians and lasted about two centuries. In the 16th century, Roman Catholic missionaries from Portugal arrived and began to make an impression on China. It was not until the nineteenth century that Protestants developed a significant missionary presence.

In 1949, with the establishment of the People's Republic, all churches and institutions receiving foreign funds were registered by the government, all foreign missionaries were expelled and by 1954 Protestant churches had begun what was known as the Three Self Patriotic Movement (self-government, self-support, self-propagation) (TSPM). This movement made it clear to government that the church was working and living within "the overall climate and necessary discipline of patriotism". It had its critics inside and outside China, but the TSPM helped ensure the church's survival. The Catholic Patriotic Association, which held its first national congress in 1957, was a parallel Roman Catholic body that experienced a split when an underground church was formed which remained loyal to the Vatican.

During the Cultural Revolution all churches and church-related colleges were closed, and the church was forced to go underground. After Deng Xiaoping assumed power, the Communist Party of China (CCP) repudiated some of its past policies, promised greater freedom to the people and allowed religious liberalization. This marked the beginning of what later came to be known as Christian fever, an

expression that by 1990 was used even in official publications. There were then nearly 6,000 open churches in China, some 15,000 meeting places and 5 million members. The Catholic Church continued to function apart from Rome.

Paradoxically, the persecution of churches during the Cultural Revolution did much for church union. The emerging church eschewed denominational labels and became united as the China Christian Council (CCC) in 1980, which operated as both a council of churches and a national Protestant church. The TSPM and CCC continue as one. In 1991 the CCC joined the World Council of Churches.

The CCP has officially recognized five religions: Taoism, Buddhism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism. Today, Christians are generally allowed to practise their faith openly, although there has been some continued persecution of individuals and groups. Church leaders say there is rapid growth of religion, with more than 100 million religious adherents in China. Estimates of the numbers of Protestant Christians vary wildly from 10 million to 80 million. Most reliable figures place the number at around 16 million.

One of the Chinese church's important links with the outside world is the Amity Foundation, set up in 1984 and largely managed by Christians. The foundation manages a number of projects in health care and rural development. Amity enables the Chinese church to receive outside assistance for social welfare projects without compromising its principle of self-support. The foundation has printed more than 30 million Bibles to date.

Hong Kong

(Hong Kong Special Administrative Region)

Statistics

Population: 7 million

Government: Special administrative region (SAR) of China, with some economic and political autonomy

Language: Cantonese; also English and others



Literacy: 85%

Religion: Confucian, Chinese Buddhist 66%, Christian 10%, Muslim 2%

WCC member churches: Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China

History

Bordering China and the South China Sea, Hong Kong was a British protectorate from 1841, when it was ceded to the UK by China until 1997, when Hong Kong Island, Kowloon Peninsula and the New Territories on the mainland were returned to Chinese sovereignty. Since then, Hong Kong citizens and the churches have been dealing with the unique challenges of the "one country, two systems" policy under which the Special Administrative Region (SAR) was established. Despite many underlying changes, day-to-day life in Hong Kong remains remarkably similar to what it was before the handover. Religious freedom also remains basically the same.

Christians in Hong Kong represent about 10 per cent of one of the most densely populated areas of the world. They are evenly divided between Protestants and Roman Catholics. Other major religions are Buddhism, Taoism, Islam and Confucianism, and no single religion has a majority. The Christian church continues to be strong in its traditional ministry in evangelism and church growth. Many churches and Christian organizations also have significant links with partner churches and agencies in mainland China.

The churches have recently renewed their commitment to issues of poverty and education in

Hong Kong. Christians are concerned about the widening gap between rich and poor as the SAR tries to maintain its economic prosperity within a fluctuating Asian economy. Christians also have an integral role in educational reform as sponsors of over half of Hong Kong's local schools.

Macau

(Macau Special Administrative Region)

Statistics



Population: 450,000
Government: Special administrative region of China
Language: Cantonese; also Portuguese
Literacy: 85%

Religion: Confucian, Buddhist 13%, Christian 7% (mostly Roman Catholic)

WCC member churches: None

History

Macau comprises a small peninsula of China and three islands. The Portuguese colonized Macau in the middle of the sixteenth century as the very first far eastern European colony. One of the richest and most decadent cities of the world during the seventeenth century, in 1987 it became a Chinese territory under Portuguese rule, and in 1999 it reverted to China as a special administrative region with a high degree of autonomy on all matters except foreign affairs and defence.

Christian mission in Macau began in the 1600s within the context of the broader cultural encounter between East and West. It was the gateway for missionary enterprise, Roman Catholics and Protestants alike. Noted missionaries included the Jesuits Mateo Ricci and Francis Xavier. The Ruins of St Paul's are Macau's most recognizable landmark, and bear vivid testimony to the vision and labour of the Jesuits. Today, most Christians in Macau are Roman Catholic.

Protestant missionary Robert Morrison arrived in Macau in 1807, followed by American Southern Baptists and other missionary societies and individuals in the mid-nineteenth century. The Protestant community in Macau is small, as Protestant churches are not officially recognized by the government and there is little local pastoral leadership. As a result, ecumenical efforts are often undermined by lack of mutual understanding, although there is some collaboration between Anglicans and Roman Catholics.

INTERCESSIONS
Give thanks for:

- o The survival of Christians and Christian churches even though they have been persecuted.
- o The Christian Conference of Asia, which has its headquarters in Hong Kong.
- o Those who struggle for human rights against great odds.
- o Christians meeting in house churches.

- o Growing congregations.
- o The China Christian Council, the Amity Foundation, the Hong Kong Council of Churches.
- o Ancient Chinese pottery and works in jade.
- o Chinese characters, and the illuminating ink strokes of Chinese calligraphy.
- o Peking duck, sweet and sour sauce, and snake soup.
- o Those with a concern for the poor and disadvantaged.

Pray for:

- o Those suffering unemployment in cities and those who are unable to find homes.
- o The rural poor, and those forced to labour in the countryside.
- o Refugees from North Korea.
- o Women and female children, who do not have equal status or opportunity.
- o Those suffering from forced sterilizations, abortions and infanticide.
- o A spirit of compassion, tolerance and acts of love for new arrivals in Hong Kong from mainland China.
- o Marginalized groups such as the aged, disabled, single parent families, and migrant workers.
- o Educational reforms, that they may bring about a holistic approach to learning.
- o Miners and all those who face hazardous working conditions.
- o A reduction in the amount of pollution and environmental damage.

PRAYERS

(1)

O God our Father,

We thank you for daily bread.

We thank you for the providence
which has sustained this restless city
where millions have found their home.

The restlessness has sapped our strength,
and often tempted our eyes towards the vulgarity of life.
But we thank you for the hard-earned daily bread
which sustains our bodies and our pride.

In the middle of rejoining China's mainstream destiny
we come to you with trembling hope and fearful joy.

Lord of the churches, make us one.
 Help us to love one another as you have loved us,
 so that all may come to know we are yours.
 Lord of history, make us strong.
 Help us to live this day as if it is tomorrow,
 so that the past no longer binds the future.
 May your will be done in this city.
 May you be pleased with this land and this people
 on which to build a concrete token of your kingdom.
 In Jesus' name.

(2)

O God,
 We thank you that you have been good to us
 during this past year.
 We pray to you,
 make us a new creation;
 renew our hearts, minds, and spirits and,
 in the likeness of Jesus,
 may we share your goodness and love
 with many more
 in the days and months to come.

(3)

We are going home to many who cannot read,
 so, Lord, make us to be Bibles,
 so that those who cannot read the book
 can read it in us.

(4)

My Lord is the source of Love; I, the river's course.
 Let my God's love flow through me. I will not obstruct it.
 Irrigation ditches can water but a portion of the field;
 the great Yangtze River can water a thousand acres.
 Expand my heart, O Lord, that I may love yet more people.

(5)
 O God, Father of light,
 Source of life,
 Author of grace and Founder of the world,
 Fount of all knowledge,
 Treasure of all wisdom,
 Instiller of holiness and Teacher of pure prayer,
 kindly Helper of the soul;
 you give the weak of soul who trust in you
 those things which the angels long to see.
 Even now, Master and Lord,
 enlighten the eyes of our understanding
 by the visitation of your Holy Spirit
 and sanctify us through and through in body, soul and spirit.

(6)
 As they face this day, O God,
 find those who are lost,
 separated from those they love,
 crossing unknown borders,
 without a country or home,
 not knowing where to turn:
**Find them, God, who always seek for the lost,
 and cover them safely as a hen covers her chickens.**

As they face this day, O God,
 stand among the ones in refugee camps around the world,
 in the hunger and despair,
 in the crowds and the emptiness,
 in the wet and the thirstiness:
**Be their hope and their strength
 in the crying out for justice
 and open the ears of the world to hear their cries.**

As they face this day, O God,
 may those who live with us,
 uprooted from their homelands,
 find a new home
 where their history is respected,

their gifts and graces celebrated
and their fear departed from them.
**May we be their home,
may we be the ones who open our hearts in welcome.**

As we face this day, O God,
sing to us your song of encouragement,
paint for us your bright pictures of a new world
where people need not flee from wars and oppression,
where no one lacks a country or a home,
and where we are all part of your new creation.
**For we long to be your people, in spirit and in truth.
We pray in the name of Jesus the Christ,
who knew the life of a refugee.**

(7)
O Lord our God,
Enlighten your church,
That wherever it may be,
It will never seek for its interests
But will only serve you faithfully.
Grant your church wisdom and courage,
That it may break down all boundaries,
So that humankind will become one again.
In Jesus' name.

(8)
O Lord Jesus,
Please abide with me.
Dispel my loneliness!
No one can be my companion forever,
But you are the Lord who is everywhere,
Present at all times.
You, only, are my dear companion and saviour.

In the long dark night,
along the silent shadowy pathways,
I beg you to grasp my hand.
When others have forgotten me,
please remember me in eternity!
In the name of Jesus.

(9)

Lord,
you will come again, this is your promise.
We pray that you give us wakeful hearts,
and protect us from delusion.
We also pray that you give us wise minds
so that we can be loyal and knowledgeable servants,
with whom, at your coming,
you will be well pleased.

(10)

Lord, you are the road to eternal life,
to whom else can we turn?
Lord, besides you there is none to save us.
We come to you.

(11)

Father, from whose loins I sprung,
Mother, on whose breast I hung,
Tender were ye, and ye fed,
Now upheld, now gently led.
Eyes untiring watched my way;
Often in your arms I lay.
How could I repay your love,
Vast as arch of heaven above?



Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore

We all drink from one water.
 We all breathe from one air.
 We rise from one ocean
 And we live under one sky.

Remember,
 We are one.

The newborn baby cries the same.
 The laughter of children is universal.
 Everyone's blood is red
 And our hearts beat the same song.

Remember,
 We are one.

We are all brothers and sisters.
 Only one family, only one earth.
 Together, we live
 And together we die.

Remember,
 We are one.

Peace be on you,
 Brothers and Sisters,
 Peace be on you.

Anwar Fazal

Brunei

Brunei (Sultanate of Brunei)



Statistics

Population: 365,000

Government: Self-governing constitutional monarchy

Language: Malay and English; also Chinese, Kedayan, Dusun, Melanau, Iban

Literacy: 88%

Religion: Muslim 67%, Buddhist 9%, Christian

7%, Chinese folk religion 4%, Confucianist 2%, Hindu 1%, Other 2%

WCC member churches: None

History

Brunei borders Malaysia's Borneo territory on the South China Sea. Its influence peaked between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, when its control extended over coastal areas of northwest Borneo and the southern Philippines as an independent traditional Islamic monarchy or sultanate. By 1888 its power had declined due to internal strife over royal ascendancy, colonial expansion and piracy. As a result, it became a British protectorate, and in 1905 it was a dependency. Japan occupied Brunei during the Second World War; it was liberated by Australia in 1945. The sultan subsequently regained control over internal affairs in 1959, but declined to join the Malaysian Federation in 1963. Britain retained responsibility for the state's defence and foreign affairs until 1984, when the sultanate became fully independent. The same family has ruled Brunei for more than six centuries. Brunei has one of the highest per capita incomes in Asia, benefiting from large petroleum and natural gas fields, and the sultan is believed to be one of the richest men in the world.

The Asian financial crisis in 1997–98, coupled with fluctuations in the price of oil, created uncertainty and instability in Brunei's economy. Current estimates of oil production suggest that Brunei's reserves will be used up by 2020. Because petroleum is the main product of Brunei, a wide variety of items, including food, must be imported. Even though Brunei has large per capita wealth, most of the money stays with the sultan and does not go to the people. Women do not have equal rights with men.

Islam is the official religion of Brunei, with more than half the population identifying themselves as Muslim. The government does not allow proselytizing. In 1991 Roman Catholic priests and nuns were expelled from the country. There are efforts by some in Brunei to create an Islamic state.

Malaysia



Statistics

Population: 23.5 million

Government: Constitutional monarchy

Language: Malay and English; also Chinese, Tamil, Javanese, Iban and over 170 others

Literacy: 83%

Religion: Muslim 48%, Chinese folk religion 24%, Christian 8%, Hindu 7%, Buddhist 7%, Other 6%

WCC member churches: Methodist Church in Malaysia, Protestant Church in Sabah

History

Malaysia consists of 13 states, 11 on the Malayan peninsula (West Malaysia) and two on the north coast of the island of Borneo (East Malaysia). In the eighteenth century the area was controlled by the British. The Malay states were brutally conquered by Japan during the Second World War. By 1957 the 11 peninsular states achieved independence as the Federation of Malaya, and in 1963 the two states on the island of Borneo joined them to form the Federation of Malaysia, which reverted to Malaysia in 1963 when Singapore withdrew.

Approximately two-thirds of Malaysians are ethnic Malay, 20 per cent are ethnic Chinese and 9 per cent are ethnic Indian. The remainder are indigenous tribal peoples and migrant workers from all over Asia. Such ethnic diversity has led to rioting and violence over the years, and to discrimination based on ethnicity. At the moment, however, the area is relatively stable. The booming economy of the 1990s was tempered by the Asian financial crisis of 1997, although Malaysia

was not affected as dramatically as some other countries.

Sunni Islam is the official religion of Malaysia, although freedom of religion is guaranteed in the constitution. In some areas there has been a resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism, leading to tensions between religious groups. There are strict laws against proselytization of Muslims and against their apostasy, as well as restrictions on the sale and distribution of Christian materials in native languages.

Roman Catholicism came to Malaysia with the Portuguese during the early sixteenth century, and Francis Xavier spent several years in Malaysia during the 1540s. Protestantism arrived with the Dutch during the seventeenth century, although Protestant churches did not spread to the indigenous populations until the London Missionary Society began work in 1814. There are several ecumenical and interfaith groups, including the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism; the Malaysia Council of Churches (MCC); and the Christian Federation of Malaysia, which consists of the MCC, Roman Catholic representatives, and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship.

Singapore

(Republic of Singapore)



Statistics

Population: 4.3 million

Government: Parliamentary republic since 1965

Language: Malay; also Chinese, English, Tamil, Malayalam, Punjabi, Javanese and Hindi

Literacy: 89%

Religion: Taoist 43%, Muslim 18%, Buddhist 15%, Christian 12%, Hindu 5%

WCC member churches: Methodist Church in Singapore

History

Singapore is a city-state located on an island at the southern tip of the Malay peninsula. As is the case for neighbouring countries, it has been inhabited for centuries by tribal peoples. During the fourteenth century it came under the rule of the Malacca sultanate. The British gained control of the island in 1819 through formal treaties with the sultan and rulers of Singapore, making it part of the Straits Settlement, a Crown Colony comprised of Singapore, Malacca and Penang. During the Second World War Singapore was occupied by the Japanese, after which it returned to British rule. In 1959 it was released from British rule, and from 1961 to 1963 was part of neighbouring Malaysia. Since then it has become an economically successful nation under very stable, authoritarian rule.

Singapore is driven by its economy, which is a highly developed free market, heavily dependent on exports. During the 1980s and 1990s its open business environment, low inflation and low unemployment, and energetic and educated workforce made Singapore an enviable model of political stability and financial success. Singapore boasts one of the highest gross domestic products per capita in the world.

However, stability and success have come with a price. The government of Singapore, with its emphasis on maintaining prosperity and harmony among its ethnic and religious groups, has suppressed many of the rights of individuals and religious institutions to voice the need for economic or political change. The Societies Act requires all religious groups to be registered and scrutinized

by the government, and those groups that are deemed detrimental to public welfare and order may be deregistered and banned. The constitution of Singapore permits restrictions on the freedom of the press, and has been interpreted broadly to censor political opposition and criticism.

The net effect of Singapore's political climate on religious expression has been to promote harmony between traditions, curtail proselytism and promote charitable work, but at the expense of the church's mission to voice its critique of political, economic and social structures.

In 1987 the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), which had its headquarters in Singapore, was "dissolved" by the government and its expatriate staff were expelled. No real reason was given for the decision. A news release by the government at the time accused the CCA of breaching an agreement "not to indulge in any political activity or allow its funds to be used for political purposes". The CCA, according to the release, had been using Singapore as a base of support for "liberation movements" in other Asian countries

and it had been providing covert help to subversive elements in Singapore. The CCA worked from dispersed offices in the region until 1993, when the head office reopened in Hong Kong.

Approximately three-quarters of the population of Singapore are ethnically Chinese, and Chinese religions, including Taoism, are the most prevalent. Christianity arrived in Singapore in the early sixteenth century, when Portuguese Jesuit missionaries brought Roman Catholicism. The Dutch brought Protestantism in the mid-seventeenth century, which suppressed the Roman Catholics. Today, Christians belong primarily to Roman Catholic, Methodist, Brethren, Anglican, Church of God, and independent churches. The 1990s saw an increase in charismatic movements throughout many of the established churches. The National Council of Churches of Singapore is an ecumenical association of Protestant and Orthodox churches that has its roots in the Council of Churches of Malaysia and Singapore, established in 1948.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The amazing diversity of life. There are many species of plants and animals which are found in these countries and nowhere else.
- o Better economies and opportunities for employment.
- o The religious and cultural diversity of Singapore, and for the many traditions in Singapore which make up the body of Christ.

Pray for:

- o Religious groups who are oppressed despite official freedom of religion.
- o Chinese inhabitants of Brunei who have been denied citizenship and face discrimination.
- o The poor of Brunei, that they gain access to the means necessary to sustain and nourish themselves.
- o Peace among the many ethnic groups within these countries.
- o The protection and encouragement of religious freedom.
- o The respectful use of natural resources and sustainable practices.
- o Women, who in some of these countries are treated as second-class citizens.

PRAYERS

(1)

Lord Jesus,
you did not have a house to call your own,
you stayed in homes that were not yours,
you know what it's like for us to be squatters,
to fear angry grunting bulldozers ready to raze our houses
standing on land we cannot call our own.

You fasted in the wilderness as the vultures circled,
you felt the pangs of hunger as days turned into weeks.
You know how we feel when our stomachs groan,
not knowing when our next meal will come,
as we watch our children grow underweight.

You walked under the relentless desert sun,
you felt the scorching heat down your back,
you know how hot it gets as the sun beats down,
making us dizzy as our metal roofs burn,
the sweat trickling down our brows.

And yet you are somehow present in our midst,
you are among us amid the squalor and filth,
you know how we live – in despair and in suffering
as the sun rises, another hard day unfolds
and we toil to earn our daily bread.

Lord Jesus, who shall we go to?
Do not forsake us.
You are the bread of life, our shining star.
In the darkness of our hopeless lives,
won't you light up a ray of hope?

(2)

I want every child in this world to be happy
I want fathers to nurture their children
and mothers to bring them up to be strong and gentle.
I want my eyes opened to the reality of other people,
to hear what they are not able to articulate.
I want to add to an atmosphere of trust,

where people who were deeply hurt when they were young
 can heal, recuperate and recover.
 I want to see justice run like a river,
 bringing healing and peace to the nations.
 I want to sing the songs of my sisters and brothers.
 I want to tell their stories, dance their dances and recite their poetry.
 I want to add my voice to the resonance
 that conveys what each person on the face of the earth wants the rest of
 the world to know.
 Her vision. His dreams. Her strength. His gifts. Her hope. His yearning.
 Her anxiety. His fears. Her grief. His sadness. Her indignation. His
 anger. Her determination. His striving. Her joys. His excitement. Her
 discoveries. His dawns.
 I want the eyes of my heart to see the grace of God
 that is present to me in every child, woman and man I meet.
 I want to be able to see differently, to think differently, to live kindly, to
 walk humbly, to serve graciously and gratefully.
 Come, Lord Jesus. Come always and save me –
 that I may want what you want,
 that I may live in you, that I may be completely holy.

(3)

Where families are fractured by domestic upheavals,
 and children forced onto the streets to fight for survival,
 where more resources are spent on arms and destruction
 and less attention paid to sickness and starvation:

Come, Holy Spirit
heal our wounds
renew the whole creation!

Where the acquisition of things has become an obsession
 and the worth of human beings is measured by their possessions,
 where our air, trees and seas are besieged by pollution
 and purblind mercenary greed threatens our environment:

Come, Holy Spirit
heal our wounds
renew the whole creation!

Where countries are split apart by communalism and racism
 and innocent blood is spilt by wanton acts of terrorism,

where internecine warfare sets nation against nation
and a nuclear holocaust looms ominous on our horizon:

Come, Holy Spirit

heal our wounds

Renew the whole creation!

(4)

We praise you for the beauty we see around us,
for the infinite variety of your creation –
the skies, the mountains, the valleys,
the plains, the rivers and the seas.

The bounty of your creation adds richness and providence
to our daily life.

We thank you for the gift of life,
and for the opportunities we have to share in your purposes
as stewards of creation.

Give us grace through your life-giving spirit
never to turn back on our responsibility
for the preservation of your creation.

Your Son, our Lord, came to our world in the form of Jesus,
that we might more clearly see your love in action
and your power over evil, sin and death.

Teach and inspire us Lord,
never to be afraid of the power of those
who are greedy and abusive of the resources
of your world and of others.

With the love of Jesus in our hearts,
we can transform every human situation
into what is good and acceptable in your sight.

Loving God, as we look to the future,
increase our faith and confidence
in your work in history.

You will take care of the poor and the powerless;
your prophets will speak against injustices;
and your people will embrace each other in love
because of Jesus Christ.

We pray only
that the church will be more courageous than cautious;

that the church will not remain silent
 when people are suffering;
 that the church will not "pass by on the other side"
 when the wounded earth is waiting to be healed.

We praise you, Creator God, that you still make all
 things new through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

(5)

Somewhere in this
 hopeless whirlpool of life,
 a hand extends to help.
 Praise God! Amen.

(6)

We thank you, God, for the blessings you have given this country,
 for peace and governmental stability,
 the riches of the soil and the sea.
 But, O Father God,
 may you keep your children
 from all selfishness and from all laziness.
 Do not allow us to be content answering the calls
 requiring little sacrifice.
 Help your church to carry the gospel to the poor
 and to care for those sitting in the shadow of sin.

(7)

Lord Jesus, open our eyes
 so that we can recognize the injustice around us
 that is not always obvious.
 May we be moved by compassion for the victims of injustice
 and act in accordance with your will,
 to defend the poorest and to save the children in need.

Lord God, you feel so strongly about the needy, the afflicted, the weak and
 the imprisoned –
 and you love them so deeply.
 Inspire the leaders among us
 to uphold the rights of the downtrodden
 and to serve with fairness, justice and integrity.

(8)

“Enlarge the place of your tent,
stretch your tent curtains wide,
do not hold back;
lengthen your cords,
strengthen your stakes.” Isaiah 54:2 (NIV)

O Lord, help us to stretch out our capacity and our imagination.
Help us to be open and listening servants.
Help us to hold hands, widen our circle and be inclusive.

Let the ecumenical space be a vast tent and a safe space:
where the communities’ needs and concerns are shared,
listened to and discussed,
where ways forward are envisioned,
that our journeys will be guided by your word.

Let not our personal limitations and incapacities
restrict our perception and actions.
Let our collective wisdom lead us to discern your will for humanity:
that we may serve you better.

Help us to have resilient long and strong cords
to keep the tent wide and open.
Bless our churches and ecumenical organizations –
that they be vibrant spaces,
accountable and effective mechanisms in serving you
and your children.

Help us to have strong stakes, driven deep to hold up our wide tents.
to have a deep understanding of the issues that affect peoples lives,
to be rooted deep in your faith,
to hold fast to your word.

That rain or shine,
our churches and organizations provide the safe and loving space.
Through storm or calm,
we are in fellowship, sharing your unrestricted and overflowing love.
That united and acting together
the world will know Jesus through us.



East Timor, Indonesia, Philippines

Be silent
mountains
valleys and springs
rivers and streams
stony ways and grassy reaches,
be silent.

Be silent
birds of the air
and waves of the sea
winds that blow
and sands that flow
in lands that no one owns,
be silent.

Be silent
canes and bamboos
bushes and eucalyptus
palms and grasses
endless verdure

of tiny Timor,
be silent.
It is a time for silence
for the silenced time
for the lifetimes lost
the lives given
for the homeland
for the nation
for the people
for our liberation.

Be silent.

Adapted from Borja da Costa

East Timor

(Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste)

Statistics

Population: *Approximately 1 million*

Government: *Constitutional democracy*

Language: *Portuguese; also Tetun, Indonesian, Chinese and others*

Literacy: 90%

Religion: Christian 92% (mostly Roman Catholic), Ethnic 3%, Muslim 3%, Other 2%
WCC member churches: Protestant Church of Timor Lorosa'e



History

East Timor is located on the eastern half of the island of Timor in southern Asia. The western half of the island remains part of Indonesia. The island of Timor itself is located at the eastern end of the Indonesian archipelago. Indigenous people have lived on their island for thousands of years, and during the sixteenth century East Timor was colonized by the Portuguese.

Timor declared itself independent from Portugal in November 1975 and was invaded and occupied by Indonesian forces nine days later. It was incorporated into Indonesia in July 1976 as the province of East Timor. A campaign of "pacification" followed over the next two decades, during which an estimated 250,000 individuals lost their lives. In 1996 Roman Catholic Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo and Jose Ramos Horta received the Nobel Peace Prize for their work in the struggle for independence for East Timor.

In August 1999, in a UN-supervised popular referendum, the people of East Timor voted for independence from Indonesia. During 1999–2001, anti-independence militias supported by Indonesia conducted indiscriminate violence, forcing another 250,000 people to become refugees or internally displaced persons. In May 2002 East Timor was internationally rec-

ognized as an independent state and the world's newest democracy – the first new nation of the millennium. Following a sudden outbreak of violence in the spring of 2006, 100,000 citizens fled to refugee camps as Australian peacemakers and a United Nations team of experts arrived to restore order and begin a process of rebuilding and reconciliation.

The country is now working to restore infrastructure, create a stable working government and economy, repatriate refugees and internally displaced people, and bring to justice those who perpetrated violence and murder during the war. The process will take time, as East Timor is one of the least developed countries of the world, and most shopkeepers and professionals were Indonesians who now have left the country. The unemployment rate in some areas is as high as 80 per cent. The UN and NGO aid agencies are working with the Timorese, helping with refugee and displaced populations, immunizing children, providing health education and job training, and repairing buildings and schools.

Unlike Indonesia, which is mostly Muslim, the population of East Timor is more than 90 per cent Roman Catholic, a legacy of its days as a Portuguese colony. The Roman Catholic Church has been a strong witness for justice and bringing an end to violence. Most of the remaining Timorese Christians belong to the Protestant Church of Timor Lorosa'e, which includes Christians from a number of Protestant bodies.

Indonesia

(Republic of Indonesia)

Statistics

Population: 240 million

Government: Parliamentary republic

Language: Bahasa Indonesian; also Javanese, Sundanese and hundreds of other languages and dialects

Literacy: 83%

Religion: Muslim 87%, Christian 7%, Hindu 3%, Buddhist 1%, Other 2%

WCC member churches: *Batak Christian Community Church, Christian Church of Central Sulawesi, Christian Church of Sumba, Christian Evangelical Church in Minahasa, Christian Evangelical Church of Sangihe Talaud, Christian Protestant Angkola Church, Christian Protestant Church in Indonesia, East Java Christian Church, Evangelical Christian Church in Halmahera, Evangelical Christian Church in Tanah Papua, Indonesian Christian Church (GKI), Indonesian Christian Church (HKI), Javanese Christian Churches, Kalimantan Evangelical Church, Karo Batak Christian Church, Nias Christian Protestant Church, Pasundan Christian Church, Protestant Christian Batak Church, Protestant Christian Church in Bali, Protestant Church in Indonesia, Protestant Church in Sabah, Protestant Church in South-East Sulawesi, Protestant Church in the Moluccas, Protestant Church in Western Indonesia, Protestant Evangelical Church in Timor, Simalungun Protestant Christian Church, Toraja Church*



History

The country of Indonesia comprises an archipelago of more than 13,000 islands, the largest nation of its kind in the world. It is also the fourth most populous nation, and has one of the largest diversities of ethnic groups, with over 800 known languages. It also has the largest Muslim population of any country in the world.

There is evidence of habitation on the islands as far back as 300,000 years ago. Several waves of migration have brought many different people and

religions. During the sixteenth century the area was under Portuguese rule. From the seventeenth to the mid-twentieth century the Dutch controlled most of modern Indonesia, with some areas under British rule. Japan invaded during the Second World War, and at war's end Indonesian Nationals under the leadership of General Sukarno declared independence. Violence and negotiations followed until 1949, when the Netherlands recognized Indonesian independence.

Sukarno was named president for life. He tried to unify the vastly diverse ethnic and religious country through the philosophy of "guided democracy" or Pancasila (Five Pillars: belief in One Supreme God, just and civilized humanity, national unity, democracy and social justice). However, his rule came under increasing pressure from the military, leading to a coup in 1965. This was put down by Sukarno's head of the army, General Suharto, but an estimated 300,000 to 400,000 people were killed in a purge of suspected communists and ethnic Chinese.

In 1966 Suharto seized power and remained president until 1998. Under his rule, there was a new emphasis on economic growth, coupled with the dissolution of antagonistic political parties, limits on the press, and increased corruption, especially within the Suharto family and cohorts. Public pressure, civil disorder and economic crisis led Suharto to step down in 1998. Democratic elections were held for the first time in 1999, but violence and allegations of corruption continued.

Despite the multiparty elections, stability has been hard to achieve in Indonesia. Several ethnic groups have been seeking independence from Indonesia (other than East Timor, whose 1999 independence gave support to other separatist movements): Aceh, which wants to create a Muslim state, and Irian Jaya, which declared independence in 2000 but is still under the control of Indonesia. There has also been continuing violence between the military and ethnic groups on the islands of Borneo, Sulawesi and the Maluccas. Government programmes in the 1980s and 1990s led to the forced relocation of many

Indonesians to less populated areas, breaking up families and taking land away from indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples and ethnic Chinese in particular are targets of violence and hatred.

Economically, the collapse of the Asian economy in 1997 led to high unemployment and recession, while those who do find jobs often work under difficult and dangerous conditions. In addition to political and economic turmoil, Indonesia is prone to natural disasters. The country contains the largest number of active volcanoes in the world and suffers from frequent earthquakes, droughts and flooding. In 2004 a terrorist bombing of night-clubs on the island tourist haven of Bali killed some 275 people, mostly foreigners. A tsunami in December of that year killed thousands more.

Around the time of Christ, Buddhism arrived in the islands. Islam swept through most of the archipelago from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. Francis Xavier was a missionary in eastern Indonesia from 1542 to 1547.

Since 1965 freedom of religion has been restricted to a choice among five recognized religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism. There are many ecumenical groups in Indonesia, including the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (CCI) with more than 60 member churches, some of them Pentecostal. The CCI is unique in that its stated purpose is to become one Christian church in Indonesia. Its five main tasks are a common calling of the churches, common understanding of the Christian faith, mutual recognition and acceptance, a common constitution for the CCI and self-reliance in theology, human resources and funds. Eukumindo is another ecumenical umbrella organization for mission groups in Indonesia. Roman Catholics represent about a quarter of all Indonesian Christians.

Philippines

(Republic of the Philippines)

Statistics

Population: 86 million

Government: Federal multiparty republic

Language: Filipino, English; also Spanish, Cebuano, Ilocan, Ilongo, Bicol, Pampango, Chinese and 60 others

Literacy: 94%

Religion: Christian 90% (predominantly Roman Catholic), Muslim 6%, Other 4%

WCC member churches: Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches, Episcopal Church in the Philippines, Evangelical Methodist Church in the Philippines, Philippine Independent Church, United Church of Christ in the Philippines



History

The Philippines consists of a huge archipelago of 7,107 islands between the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea, east of Vietnam.

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries the islands were a Spanish colony. The country came under the rule of the US in 1896, when Spain ceded it without reference to the population following the Spanish–American War. It was occupied by Japan during the Second World War. The Philippines gained independence in 1946. Beginning in 1971, martial law was imposed and the country was ruled for 21 years under a single party headed by Ferdinand Marcos. Massive public demonstrations against corruption, increasing authoritarianism, and the presence of huge American military and naval bases led to his fall in

1986. Roman Catholic and Protestant churches played a major role in this “people’s power” uprising. Marcos was succeeded by Corazon Aquino, the opposition to him.

The country has since been a multiparty democracy, but continues to experience political unrest and violence. A long war with Muslim separatists on the island of Mindanao, which claimed 120,000 lives, ended with a treaty in 1996, though violent clashes continue. Another rebel group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, signed unity agreements with the Philippine government in 2001. Another group of guerrillas (fighting since the 1970s for an independent Islamic state and protection of local fishing rights) gained international notoriety in 2000–2001 with a spree of kidnappings that resulted in dozens of deaths.

In addition to political unrest and violence, poverty, caused by unequal distribution of the country’s wealth, and high population growth are significant problems. Other concerns are the loss

of the rainforest and environmental pollution. In February 2006 massive mudslides wiped out an entire village.

Roman Catholicism came to the Philippines during Spanish rule, and today the Philippines is the only predominantly Christian country in Asia. Two-thirds of the population are Catholic. Protestant missions arrived during the early twentieth century. The National Council of Churches of the Philippines was formed in 1963 as an ecumenical group of the ten mainline Protestant churches committed to human rights and the separation of church and state. Its long-term programme emphasis, “Transformation of Church and Society”, helped create political awareness among the people. During the peoples’ power revolt in which hundreds of thousands of Christians peacefully opposed Marcos’s troops, a koinonia of Protestants and Catholics, as well as Muslims, occurred. Since then the churches have continued in their participation and collaborative work of achieving “reconciliation with justice”.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The witness of those who advocate an end to violence.
- o Those who have worked for greater understanding among different religions.
- o Those who stand with the poor.
- o Gamelan, gongs, and bamboo buzzers.
- o Shadow puppets, an ancient art with which Christians tell Bible stories.
- o Rice from fertile soil and fish from the warm sea.

Pray for:

- o The rebuilding of East Timor into a stable and independent nation.
- o Healing for all those who have suffered the loss of loved ones and livelihood because of religious strife and political conflict.
- o The Christians of Ambon, who after years of peace with their Muslim neighbours have endured a long and deadly conflict.
- o Refugees and internally displaced people who long to return to their families and homes.
- o Women who leave their country in order to provide for their families.

- o Contact between different ethnic and religious groups, to bring deeper understanding and tolerance, rather than hatred and violence.
- o Governments that will end corruption and strive for true justice and peace for all.
- o Those trapped in dire poverty, that they may have food, shelter and security.
- o Those who must rebuild their lives after volcanic eruptions, mudslides and the tsunami.

PRAYERS

(1)

Let us pray

Our God who art in heaven

who is present in the Hindu temple, the Muslim mosque,
the Christian church,

who stands with us in our differences;

our God who takes the side of women beaten into madness,
of men without hope,

who is merciful to victims of violence in Aceh, Maluku,

West Papua, Central Sulawesi, Timor

who shuns those who pay for, orchestrate, and instigate this violence

Hallowed be thy name

not the names of presidents – Soekarno, Soeharto, Habibie,

Gus Dur, Megawati

not the names of generals – Wiranto, Pribowo, Damiri

not the names of economic and political elites –

Amien Rais, Akbar Tanjung, Bob Hassan, T. Soeharto

not the names of so-called development –

ExxonMobil, Nike, Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Hallowed be thy name among farmers and indigenous tribes

whose lands and forests are no longer secure,

among women whose bodies are no longer secure.

Your Kingdom come

to this land of 218 million people,

come as an Earth renewed by laws of love and justice.

Your will be done on earth

your will to restore forests and streams

destroyed in West Papua

by the American Freeport-McMoran gold mining company,

your will to provide homes and a future
 for our nearly 5 million internally displaced persons,
 your will to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS
 and other sexually transmitted diseases among poor students,
 illiterate farmers, commercial sex workers.

As it is in heaven

your will for dialogue between the wronged
 and those who wrong them,
 your will for balance between taking and giving,
 your will for justice with mercy,
 participation by all in decisions that effect them,
 your will for an economy of sustainability rather than of profit.

Give us this day our daily bread

that we may learn from our farmers
 communion with the earth rather than alienation from it,
 that we may have useful and meaningful work
 to stop the flow in human trafficking,
 the militarization of youth, the slow death of our villages.

Forgive us our debts

forgive us our US 137 billion dollars of foreign debt,
 forgive us our culture of corruption
 that permits public officials to rob public coffers,
 forgive us our mercenaries and those who pay them,
 forgive us our military leaders
 who incite unrest and will not check their power...

As we forgive our debtors

as Christians in West Timor offer sanctuary to Muslims,
 as Muslims in Central Java give their lives
 defending the right of Christians to worship in safety,
 as we forgive citizens of those countries
 whose policies aid and abet our wealthy elite.

And lead us not into temptation

take away the temptation
 to bow to international financial bodies
 that would have us remove subsidies
 desperately needed by the poor,

take away the seduction of bigger malls,
 greener golf courses, faster cars,
 take away the pressure of meeting global standards
 while the majority of our population lives among the dregs
 of industrial backwash and unemployment
 take away the temptation to shirk our responsibilities
 by blaming victims of poverty, corruption,
 and violence for their plight.

But deliver us from evil

from the evil of monopoly over our natural resources,
 from the evil of manipulating public opinion,
 from the evil of disregard and disdain for the will of the people.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.

(2)

How long, O Lord,

how long will the peasants remain landless
 will the workers remain displaced
 will the urban poor remain homeless
 will the youth and students remain unchallenged and unschooled
 will the national minorities remain ostracized and excluded
 will the women remain doubly burdened
 will the poor remain poor?

How long, O Lord,

how long will the country be governed
 by manipulative, exploitative and insensitive men
 with warped military and capitalist ideologies?

How long, O Lord,

how long will those who hold the reins of government
 be beholden to monopoly capitalism
 in the midst of the rising crescendo
 of the people's painful and anguished cries?

How long, O Lord, how long?

(3)

Lord, make us realize that our Christianity is like a rice field: when it is newly planted the paddies are prominent, but as the plants take root and grow taller, these divided paddies gradually vanish, and soon there appears only one vast continuous field. So give us roots that love, and help us grow in Christian fellowship and service, that your will be done in our lives, through our Saviour, your Son, Jesus Christ.

(4)

God, take fire and burn away our guilt and our hypocrisies.
 Take water and wash away the blood of our brothers and sisters
 which we have caused to be shed.
 Take hot sunlight and dry the tears of those we have hurt,
 and heal their wounded souls, minds and bodies.
 Take love and root it in our hearts,
 so bonds of unity may grow,
 transforming the dry desert of our prejudices and hatred,
 through Jesus Christ.

(5)

PEACE BLESSING

Peace to the world
 Peace to the city
 Peace to the village
 Peace to the desert
 Peace to Mother Earth
 Peace to the cosmos
 Peace to you
 Peace to me
 Peace to my neighbour
 Peace to my enemy
 Peace to whom it may concern
 Peace, Peace, Peace!

(6)

God of Peace, of Mercy and Love,
 may the Flower of Peace
 bloom in the desert of war and adversity,
 now and always.
 So be it!

(7)

A PSALM OF PEACE

Gracious Spirit, I cry to you from the depths of my heart.
My country longs for peace because it is torn by war
and its children are maimed by landmines and hunger.

My people cry for justice, how long, O Lord, how long?

Reading the world news makes me feel depressed and powerless.
Fear starts to immobilize me and my neighbours.
Threats of nuclear war and bio-terrorism cross our borders.
Why, oh why, has life become so cheap?
Why have people become more vulnerable than before?

Oh, Compassionate God,
grant me, grant us, discerning spirits,
courageous and humble hearts;
cleanse us of all toxic emotions and evil thoughts.
Vanish our fears.
Strengthen our wills.
Answer our prayers.
Listen to our dreams.

I dream of a world filled with peace based on justice.
I dream of war-free zones and discrimination-free nations.
I dream of travelling without fear.
I dream, I cry, I hope, I pray.

Divine Spirit, Bathala,
empower us with your wisdom and love
so we may learn to choose
the path of righteousness and harmlessness,
and climb the mountain of truth and the ridge of forgiveness.

To turn instruments of war and hatred
into instruments of peace and reconciliation,
to bless all creatures with a smile and loving kindness,
to dance the dance of life boldly through the night,
from the depths of my heart,
Gracious Spirit,
I dance for you!
So be it.

(8)

IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE VICTIMS OF THE 2005 TSUNAMI

Stay with us, Lord, in the devastating moments
when waters roll above our heads,
smashing trees, destroying houses,
flooding rice fields, swallowing cattle herds,
chasing people running to save their lives.

Stay with us, Lord, in the dark moments,
open our eyes that we may recognize you as the risen One,
who has defeated death and its sting;
who has come by water and blood;
who has been baptized with water by John;
who has changed water into wine;
who has calmed the stormy sea;
who has given living water;
who wipes away our tears.

Stay with us, Lord, in the uncertain moments.
With your Holy Spirit raise us from our hopelessness,
wipe away our disbelief and strengthen our faith,
so that our hearts will burn to proclaim your resurrection,
the water of life springing forth and bringing hope.

(9)

You are the source of our lives.

Only by your grace

can we work everyday,

can we travel whenever we want to go to do our task.

Sometimes we are so very busy that we don't realize –

You are beside us.

You stand by us to follow our steps.

You listen when we are talking.

You know who we are.

We don't realize –

We treat you as a stranger.

We think you do not know what we think,

that you do not know what we are so busy about.

We forget you know us better than we do.

You are the risen Lord.

You defeat death.

We assumed that death was the end of life.

By rising from the dead,
you give us a new beginning.

Now we are walking with you, winning Lord.

We didn't believe you with our heart.

When you died on the cross

we didn't remember that you would rise again.

Actually, you made us know who you are.

You are teaching us.

You remind us about what you taught your disciples.

Thank you, God.

You are an active God.

You come to us.

You stay with us.

We realize

you are full of understanding.

You are the risen Lord.

Believing you, we can preach the good news to the world.

(10)

God of creation, we give thanks
for the symphony of hidden insects and creatures
that wake up minutes before sunrise
to sing the wondrous beauty and balance in your universe.

Lessen our yearning for technology
and return us to a renewed appreciation of our role
as respectful governors of the paradise you have made.

God of diversity,

we give thanks for human nature and our need to find our Maker.
Although we are divided by faith traditions, economic situations
and differing perspectives of reality,

help us to see you
in the child on the hips of its mother,
in the elderly woman
whose income comes from making flower baskets for religious offerings,
and in the many people wading in the rice paddies.
May we learn to be human
and live out the compassionate nature of Jesus through all that we do.

God of joy,
we often do not understand where the source of joy lies,
or how we can find fulfillment in the midst of political struggles,
uncertain economies,
and the constant struggle by developing countries
to be heard by the rich and prosperous ones.
Yet, you have blessed us with a spark
that lifts our spirits while adversities continue to cloud our future.
We thank you, dearest God, for sharing our tears, our sweat,
but especially our smiles.
May your smile never leave your peoples.

God of resurrection,
we long to hear, "Do not be afraid,
for the one you seek is no longer here. He is risen."
We ask for faith in your promise of resurrection of body and spirit.
Help us not to be afraid,
but pass on the message that the one we seek has risen indeed!
We ask for your comforting embrace around those facing illnesses and death,
especially in situations where the available medical attention is simply
inadequate.
By your words and healing touch,
grant them peace and heal them of their calamities.
Show us the ways to be generous even when we have little,
for your grace is always enough to sustain our every need and desire.
Teach us to appreciate the gifts in the universe and give thanks unto you,
through the one who is the resurrection and the life, Jesus Christ.



Japan, South Korea, North Korea, Taiwan

Japan

As we cannot go to heaven alone
 we should share with one another.
 As we all share the light of the heavenly stars
 we should share and eat rice together.
 Heaven is rice.
 When we eat and swallow rice
 heaven dwells in our body.
 Rice is heaven.
 Yes, rice is something
 we should eat together.

Kim Chi Ha



Statistics

Population: 128 million

Government: Constitutional monarchy with parliamentary government

Language: Japanese; also Ryukyuan, English, Korean, Chinese, Okinawan, Sakishima and others

Literacy: 100%

Religion: *Shinto Buddhism* 70%, *New religions (offshoots of Shinto and Buddhism)* 24%, *Non-religious* 4%, *Christian* 1%, *Other* 1%

WCC member churches: *Anglican Church in Japan, Korean Christian Church in Japan, Orthodox Church in Japan, United Church of Christ in Japan*

H i s t o r y

Japan lies off the eastern coast of the Asian continent, in an archipelago of four main islands and approximately 3,900 smaller islands. If one excludes uninhabitable land, Japan has a population density of 1,500 people per square kilometre, making it one of the most densely populated countries in the world.

There is evidence that the islands were occupied more than 10,000 years ago, with continuous immigration from China and Korea. During the seventh and eighth centuries Japan was consolidated by a strong central government led by an emperor. This lasted until the twelfth century, when civil war and waning imperial influence led to a more decentralized form of imperial rule, with most of the power held by local warlords called *shogun*. In 1543 Portuguese traders and missionaries arrived in Japan, soon joined by Dutch and British merchants.

From the early seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries Japan largely closed itself to western powers, but from the 1850s treaties and trade agreements with the US and other western countries were negotiated. By the end of the nineteenth century the feudal system began to break down, and a new state centred on a form of emperor worship arose. From 1890 to 1910 Japan came into conflict with both China and Russia. Japan annexed Korea, which remained under Japanese control until 1945.

During the 1930s, led by a strongly nationalistic military government, Japan invaded several neighbouring countries. During the Second World War it took control of much of southeastern Asia, and bombed the US naval base at Pearl

Harbour in 1941, which brought the Americans into the war on the side of the Allies. The war ended with the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, which killed more than 100,000 people. A US-led transitional government was formed, and in 1947 a new constitutional government emerged with the emperor relegated to a mostly ceremonial role. The new government renounced the use of force in international disputes and dismantled the Japanese armed forces. The lack of military expenditures and a highly educated and loyal workforce were factors that led to booming economic growth beginning in the 1960s. In 1989 Emperor Hirohito died after a 62-year reign. In 1997 the Asian financial crisis inflicted a major slowdown on the national economy after three decades of unprecedented growth.

Shinto and Buddhism are the primary religions in Japan. Shinto arose in Japan out of worship of spirits called *Kami*. This polytheistic set of traditions, rituals and naturalistic beliefs continues to be a major part of Japanese life, and underlies and intermingles with the other major belief systems of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. Roman Catholicism came to Japan in 1549 with Francis Xavier and other missionaries from Portugal and Spain. Though Christianity expanded in some areas through conversions, schools and charitable institutions, by the early 1600s it was viewed as part of western imperialism and a threat to Japanese political independence. Growing suspicion at the arrival of other religious orders and Protestant faith led to the persecution and martyrdom of Christians. When Christian missionaries returned during the nineteenth century, they discovered tens of thousands of Christians in hiding, known as *Kakure* (hidden) Christians.

The rise of nationalism and an imperial government early in the twentieth century severely tested Japanese Christians, whose first loyalty was to the God made known by Jesus, not the emperor. Totalitarian control led to the establishment in 1940 of a unified Protestant church,

the United Church of Christ (*Kyodan*). Those churches that refused to join officially ceased to exist. After the Second World War and the abolition of old religious laws, a number of churches withdrew from the *Kyodan*, but it remains the largest of the Protestant churches seeking to live and work in an ecumenical context. Nearly half of Japan's Christians are Roman Catholic.

Confession of responsibility for the atrocities of the militaristic era and the Second World War is deeply felt by Japanese Christians. A resolution of the *Kyodan* seeks the forgiveness of God and all people "because the church fell into sin and neglected to perform our mission as a watchman".

South Korea

(*Republic of Korea*)



Statistics

Population: 48.5 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: Korean; also English and Chinese

Literacy: 98%

Religion: Christian 41% (mostly Protestant and Independent), Ethnic 31%, Buddhist 15%, Confucianist 11%, Other 2%

WCC member churches: Anglican Church of Korea, Korean Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, Presbyterian Church of Korea

History

The people of the Korean peninsula have a distinctive history and culture extending over 4,000 years. Originally an independent kingdom, the nation of Korea was annexed by Japan early in the twentieth century. It remained under extremely cruel colonial rule until the end of the Second World War. In 1948 Korea was divided at the 38th parallel into two military occupation zones, with forces of the Soviet Union in the north, and those of the US in the south. North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950 and the ensuing three-year war, which also involved Chinese and UN forces, hardened attitudes and generated fear and suspicion. An armistice was signed in 1953 which still exists, keeping the two sides technically at war and separated by a virtually impenetrable demilitarized zone of concrete and barbed wire.

Recovery from the war was slow, and in 1961 a military coup brought Park Chung Hee to power. He introduced a number of reforms which led to spectacular economic growth. However, his regime was politically repressive and during much of the 1970s South Korea was under martial law. Park was assassinated in 1979, and there followed a decade marked by violence and political instability. In 1987 free democratic elections were held and a new constitution was ratified. In 1991 North and South Korea were both admitted to the United Nations and signed a non-aggression pact. The 1997 Asian financial crisis hit South Korea hard, leading to another turnover in the government, and Kim Dae-jung, a pro-democracy leader, was elected president. In 2000 Kim and the leader of North Korea, Kim Chong-il, held the first summit since 1953. Talks continue at an official level but at a very slow pace. Visits have also been arranged for families split by the war.

Korea had several encounters with Christianity over the centuries, mostly from Japan and China, but it was not until the eighteenth century, when Koreans themselves began missionary work, that Christianity took hold. These missionaries had come into contact with Roman Catholic priests and Christian literature in the course of official

visits to China. During the nineteenth century, Christians were persecuted by the government and Korea was closed to foreigners. The US signed a treaty with Korea in 1884, allowing American Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries to enter the country. Others followed and Christianity grew. These Protestant churches were deeply involved in resisting Japanese occupation.

The theology of *minjung* (meaning "people" and "the masses") is indigenous to the Korean church. It developed during the period of military oppression, with its systematic suppression of human rights and a widening gap between rich and poor. This theology is rooted in the suffering people and its task is to reflect on the concrete experiences of suffering.

The Presbyterian Church of Korea remains the largest single Protestant denomination in the country, followed closely by the Pentecostal Church and Assemblies of God. A strong indigenous effort has strengthened the population of Protestants, but with this have come splits among the major denominations. There are now over 100 denominations in South Korea, many of which are offshoots of missionary churches and others, which blend Christianity with mysticism, naturalism and strict moral codes, like those of Confucianism.

There have been times when Christians, particularly those who opposed oppression by the government, have been dealt with harshly. In recent years there has been greater freedom, and Christians are found participating in the government and the military and engaging in open and active evangelism. Christianity has particularly flourished in the cities. Since the 1990s the churches, especially Pentecostal and charismatic churches, have experienced explosive growth and renewal. Many Korean missionaries serve overseas in other parts of the world.

Many in North and South Korea desire reunification. A number of denominational and ecumenical Christian organizations have formed committees to reach out to the governments of both Koreas, asking that dialogue be continued towards this end. One of these ecumenical bodies

is the National Council of Churches (NCCCK), founded in 1924, which represents seven denominations and over a third of the Christians in South Korea. It took the initiative in declaring that the Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon (the Moonies) "is not Christian".

North Korea

(Democratic People's Republic of Korea)



Statistics

Population: 24 million

Government: One-party communist state

Language: Korean; also Chinese and Russian

Literacy: 95%

Religion: Officially atheist, Buddhism, Confucianism, Chondogyo 13%, Ethnic 12%, Christian 2%, Buddhist 2%

WCC member churches: None

History

From the time of separation in 1948, Kim Il-song led North Korea as a communist state until his death in 1994, when he was succeeded by his son, Kim Chong-il. As discussed above, relations between North and South Korea have been strained at the best of times, and there have been several cycles of violence followed by peace agreements and talks about reunification. The communist regime is repressive and engages in

human rights abuses, including arrests, kidnappings, beatings, torture and killings.

Since 1994 a series of natural disasters (including floods in 1995 and 1996, and droughts in 1997, 2000, 2001 and 2002) has led to severe famine, and aid agencies estimate that up to 2 million people have died. Facing starvation, some people have fled into neighbouring China, but those who are captured and returned are punished or killed by the North Korean government for defection. In 2002 North Korea repudiated a 1994 agreement to shut down its nuclear reactors and expelled UN monitors.

Active religious practice is discouraged, although the constitution speaks of religious liberty. Those who do practise religion tend towards Shamanism and an indigenous ritualistic creed called Chundokyo (Religion of the Heavenly Way), which possesses an eclectic set of supernatural beliefs and a variety of ritual practices. During the Korean War many thousands of Christians were massacred, and most of the rest fled from north to south. Today, Christianity is practised underground, and most worshippers attend either house churches or are isolated followers of Christian radio programmes broadcast from South Korea.

However, in 1998 the eighth assembly of the World Council of Churches welcomed four official guests from North Korea as a delegation from the Korean Christian Federation, a non-denominational organization functioning with government approval and support. It was the first time churches from that country had been to a WCC assembly. Members of the delegation spoke of having small congregations and church buildings, as well as Catholic membership. Critics claim the federation is a front for claims of religious freedom.

Taiwan

Statistics

Population: 22.5 million

Government: Multiparty democratic regime

Language: Mandarin; also Taiwanese,

Cantonese, Hakkien, Hakka, English, Koashan and over 20 smaller languages and dialects

Literacy: 94%

Religion: Chinese or Formosan folk tradition 51%, Buddhist 21%, Taoist 10%, Christian 6%

WCC member churches: Presbyterian Church in Taiwan



History

Taiwan's population lives on several islands off the coast of China. From the sixteenth until the end of the nineteenth century, it was part of China, and from 1895 to 1945 it was ruled by Japan and called Formosa. Following the communist victory on mainland China in 1949, some 2 million Nationalist Party Mandarin-speaking Chinese fled to Taiwan and declared a government for all of China based on the constitution of 1946. Over the next five decades the rulers of Taiwan gradually democratized and incorporated the indigenous population into the governing structure. In 2000 the old Nationalist Party was defeated in democratic elections and a peaceful transfer of power was effected. During the period of Nationalist rule, Taiwan prospered and became one of East Asia's economic "tigers".

China, however, never officially recognized Taiwan's autonomy, nor its claims on the mainland, and their relationship has often been hostile. Since the 1990s, the issue of whether to declare independence from China has been at the heart of Taiwanese politics.

The first Christian missionaries to arrive in Taiwan were Roman Catholic Dominicans who came from the Philippines in 1621, followed closely by Dutch Protestant missionaries. However, all the missionaries and Christians were killed soon after when a Chinese pirate took over the island. Presbyterian missionaries arrived in 1865. During its occupations between the 1890s and 1940s, Japan tried to suppress Christianity, but the churches resisted and grew. Today, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan is the

largest single denomination. The National Council of Churches of Taiwan was formed in 1991, although many Taiwanese Christians belong to small, independent churches. During the Nationalist regime, the Presbyterian Church was often in conflict with the government on human rights issues and many pastors and laypeople were imprisoned. Currently the Christian churches are active participants in the political process.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The flourishing Christian churches in South Korea.
- o Those who witness to the self-giving love of Christ in the midst of cultures that value individual prosperity.
- o Those engaged in bringing together North and South Korea.
- o Christians who serve Christ even when they are small minorities.
- o Kimchi, sushi, tea and all the wonders from the sea.
- o Enormous drums which beat the rhythms of life.

Pray for:

- o Those who continue to be affected by the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima.
- o An end to nuclear weapons.
- o Greater protection of human rights and a decrease in political corruption.
- o Those families torn apart by the separation of North and South Korea.
- o Peace in this region of frequent tension and misunderstanding.
- o Those in North Korea who suffer from malnutrition and face starvation.
- o Hope for people in North Korea who have seen only despair, deprivation and violence.
- o A just and peaceful resolution to the conflict between China and Taiwan, and an end to the ambiguous understanding of Taiwan's identity in the world.
- o Those who seek power, prestige and wealth at the expense of spiritual wholeness, that they may be filled and renewed.
- o Aboriginal peoples in Taiwan.
- o Those still rebuilding their lives after powerful earthquakes.
- o Children forced into prostitution.

PRAYERS

(1)

O God our heavenly father, because of the atomic bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we know how terrible these weapons of slaughter are, how they destroy people's lives from the very root, and how they cause suffering to people over a long time. There are now in the world nuclear weapons capable of causing ruin and destruction that would be many times more terrible. Please, O Lord, guide the hearts of the people of the world, so that a peace can be realized that comes not from weapons and a balance of military might but from dialogue, and so that all forms of nuclear weapons may vanish from the face of the earth. We ask this through the Lord Jesus Christ.

(2)

Our faithful God of Love and Hope!
 They say there is no way to escape the net of injustice.
 They say it is the rule of economy,
 that there are always losers and winners,
 and actually losers have no voice.
 But we still have voice. We can tell stories.
 How can we stop proclaiming the Gospel of Hope?

They say it is better to obey the rules of the global players.
 "Buy more software, hardware and other ware.
 Come to the warehouses then you will be happy."
 But we come to you.
 Although we are a small group, we still follow the rule of love.
 How can we obey the rules of the world market rather than you?

Give us strength, God of the whole cosmos.
 Let us continue to hope for the day,
 in which the true justice will blossom
 like the lilies of Taiwan in the darkest valley and on the street.

(3)

O God! Your hand once liberated those who are oppressed.
 The stories of your people are wonderful.
 But when our eyes see the tearful faces around us
 and our ears hear people crying
 we can no longer sing joyfully the song of victory.
 O God! Your triumph is so humble, so still, so small in our land.
 Fear and despair are the kings of our land.
 We fear for the invasion of one tremendous power in this world.

The people see no hope to be respected.
 O God! Once you did wonderful things:
 the stone, which the builder rejected, has become the main cornerstone!
 Come and comfort our frightened heart and teach it to sing:
 "I shall not die, I shall live to proclaim what the Lord has done."

(4)

Eternal God!

When will the day come when your righteousness will shine like the sun
 and your plan for the world be seen everywhere?

Our hearts wait eagerly and cry out:

no more hidden hands in darkness!

no more manipulation in the mass media!

Stop the cheating games of the world market!

Lord of time and space,

Lord of peace and justice,

come and help us live in this postmodern global world.

Help us to recognize the oppression in this new world system.

Help us to choose the way of life.

We commit ourselves to you. Let your light shine upon us!

In the name of Jesus Christ.

(5)

How happy we are, dear Jesus Christ,
 when we find your face in the people around us.

How great it will be, dear Jesus Christ,

when we feel the power of your resurrection among us,

in our daily life,

in our daily work.

Stay with us, O Jesus Christ, in a hundred thousand different images
 and let us recognize you

in a woman who is labouring to bring the world a new life,

or in a farmer who takes care of the rice field with love and pain.

Fill us with the power of your resurrection.

(6)

Eternal God,

We say good morning to you.

Hallowed be your name.

Early in the morning, before we begin our work, we praise your glory.

Renew our bodies as fresh as the morning flowers.

Open our inner eyes, as the sun casts new light upon the darkness
which prevailed over the night.

Deliver us from all captivity.

Give us wings of freedom like the birds in the sky,
to begin a new journey.

Restore justice and freedom, as a mighty stream
running continuously as day follows day.

We thank you for the gift of this morning,
and a new day to work with you.

(7)

Prayer! Prayer! Prayer!

May heaven accept this prayer of mine
repeated over and over again for many months.

May the edge of my soul become sharper.

Even if my breast explodes in agonized wailing,
let me set out on this journey.

Let me go out into the wilderness
into the land that nearly drives me mad
with its awakening bitterness.

The land over which stars sparkle
in the frozen winter dawn.

Let me pray alone,

let me decide alone:

to be with the people, at the bottom,
to be beaten with them, to decay with them,
and finally to rise up gallantly from the earth
with them

in the bright morning sunshine,

with our heads held high.

(8)

Who do I say that you are? I don't know.

But what I know,

You – Good News to the captives and the poor.

Liberator of the oppressed, friend of Minjung,
suffering people, under repression,

attentive ear to the silenced,

healer of the tortured, advocate of the lowest,

hope of the desperate, homeland of the exiled.

Who do I say that you are? I don't know.
 But what I know,
 You – Flower of freedom in the valley of repression.
 Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God.

(9)

At this time, Lord, we are especially thankful for the golden ripe grain and for the hundred kinds of red fruit. Where do they come from? The farmers who take them into their barns think they are the result of their own labours. But, O Lord, they are yours. To sustain our lives you have given us the sunshine and the proper rain; by these we sustain our lives and for them we are grateful. Just as the farmers, following natural laws, are busy at the time of sowing so that they will reap, so may we follow the laws which you have established and sow righteousness every day.

(10)

O Lord, who rose from death to life,
 we glorify and praise your name.
 O God, Creator and Giver of life!
 We confess our sins with the help of your power binding us together.
 Show us your mercy and forgive us.
 You made us one, but we have been divided for so long,
 and are still torn by conflict and suffering.
 O Jesus Christ, healer of our division!
 Help us to remember the pain and sorrow of Korea
 whenever we remember your suffering on the cross.
 Help Koreans take up their cross of unification
 so they have strength to continue their exchanges and cooperation.
 Lead them to carry forward their efforts for unification.
 Help them to overcome evil powers planning war in Korea,
 and let them live as one nation
 dreaming together the vision of a united people.
 O Holy Spirit, guiding Koreans to peace and unification,
 fill them with the joy of your resurrection,
 and strengthen their faith and sacrifice for peace and unity.
 Guide them to bring about peace in northeast Asia
 and the harmony of all creation,
 when they forgive each other and bind themselves as one.
 We pray in the name of Jesus Christ who died but has risen again,
 to establish true peace on earth.

(11)

As the cherry blossoms quickly fall and are forgotten, so in your bounteous mercy grant that our sins may be shed and remembered no more.

(12)

Lord!

Cleanse my heart and make it as white as snow.

Make my faith as firm as mountains.

Make my personality as beautiful as flowers.

When I fight for the truth, make me as brave as the lion.

When I suffer for justice, make me as meek as a lamb.

When I serve the suffering, make me as patient as the buffalo.

O God! Restore my humanity.

(13)

God of creation and salvation, hear our prayer.

You are almighty and merciful.

You said that you will wipe away the tears from all faces,

and the disgrace of your people you will take away from all the earth.

Now, please, look at Taiwan,

a country disgraced in the international society,

yearning to be free from China's imperialism.

Where is your salvation for Taiwan?

We pray that you would wipe away the tears and disgrace

from all the faces of Taiwan,

as well as of other peoples whose situations are similar to Taiwan.

Have mercy upon us.

Let the earth be full of your peace and justice forever.



Djibouti, Somalia

Djibouti
(Republic of Djibouti)

A neocolonial subject is born into uncertainty, lives in uncertainty, dies in uncertainty and operates on the frontiers of uncertainty. A neocolonial subject is a person who is told, "You are not who you are." As a result, neocolonial subjects cannot tell their own tales. Because neocolonial subjects are trapped in cultural narratives that are not theirs, they must step outside themselves in order to speak.

Naruddin Farah



Statistics
Population: 500,000
Government: Republic
Language: Arabic, French; also Somali, Afar
Literacy: 46% (men 60%, women 32%)

Religion: Muslim 94%, Christian 5% (mostly Ethiopian Orthodox), Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

The former French Territory of the Afars and the Issas became the Republic of Djibouti in 1977. Although it is a very small country it occupies a strategic geographic position at the mouth of the Red Sea and serves as an important trans-shipment point for goods entering and leaving the east African highlands of Somalia and Ethiopia. Its location near some of the busiest shipping lanes in the world and the Arabian oilfields makes it a critical watching post for the region and the Middle East. Djibouti is on the northeastern Horn of Africa, bounded by Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. The land is desolate, consisting of dry and barren desert accentuated by steep cliffs and deep ravines.

The area was colonized by France from 1846, eventually becoming an overseas territory. There has been violence by the government against the nomadic Afar tribe, which resulted in civil war from 1991 to 1994. There is also fierce fighting between nomadic Afars of Ethiopia and Issas from Somalia. Djibouti is heavily dependent on foreign assistance, with an unemployment rate approaching 50 per cent. These problems are compounded by the high population growth of refugees and immigrants from the wars between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Most people in Djibouti are Muslim, with Christians making up only about 5 per cent of the population. Roman Catholic priests from France arrived in Djibouti in 1883. It is the only Christian group to have converts from the local population, although even most Catholics are foreigners. The dominant Christian group is the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, comprised primarily of Ethiopians living and working in Djibouti.

Somalia

(Somali Democratic Republic)

Somalia is a nation of poetry. Even children of a few years old who herd sheep have songs they

have created themselves. If you are tending a herd or making handicrafts, poetry becomes your companion. If you ask for something, it is traditional to ask with poetry. People cannot do their jobs without poetry. At a certain point, poetry became a necessity, like food. It became the only thing that could move society.

Hadrawi



Statistics

Population: 8.3 million (estimate)

Government: No effective central government since civil war began in 1988

Language: Somali and Arabic; also Italian, English and others

Literacy: 25% (men 36%, women 15%)

Religion: Muslim 98%, Christian 1% (mostly Ethiopian Orthodox), Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Somalia is in the Horn of Africa on the Indian Ocean and bounded by Ethiopia and Kenya to the west. Its border with Ethiopia is only an administrative line with the Oromo region of Somalia, but landlocked Ethiopia maintains port facilities with Somalia. It is rough desert country of flat or undulating plateaux with hills in the north.

The Cushitic indigenous population was joined by Arabic and Persian traders in the seventh century, and beginning in the ninth century the area was the Arab sultanate of Koreishite, ruled by

immigrants from Yemen. Portuguese traders controlled several coastal ports in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, until they were retaken by the Sultan of Zanzibar. European powers colonized the land in the nineteenth century.

After the Second World War the two colonies, British northern and Italian southern Somaliland, were turned over to a British–Ethiopia partnership, and Somalia gained its independence in 1960. By the middle of the 1970s, fighting by Somali expatriates in the Ogaden border region of Marxist Ethiopia was severe. During the 1980s Somalia turned to the west for help, with the US entering the region from 1982 to 1994.

Chaos and anarchy have prevailed ever since the outbreak of civil war, clan-based faction-fighting, and the ousting of the Siad Barre regime in 1991. In mid-1991 northern clans declared an independent Republic of Somaliland located in what was once British Somaliland. Although not recognized by any country, the area has maintained a relatively stable existence, due in part to the overwhelming dominance of one ruling clan and the economic infrastructure left behind by British, Soviet and American military assistance programmes.

The southern part of the country has not fared well. Once under Italian colonial rule, Somalia disintegrated after Barre's departure, leaving warring clans battling over territory and power. A severe famine in 1993 sparked a US-led humanitarian effort, nominally under UN control, which brought the marines to the beaches of Mogadishu, the one-time capital. The US was forced to withdraw in 1995, having suffered significant casualties and failing either to alleviate the starvation or restore order.

In 1998 another region of the country declared itself to be the autonomous state of Puntland, which has some vestiges of government but expresses no wish to achieve independence. In recent years Puntland has also suffered civil strife similar to that of the south.

Various efforts have been made by the African Union and its predecessor (the Organization of African Unity) to establish government institutions, but these have largely failed. A Transitional National Government (TNG) was given a mandate by clan leaders in 2000 at a meeting in Djibouti, but expired without success in 2003. More recently efforts by Kenya and Ethiopia have produced some hopeful signs, but warlords and clan leaders are still fighting for control of Mogadishu and the south.

Half a million people have fled the country as refugees. Of those who remain, approximately 70 per cent of the population is nomadic or semi-nomadic, dependent on livestock. Their problems have been exacerbated by severe droughts. Chronic malnutrition, an almost universal lack of clean drinking water, and the absence of medical resources have left an estimated 75 per cent of the population with parasitic diseases and other infections.

Islam is the religion of Somalia; Christians make up only about 1 per cent of the population. In 1972 the government passed a law that nationalized all church property, and in 1976 Protestant missionaries, mainly Mennonites, were expelled. The largest church is the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, although its members are predominantly refugees from neighbouring Ethiopia.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Those who continue to serve others in the midst of great difficulty.
- o Christian aid agencies, who do not give up on Somalia, even when they are exposed to frequent danger.

- o Christians who persevere in spite of being a tiny minority.
- o Each small sign of progress towards reestablishing a government in Somalia

Pray for:

- o Peace in Somalia and that clan and military leaders would repent of the devastation they have caused to the land and its peoples.
- o Hundreds of thousands of Somali refugees all over the world, and refugees from Eritrea and Ethiopia who have fled to Djibouti.
- o Those suffering from malnutrition and facing starvation,
- o Those who have no clean water to drink, and who suffer with otherwise preventable diseases and infections.

PRAYERS

(1)

Now you depart, and though your way may lead through airless forests thick with hagar trees,
places steeped in heat, stifling and dry, where breath comes hard, and no fresh breeze can reach –

yet may God place a shield of coolest air between your body and the assailant sun.

And in a random scorching flame of wind that parches the painful throat and sears the flesh,

may God, in compassion, let you find the great-boughed tree that will protect and shade.

(2)

You who give sustenance to your creatures, O God,
Put water for us in the nipples of rain!

You who poured water into oceans, O God,
Make this land of ours fertile again!

Acceptor of penance, who are wealthy, O God,
Gather water in rivers whose beds have run dry!

You who are glorious, truly bounteous, O God,
Our cries have undone us, grant a shower of rain!

You who are clement, truly worshipped, O God,
Milk water for beasts which are stricken with thirst!

Creator of nature who made all things, O God,
Transmute our ruin to blessing and good!

We have done much remembrance, O God who remembers,
Loosen upon us rain from the clouds!

You who are merciful and compassionate, O God,
Milk rain from the sky for those in need!

You who are truthful, Creator, O God,
We accept in submission whatever you say!

You who mete out good and evil, O God,
In this land we are broken, milk the clouds from above!

The earth and the sky you constructed, O God,
We cannot get water, bring forth drops of rain!

The darkness of night you transfigure, O God,
And make daylight follow; milk the sky lavishly!

You who open all and give sustenance, O God,
People have scattered; send forth healthy rain!

Almighty, perfecter of counsels, O God,
Pour for us rain which would make the land wet!

You who are bounteous, the protector, O God,
We cannot survive drought, send us rain from your store!

You who drive the air which sways the trees, O God,
It is you whom we praised, grant us the goodness of rain!

You who are worshipped and answer prayers, O God,
Make the rain spread over the whole of the land!

Bestower of victories, benefactor, O God,
Bring us faultless rain which makes us dwell where it falls!

You who are one and are trusted, O God,
Provider of all, give water to your people!

You who spark off lightning from clouds you have loaded, O God,
It is you who have power over rain which satisfies abundantly!

You who fill water-holes dug in wadis, O God,
Milk rain on this land, cream-giving rain!

You who used to relieve the strangest plights, O God,
It is to you that I have turned for help!

(3)

O Allah! (Lord)

Make me among those whom you have guided.

Make me among those whom you have pardoned,
and make me among those to whom you are a patron.

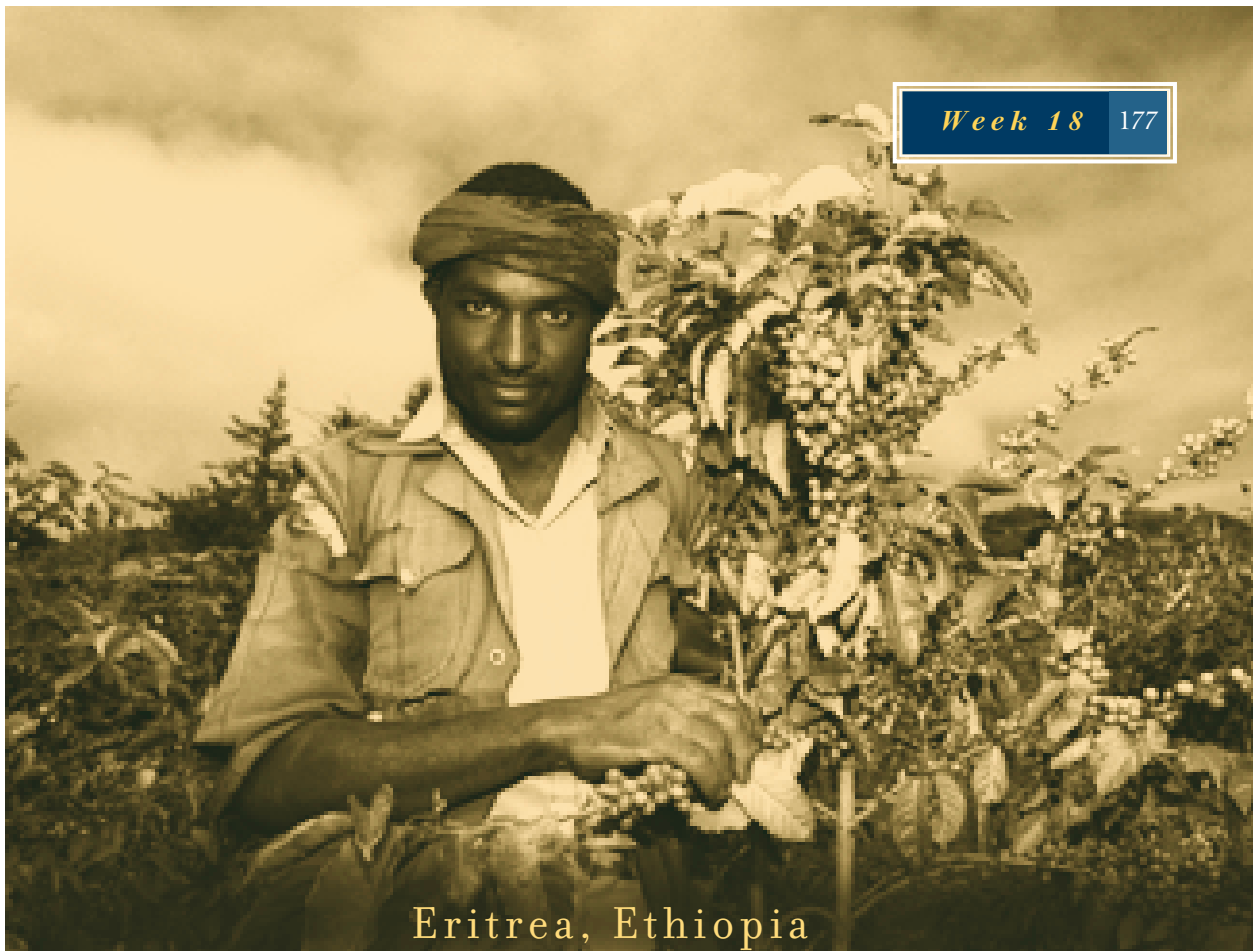
Bless that which you have bestowed on me
and shield me against the evil of what you have decreed.

Truly, you are the one who decrees and none can decree over you.

The one to whom you show allegiance can never be abased,
and the one whom you take as an enemy
is never honoured and mighty.

You are the blessed and the exalted.

("Allah" is Arabic for "God".)



Eritrea, Ethiopia

Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is himself the way to peace and God our Father's gift of peace to the human family. The search for peace is found when prayer to God brings about a change of heart leading to conversion and to helping us to become instruments of peace. We are convinced that it is the duty of all citizens to form themselves to peace; to respect political, social, cultural and religious pluralism; to favour dialogue and solidarity at the national and global levels. It is impossible for peace to exist without first having virtue to flourish.

*God's Gift of Reconciliation and Peace:
An Appeal of the
Catholic Bishops of Ethiopia and Eritrea*

Eritrea



Statistics

Population: 3.4 million

Government: Transitional one-party regime

Language: Arabic and Tigrinya; also Tigray, Tigre, Afar, Bilin

Literacy: 20% (men 30%, women 10%)

Religion: Christians 51% (mostly Orthodox), Muslim 45%, Other 4%

WCC member churches: Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church

History

Eritrea is located at the eastern tip of the Horn of Africa, along the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. It consists of dry coastal plain with lowlands and central highlands straddling the escarpment of the Rift Valley. It is bordered by Sudan to the west, Ethiopia to the southwest, and Djibouti to the southeast. Yemen lies nearby, across the Red Sea.

Eritrea was first settled by peoples from the Nile valley over 6,000 years ago. From the fourth century, it was part of the Ethiopian kingdom, until it was annexed by the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century. Later, it became an Italian colony.

Eritrea emerged from a long war of independence from Ethiopia in 1993, only to plunge once again into violent strife, first with Yemen and then, more devastatingly, in 1998, a full-scale border war, again with Ethiopia. Both sides were left two years later with tens of thousands of people dead and Eritrea with a badly destroyed infrastructure.

An Italian colony from 1889, Eritrea was occupied by the British in 1941. In 1952 the UN resolved to establish it as an autonomous entity federated with Ethiopia as a compromise between Ethiopian claims to sovereignty and Eritrean aspirations for independence. However, ten years later, the Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie, annexed Eritrea, triggering a 32-year armed struggle. This culminated in independence in 1991, after an alliance of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and a coalition of Ethiopian resistance movements defeated Selassie's successor, the communist dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam.

In 1993, in a referendum supported by Ethiopia, the Eritrean people voted almost unanimously in favour of independence, leaving Ethiopia landlocked. But the two countries hardly became good neighbours, with Ethiopian access to the Eritrean ports of Massawa and Assab one of the main stumbling blocks. In 1998 border

disputes flared into full-scale war, which ended only in 2000 under UN auspices. Eritrea currently hosts a UN peace-keeping mission monitoring a Temporary Security Zone on the border with Ethiopia. An international commission organized to resolve the border dispute posted its findings in 2002, but the final demarcation is delayed due to Ethiopian objections.

The many years of war destroyed almost all the infrastructure, including clinics, schools and many other buildings. Landmines are a frequent source of injury. Malaria and HIV and AIDS are prevalent. The average life expectancy is 46 years, and over a quarter of the population is dependent on relief food due to drought and war.

Eritrea has a diverse ethnic population, and just over half the people are Christian, members until independence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, a WCC member. However, in 1993, with the support of the Eritrean government, the Orthodox people living in Eritrea appealed to Pope Shenouda III of the Coptic Orthodox Church (Egypt) for separation from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and autocephalous status as the Eritrean Orthodox Church. This was granted in 1994 and Pope Shenouda ordained five new Eritrean bishops in Cairo. The Ethiopian and Eritrean churches signed an agreement in Addis Ababa reaffirming the autocephalous status of both churches. The church has been in the region for several centuries, and played a significant role in the struggle for independence. Eritrean Orthodox make up about 40 per cent of Eritrea's population. About 50 per cent are Sunni Muslims. Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries arrived in the late nineteenth century, but these groups remain small.

Ethiopia

(Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia)

A stand of trees, known as the holy forest, surrounds every Ethiopian Orthodox Church, so to resemble oases in the desert. The holy trees are never cut. On such grounds around the country,

soil from the forest floor provides a good start for trees planted by the community... Known as holy trees, many will be blessed and distributed to families at the Sunday worship service. People care for the seedlings. Planting drought-resistant trees, like eucalyptus, helps push back the desert in Northern Ethiopia. One day these church-planted trees will reclaim the mountain. Orthodox Christians understand all of creation as participating in the saving work of Jesus Christ, so they participate today in restoring the forest.



Statistics

Population: 68 million

Government: Federal republic

Language: Amharic; also Gallinya, Tigrinya, Tigre, Arabic, Somali, Afar, Italian, English and over 90 others

Literacy: 35% (men 45%, women 25%)

Religion: Christian 58% (mostly Orthodox), Muslim 40%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

History

Ethiopia is entirely landlocked on the eastern horn of Africa. Eritrea and Djibouti lie to the northeast, Somalia to the east and southeast, Kenya to the southwest, and Sudan to the west and northwest. Ethiopia contains part of the Great Rift Valley where remains of Australo-

pithecus humanoids were discovered, and some of its languages and peoples are known to date to 13,000 BC.

Ethiopia was a trading state known as the Aksumite kingdom during the first century. It was led by the Solomonid Dynasty (after King Solomon, according to Hebrew scripture the consort of the Queen of Sheba), which in the fourth century embraced Coptic Christianity. Beginning in the seventh century, the Zagwe Dynasty brought in Islamic northern peoples. For the next several centuries there was conflict between these different religious and ethnic groups, although by the thirteenth century the Christian Solomonids had regained control. During the eighteenth century religious and regional warfare weakened the state and it broke into regional fiefdoms of Tigrayan and Oromo princes. By the mid-nineteenth century the European expansion into the Horn of Africa brought problems with Italy, France and Britain, particularly once Italy colonized neighbouring Eritrea in 1889. However, uniquely among African countries, the ancient Ethiopian monarchy maintained its freedom from colonialism throughout its history, even fending off two colonizing attempts by Italy.

In 1952 the United Nations voted to federate Ethiopia and neighbouring Eritrea. Ethiopia annexed Eritrea in 1962, leading to several decades of violence until Eritrea achieved independence in 1993. In 1974 a military junta, the Derg, deposed Emperor Haile Selassie (who had ruled since 1930) and established a military regime. The Coptic Orthodox Church, closely tied to the emperor as official state church, had most of its wealth and vast landholdings taken away. However, torn by coups, uprisings, drought and massive refugee problems, the Derg regime was finally toppled by a coalition of rebel forces, the Ethiopian People's Liberation Front (EPRDF), in 1991. A constitution was adopted in 1994 and the country's first democratic elections were held. In 1995 a vicious border war with Eritrea ended inconclusively in December 2000.

Emperor Haile Selassie's remains were ceremonially reburied in Trinity Orthodox Cathedral in Addis Ababa in 2000, although the Orthodox Church was not restored to its position of state church nor were its vast lands given back. The country suffers from insufficient medical personnel, inadequate sanitation, and nutritional deficiencies. Life expectancy is 50 years for males and 53 years for females. In 1999 Ethiopia suffered an epidemic of meningococcal meningitis, and HIV and AIDS has reached epidemic proportions, affecting more than one in ten adults. Tuberculosis has also increased dramatically, and is now the single largest cause of death in Ethiopia.

Christianity is said to have come to Ethiopia in the first century (Acts 8:27), when the first king, Aksum, was converted. One tradition holds that St Matthew proclaimed the Gospel in Ethiopia. During the fifth century the Ethiopian Orthodox

Church was one of the churches that split from the early Christian church at the Council of Chalcedon over how to define the relationship of the human and divine natures of Jesus Christ. Despite the spread of Islam in the region, about half the population of Ethiopia remains Christian, of whom two-thirds belong to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Throughout the centuries it has been a unifying force in the country. Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries arrived with European colonizers and established several churches. There was a strong revival movement of Pentecostals beginning in the 1960s, and today the largest Protestant denomination is the Word of Life Evangelical Church. The third largest denomination is the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus ("dwelling of Jesus"), which is a member both of the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The faithful witness of Ethiopian and Eritrean Christians.
- o Ancient traditions, and new possibilities for proclaiming the faith of the risen Christ.
- o Those who serve the poor and the hungry.
- o Injera (Ethiopian bread) and wat (a sauce for meat and vegetables).

Pray for:

- o Governments marked by peace and justice.
- o The settling of border disputes by diplomatic means instead of violence.
- o New sources of food and potable water that can be developed affordably.
- o Medical personnel to be trained and clinics to be made available for the people.
- o Refugees and those who have been displaced from their homes and villages.
- o Those suffering from AIDS, tuberculosis and other diseases, who have no access to medical care.

PRAYERS

(1)

For the waters of the rivers, that God should fill them unto their due measure and bounds; for the fruits of the earth that God may grant to the earth her fruit for sowing and for harvest; for thy holy name is blessed and filled with glory, O Holy Trinity, now and ever and world without end.

(2)

O God Eternal, good beyond all that is good, fair beyond all that is fair, in whom is calmness and peace: reconcile the differences which divide us from one another and bring us back into the unity of love which may bear some likeness to your divine nature. Grant that we may be spiritually one, both within ourselves and with one another, through the grace, mercy and tenderness of your son, Jesus Christ.

(3)

God, Creator of moon and stars, may this moon be one of joy and happiness. Let the young become strong and the grown man maintain his strength, the pregnant woman be delivered and the woman who has given birth suckle her child. Let the stranger come to the end of his journey and those who remain at home dwell safely in their houses. Let the flocks that go to feed in the pastures return happily. May this be a moon of harvest and of calves. May this be a moon of restoration and of good health.

(4)

We thank you, God,
for you have led us safely through the dreary winter months,
for you have enabled us to smell the fresh fragrance of flowers,
for you allowed us to enjoy the fresh breezes of autumn winds,
for you led and brought us from the old to the new year,
for you made our crops and plants produce for our nourishment.

We pray

for peace to prevail in homes, neighbourhoods and in the land,
for you to eradicate illness, pestilence and plagues
so there may be no hunger or famine on our land,
so that those who have no children may have children,
so that those who toil may prosper and succeed in life.

Again we pray
for safe labour and delivery in childbearing,
for the rains of the planting season,
for new crops and bounties of harvest,
for alleviation of natural disaster: drought, floods, epidemics or plagues,
for victory over hostile intrusions,
for the healing and well-being of the sick,
for multiplying the population of the herds,
for cows bearing calves, giving meat and milk,
for the steers and oxen tamed to pull the ploughs.

(5)

Dear Lord Jesus, we give you thanks.
Because you were resurrected from the dead,
we can be also raised from our mortal lives
with you, the giver of eternal life.
We ask you to appear before us,
as you appeared to your disciples.
Breathe in us your Holy Spirit,
so we can go out
and be your good witnesses
with peace, love, joy and happiness.
In your name we pray.

(6)

Thank you, dear Jesus,
for being a good shepherd to all believers.
When we are lost from your flock,
you never sleep until you bring us back,
and there is rejoicing in heaven and on earth.
Our daily shepherd, our defender, our protector,
thank you for keeping us from all evil,
from fearful, harmful things
and for preserving us from all unbelief.
In your name we pray.

(7)

Jesus,

you are our way, our truth, our life.

Help us to love you,

to respect, adore and worship you,

and especially to obey your commandments

to love you and one another.

Put in us this great love, which is the basis of all the other fruits of your Spirit.

Thank you for your eternal love.

Give us more of your love,

today, tomorrow and forever.

This we ask in your name.

(8)

In the name of the Father and of the Son

And of the Holy Spirit, one God, **Amen**.

For them that will love life, and see good days,

let them refrain their tongues from evil,

and their lips that they speak no guile.

Let them eschew evil, and do good; let them seek peace, and ensue it.

For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous,

and God's ears are open unto their prayers:

but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

And who are they that will harm you

if you will be followers of that which is good?

But if you suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are you:

and be not afraid of their terror,

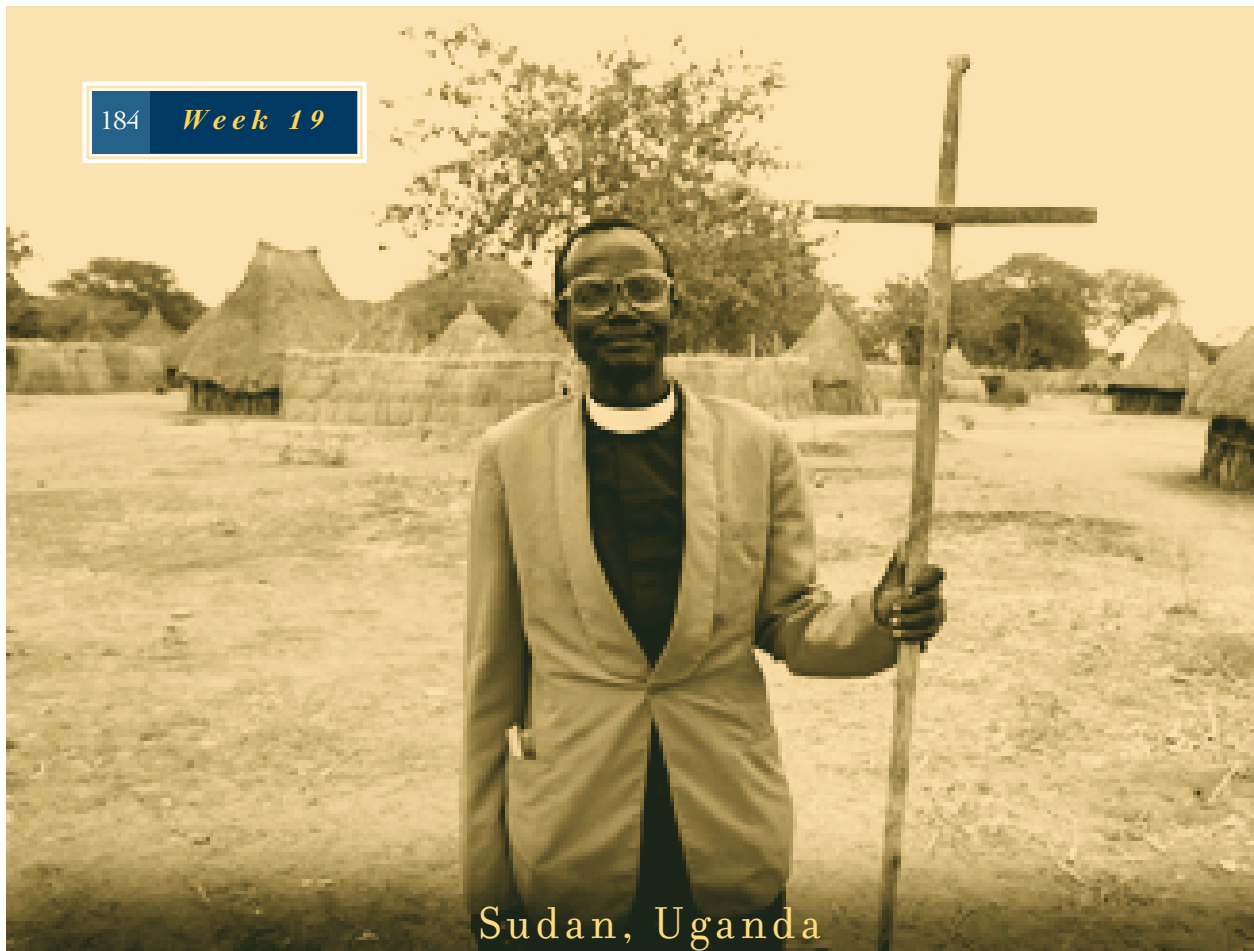
neither be troubled.

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts:

and be ready always with an answer

to every one that asks you a reason for the hope that is in you,

with meekness and fear.



Sudan, Uganda

Sudan

(Republic of Sudan)

What is a refugee?... As refugees, we are victims of violence and war. We left our motherland because we were mistreated in many ways. We ran to get protection in other countries. But as a refugee... you are a human being without any value. You can pass through disaster and nobody will care about you. Oh! Without your home you are like a dog without a tail.

Andrew Mayak



Statistics
Population: 39 million
Government: Islamic military government
Language: Arabic; also English, Dinka, Nuer

Nubian, diverse dialects of Nilotic, Nilo-Hamitic, Sudanic languages and over 130 others

Literacy: 46% (men 57%, women 34%)

Religion: Muslim 70%, Christian 17% (mostly Roman Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian), Other 1%

WCC member churches: Africa Inland Church – Sudan, Episcopal Church of the Sudan, Presbyterian Church of the Sudan

History

Sudan, located in northeast Africa on the Red Sea, is the largest country in Africa. It is also one of the most violent and poverty-stricken. It has known only ten years (1972–82) without civil war and massive population displacement since it was granted independence from Britain in 1956. The wars are rooted in northern economic, political, social and religious domination of the non-Muslim, non-Arab southern Sudanese people. It is estimated by the UN and churches that since the war resumed in 1983, more than 2 million people have died and 4–5 million have been displaced due to war and famine-related causes. In 2003 Islamic extremists attacked black Sudanese in the western Darfur region where thousands died and more than a million more were displaced in a humanitarian disaster that continues.

Sudan has been dominated in the north by Arab and Egyptian influence and has been strongly oriented towards radical Islam in recent years. Approximately 40 per cent of the country's population are Arabs, who live mostly in the north. Various black African tribal and ethnic groups comprise the population of the south, which is largely Christian or animist. A major division has existed between the north and south since before independence. In 1955, as preparations to end British colonial rule were underway, the southern provinces began to rebel against rule from the Muslim north. Successive governments, both civilian and military, have been unable to deal with the tensions. Civil wars had raged for 17 years when representatives from the All Africa Conference of Churches and the World Council of Churches and neighbouring countries were able to negotiate a

peace agreement which lasted for a decade. During that time, attempts to grant the southern African region a form of autonomy or self-government failed, while inter-tribal struggles over land and cattle made the region a tinderbox.

After the discovery of oil in the south and demands by the Khartoum government that the revenues go to the national government, war broke out again in 1983 and there has been no peace since. From 1989 onwards the ruling regime has been a mixture of military elites and a fundamentalist Islamist party which took power in a coup. In 1999 the army dissolved the national assembly and suspended the constitution. Peace talks beginning in 2002 led in 2005 to some promise of a resolution of the conflict in the south.

Decades of war have led to a large refugee population, as well as millions of landmines around the country. Children have been kidnapped and forced to serve as soldiers. Slavery, another monstrous human rights violation, has continued for more than 300 years. North African Arabs and Arab Moors buy, sell and breed black Africans for the slave trade. The country has been ravaged by drought, famine, desertification, soil erosion, poaching of endangered animal species and excessive hunting. The oilfields of southern Sudan have been developed by international corporations, but are also the cause of brutal repression of southerners who demand a share of the lucrative royalties.

Islam is the religion of the majority of the population, although Christianity has a long history in the Sudan, beginning with the arrival of Coptic Christians during the fourth century and Melkite missionaries in 543. Christianity flourished until the fourteenth century, when Islam dominated and extinguished all Christian presence. Roman Catholic missionaries arrived in 1861, although their mission was largely destroyed during an insurrection in 1881. The Roman Catholic Church was reestablished in 1898, and the Anglicans followed soon after. Today, the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian churches are by far the largest denominations in Sudan. There are also Coptic, Ethiopian and Greek Orthodox churches.

The Sudan Council of Churches was established with headquarters in Khartoum in 1965 and includes Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Anglican churches. It has an exiled wing, the New Sudan Council of Churches, based in Nairobi, Kenya. While the two councils see themselves as one, the many years of war and destruction have made it impossible to serve as an ecumenical resource for the southern Christians. The NSCC maintains regular contacts with the churches of the south, both spiritually and materially, helping with education, humanitarian assistance, refugee support and spiritual solidarity between and among churches, all of whom, including the Roman Catholic, maintain close ecumenical ties in a fractured country.

U g a n d a

(*Republic of Uganda*)



S t a t i s t i c s

Population: 26.4 million

Government: Non-party parliamentary republic

Language: English; also Ganda, Swahili, Nkole, Teso, Arabic and over 50 other tribal languages

Literacy: 61% (men 73%, women 50%)

Religion: Christian 89% (mostly Roman Catholic and Anglican), Muslim 5%, Ethnic 4%, Hindu 1%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Church of Uganda

H i s t o r y

Uganda, entirely landlocked, is a tropical area on a fertile plateau that supports an agriculturally based economy. Kenya lies to the east, Tanzania and Rwanda to the south, the Democratic Republic of Congo to the west, and Sudan to the north. There is evidence that hunter-gatherers lived in the area for more than 40,000 years, and herding and farming continue to be the dominant way of life for most Ugandans.

Until the nineteenth century there were several local kingdoms in Uganda, most famously the Baganda. In 1894 Britain declared Uganda a protectorate, encouraging conflict between tribal groups to ensure European dominion. At independence in 1962 Uganda was a prosperous nation with an economy that thrived on cotton, coffee and tea, as well as a vigorous tourist industry. Its superb Makerere University produced first-rate academics and professionals. However, Britain's policies of divide and conquer continued and Uganda was ill-served by its corrupt and vicious leaders: the country was in a state of almost constant civil war. Between 1969 and 1986 more than 500,000 Ugandans died under the ruthless dictatorships of Milton Obote and Idi Amin, whose military regimes wreaked havoc upon the indigenous civilian population, killing and torturing citizens, particularly the educated and members of religious groups. Among these was the martyred Janani Luwum, head of the Anglican Church, who was murdered by Amin. The economy collapsed, as Idi Amin invaded Tanzania and was routed. The country's government splintered into chaos and guerrilla warfare raged until 1986, when Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army took firm control and Uganda began slowly to recover, instituting some democratic reforms.

In 1995 a new constitution allowed the reinstatement of local monarchies without political power, and in 1996 national non-party elections were held. Throughout the 1990s Uganda was engaged in a number of internal and external armed conflicts with its neighbours: Sudan,

Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Recently, internal stability has been threatened by corruption, human rights violations against civilians by the military, and compromised rights to free assembly. The situation in northern Uganda has attracted international concern.

As if all this instability were not enough, the HIV and AIDS pandemic devastated the country, leaving thousands dead and tens of thousands of orphans with little support. While Uganda was one of the hardest hit countries in Africa in the early days of the pandemic, it was also one of the first to deal with it openly and remove the stigma attached to the disease. Museveni openly spoke of AIDS and gradually, with enlightened approaches, Uganda has also become one of the few African countries to begin to slow the spread of the disease.

Christianity was brought to Uganda by Roman Catholic missionaries from France and Anglican missionaries from Britain during the late nineteenth century. Religious tensions quickly erupted into violence under the rule of King Mwanga in 1887: Christians were forced to renounce their faith, and almost two dozen were

martyred by being burned to death. The 1967 constitution provides for freedom of religion, but during the reign of Idi Amin more than 400,000 Christians were either killed by death squads or disappeared, and many Christian organizations were banned. Amin also expelled hundreds of thousands of Asians, many of whom have never returned. The Uganda Joint Christian Council, founded in 1963, includes Anglican, Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. The Roman Catholic Church is the single largest denomination in Uganda, followed closely by the Anglican Church of the Province of Uganda.

Among the fastest growing churches in Africa are the Pentecostal-related, which is illustrated by the massive growth of the Kampala Pentecostal Church in Uganda, founded in 1984. Ten years later it had grown so much that each of its three Sunday services is attended by more than 5,000 people. It is non-denominational, with many of its members belonging to the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches. The Kampala Church's impact on youth is so great that thousands of parents of all churches urge their young people to join.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Those working to make peace agreements benefit the Sudanese people.
- o Those refugees able to return home.
- o Those taking care of refugees, and international aid organizations.
- o Peace-makers working to find solutions to Sudan's divisions.
- o Those who strive to end the civil war in Uganda.
- o The commitment of the Ugandan government to control the AIDS epidemic.

Pray for:

- o An end to the bombing of innocent civilians by the Sudanese government.
- o A just solution to the conflicts in the Sudan.
- o Those divided by civil wars and violence between ethnic and religious groups.

- o Refugees in and near Darfur.
- o People affected by severe famine in southern, western and eastern Sudan.
- o Groups such as the Bantu, Melut and Adariyal who have been displaced from their villages due to the oil research in their areas.
- o Those suffering from HIV and AIDS, particularly children who have been orphaned by the disease.
- o Peace between Uganda and its neighbours.

PRAYERS

(1)

God our heavenly Father, Lord of peace, God of love,
we pray you guide all children who have lost their parents
and are living in hard times.
Lead them in everything they do,
send your love into the hearts of those caring for them.
Let this group know your love for them
and they will praise you.

(2)

Bless, O Lord, those who hear your word and believe it.
We pray for the people who are in remote areas,
and live in fear of the world of spirits,
that they will know your power as Saviour of the world.
Bring peace to our land
and all parts of the world that are disturbed,
so that the gospel of salvation may be preached to all humankind.
In Jesus' name we pray.

(3)

We thank you, God, for your creation.
You created earth and heaven.
You created man and woman.
You created sun and moon.
You are the only God to be worshipped.
Thank you, God, for giving us life.
We thank you for the good sunshine.
Thank you for the good rain, that causes the crops to grow.
God be praised for the plenty of a good harvest.

We thank you for our food,
for our bananas, sorghum, beans, maize and other crops, O Lord.

God, we thank you for our cows, goats, sheep,
that give us milk and meat.

Thank you, God, for giving us children.

You are the source of life, we thank you.

We, your children, are happy enjoying the fruits of your creation.

Therefore, we thank you.

Divine Intelligence, give us peace in our country.

We want peace in our homes.

Give peace to the world which you saved from the power of Satan.

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you and praise you for our salvation.

Bless us today, Lord.

Bless our children as they play together in school or at home.

Lord, bless the president and our nation.

(4)

O Father Almighty, and God of all comfort,
look with compassion we pray,
upon the little companies of our faithful fellow Christians
who, in lonely places of the world,
are striving to uphold the banner of the cross.
If the comfort of human sympathy seems far from them,
be their close companion,
and pour into their hearts the spirit of hope;
that they may steadfastly persevere,
and be of good courage because of your word,
knowing that their labour is not in vain.

(5)

Visit us, we are despairing.

Our faith is wavering, O Lord, come visit us.

The hardness of the world weighs heavily on us.

Sin keeps us away from your path.

We are forsaken, forsaken, forsaken.

(6)

Keep us, Lord almighty, from all panic, as fears and crises arise.
 Help us to recognize that, the whole time in the furnace, you accompany us.

(7)

Jesus, I want to join my prayers to many other voices.
 Every few months we are driven away from one refugee camp to the other,
 so far in the desert where nothing, nothing at all exists.
 This is no way for a human being to live.
 No way to live in such a shocking place –
 uncultivated, waterless, treeless and barren region... !
 Everything is burning, Lord, around me, around us... in me,
 in us ... Everything is barren, hell, hell... !
 Yet, Lord, we believe you are there, beside us.
 We pray for all the Africans living now in our same condition.
 Bring back peace and tranquillity to our beloved country.
 Peace, which is desired by everybody, the old and young,
 rich and poor, women and men.
 Amen... amen... Let it be so.

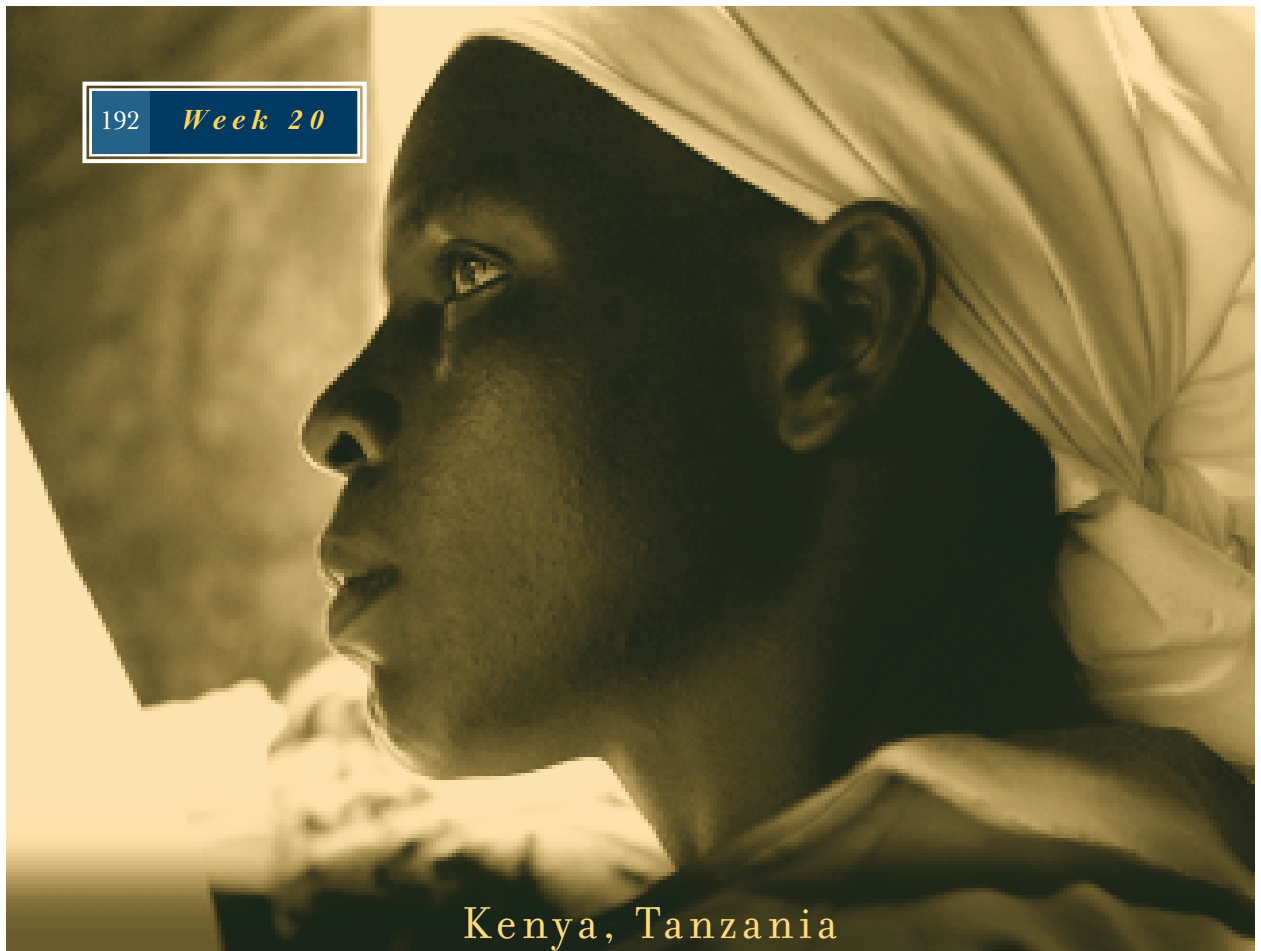
(8)

Lord, help me to mean every "Amen" I pray.

(9)

Lord, our everlasting God,
 we pray for our family members and relatives at large,
 that you may grant us peace and mercy.
 We pray that we may find the new place safe.
 We pray that we may find this new place in a peaceful manner
 because in your presence everything is all right.
 We pray that we may not find terror in this place,
 and that you will give us courage and strength to overcome Satan's temptations.
 We know that your Son Jesus Christ overcame Satan;
 may our spirits be strong enough to overcome his temptations.
 We ask this in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

(10)
Heavenly Father,
we thank you for your love,
especially to women who work with poor people,
teaching, nursing and helping women during their labour.
We pray you to give them wisdom;
guide them always to fulfil their duties without difficulties.
Lord, be with those they work with
and send your Holy Spirit to give us love to help all people.
We pray you to lead us,
through Christ, our Saviour.



Kenya, Tanzania

Today, we live in a world we recognize as a broken world; a world searching for meaning in life and for security, yet a world in which many lead meaningless and insecure lives. The answer is neither in politics nor in economics. Nor is the answer to be found in military might. The problem humankind is facing today is deeply spiritual and moral. This therefore is a huge challenge to the World Council of Churches. We will work tirelessly towards the healing of the world, and the restoration of the human dignity of all the people of God.

The challenge the world is facing today is how to relate to one another as human beings and not merely as consumers and sellers, or as powerful and powerless. The historical injustices of preceding centuries have come back to haunt us in the twenty-first century. Unless and until

these underlying historical injustices are resolved, it will be difficult for everyone to feel safe in this world. As a council of churches, we commit ourselves to advocate for non-violent ways of attaining justice, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation.

For the WCC to gain the capacity to inspire the world, we need inner strength. I believe that the twenty-first century will be a century where spirituality will take centre stage in our lives. [There is an] African saying: "If you want to walk fast, walk alone. But if you want to go far, walk together with others." My prayer is that in this ecumenical movement, we shall go very far, walking together, strengthening each other to fulfil that prayer of our Lord – that all may be one.

Samuel Kobia

Kenya

(Republic of Kenya)



Statistics

Population: 32 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: Swahili and English; also Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo and more than 60 others

Literacy: 78% (men 86%, women 70%)

Religion: Christian 79%, Ethnic 12%, Muslim 7%, Baha'i 1%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: African Christian Church and Schools, African Church of the Holy Spirit, African Israel Nineveh Church, Anglican Church of Kenya, Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church, Methodist Church in Kenya, Presbyterian Church of East Africa

History

Kenya is on the Indian Ocean coast of Africa, with Tanzania to the south, Uganda to the west, Sudan to the northwest, and Ethiopia to the north. It is the site of some of the oldest known human remains. They were found at Olduvai Gorge and are over 3.6 million years old. In this ancient valley begins the story of the human species, for here is evidence of the dramatic shift from homo erectus to homo sapiens. DNA analysis indicates that these remains are the ancestors of us all.

The Portuguese arrived in 1498 and were driven out at the end of the seventeenth century by the

Arabic Omani Dynasty, which established a thriving trade in slaves until Kenya became a British colony in the nineteenth century. While the British halted the slave trade, they exerted their rule by encouraging ethnic violence, and divided the indigenous population into a number of artificial tribes based on similarities in language. They took the land they wanted and allowed the Africans to work their European-style farms, but refused to allow them to live on their own land, which eventually led to the violence of the Mau Mau Emergency in the early 1950s. Settlers were rudely awakened from their colonial reverie and with black rule on the horizon, disaster was widely predicted for independent Kenya.

Under the leadership of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya moved on a moderate, if authoritarian, path: pro-western, capitalist and strongly attached to economic development. After his death in 1978, Daniel arap Moi took power in a constitutional succession, continuing Kenyatta's policies until, in 1982, he declared the Kenya African National Union (KANU) the sole legal political party in Kenya. Moi and his thuggish police ruled with an iron hand and the country became relatively prosperous and stable compared with its neighbours. In 1991 Moi could no longer contain internal and external pressure for political liberation, much of which came from the leaders of the Christian churches. Opposition parties were formed, but were so fractured along ethnic lines that Moi kept power through two fraudulent and violent elections in 1992 and 1997. He stepped down in 2002 and was replaced in free and fair elections by Mwai Kibaki, running as a candidate of the multi-ethnic opposition Rainbow Coalition.

The country is marred by huge gaps between rich and poor. The unemployed underclass of Nairobi's slums contrasts grossly with the conspicuous wealth of the monied and ruling classes. Kenya's recent political and economic problems have also been exacerbated by a large number of refugees from civil unrest and violence in neighbouring countries. The total number of refugees from these countries is approximately 250,000

and this has greatly affected food supplies. Kenya also had to deal with the aftermath of a drought that hit the country in 1999–2000, contributing to the food shortage. Other environmental concerns include deforestation and over-hunting. Lake Victoria, the world's second-largest freshwater lake, is threatened by an invasion of the water hyacinth, which has spread wildly and is now decreasing the oxygen supply in the lake. HIV and AIDS has reached epidemic proportions, with one in seven adults infected.

Christianity first came to Kenya in 1498 with the arrival of explorer Vasco da Gama. Several waves of Protestant, Anglican, Roman Catholic (Holy Ghost Fathers) and Independent (Pentecostal and Evangelical) missionaries came to share the gospel over the next several centuries. Mission activity was particularly strong during the twentieth century, so that today most Kenyans are Christian, evenly divided between these four groups. Kenya's government influenced the practice of religion in the second half of the twentieth century. In 1968 it took over the management of mission-founded schools. In 1969 freedom of religion was added to the constitution. The Kenyan government has also lent cooperation and aid to church-sponsored projects such as hospitals, dispensaries, village polytechnic schools and socio-economic development programmes, and has allowed chaplaincy programmes in the armed forces and prisons.

The All Africa Conference of Churches, an ecumenical regional organization representing over 100 Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox churches and councils of churches throughout Africa, was formed in 1963 and has its headquarters in Nairobi.

Tanzania

(United Republic of Tanzania)

Statistics

Population: 36.5 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: Swahili, English

Literacy: 67% (men 79%, women 56%)

Religion: Christian 50%, Muslim 32%, Ethnic 16%, Hindu 1%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Anglican Church of Tanzania, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Moravian Church in Tanzania



History

Tanzania is located in eastern Africa along the Indian Ocean. It is bordered to the south by Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia, to the west by the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Rwanda, and to the north by Uganda and Kenya. It also borders on several freshwater lakes, including Lake Victoria, Lake Tanganyika and Lake Nyasha.

Beginning around the eighth century, Arab traders established outposts along the islands and coast of Tanzania. During the nineteenth century the area was colonized by both the British, who took over the Sultanate of Zanzibar on an island just off the coast in the Indian Ocean, and the Germans, who took over mainland Tanganyika. By 1914 some 5,000 Germans lived in the newly subjugated country after years of rebellion which cost the lives of 120,000 Africans. The outbreak of the First World War brought an end to the peace, with armed conflict entering the colonies in a costly guerrilla war conducted by the isolated Germans. In 1918 the remnants of Tanganyika were turned over to

Britain. British settlement and development followed, but never on the scale lavished on Kenya.

In 1964 Zanzibar merged with Tanganyika to become the United Republic of Tanzania. Tanzania was ruled by a single-party republican government led by Julius Nyerere until 1985. The founder of the philosophy of Ujamaa ("family" in the official Swahili language), he retired and the country amended its constitution to become a multiparty republic.

Tanzania is one of the poorest countries in the world, with more than half the population living below the poverty line. The HIV and AIDS virus is a growing problem, with an estimated 9 per cent of the population known to be infected. In addition, there was a massive influx of refugees from neighbouring Rwanda and Burundi during the 1990s.

Christian activity began in Tanganyika in the sixteenth century with the arrival of Portuguese Roman Catholic priests, and today most Christians are Roman Catholic. During the late eighteenth century German missions were established and overseen by the Moravians. Today, the world's largest Moravian population can be found in Tanzania. After the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the next largest presence, followed by the Anglican Church, which was established in 1963. There are also several African indigenous churches. The churches have been closely involved in the social and developmental works of the country, aided by the Christian Council of Tanzania, an ecumenical group that was first established in 1936.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The witness of Christian churches and organizations and the continued relationship between brothers and sisters in Christ from different denominations.
- o Choirs who spend long hours rehearsing to give God praise.
- o Worship with joyous dancing accompanied by drums and shakers.
- o Small farmers who work hard to feed their families.
- o Ugali (cornmeal), cassava, rice, chapati (a type of Indian bread).
- o Welcoming people, who share their resources with strangers from across the borders.
- o Mt. Kilimanjaro, and the vast Indian Ocean.

Pray for:

- o Refugees from neighbouring countries, that they may find food and shelter and soon be able to return to their homes.
- o Those affected by drought, that they may have clean water to drink and grow their crops.
- o Peace among ethnic and tribal groups, so that they may work together to create a just society.
- o Churches and church leaders as they seek to fight corruption and promote democracy and good governance.

- o Young women forced into prostitution.
- o Those suffering from HIV and AIDS, children orphaned by the epidemic, and those who care for them.
- o Those who live in abject poverty, many of whom are not able to feed themselves or their families.
- o Relief for the people of Africa from the burden of international debt.

PRAYERS

(1)

My God, place me where I may be held tightly by you.

O God, let me become like a liana,
like millet with very many small grains.

God of the mountain of my ancestors, hear me!

My God, grant me light for my eyes to see all things.

My God, you who are here and elsewhere, be a God who sees and hears.

(2)

O Lord and heavenly Father, we commend to your care the men, women, and children of our country and of all Africa who are suffering distress and anxiety because of lack of food. Strengthen and support them, we pray, and grant that the world may grow in understanding of your ways and in sharing with each other the good gifts which you have given to us; for Jesus Christ's sake.

(3)

Almighty God, we pray for your peace on earth.

For peace that is life-giving;
for peace that is love-bearing;
for peace that is true freedom;
for peace that is purposeful;
for peace that is prevailing.

We pray for children in time of war;
they are defenceless.

We pray for the old; they are unable to escape danger quickly.

We pray for those with physical disabilities;
they are at the mercy of others.

We pray for women; they are vulnerable to abuse.

We pray for the innocent;
they suffer from the unjust desires of others.

We pray for those whose lives have been changed by war:
 the blinded; the burned;
 those who have lost limbs; those who have lost their reason;
 those who have lost their peace of mind;
 those who have lost their health and strength forever;
 O God, above all we pray for those in anguish,
 those whose lives will never be the same again;
 those who have lost their loved ones; those who have lost their lives.
 Deepen in us our desire for peace,
 restore our resolve for peace, increase our intent to work for peace.
 Will for us your peace, perfect and prevailing
 for your Son, our Saviour Christ's sake.

(4)

God of Hope,
 whose Spirit gives light and power to your people,
 empower us to witness to your name in all nations,
 to struggle for your own justice
 against all principalities and powers
 and to persevere with faith and humour
 in the tasks that you have given to us.
 Without you we are powerless.
 Therefore we cry together:
Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus.

And grant that we may with one voice and one heart
 glorify and sing praise to the majesty of your holy Name,
 of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

(5)

For your blessing we thank you, God.
 Increase our faith in you, we beg, so that we no longer doubt.
 Drive out all our miserliness, so that we do not refuse you anything.
 Increase our faith, for the sake of those without faith.
 Make us instruments of your faith, for those with only a little.
 Fill our bodies with faith, our bodies that work for you all our days.
 Help us to avoid the enemies of faith, or to overcome them.
 You are with us in confrontations; this we believe.
 In your hands we place ourselves, and are secure.
 Make haste to enter our hearts; make haste.

(6)

We rise up in the morning before the day, to take ourselves to labour, to prepare our harvest. Protect us from the dangerous animal and from the serpent, and from every stumbling block.

O Boora Punnu [God], you alone have created us and given us the capacity to feel hunger, so we need grain and we must have fertile fields.

(7)

BLESSING

May God free you, may God guard you night and day.

May God set you in your right place,

and may you spread out like the grass of a prairie.

Spread out like palm leaves; continue your walk,

and may life be with you.

May God place you where God's stars are placed at dawn and at night.

Spread out like water of a lake.

Be numerous like the feet of a millipede.

(8)

Heavenly Father, Lord of peace,

we thank you for the continued peace Kenyans (and Tanzanians) have enjoyed.

May your Holy Spirit continue dwelling in our hearts as we preach for your peace.

God, we pray for those countries holding elections.

May your wings of peace protect the people during the electioneering period and the campaigns;

grant us your peace to live in love and harmony

amongst our brothers and sisters,

as we await entering the promised Holy City of Jerusalem.

Lord, in your mercy

hear our prayer.

(9)

Thank you Father for your free gift of fire,

because it is through fire that you draw near to us every day.

It is with fire that you constantly bless us.

Our Father, bless this fire today.

With your power enter into it.

Make this fire a worthy thing,

a thing that carries your blessing.

Let it become a reminder of your love,

a reminder of life without end.
 Make the life of these people to be baptised [confirmed] like this fire,
 a thing that shines for the sake of people,
 a thing that shines for your sake.
 Father, heed this sweet smelling smoke.
 Make their life also sweet smelling,
 a thing sweet smelling that rises to God,
 a holy thing, a thing fitting for you.

(10)

AFFIRMATION

I dream of a community
 where justice is practised
 and leaders are not dictators;
 where human rights are observed;
 where tribalism does not exist;
 where leaders are honest and able;
 where politicians listen in silence.
 I dream a lot more
 and I still believe God will provide.

(11)

Almighty God the true Vine,
 send the Holy Spirit to the nation,
 the leaders and the people of Kenya.
 Transform their leaders to act as your true prophets,
 instil in them the desire
 for transparency and leadership according to your way.
 May rays of your light bring hope,
 especially during difficult, helpless and painful times
 when we easily draw far from your presence.
 Great Vinedresser, prune our thoughts,
 our actions and our efforts.
 Make us more fruitful
 in addressing the enormous challenges facing us:
 poverty, unemployment, diseases such as HIV and AIDS,
 and good governance.
 Lord, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

(12)

All you big things, bless the Lord.
 Mount Kilimanjaro and Lake Victoria,
 The Rift Valley and the Serengeti Plain,
 Fat baobabs and shady mango trees,
 All eucalyptus and tamarind trees,
 Bless the Lord.

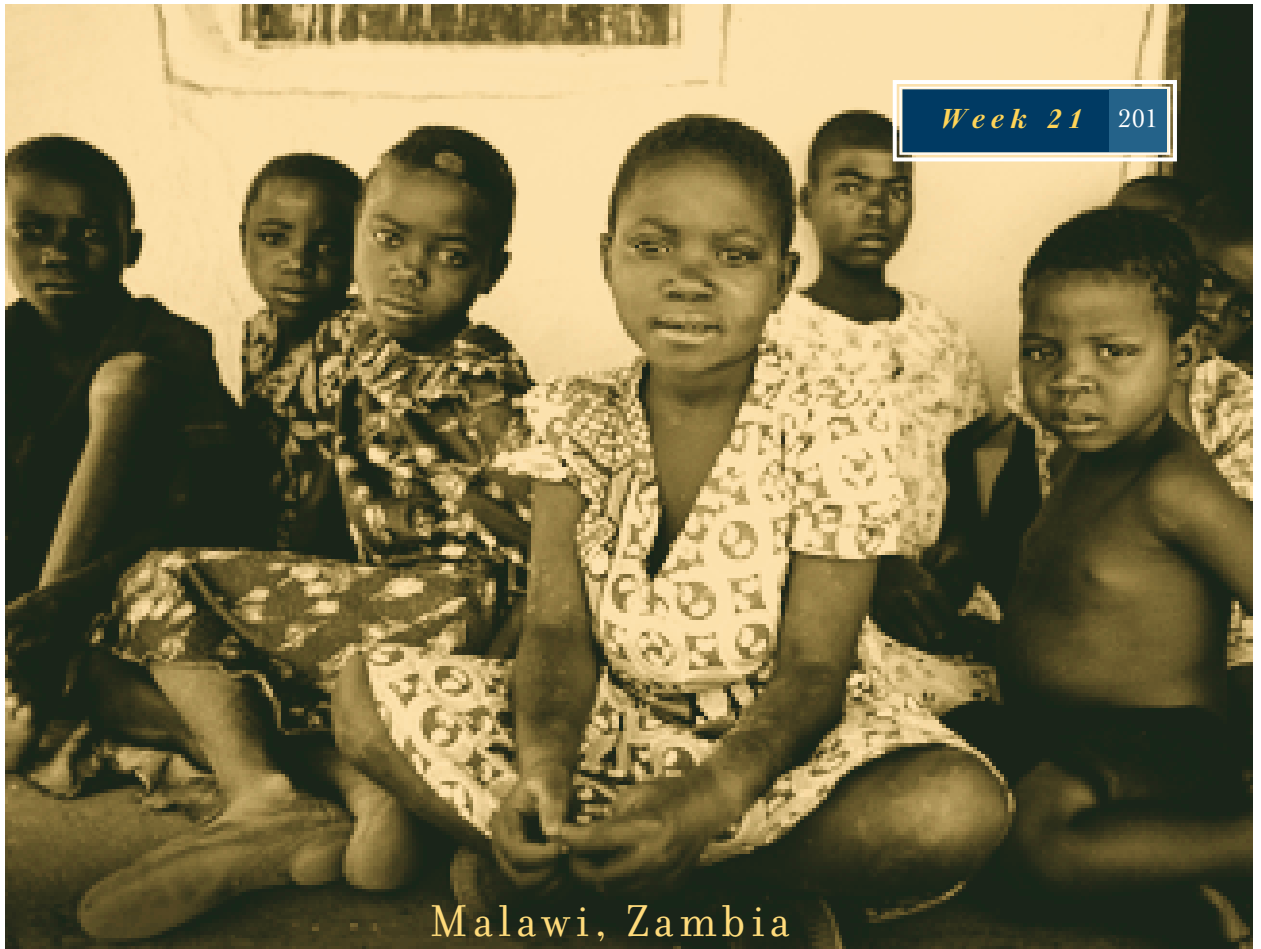
Praise and extol him forever and ever.

All you tiny things, bless the Lord.
 Busy black ants and hopping fleas,
 Wriggling tadpoles and mosquito larvae,
 Flying locusts and water drops,
 Pollen dust and tsetse flies,
 Millet seeds and dried dagaa,
 Bless the Lord.

Praise and extol him forever and ever.

(13)

God of the mighty wind,
 send the warmth of your Spirit
 so we can embrace one another.
 Send the breath of your Spirit
 so we can speak in our own tongues
 and yet understand one another
 as we go about our daily lives.
 Send the fire of your love
 so we can avoid conflicts and tribal clashes.
 Holy Spirit, come, and fill us with your gifts
 so we are strong in joy, love, patience, kindness and peace
 with one another and all the neighbours around us,
 through Jesus Christ, our Lord.



Malawi, Zambia

Some are called untouchables or outcastes, yet all are created in God's image.

Some are called street kids, yet there is none whose birthplace is Kamuzu Procession Road [a famous road in Malawi].

Some are identified as refugees or asylum seekers, yet the whole world is God's parish.

What have they done to be called by such dehumanizing terms?

Some are not given jobs because of colour and tongue, yet our God is no respecter of persons.

Some are denied ordination because they are female, yet both sexes are found in God.

Some countries are called the first world, others the third, yet God alone created the heavens and the earth.

What have they done to endure such discrimination?

Goodwin Zainga

Malawi

(Republic of Malawi)



Statistics

Population: 11 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: Chichewa, English; also Tumbuka, Yao, Hindi and others

Literacy: 56% (men 71%, women 41%)

Religion: Christian 77%, Muslim 15%, Ethnic 7%

WCC member churches: Church of the Province of Central Africa

History

Malawi is a tiny country wrapped around one side of Lake Malawi (Nyasa) in east central Africa. It shares boundaries with Mozambique to the east and south, Zambia to the west and Tanzania to the north. Densely populated, its people depend primarily on subsistence agriculture and are very poor. Malawi is also plagued with HIV and AIDS and a deteriorating land base.

Established in 1891 as the British Protectorate of Nyasaland, it was once part of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, which was an attempt to unite Northern and Southern Rhodesia (now Zambia and Zimbabwe) with Nyasaland (Malawi) as a way of forcing these restive colonies together. The scheme lasted about ten years (1952–62) until independence swept across Africa. Into the confusion stepped one of the Africa's most eccentric and ruthless leaders, Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, who returned from Scotland in 1958 after 40 years abroad to help break up the federation and led Malawi to independence in 1964. Banda was a medical doctor and elder in the Church of Scotland, but he will be remembered as a ruthless dictator. He muzzled the press, suppressed the opposition and many of his political opponents disappeared. Prior to his death in 1997, it was estimated that Banda had come into ownership of approximately 30 per cent of the economic assets in Malawi.

Malawi is a land of great natural beauty, from the shores of Lake Malawi, known in neighbouring Tanzania as Lake Nyasa, through national parks and game preserves to the peak of Mount Mulanje. In recent years, intermittent flooding and drought have led to extensive food shortages. Near the end of 2000, Malawi began to be granted international relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries programme. The country is a beneficiary of financial assistance from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Malawi is among the region's least developed countries. The AIDS pandemic is spreading: it is now estimated that 25 per cent of the adult population is HIV-positive.

Christianity first came to Malawi with the famed British missionary and explorer David Livingstone in the mid-nineteenth century. Roman Catholic and other Protestant missionaries arrived soon after, and the church grew rapidly. The country is 75 per cent Christian, while the balance of the religious population is primarily Muslim. The majority of Christians belong either to the Roman Catholic Church or the Church of the Province of Central Africa, Presbyterian. Although church and state remain separate, they are close partners in development. The churches work extraordinarily closely in maintaining a critical watch over government, together with the Muslim community. The churches are also heavily involved in education and medical and social services.

Zambia

(Republic of Zambia)



icibote means "peace be with you" in Bemba, Zambia's main language. It's used throughout Zambian society – in politics, religion and everyday life – as a greeting, the reply being, **icibote chibe narmwe**, or "peace be with you also". It's to show that we Zambians cherish peace. Without **icibote**, there can be no harmony here. This is especially true in the church, where

Christians praise the Lord for giving them peace. Without **icibote**, there can be no true worship.

Moses Mbulo

S t a t i s t i c s

Population: 10.5 million

Government: Republic since 1964

Language: English; also Bemba, Tonga, Nyanja (Chichewa), Lunda, Lamba, Mambwe and Lozi

Literacy: 78% (men 85%, women 71%)

Religion: Christian 82%, Baha'i 2%, Muslim 1%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Reformed Church in Zambia, United Church of Zambia

H i s t o r y

With the expansion of European colonialism in the nineteenth century, the British South Africa Company operated by Cecil Rhodes saw the region now called Zambia as a source of cheap labour for mines in Rhodesia and Johannesburg. The land itself attracted greater attention from the colonial authorities with the discovery in the 1920s of vast copper deposits on the frontier of what had become Northern Rhodesia. This led to an influx of British settlers and the urbanization of the Copper Belt, virtually emptying the agricultural potential of the country for the dubious wealth of the mining industry. The mining companies profited, but Zambia failed to benefit: Rhodes' companies took out more than US\$160 million in royalties for "ownership"; the British treasury collected some \$90 million in taxes and only reinvested \$10 million; a further \$200 million was extracted and reinvested in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Today, the copper mines are barely operating and badly run down.

In 1964 Northern Rhodesia also left the Federation and became independent Zambia, made up of all the lands acquired by Rhodes north of the Zambezi River and surrounded by eight countries: Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi and Tanzania. Zambia was a one-party state headed by Kenneth Kaunda until elections in 1991, when voters elected an opposition party

candidate by a wide margin. Kaunda's ideology of Christian humanism prompted him to commit Zambia to the many liberation movements that used Lusaka, the capital, as an exiles' base of operations, including those from Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. His unstinting support came at a sacrificial price to Zambia and played havoc with the faltering economy. The country has since had two more peaceful transfers of power and Kaunda is widely recognized as an elder statesman who gave great leadership to the liberation of southern Africa.

Copper mining formed the basis for the Zambian economy, for many years to the detriment of agriculture. The poor condition of the nationalized copper mines and fluctuating prices have left the country poverty-stricken and agriculture is only beginning to revive following years of neglect. Food still remains in short supply. Like much of southern Africa, HIV and AIDS has struck hard, with some 25–30 per cent of Zambian adults with HIV or AIDS. More than 900,000 children have been orphaned. Medical resources are extremely limited. In addition, copper mining and refining have resulted in acid rain and environmental pollution of air, water and soil.

The majority of the people of Zambia are professing Christians. Roman Catholicism is the largest Christian faith family, followed closely by Protestant and Independent Christian churches. The United Church of Zambia resulted from a formal union in 1965 and is the largest Protestant church in Zambia. In 1991 the country was declared a constitutional Christian country under the impetus of "born-again" President Frederick Chiluba, Kaunda's successor. The constitution, however, allows for freedom of religion for all faiths. Formal ecumenical activities have existed since 1945, when the Christian Council of Zambia (CCZ) was founded. Among the subsequent ecumenical groups to be established, the Zambian Christian Commission for Development (ZCCD) has been the most broadly representative, bringing together Protestants, Roman Catholics and indigenous churches.

INTERCESSIONS***Give thanks for:***

- o Democratic multiparty politics in Malawi and Zambia, and peaceful transitions of leadership.
- o Rich agricultural land and environment.
- o The growth of the church.
- o Christians who stand by the poor and hungry.
- o Those who proclaim God's will for justice.
- o Those who work for the cancellation of the burden of international debt that brings poverty and death to many Africans.
- o Good humour and those who can laugh in the face of grave problems.

Pray for:

- o The democratic governments in Malawi and Zambia, that they may work for the welfare and development of the nation, irrespective of party affiliation.
- o Those suffering from AIDS, and government efforts to combat the AIDS pandemic.
- o A sufficient supply of medical personnel, equipment and drugs in government hospitals and health centres.
- o Victims of floods and drought, that food production may again flourish.
- o The increasing numbers of school drop-outs, street youth and delinquents, that they may find hope and meaning in their lives.
- o Those affected by inflation and unemployment, that they may find work and be able to feed their families.

PRAYERS

(1)

There are many dangers on my life's pathway.
 Send your light to enable me to recognize the danger.
 Give me courage to face those I cannot avoid,
 and wisdom to see the way of escape and use it,
 through him who overcame temptation.
 Though tried in every way,
 he emerged without sin,
 even Jesus, the Christ.

(2)

God of love, God of compassion,
 in the midst of death and evil,
 you mercifully look after us:
 protecting, providing and smiling,
 constantly reassuring us of your care.
 Grant to us the joy of this occasion,
 especially as we celebrate our birthdays,
 knowing that your love is life.
 Teach us to number our days aright,
 that we may acquire a heart of wisdom,
 through him whose life has become our light, even Jesus Christ.

(3)

Master, master, we are dying.
 Don't you see the plague
 that has engulfed entire peoples,
 the HIV/AIDS plague,
 a plague without a cure,
 a plague so devastating.
 Master, master, hear the statistics:
 10 per cent to 30 per cent,
 we are being wiped out,
 whole peoples and whole nations.
 Have mercy on us, O loving Master.
 Take pity upon the sheep of your fold.
 Grant us life, grant us hope, grant us a cure.
 Through the risen Lord, we beseech you.

(4)

We are all affected by HIV/AIDS;
we are the body of Christ.
 We have lost close relatives;
heal our bodies.
 We have lost close friends and neighbours;
heal our hearts.
 We have lost church and work mates;
heal our spirits.

We have lost our hope;
heal our minds.
 We put our trust in you.
You are Emmanuel,
you are God With Us.
You will never leave us or forsake us.
You will be with us to the end of the ages.

(5)

A leader asks the people participating in the worship to pray for each and every part of their bodies, while touching each part as they silently pray for it. This action helps emphasize the fact that each part of our body is a member of the temple of the Living God, so we can commit it to our God who created it. In conclusion, after giving enough time to pray for each part of the body, the leader may start the prayer that was taught by Jesus. Each member may be asked to pray in his or her own language.

(6)

PRAYER BY WOMEN

Your body was broken for us.
 Your blood was spilled for us.
 We as women have been washed clean
 and made members of your body through baptism.
 We are the temples of your Holy Spirit.
 Help us to remember this
 and to refuse to tolerate any violence against us.
 Help us to say no to HIV/AIDS death. Bless us, Lord.

(7)

Out of all the
 beautiful houses,
 well-to-do families,
 professionals in Bethlehem,
 families of the Pharisees,
 beautiful girls in Judea,
 richest cities in the world,
 Jesus was born:
 in a cattle shed,
 to a poor, insignificant but obedient family,
 to a carpenter named Joseph

and a young woman, Mary,
in Bethlehem.

May your Holy Spirit enable us to realize the implications of your birth,
that our mission involves

working with the
marginalized,
destitute,
forgotten,
people living with AIDS,
widows and orphans,
and untouchables;

whatever we do to the least of his brethren.

(8)

Almighty and eternal God,
we fervently lift up our eyes to you,
searching for help and guidance in the midst of very many problems.
Come and show us how to serve the refugees and the oppressed,
how to stand alongside those who struggle for social justice.
Come, liberate us from captivity to confessionism
and make us agents of reconciliation and unity.
Give us a will to love and serve you
through loving and serving others.



Botswana, Zimbabwe

Botswana

(Republic of Botswana)

I dream of a world where the youth are free,
free to play with each other without fear,
free to touch, tickle and to embrace,
free to be themselves and be respected for that.

I dream of a world where the young blossom,
where potential is harnessed and realized,
where people's efforts are rewarded,
and where one can fly to reach the sky.

I dream of a church that is inclusive,
where I am not the church of tomorrow,
where I am permitted to sing my own tune,
where I belong in my own right.

I dream of a world without HIV and AIDS.
I dream of a kaleidoscope of African youths,
who sing a song of praise and do not shed tears.
I dream of life in fullness and no more death.

Moiseraele P. Dibeela



Statistics

Population: 1.6 million

Government: Parliamentary multiparty democracy

Language: English, Setswana; also Bantu and others

Literacy: 69% (men 80%, women 59%)

Religion: Christianity 60% (mostly Independent), Ethnic 39%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Botswana is a landlocked country in south central Africa that is a little larger than France. It is surrounded by Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Most of the country is made up of the Kalahari Desert and a sandy plateau to the west. A major river, the Okavango, ends in a swamp in the northwest part of the country. The original inhabitants of the Republic of Botswana were Bush people, thought to have migrated from the north. Following these people were the Hottentots, and then Bantu speakers. These groups lived peacefully together, trading with each other. The name "Botswana" comes from a later ethnic group, the Tswana, who migrated north from South Africa beginning in the fifteenth century.

In the late nineteenth century hostilities broke out between the Botswana and Boer settlers from the Transvaal, and in 1885 the land became a British protectorate known as Bechuanaland. Attempts by South Africa to include Bechuanaland in the Union of South Africa were resisted, and, after a long process towards self-government, Botswana became an independent nation in 1966. It is Africa's oldest democracy, having its roots in Setswana (a Bantu group) traditions, exemplified by the Kgotla (village council) which limited the powers of its leaders by custom and law.

Botswana's economy is based primarily on the export of diamonds. However, work is sometimes scarce, and many miners travel to work in South Africa. The top 20 per cent of the population earns two-thirds of the total income, while the bottom 50 per cent earns less than one-sixth. Even so, Botswana has one of the best human rights records of the continent and a strong democratic tradition. Concerns include providing public education and safe drinking water, and

dealing with the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Botswana has the highest rate of HIV and AIDS infection in the world, with nearly 40 per cent of all adults infected. Drought has also been a problem in recent years.

Christianity, especially Protestantism, is a significant force. The United Congregational Church is the major denomination, tracing its roots from the London Missionary Society. Seventh Day Adventists are the second largest denomination. In the 1990s a Pentecostal/charismatic renewal occurred. Many denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church, belong to the Christian Council of Botswana (CCB), formed in 1966. This organization is significant for its urban and rural development programme and its urban-industrial mission. It is estimated that there will be a massive increase in church membership in the next decades as tribal religions decline.

Zimbabwe

(Republic of Zimbabwe)



Statistics

Population: 12 million

Government: Parliamentary republic

Language: English; also Shona, Ndebele and many others

Literacy: 85%

Religion: *Christian 68%, Ethnic 30%, Jewish, Muslim, Baha'i and Hindu communities 2%*
WCC member churches: *Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, Reformed Church in Zimbabwe, United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe*

History

Zimbabwe is a landlocked nation in south central Africa, east of Botswana and north of South Africa. Because of its altitude (a high plateau) it has a moderate climate in spite of its tropical latitude.

Human remains found in Zimbabwe have been identified as being 500,000 years old. The earliest settlers were known as Khoisan. Bantu domination followed, and then the Shonas, who ruled from 1000. Descendants of the Shona, the Nguni and Zulu, were in control when the first British explorers came in the 1850s. The area was named Rhodesia after Cecil Rhodes of the British South Africa Company. Rhodesia became a self-governing British colony in 1923.

Zimbabwe has had a troubled and violent history. From 1890 to 1979 a minority white population controlled the government. From 1965, when this minority declared itself independent from Britain, until 1979, when they finally agreed to multiracial elections, black nationalist groups struggled, sometimes violently, for independence, while international bodies exerted political and economic pressure to aid the cause. In 1980 Robert Mugabe won a landslide victory, and the country was renamed Zimbabwe, which means house of stone in the Shona language. For a decade the country was ruled as a one-party socialist state, until Mugabe instituted multiparty elections in 1990. Mugabe's party continues to win decisive electoral victories. In 2002 he was reelected to another six-year term as president in a ballot marked by blatant state terrorism and denounced as rigged by international observers – one indication of the increasingly dictatorial role that Mugabe has assumed.

Equitable distribution of land and economic justice is a major problem in Zimbabwe. Mugabe

supporters, many of them veterans of the Zimbabwean war for independence, have begun squatting on white-owned farms, forcing landowners to flee, and sometimes attacking or killing them. In 2001 a constitutional amendment was passed which allows the government to seize white-owned land without compensating the owners. Mugabe states that since the problem of white ownership of land began under British rule, the United Kingdom should compensate these owners.

Presently, Zimbabwe faces continued violence, political and social tension and health concerns. The parliamentary election of 2005 failed to meet a minimum of standards for a free and fair reflection of the peoples' wishes. The economy is in crisis. Droughts and flooding have devastated the agricultural economy in the last several years. The flight of white settlers and the economic mismanagement of large plantations following their departure have also undermined food production. In addition, Zimbabwe, like many African nations, has experienced the epidemic of AIDS. According to a UN estimate, a quarter of the population is HIV-positive, and more than 900,000 children are already AIDS orphans.

The church did not escape racial divisions in Zimbabwe. Often, separate church communities exist for white and black Christians, and while churches are predominantly black African in membership, only recently has denominational leadership reflected this racial composition. There are many independent and Protestant denominations in Zimbabwe. The largest single denomination is the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God. The Roman Catholic Church is also strong, and there are many indigenous churches, most notably the African Apostolic Church. A Pentecostal/charismatic renewal movement is spreading throughout the nation.

Interdenominational organizations include the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, the Episcopal Commission for Ecumenism, and the African Independent Churches Conference.

INTERCESSIONS***Give thanks for:***

- o Health care workers who provide medical aid and education to those infected with the HIV virus.
- o The Christian Council of Botswana and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches.
- o Marimbas, drums, mbiras (instruments made with tuned strips of metal and played with the thumbs) and shakers.
- o Choir festivals where singers join together in praise of Christ.
- o Those working for a better democracy in Zimbabwe.
- o Uncles, grandmothers and cousins taking care of children whose parents have died of AIDS.

Pray for:

- o The leaders of government and their success in bringing economic progress, education and health care to their people.
- o Landowners and the land workers, and those who are displaced by land reform.
- o Reconciliation between the races in Zimbabwe, leading to a society of equality and respect.
- o AIDS orphans.
- o Hope for those who have little to hope for.

PRAYERS

(1)

PRAYER FOR DROUGHT-PRONE BOTSWANA

O God,

we pray for those places in the world made awful by climatic conditions;
places of intense cold, and heat and drought,
places of great hardship and privation,
where man, woman and beast are constantly endangered by the elements
and the environment.

We give thanks for all that sustains and helps them,
and pray that such may be multiplied.

In the hands of Jesus Christ and those who serve in his name.

(2)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Creator God, we have sinned against your creation,
when we discriminate against people on the basis of their colour, gender,
ethnicity, class, health and sexual orientation. This discrimination has
exposed these groups to HIV/AIDS infection and lack of quality care. We
have been hypocritical, for we have failed to love others, while we claim
to love you.

Forgive us, Lord, and teach us how to love one another.

(3)

God, you have created us to be us,
yet we have succumbed to be something else.
We have accepted to be surrogate children
of western lifestyles and cultures.
Help us to claim back our dignity as your people.
You have made us black yet we would rather be white.
You have given us beautiful languages
but we would rather take pride in a language of our enslavement.
How can we sing you a new song in a language we can hardly comprehend?

You taught us that to be is to belong to you
and to one another and to the environment,
but we would rather listen to human masters who say,
"To be is to accumulate wealth at all costs."
Teach us to relearn our lifestyle of *botho*.

Lord, we confess our split personality to you.
We have accepted the fallacy that your worship
is incompatible to our way of life as your people.
Help us to be ourselves, to render unto you worship
full of African fragrances and authenticity.

(4)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Dear God, our Creator,
we come before you asking for your mercy.
We have sinned against you
and have forgotten your grace towards us.
We have failed to be loving and accepting
to those we live with.
We often wrong the little ones among us through our arrogance.
Forgive us our sins
and restore us to fellowship with each other and with you.

(5)

Lord, Lord, you are the Lord.
 You created all things.
 You are the master of the forest.
 You are the master of the animals.
 You are our master, and we your servants.
 You are the master of life and death.
 You rule, we obey.

(6)

God, the father of all humankind,
 you have not fallen short in your role as father, ever.
 You love, you take care, and you gently guide us.
 O God, we need your guidance for fatherhood in Africa,
 guidance to take care and love those whom they have brought into this world.
 We pray for all those people
 who have not yet felt the love of a father in their lives.
 We pray for those who only know violence and abuse;
 those whose lives are empty and full of hurt.
 Guide us, Father, as you guided Joseph.

(7)

Holy God, hear our cry.
**If we are without hope,
 weighed down and affected by HIV/AIDS,
 prone to stigma and discrimination,
 hear us and help us.**

Holy Creator, hear our cry.
**When we ignore visions to combat HIV/AIDS,
 pass by widows and orphans,
 preach doom and destruction,
 hear us and help us.**

Listen now to the message of hope.
 After the darkest night the moon shines the brightest,
 disease and pain shall be banished,
 stigma and discrimination shall be overcome.
**All praise and honour be yours
 God of hope, love and mercy.
 The Spirit is with us.**

(8)

Great Spirit, piling up rocks into towering mountains,
 when you stamp on the stone,
 the dust rises and fills the land.
 Father, you sew the heavens like cloth:
 knit together that which is below.
 Caller-forth of the branching trees,
 you bring forth the shoots that stand erect.
 Wonderful one, you live in the midst of the sheltering rocks.
 You give rain to humankind.
 Hear us, O Lord!
 Show mercy when we beg you.
 Gracious One, you are on high with the spirits of the great.
 You raise the grass-covered hills above the earth, and create the rivers.

(9)

Lord God,
 we give you thanks for sending your only Son to give us life.
 In the midst of wealth we are crushed by poverty,
 and while we are offered Christ-life in all its fullness,
 we are surrounded by disease, death and destruction.
 We are tempted to despair, and yet keep hoping,
 knowing that you care.
 At times we weep silent tears, and cry out with deep emotion.
 We come to you, our only hope and refuge.
 Thank you for the gift of laughter,
 even when the going is tough.
 With you, O Lord, we may be troubled but not destroyed.

(10)

Dear God, our builder,
 you have all the building materials needed to construct our societies.
 You have all the strength to put wisdom on all that has fallen apart in our lives.
 You have the wisdom to reshape our world.
 Inspire us with all your wisdom, strength and love,
 to rebuild the broken walls in our community.

(11)
 Holy and loving God,
 from whose expert hand we proceed,
 we thank you for the gift of sexuality.
 We praise you for your mighty works.
 Guide us that we may appreciate our bodies,
 that we may express our sexuality in a responsible way.
 Lead us to accept that we are temples of the Holy Spirit.
 Forgive us when we minimize your creation.
 Teach us to avoid abusing the power of sexual attraction.
 Give us courage to denounce all systems
 that commercialize human bodies.
 By your Spirit, enable us to cherish our sexuality;
 through Jesus Christ we pray.

(12)
 God of Wisdom,
 we pray for our young men,
 that you may grant them discerning minds;
 that they may hold on to your word;
 that they may grow to express their sexuality responsibly.
 Let our young men seek life-saving knowledge.
 Let them grow to respect women.
 Let them shun wicked and stifling systems.
 Let them take care of the sick and lonely.
 Accord them wisdom to protect the poor.
 Nurture them to detest discrimination in all its forms.
 Guide them to avoid the snare of drugs and the abuse of alcohol.
 Mould them in the palm of your hand;
 pattern their lives after Jesus Christ.
 Let them be truly humble and loving and responsible citizens,
 in Jesus' name we pray.

(13)
 Creator God,
 we offer our prayer for people living with AIDS;
 teach us to listen and to honour their pain and emotions.
 Forgive us for the times when we have held them hostage,
 by accusing them of being immoral and not worthy of mercy.
 We pray that you may help us to learn from the experience.

(14)

L1 We pray, asking God the question of the disciples of Jesus.

God, who is the greatest among us?

L2 Not the one that has only revenge in mind, just to kill and to maim.

L1 But whoever receives a child in my name, receives me.

God, who is the greatest among us?

L2 Not the one who makes and obeys laws which reduce others to a lower status than themselves.

L1 But whoever receives a child in my name, receives me.

God, who is the greatest among us?

L2 Not the one who believes that power is about control and domination.

L1 But whoever receives a child in my name, receives me.

God, who is the greatest among us?

L2 Not the man who rules his household with violence and instills only fear.

L1 But whoever receives a child in my name, receives me.

God, who is the greatest among us?**Not the man who uses power to dominate and exploit women and children sexually, and spreads HIV/AIDS.**

**Make us like little children, O God,
humble and compassionate;
able to love and embrace without prejudice;
able to take care and protect
without expecting any reward or favour;
able to forgive as you have taught us to do.**

(15)

SENDING

Go with the God of compassion.

Go with Emmanuel, the God with us.

Go with the Comforter, the spirit of power and fire.

Go forth to liberate creation from oppression.

Go forth to heal and comfort God's people.

(16)

God of liberation and justice,
defender of the poor and marginalized,
we seek your guidance.

Give us the vision and confidence to become prophets
when resources are looted.

Let us hear the cry of the widows.
Let us feed the orphans.
Let us denounce injustice by the powerful.
May we demand drugs for the sick.
May we demand care for the abandoned.
May we denounce wastefulness by the affluent.
Forgive our silence.
Forgive our complicity.
In your mercy, forgive our condemnation of people living with HIV.
Forgive us when we deal lightly with the wounds of your people.
Forgive the times when we have offered artificial solutions.
Empower us to tackle corrupt systems.
Make us instruments of your peace.
Make us agents of transformation.
In Jesus' name we pray.

(17)

Lord, this life is full of contradiction.
I myself am an embodiment of that contradiction,
in that my life is characterized by:
both love and hatred,
strengths and weaknesses,
light and darkness,
sorrow and joy,
humiliation and upliftment,
truth and falsehood,
direction and chaos,
self and others,
life and death.
All these are weighing so heavily on me,
yet you, God of heaven, who know all these,
have decided that you will use me
in your world, for your purposes.
Help me then:
to see myself,
to see others,
and to see this life with your eyes.

(18)

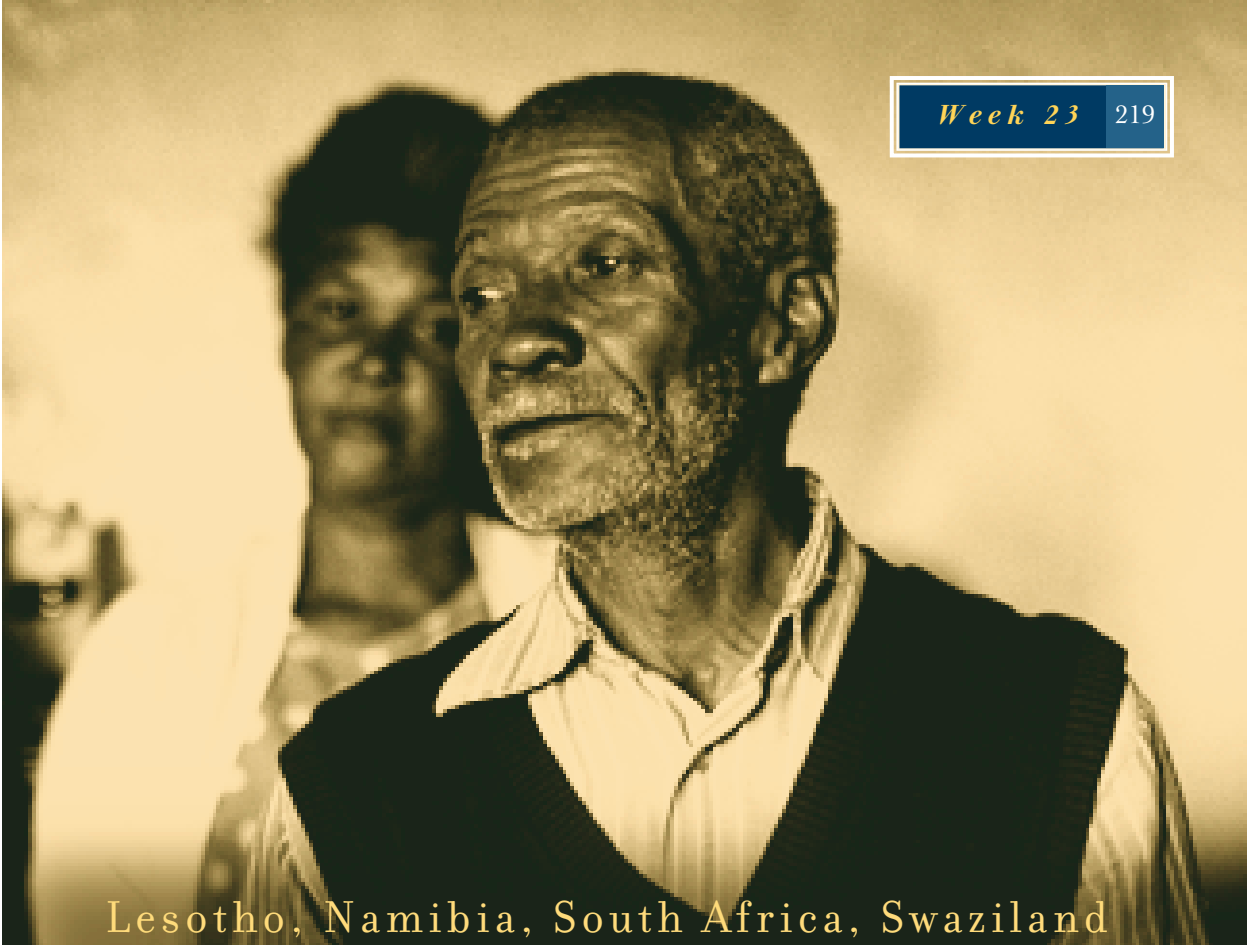
A STUDENT'S PRAYER

Our mighty God,
we come to you, Lord, with thanksgiving.
We want to thank you, Lord, for your love.
We also kindly ask you for your guidance.
Let the eyes of the blind open, so that they may know your kingdom.
We also pray for the sick, the poor and those facing different crises.
We ask you to guide us in our studies so that we may achieve our goals.
Be with our teachers, as well as the headmaster,
so that whatever they teach may sink deep in our hearts.
We all pray this through our Christ.

(19)

Lord, we thank you because you give us many things in life, though we are not free to give freely and wholeheartedly. We know that we are too stingy to give, but we ask you to bless the little we have offered so that it will benefit those who are in need. Help the poor, hungry, disabled, deaf and blind with these offerings, Lord. Help those who have failed to give today so that they will give tomorrow, for it is more blessed to give than to receive.

We offer unto you at this hour of prayer, all the refugees we are sheltering here in Zimbabwe. Give them food and clothes, O Lord. We submit also into your hands the misfortunate ones in Zimbabwe – those who are crippled and all the disabled who are kept in the Jairos Jiri Camps of Zimbabwe. We offer to you, Lord, the street kids of our country. Most of them are orphans; may you give them all what they need. Help them, for you know what they need.



Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland

“What is truth?” Pilate asked, when confronted by Jesus 2,000 years ago. As I see it, truth is not a freestanding collection of information outside or beyond me. It is rather a willingness to discover something and an ability to unlearn almost everything we think we know. It is about openness to hearing something new and being willing to follow its consequences. This is why we need to introduce the idea of truth into our consideration of justice and forgiveness. One cannot forgive what one does not know, nor can justice be done before the truth is uncovered. However, openness to truth, to learning the worst, and the best, about one’s friends and enemies is the only place from which we can begin to forgive. Knowing the worst, and best, about our enemies also keeps us from turning justice into revenge.

Njonkulu Ndungane

Lesotho

(Kingdom of Lesotho)



Statistics

Population: 1.8 million

Government: Constitutional monarchy

Language: English, Sesotho; also Zulu, Xhosa and others

Literacy: 71% (men 81%, women 62%)

Religion: Christian 91% (mostly Roman Catholic), Ethnic, 8%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Lesotho Evangelical Church

History

Lesotho (pronounced "Leh-soo-too" – "the mountain kingdom") is entirely landlocked and surrounded by South Africa, yet it is completely sovereign, like an island nation. The country has existed as a separate entity from neighbouring South Africa since the early nineteenth century, during Shaka's expansion of the Zulu Empire, when many peoples were displaced from neighbouring areas. By 1825 there was hardly a village left in Sotho territory: whole clans and even tribes disappeared as Shaka conquered and subjugated all the territory that today is the South African province of KwaZulu Natal.

In 1824 a Basotho leader named Moshoeshoe was attacked again and again and his village destroyed. It was then he began his long march to his final fortress home at Thaba Bosiu (Mountain at Night) and there, half starved and chilled by the icy mountain air, fought the Zulus and established his mountain kingdom. He was to remain there 50 years, slowly expanding his influence and his kingdom. Moshoeshoe gathered the tribal remnants, offered them protection and imposed through his own moral stature a new way of living. They called their land Basutoland and its landscape is magnificent: high mountains where there is sometimes snow, long valleys always interrupted by gaunt jagged mountains.

Soon, however, they were threatened by white Afrikaner settlers who coveted Moshoeshoe's land and threatened to deprive him of his authority. He chose instead to put Basutoland under British protection in 1868 and kept his kingdom intact until he died two years later. The British assumed direct control and avoided ceding this land to the Union of South Africa. The area retained its individuality, and received its independence as Lesotho in 1966, with a constitution

that gave the country a legislature half elected by the male population and half appointed by the king on behalf of the chiefs.

Moshoeshoe II lost to democratic politics and the open connivance of white South Africa. Chief Leabua Jonathan won the first election and immediately stripped the king of most of the meagre powers left to him. Then Jonathan staged a coup, suspended the constitution, banned political powers and sent the king into exile in Britain. Between 1970 and 1993 the country was governed by a series of military dictators with close ties to South Africa, but in 1993 a new constitutional government was established, King Moshoeshoe II returned home (only to be killed in a car crash a year later) and his son, Letsie III, now heads the independent and democratic constitutional monarchy of Lesotho.

While the political situation has stabilized, Lesotho remains one of the poorest countries in the world. Even today there are few roads in Lesotho, and fully two-thirds of the country is accessible only by bridle path. Clusters of thatched huts cling to the hillsides still. Half the population lives below the poverty line. The AIDS pandemic has seriously affected the country, with the UN estimating that 31 per cent of the people are infected. Food production has dropped, and in 2002 a famine affected a quarter of the population.

In 1833 Protestant missionaries from France established the Lesotho Evangelical Church. French Roman Catholic missionaries came to Lesotho in 1862. Today, the majority of the population is Christian, a majority of whom are Roman Catholic. The Christian Council of Lesotho is an ecumenical organization founded in 1964 and has considerable influence on health, education and development.

Namibia

(Republic of Namibia)

How wonderful it is, how pleasant,

To be healed of the corrosive disease of racism
and separation;

And to live as God's people together in harmony.
 The Spirit of the Lord will then fill the hearts
 and the minds of all the people.
 Nobody will be judged any more on the basis of
 race or colour;
 but all will be ruled with justice and integrity.
 The war will end and the people together will
 rebuild the country.
 There will be no reference to the colour of the
 skin,
 for all will be regarded as the people of God, the
 people he created in his image.
 And this will be the beginning of what the Lord
 has promised – the life that never ends.

Zephania Kameeta



Statistics

Population: 1.9 million

Government: Republic

Language: English and Afrikaans; also
 Oshivambo, Nama, Herero and others

Literacy: 75%

Religion: Christian 92% (mostly Protestant),
 Ethnic 6%, Other 2%

WCC member churches: Evangelical Lutheran
 Church in Namibia, Evangelical Lutheran
 Church in the Republic of Namibia

History

This long, slender country, rich in minerals and fish, is bordered by Angola and Zambia to the north, Botswana to the east and South Africa to the south. It is one of the most startlingly beauti-

ful places on earth. Its Namib desert is the oldest on the planet and the crashing green waves of the Atlantic spread the dunes north along the Skeleton Coast.

The San came here first about 25,000 years ago and then the Khoikhoi, followed in the fifteenth century by the Ovambo and Herero. By 1884 Namibia had become part of German Southwest Africa (along with Togo and Cameroon). The Germans were frequently brutal colonizers and Namibia's people had to suffer even more than most. Serious massacres reduced the Herero and Nama people from 120,000 to fewer than 40,000 in less than 20 years. Uprisings were put down ruthlessly. Unscrupulous cattle deals and massive land appropriation reduced the indigenous people to rank poverty and virtually wiped out the San, who fled south.

During the First World War South African troops entered Namibia and in 1920 the country was taken from Germany and "entrusted" to Britain by mandate of the League of Nations. Britain promptly gave it to South Africa to run, but refused to allow them to annex Namibia. The South Africans virtually sealed off the Ovambos in a northern bantustan, imposing hideous hut and head taxes, confiscating "native" lands and forcing them to migrate to South Africa as forced labour for the mines and fields. The Ovambos never forgot and when the liberation war began it was they who waged the guerrilla war that eventually drove out South Africa.

After the Second World War when all mandates were revoked and Namibia reverted to the UN, South Africa refused to release Namibia even after the General Assembly revoked the mandate in 1966. The Southwest Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) escalated the bush war and the Ovambo had their revenge. In the meantime, from 1950 onwards, South Africa imposed a form of apartheid far more viciously than at home, often using Namibia to experiment with racist social engineering.

SWAPO, in exile in Zambia, was recognized by the international community as Namibia's legiti-

mate government. For a further 14 years South Africa's toughest troops reacted with calculated brutality, using torture and murder with apparent impunity. In the end the price of Namibia's uranium and diamonds dropped and the fishing industry failed, causing South Africa to lose its lust for power – fighting SWAPO was just too expensive. Negotiations began under the UN and in 1990 Namibia finally received its independence and constitution, one of the most human rights-oriented in the world. Its elections brought majority rule under the presidency of Sam Nujoma, SWAPO's leader. The country has one of the most stable governments in the region. SWAPO has been reelected along with Nujoma every four years since 1990. Namibia's economy remains strong and protection of the environment is highly stressed. As elsewhere in the region, HIV and AIDS has become a terrible plague, infecting 23 per cent of the population.

British, German and Finnish Protestant missionaries worked in Namibia throughout the nineteenth century, and today the majority of the country is Christian (predominantly Lutheran). During the years of South African rule church leaders spoke out against oppression, particularly the imposition of apartheid, and were subject to imprisonment, expulsion and exile. Lack of priests and ministers continues to be a problem in the Christian community. The Namibian Council of Churches was established in 1978 and played a critical role in the independence struggle, helping to relocate and rehabilitate thousands of exiles.

South Africa

(Republic of South Africa)

Statistics

Population: 42 million

Government: Democratic republic

Language: Afrikaans, English, Zulu, Xhosa, Tswana, Sesotho, Sotho, Pedi, Tsonga, Venda, Ndebele, siSwato and others

Literacy: 81%

Religion: Christian 68%, Hindu 2%, Muslim 2%, Baha'i 1%, Other 2%

WCC member churches: Church of the Province of Southern Africa, Council of African Instituted Churches, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa, Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Moravian Church in South Africa, Presbyterian Church of Africa, United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa



History

South Africa is at the southernmost tip of the African continent, with coastlines on both the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Swaziland form its borders to the north.

The Bantu people drifted south into what is now South Africa, where they met the San and the Khoikhoi, the yellow-skinned Stone Age people who were then southern Africa's only inhabitants. The new immigrants became known as the Xhosa. In about 1780 this slow migration encountered Dutch settlers moving north from the Cape of Good Hope. Dutch Reformed settlers believed they were a chosen people, a belief which found its ultimate expression in the doctrine of apartheid. The two groups made treaties, stole cattle, plundered land and fought for more than a hundred years.

The British came to South Africa in 1820 as conquerors. They ignored the natives as long as they were silent and decided to deal with the Afrikaners, who by now had two republics and had been joined by other Europeans on their central South African plains where they had good farms. These republics were overthrown in the Boer War of 1899–1902 with huge loss of life and thousands of Boer or Afrikaner families left homeless. Thus the British introduced to history concentration camps, where some 25,000 Afrikaner women and children died. The legitimate grievances of the Boers sank into a bitter, resentful, self-pitying Afrikaner nationalism.

Britain's colony of Cape Town became the self-governing Union of South Africa, incorporating Boer Transvaal and Natal provinces in 1910 without a thought for its black people, who could not vote. The Boer General Jan Smuts steered the rest of Boer South Africa into the First World War on the British side, as happened again in the Second World War. By 1948 Boer nationalism led to the enthronement of the first National Party. When the nationalists gained power they immediately disenfranchised all "coloureds" and made sure non-whites would never vote again. Separateness was their watchword. Thousands of people were suddenly unqualified to live where they had always lived. In Johannesburg whole communities were uprooted. It was racist social engineering on a scale not seen since Hitler's demise.

In 1961 the country separated from the British Commonwealth as the Republic of South Africa. In 1963 African National Congress (ANC) leader Nelson Mandela was jailed. There was widespread international condemnation of apartheid and pressure on South Africa to reform.

After decades of heroic protest, resistance and suffering, apartheid began to fall apart in 1990, when the last National Party president of the republic, F. W. De Klerk, released Nelson Mandela from prison. After four more bloody years of negotiations, the first multiracial, democratic elections were held and Nelson Mandela became president. Since then there have been three more

democratic elections. Thabo Mbeki succeeded Mandela and the ANC absorbed the once invincible National Party.

In 1996 a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established, headed by retired Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, to conduct hearings into atrocities committed by all sides between 1960 and 1993. It had the power to grant amnesty and compensation. It heard 20,000 statements from victims and 8,000 applications for amnesty and may well have saved the country. South Africa now has a new constitution far more progressive and humane than most in the world.

The political and economic transition from apartheid continues to be difficult. There is still a deep divide between rich and poor, white and black, rural and urban. The AIDS pandemic now affects 20 per cent of the population. There are more people living with AIDS in South Africa (5 million) than in any other country on the continent. About half the population lacks access to clean water and sanitation. Violent crime is a great problem in urban areas, especially Johannesburg and Cape Town.

The first missionaries in South Africa were Dutch, but they ministered primarily to their own white people until the late nineteenth century. The Moravians sent missionaries to the native peoples in the early eighteenth century, followed by British missions. Methodists and Lutherans had a strong impact on the spread of Christianity. Today, over 80 per cent of the population is Christian, belonging to more than 3,300 denominations.

The South African Council of Churches was formed in 1936 and played a major role in the struggle against racism and oppression. The churches themselves, however, were seriously divided along racial lines. The main white Afrikaner Dutch Reformed churches developed a theology that supported apartheid and were eventually expelled from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, which declared apartheid a heresy, as did other world church communions. Many other churches were widely persecuted by the apartheid regime for their heroic and prin-

cipled opposition. Many Christians died in the struggle and more were exiled, banned and jailed. The churches maintained a significant international opposition and the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) mounted a successful and compassionate campaign to raise money and awareness for victims of apartheid and racism throughout southern Africa. In 2004 the government of South Africa presented its highest civilian award, the Oliver Tambo medal, to Baldwin Sjollema, the first director of PCR, in recognition of the WCC's work. In 1984 Archbishop Tutu had received the Nobel Peace Prize for his work towards a peaceful end to apartheid.

Swaziland

(Kingdom of Swaziland)



Statistics

Population: 1.1 million

Government: Absolute monarchy

Language: siSwati and English; also Zulu, Sotho, Afrikaans, Tsonga and others

Literacy: 81.6% (men 82.6%, women 80.8%)

Religion: Christian 87% (mostly Zionist), Ethnic 11%, Muslim 1%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Swaziland is the last of the traditional African monarchies, in which the monarch has real power and depends on wise old councillors. Like Lesotho, it is landlocked, and squeezed in by South Africa and Mozambique.

The British arrived in 1840 at the invitation of King Mswazi, who wanted help fighting the Zulu. From 1894 to 1899 the country was a protectorate of South Africa, and in 1902 came under the British, who supported the native chief. In 1968 it achieved its independence from Britain. King Mswati III took the throne in 1986, at the death of his father, King Sobhuza II, who is reported to have had over sixty wives. The king and his ministers, the traditional tribal advisory council or *liqoqo*, meet near the royal cattle kraal. When the council is in session they shed their three-piece suits and wear traditional dress (lion skins, impressive feathers and considerable ornament). Petitioners are permitted to raise any topic they wish and can come, in theory, from any rank or place in the kingdom. The Sotho-speaking populace were not generally happy about this form of governance and demanded a new constitution, which was drawn up in 1978 but never released and is still in suspension.

Swaziland is economically dependent on South Africa for most of its goods. About half the country is engaged in subsistence agriculture and herding. Like its neighbours, soil erosion due to over-farming and over-grazing is an increasing problem, and wildlife is becoming scarce with over-hunting. Droughts and floods are common. AIDS has reached catastrophic proportions, with 33 per cent of the population infected, and the average life expectancy at birth has dropped to 38 years.

Methodist missionaries from South Africa were invited in by the Swazi king in 1825, and this remains the largest Protestant denomination. Most of the Christian population belongs, however, to indigenous Zionist and other independent churches. There was a failed attempt to unite these churches into a single Swazi national

church during the 1930s. Today, they come together each year at Easter to worship at the home of the king. The Council of Swaziland Churches is an ecumenical organization founded

in 1976 and includes the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church of Africa, Anglicans, Mennonites and the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Those around the world who worked for an end to apartheid and who continue to strive against racism in all its forms.
- o Nelson Mandela, a beacon of hope, a leader who brought his people to freedom, and then gave up power as a model of democracy.
- o The prophet Ntsikana, the first Xhosa Christian convert, whose witness led to the spread of the Christian faith among the Xhosa people in South Africa during the early nineteenth century. He wrote Christian music for his people and he preached peace.
- o Those who care for children who have been orphaned by the HIV and AIDS crisis.
- o Those who raise awareness of HIV and AIDS and provide services for those living with this disease.
- o Those who dare to bring the issues of sexuality into the church in order to prevent God's people from dying.
- o Songs which proclaim justice, freedom, and hope.
- o Overtone singing, the ability to sing two notes at the same time, and the *uhadi*, a musical bow used to accompany songs.
- o Ecumenical efforts in these countries as they seek to find unity and face political, social, and cultural challenges with a united voice of faith and witness.

Pray for:

- o Stability and justice in the government, that all may receive fair treatment.
- o Those who lead subsistence lives, who continue to live in substandard housing, are unemployed, who do not have access to safe water or sanitation, who suffer from malnutrition and the effects of drought.
- o A fair distribution of wealth from natural resources so that it contributes to the general well-being, not just that of foreigners.
- o Continued healing and rebuilding of these nations that have been torn apart on the basis of race.
- o Land and educational reform, economic justice, and access to medical care for people of all colours and ethnicities.

- o Women and children who continue to bear the brunt of poverty and are vulnerable to domestic violence.
- o Young girls who have been raped in the mistaken belief that this is a cure for AIDS.
- o Parents who see their children die of disease and malnutrition, and children who see their parents die of AIDS.

PRAYERS

(1)

Lord, we think you know our land.

It is so like the country you yourself once lived in –

mountains, and sometimes snow, contrasting with the thirsty lowlands.

You, who often went alone upon hillsides,

know the mysterious peace and beauty to be found there.

You know also the clamouring crowds waiting down below.

We wait for you today, on our hillsides and in the midst of our crowds.

(2)

Lord,

Remind me when

I need to know,

you did not

ask me to

defend your church,

but to lay

down my life

for people.

(3)

Give us courage, Lord, to stand up and be counted,

to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves,

to stand up for ourselves when it is needful for us to do so.

Let us fear nothing more than we fear you,

let us love nothing more than we love you,

for thus we shall fear nothing also.

Let us have no other God before you,

whether nation or party or state or church.

Let us seek no other peace but the peace which is yours,

and make us instruments, opening our eyes and our ears and our hearts,

so that we should know always what works of peace we may do for you.

(4)

Lord, please go before us, to lead;
 Walk beside us, to befriend;
 Be above us, to protect;
 Stay behind us, to direct;
 Be beneath us, to support;
 Abide with us, to love.

(5)

Help me, O Lord, to be more loving.
 Help me, O Lord, not to be afraid to love
 the outcast, the leper, the unmarried pregnant woman,
 the traitor to the state, the man out of prison.
 Help me by my love to restore the faith
 of the disillusioned, the disappointed,
 the early bereaved.
 Help me by my love to be the witness of your love.
 And may I this coming day be able to do some work of peace for you.

(6)

Does anyone care
 that I sit and stare
 and wonder why
 I'm here at all?

 A still small voice
 whispers – Yes – Rejoice.
 You're a precious stone
 in my Kingdom's wall.

(7)

LITANY OF CONFESSION

Lord, we confess our day-to-day failure to be human.

Lord, we confess to you.

Lord, we confess that we often fail to love with all we have and are,
 often because we do not fully understand what loving means,
 often because we are afraid of risking ourselves.

Lord, we confess to you.

Lord, we cut ourselves off from each other and we erect barriers of division.

Lord, we confess to you.

Lord, we confess that by silence and ill-considered words
we have built up walls of prejudice.

Lord, we confess that by selfishness and lack of sympathy
we have stifled generosity and left little time for others.
 Holy Spirit, speak to us. Help us to listen to your word of forgiveness,
 for we are very deaf.

Come fill this moment and free us from our sin.

(8)

O Lord, open my eyes
 that I may see the need of others,
 open my ears that I may hear their cries,
 open my heart so that they need not be without succour.
 Let me not be afraid to defend the weak
 because of the anger of the strong,
 nor afraid to defend the poor
 because of the anger of the rich.
 Show me where love and hope and faith are needed,
 and use me to bring them to these places.
 Open my eyes and ears that I may, this coming day,
 be able to do some work of peace for you.

(9)

You are the true fortress.
 You are the true forest (of refuge).
 It is you who dwell in the highest.

You created life, you created on high.
 You are the creator who created the heavens.
 You created the stars and the Pleiades.
 A star flashed forth, bringing us your message.
 You created the blind – did you not create them for a purpose?

The trumpet has sounded, it has called for us.
 You are the hunter who hunts souls.
 You gather together flocks rejecting each other.
 You are the Great Blanket with which we are clothed.

Your hands are wounded.
 Your feet are wounded.
 Your blood – why is it streaming?
 Your blood was poured out for us.
 Are we worthy of such a ransom?
 Are we worthy to enter your homestead?

(10)

You asked for my hands
that you might use them for your purpose.
I gave them for a moment
then withdrew them, for the work was hard.

You asked for my mouth
to speak out against injustice.
I gave you a whisper that I might not be accused.

You asked for my eyes to see the pain of poverty.
I closed them, for I did not want to see.

You asked for my life that you might work through me.
I gave a small part that I might not get "too involved".

Lord, forgive me for my calculated efforts to serve you
only when it is convenient for me to do so,
only in those places where it is safe to do so,
and only with those who make it easy to do so.

Father, forgive me,
renew me,
send me out as a useable instrument
that I might take seriously the meaning of your cross.

(11)

RITE OF RECONCILIATION

Let us all pray together:

**Merciful God, in your goodness forgive us our sins
against the unity of your family.**

**Show us our own ability to oppress others
and our fear of acknowledging when we are being oppressed.**

Give us courage to confront destructive forces.

Reconcile us to yourself through Christ our Lord.

BLESSING OF THE WATER

Lord, God,
with this water, cool our hands,
our bodies, from the heat of the sun.

Christ have mercy.

With this water, kindly remove the heat of the heart.

Lord have mercy.

With this water, soothe our injured feelings,
remove the anger of yesterday.

Christ have mercy.

Cleanse us from true and false accusation.

Lord have mercy.

Clean the stains left by our own wrongdoing.

Christ have mercy.

Wash away the bloodstains of those who died unjustly.

Lord have mercy.

Purify our hearts and minds.

Christ have mercy.

Remove any trace of suspicion.

Lord have mercy.

With this water, give us a fresh start to build a new community.

Christ have mercy.

With this water, fill our hearts with a clean spirit.

Lord have mercy.

With this water, prepare us to be reconciled to yourself, through Christ and through one another and to one another.

CLEANSING RITE USING WATER

You are invited to wash your face in fresh water as a sign of healing, reconciliation and hope.

People come and wash their face. During this time the congregation may sing.

ABSOLUTION

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy on us;

pardon our sins and set us free from them:

confirm and strengthen us in all goodness

and keep us in eternal life;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

COMMITMENT

We are called not only to confess but to turn,

to repair the damage done over the centuries,

and beyond that to struggle against all that yields death.

In the silence listen to the Spirit.

What does it tell you?

What claim does it make upon you?

What will be your next step?

Silence

(12)

God,

How wonderful it is, how pleasant,
 to be healed of the corrosive disease of racism and separation;
 and to live as your people together in harmony.
 Your Spirit will then fill the hearts and the minds of all people.
 Nobody will be judged any more on the basis of race or colour;
 but all will be ruled with justice and integrity.
 The war will end and the people together will rebuild the country.
 There will be no reference to the colour of the skin,
 for all will be regarded as the people of God,
 the people created in your image.
 And this will be the beginning of what you have promised –
 the life that never ends.

(13)

God, our Father,

here we are your people meeting together in service to adore you.
 We humble ourselves as your church universal
 in celebrating and bringing to our memory
 that you gave yourself up for the whole world.
 Join our hearts together that it may be known that we are your children,
 that your presence will be among us,
 and we may keep unity in the bonds of peace,
 which you prepare in the covenant we have with your Son, Jesus Christ.

(14)

PSALM 139

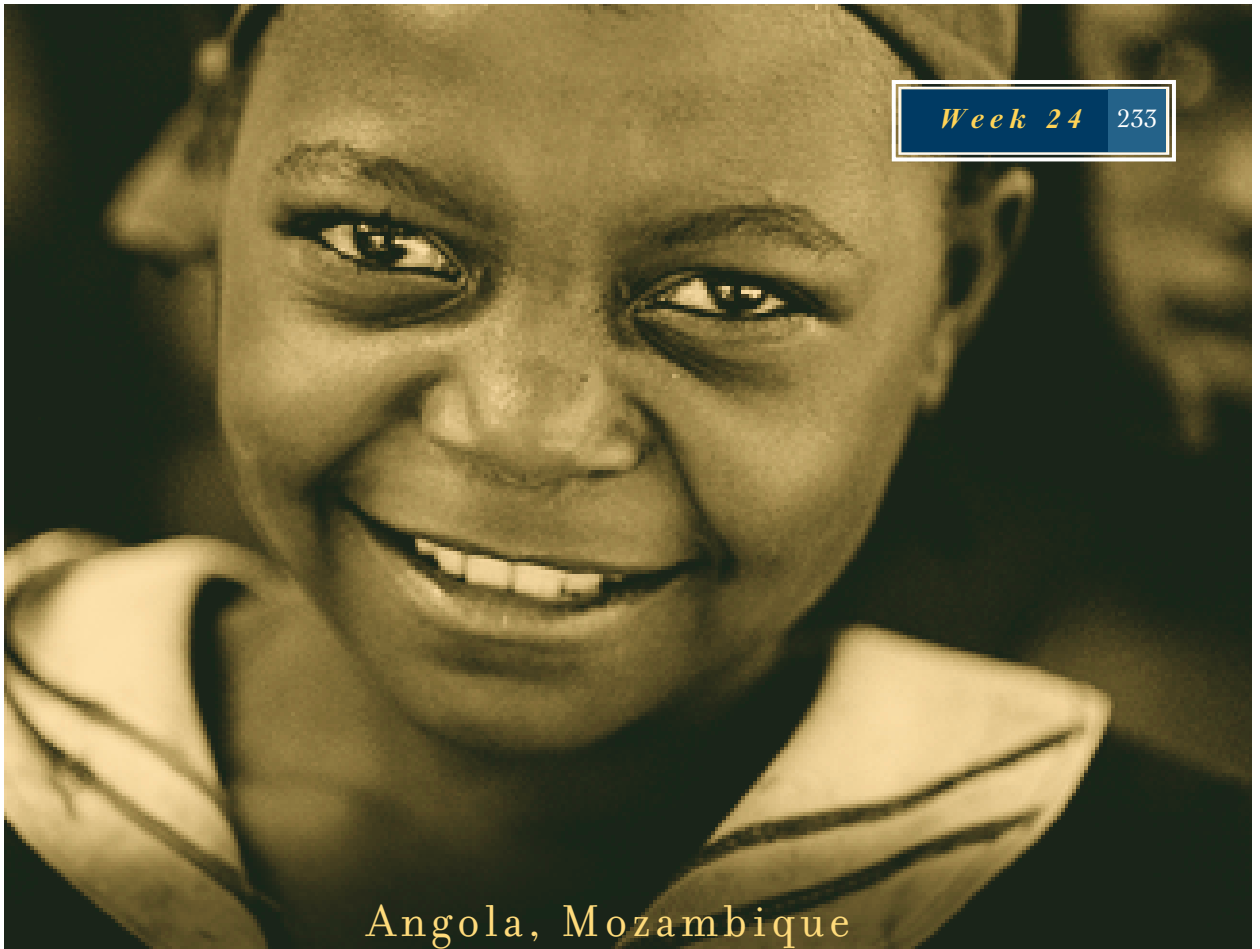
Lord, you have examined me and you know me.
 You know everything I do;
 from far away you understand all my thoughts.
 You see me, whether I am confessing or denying you.
 Even before I speak,
 you already know what I will say.
 You are all around me on every side;
 you protect me with your power.
 Your knowledge of me is too deep,
 for you knew me before I was born;
 and this is beyond my understanding.

It is very dangerous to serve you in this world,
but where can I go to escape
from being the instrument of your peace?
What far place can I flee to,
without confessing you?

If I withdraw myself into "neutrality",
you would be there;
if I go into my office to hide behind my typewriter
you would be there;
if I take refuge in the farthest country
away from the oppression of my people,
you would be there,
to remind me of what I promised you.
I could ask the darkness of my pain and humiliation
to cover me,
or the light of your love in my life
to turn into darkness;
but even the night of my suffering
dissolves in the light of your presence.

You created me in your image and loved me
even before my mother conceived me.
I praise you,
what you do is so wonderful
and above our human understanding.

Examine me, O God, and change my mind;
test me, and clean my thoughts.
Start the revolution in my life,
create me anew,
and guide me in the everlasting way.



Angola, Mozambique

In that place the war had killed the road. Only the hyenas swept along the paths, nosing among the ashes and dust. The countryside had become a mixture of sadnesses never seen before, in colours which caught in the mouth. They were dirty colours, so dirty that they had lost all their lightness, the daringness of taking wing for the long-forgotten blue. Here the sky had become impossible. And the living were accustomed to the ground, in resigned learningness of death.

The road which now opens in front of our eyes intersects with no other. It is more prostrate than the centuries, only carrying its own complete distance. Along the edges burnt out vehicles rot, the remainders of the pillage. In the surrounding savannah, only the baobabs contemplate the deflowering of the world.

An old man and a boy walk along the road. They walk with a sway as if walking has been their only purpose since they had been born. They go there from no particular place, taking the coming without the going, awaiting the postponement.

They flee the war, that war which had contaminated their entire country. They travel in the illusion of, besides everything else, having a peaceful refuge. They progress without shoes, their clothes the same colour as the paths. The old man is called Tuahir. He is thin, as if he has lost all his substance. The young one is called Muidinga. He has walked in front since they left the camp for the displaced. A slight hobble is noticeable in his walk, one leg hesitating more than his step. A leftover from a disease which, recently, dragged him to the edge of death. The old man had to teach him all his beginnings: walking, talking, thinking. Muidinga was childed all over again. This second childhood, however, was more rapid due to the dictates of survival. When they began the journey he was used to singing, giving voice to his distracted dreamations. In the company of solitude however, the song ended up by migrating from him. The two travellers follow the road, wilted and laden with hopelessness.

Mia Couto

Angola

(*Republic of Angola*)



Statistics

Population: 11 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: Portuguese; also Mbundu, Kimbundu, Bantu, Kikongo and over 30 tribal languages

Literacy: 41% (men 55%, women 28%)

Religion: Christian 94% (mostly Roman Catholic), Ethnic 5%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Evangelical Baptist Church in Angola, Evangelical Congregational Church in Angola, Evangelical Pentecostal Mission of Angola, Evangelical Reformed Church of Angola

History

Angola is in southern Africa along the west coast, bordered by the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to the north, Zambia to the east and Namibia to the south. Angola also includes a small enclave to the north along the Atlantic Ocean called Cabinda, which is surrounded by the DRC. Angola has a large mix of tribal groups.

In 1483 a Portuguese explorer, Diego Cao, obsessed with the idea of a passage linking the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, came along what is now the Angolan coast. By 1504 individual Portuguese were trading with the Mbundu living peacefully and prosperously on the Luanda plains,

until the Europeans drove them away. By 1520 a Portuguese royal regiment was sent to Angola to convert the natives to Christianity. Ngola, the native leader, was given a choice for his people: convert and lead a Christian life or be taken far away as slaves. In 1575 the Portuguese set up a fort at Luanda (today's capital) and slaves quickly became the most lucrative export. Some 3 million Angolans were shipped overseas, mostly to Brazil.

In the modern period, Portugal ran its African territories – Angola and Mozambique particularly – not as colonies, but as provinces of Portugal itself. Since Portugal after 1910 was itself a repressive dictatorship, so too were its overseas provinces. The press was rigidly censored, the secret police omnipresent and political parties were ruthlessly suppressed. Forced labour was imposed on every black Angolan and they were seldom educated (at independence there were only 68 black high school graduates in the entire country).

After the Second World War there were popular calls for independence from Portugal. A low-level but deadly bush war began, with three major groups fighting for control, all of whom at various times had Soviet and US support: the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), a Marxist group supported by Cuba and other communist nations; the National Liberation Front (FNLA), located primarily in the north, and supported by the US and Zaire; and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), headed by Jonas Savimbi in southern Angola, supported by South Africa. The Portuguese spent millions fighting these groups. Independence came swiftly and unexpectedly in 1975 with the overthrow of Portugal's last dictator, Antonio Salazar, in a military coup. The Portuguese abandoned Angola almost overnight, looted it of everything portable and left behind a political vacuum (filled by warring factions which soon became surrogates for great-power rivalry) and a poverty-stricken, depopulated nation, its people uneducated and with no knowledge of governance.

After five centuries of colonization Angola was to face even worse as the three independence

movements, aided by their international supporters, engaged in a protracted civil war that led to hundreds of thousands of homeless people and an estimated 1.5 million deaths between 1975 and 2000. At the end of the Cold War the US, Cuba, and South Africa pulled out of Angola, and a ceasefire agreement was signed. Part of the deal was free elections, which were held for the first time in 1992. The MPLA won the popular vote, but Jonas Savimbi of UNITA contested the elections and continued the fighting. A coalition government was established in 1997, but again Savimbi refused to participate. Finally, in February 2002, Savimbi was killed by government forces, and six weeks later another ceasefire was signed, ending the civil war.

After nearly five decades of fighting, the average life expectancy of Angolans is just 39 years, and two generations have been born who have never known peace. Today, malnutrition and famine affect up to half a million people. The government estimates another 500,000 live in areas that were cut off from the world for generations and more than 4 million people fled to neighbouring countries before peace was proclaimed. Another legacy of the war is some 5 million landmines and other unexploded ordinance; more than 70,000 people have already lost limbs to landmines, the highest per capita in the world. In addition, there are numerous health problems and a shortage of medical supplies. There is little remaining infrastructure and almost no access to clean water and adequate sanitation. Since many Angolans have not been immunized, preventable and treatable diseases such as malaria, polio, tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough are serious problems. AIDS is also on the rise, with over 5 per cent of the adult population already infected (accurate statistics are almost non-existent).

Angola is rich in natural resources: huge oil reserves, diamonds and other minerals, fertile land and waters filled with fish. However, it has been grossly mismanaged and corruption is rampant. Much of its wealth has been looted by politicians and warring parties.

The Portuguese brought Roman Catholicism to Angola in 1491, and Jesuits spread the gospel widely after the conversion of King Afonso I, whose son became the first black African bishop in Roman Catholic history. However, as the slave trade became firmly established and Afonso's empire disintegrated, Christianity waned. Over the next several centuries the Jesuits, Capuchins, Franciscans, Carmelites and the Holy Ghost Fathers all had missions in Angola. Today, almost three-quarters of all Angolan Christians are Roman Catholic. Protestantism arrived during the late nineteenth century, with missionaries from Britain, Canada and the United States. Prior to independence, the Roman Catholic Church was closely associated with the government by concordat. At independence, Angola was declared to be a secular state, and church schools and property were nationalized. Over the next few years a number of Catholic and Protestant missionaries were kidnapped, killed or expelled, and many churches were denied official status. However, tolerance of religious groups by the government has increased since the late 1980s. The Council of Christian Churches in Angola has eight denominations and is related to the World Council of Churches.

Mozambique

(Republic of Mozambique)

Statistics

Population: 19 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: Portuguese; also Makua, Tsonga and others

Literacy: 40% (men 57%, women 23%)

Religion: Ethnic 50%, Christian 38%, Muslim 20%, Other 2%

WCC member churches: Presbyterian Church of Mozambique

History

Mozambique is on the southeastern coast of Africa. Across the Mozambique Channel of the Indian Ocean lies Madagascar. To the west are



South Africa and Zimbabwe; to the north are Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania.

Vasco da Gama was the first European explorer to arrive in Mozambique in 1498, at the booming port of Sofala (now Beira), which was where the gold and ivory from the Kingdom of Monomatapa (Great Zimbabwe) were shipped around the coast of Africa, to Persia, Arabia and India. The whole coast, da Gama discovered, was under the domination of the Arabs, who had plied the Indian Ocean for centuries. Mozambique was also a great source of slaves for Arabs and later the Portuguese.

Both the Portuguese and Dutch gained control of parts of the coast after their arrival in the sixteenth century; both tried to conquer the interior, known to have gold mines, but they were repelled by the indigenous peoples and by disease. Portugal became the colonial power and, as with Angola, made Mozambique an overseas province. Even by colonial standards, the Portuguese rule of Mozambique was a disgrace. In the early days they drained the country of its people, selling them to the Americas, keeping just enough to establish a forced labour pool for themselves. When slavery was abolished in the nineteenth century, very little changed for Mozambicans. Forced labour meant that every black in the country had to put in six months' unpaid labour. Portugal began granting concessions of land to private European companies to mine or grow crops, which absorbed much of the forced labour left in the country.

Resistance to this atrocious system began in earnest in 1962 with the formation of the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO). Two years later it had driven the Portuguese out of the two northern provinces. The bush war was bitter and many thousands died, but with the overthrow of the Lisbon government in 1975 Mozambique became independent. In 1975 the departing Portuguese looted the country and left the population 90 per cent illiterate. Three dozen doctors served the whole country. The economy collapsed, there were severe food shortages and massive starvation. Apartheid South Africa, fearing the Marxist orientation of FRELIMO, basically took over, creating major dependency. Then, in retaliation for FRELIMO's harbouring Zimbabwean freedom fighters, South Africa expelled all Mozambican mine workers, ending the country's access to any foreign exchange.

By 1983 Mozambique was bankrupt and there was widespread starvation. White supremacist Rhodesia had created and funded a guerrilla army to destroy what was left of Mozambique from within, to pressure FRELIMO to stop supporting the Zimbabweans. RENAMO, as this rebel gang was called, was then passed on to South Africa when Smith gave up Rhodesia and Mozambique was faced with a prolonged civil war. RENAMO became infamous for its barbaric tactics in the countryside, and slaughtered thousands of Mozambicans, especially teachers, medical workers, intellectuals and development workers and their families. President Samora Machel was forced to sign a deal with South Africa, which promised to stop supporting RENAMO in return for Mozambique denying access to the African National Congress. The war continued because South Africa failed to keep to the bargain. Machel was killed in a suspicious plane crash and FRELIMO officially abandoned Marxism in 1989. A new constitution was promulgated in 1990, a ceasefire was instituted in 1992, and multiparty elections were held in 1994 and 2000, which FRELIMO won. Since then, Mozambique has tried to build a stable political system and economy.

Like most of its neighbours, Mozambique suffers from heavy international debt and extreme poverty, with most of the population living at or below subsistence level. During the rainy season in 2000–2001, heavy flooding devastated the country and destroyed many farms, while 2002 brought severe drought followed by floods. The World Food Program is working to feed the nearly 2.6 million people who are going hungry. In addition to devastation from years of civil war, the AIDS pandemic is having a severe impact; it is estimated that one in eight adults are already infected – about 14 per cent of the population.

About half the population still practises traditional tribal religions. Islam arrived with Arab traders around the tenth century. The first Christian missionary to the area, a Jesuit priest, was killed when he tried to convert the Shona people in 1561. It was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that Christianity found a foothold in the country, and today just over a third of the population is Christian. The constitution maintains a separation between church and state, and guarantees freedom to practise religion. The Christian Council of Mozambique is an ecumenical body of eight churches.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The United Nations, especially the World Food Program, and other organizations that work to assist the people of Angola and Mozambique.
- o The churches, which continue to provide hope to people battered by civil war.
- o The efforts to keep open dialogue between opposing communities.
- o Farmers who risk planting fields even when landmines might be present.

Pray for:

- o Rebuilding these countries devastated by civil war.
- o Those who have been left homeless or who have fled as refugees.
- o The tens of thousands of people who have lost limbs to landmines, and for all people who must deal with them for years to come.
- o Children who have never known peace, who have been traumatized and victimized by war.
- o A balance of rain and sunshine so that crops will grow.
- o Greater supplies of food and lower prices, so that the poor are able to afford to feed themselves and their families.
- o Those suffering from HIV and AIDS, their families, and their communities.
- o An end to international debt bondage.

PRAYERS

(1)

O God,
 enlarge my heart
 that it may be big enough
 to receive the greatness of your love.
 Stretch my heart
 that it may take into it
 all those around the world
 who, with me, believe in Jesus Christ.
 Stretch it
 that it may take into it
 all those who are not lovely in my eyes,
 and whose hands I do not want to touch;
 through Jesus Christ, my saviour.

(2)

Almighty Father, Omnipresent, Omniscient,
 Creator of the Universe,
 we worship and bless you.
 Because of your love for us, you have sent your only Son to die,
 crucified so we can be saved.
 We thank you and glorify you
 because the Lord Jesus,
 before he ascended,
 gave a strong command to his followers
 to go throughout the whole world announcing the Good News.
 And it has arrived in Angola.
 We pray that this Good News be admitted
 and accepted in our families
 so that hate, envy, injustice and disease vanish from this country.
 Stir up those who have a vocation to work for you in Angola.
 O Lord, reveal those, whom you call,
 to announce and proclaim the Gospel.
 In Jesus Christ's name we pray.

(3)

Great God, we bless you and praise you.
You are the Creator of this world and the Father of Eternity.
We come before you
because we know we are sinners
and want to ask for forgiveness.
Lord, you showed compassion
when they brought to you the son of the widow from Nain.
You are the Father of all compassion,
a liaison watching over all our suffering,
because you suffer with those who are suffering.
You heal the sick and raise the dead.
You are the Life,
 giving life to everyone who believes in you.
We hand over into your care all those who are oppressed .
Have mercy and compassion on all continents and countries,
but especially today on Angola [and Mozambique].
All this we ask you as we wait for your blessing,
through our Lord, Jesus Christ.

(4)

We sincerely thank you, O God,
for your powerful gift of hope
in the face of seemingly hopeless situations.
We thank you for your peace
in the hearts and minds of men and women
in this part of Africa
who believe you are the living God,
quick to save in time of danger.
You reign above all,
directing the course and destiny of the universe.



Brazil

Brazil

(Federative Republic of Brazil)

If this street, if this street were mine

I would order Mrs Hunger to go for a walk
and put on each post an inscription:

It is forbidden for a child not to have bread!

If this street, if this street were mine

I would order the exploiter to another place, and
on each corner only one voice would be heard:

Violence no longer lives among us!

If this street, if this street were mine

I would tear down the Forest of Loneliness
and shout in the new meadow:

Children are safe here!

Daniel Vieira Ramos



Statistics

Population: 184 million

Government: Multiparty federal republic

Language: Portuguese; also English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, Tupi, Ge,

Arawak, Carib and over 100 other indigenous languages

Literacy: 83%

Religion: Christian 91% (mostly Roman Catholic), Animist 5%, Other 4%

WCC member churches: *Christian Reformed Church of Brazil, Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil, Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil, Methodist Church in Brazil, United Presbyterian Church of Brazil*

H i s t o r y

Brazil is on the Atlantic Ocean and shares common boundaries with every South American country except Chile and Ecuador. It is the fifth largest country in the world and the largest in South America – one-fifth of the continent. It has a magnificent coastline, the mighty Amazon River, a huge rainforest which extends halfway across the continent, massive jungle containing some of the great medicinal ingredients, highlands and plateaux, and huge cities with appalling wealth and appalling poverty.

Prior to the arrival of the Portuguese in 1500, Brazil was sparsely populated by a number of indigenous tribes, who gradually retreated further and further into the interior. Their population declined drastically after conquest and colonization due to severe malnutrition and epidemic disease.

Brazil was a Portuguese colony from 1549 to 1822, during which time the slave trade between Angola and Mozambique in Africa and Brazil was immense. Indians and slaves were forced into the growing sugar industry as early as 1530. Land was cleared and forests destroyed and converted to sugar plantations. In 1558 the Tupinamba Indians rose up. Their bows and arrows were no match for the Portuguese swords and muskets. The Portuguese enslaved all the Indians who survived the uprising and turned the depopulated land over to settlers, who then had slaves to work fields. For the Indians who were brought to the slave markets of the coast, life was frightful: families were broken up; women and children sold to plantations and forced to work seven days a week;

men were worked literally to death with little food, long hours and back-breaking labour; and all this was accompanied by settler disease. Few survived. So the Portuguese turned to Africa and brought 3.5 million slaves, the largest number of African slaves of any country in the New World.

The Jesuits who first came to Brazil were appalled at the cruelty and sought to protect the Indian and African slaves. They took their case directly to the king. The settlers responded that the slaves were barbarians and were waging war against the Portuguese. The law of that day allowed all people captured in war to be turned into slaves, so the Portuguese deliberately fomented war to meet their insatiable demand for slaves on the sugar estates. The Jesuits were expelled from Brazil in 1750, and from neighbouring Spanish colonies in 1768. Indian slavery utterly destroyed the Indian way of life. Today, the Indians are largely silent, gone. It was not until 1988 that Brazil recognized constitutionally that surviving Indians had rights.

From the time Brazil became a republic in 1889 until 1986, the military were the de facto rulers of the country, even though elections were held from time to time and civilians had government posts. When poor Brazilians began to demand their rights, the army reacted with fury. From 1968 to 1986 there were disappearances, torture, political assassinations and attacks on the organizations of the poor, all perpetrated by military dictatorships.

Potentially a rich country, with vast mineral and agricultural resources, as well as modern industrialization, Brazil has suffered for decades from inflation, unemployment, corruption and massive foreign debt. Rural people and residents of the huge favelas (slums) in some of the world's largest cities remain desperately poor and, during the periods of military rule, their lives became unbearable. Within the Roman Catholic Church, fearless bishops and priests aligned themselves with the downtrodden masses, recognizing God's preferential option for the poor and establishing Christian base communities as organizations for

prayer, Bible study and resistance to corrupt and cruel military and business leaders. They recognized the reasons for the huge gap between rich and poor and fought courageously for their rights.

The last of these dictatorships ended in 1986, and in 1988 Brazil promulgated a new constitution. In 1989 the first elections in three decades were held, but unfortunately they were won by a corrupt politician, Fernando Collor de Mello. However, democratic institutions prevailed and he was defeated by President Luiz Inacia Lula da Silva, a socialist. Since then, Brazil has stabilized somewhat politically, although violence, human rights violations, police brutality and torture continue. In January 2002 an opposition party leader was killed. Each year death squads are responsible for several hundred deaths, including political organizers, ethnic minorities and street children.

The Real Plan (named after Brazil's new currency) was instituted to bolster the economy in 1994. However, financial crises in Asia and neighbouring Argentina and internal corruption have contributed to Brazil's own financial instability. By 2002, Brazil carried an estimated US\$250 billion in international debt, and some feared that the country would default. But recently the economy has improved.

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest in Brazil, claiming approximately 80 per cent of the population. During the 1970s and 1980s, church-supported Christian base communities, which were rooted in liberation theology and included strong lay leadership, had missions to support and strengthen the role of the poor through political and social action. The Pentecostal movement has been expanding rapidly.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The strength of the church in Brazil, the members and leaders of the Roman Catholic dioceses, the work of the National Council of Christian Churches in Brazil, the witness of Pentecostal and Evangelical Christians, and those who work to spread the Gospel on the streets and in the favelas (shanty towns).
- o Those who work for the liberation of the people and for social, political and economic justice.
- o The beauty and biological diversity of the Amazonian rainforest – for parrots and the golden-headed lion tamarin (an endangered monkey).
- o Feijoada, strong coffee, rice and beans.
- o Carnival, when rich and poor dance together.

Pray for:

- o Indigenous peoples who have lived on the land for thousands of years, but whose ways of life have been threatened or ended in the name of development and greed.
- o The hundreds of thousands of children who are forced to live and work on the streets; that they may know your gentle touch and love.
- o An end to political violence, torture and brutality by police and others who are charged with the well-being and safety of the people.

- o Landless peasants who struggle to make a life for themselves and their children.
- o Respect for human rights, so that no one can deny others their basic liberty with impunity.

PRAYERS

(1)

Lord,
 isn't your creation wasteful?
 Fruits never equal
 the seedling's abundance.
 Springs scatter water.
 The sun gives out enormous light.
 May your bounty teach me
 greatness of heart.
 May your magnificence
 stop me being mean.
 Seeing you a prodigal
 and open-handed giver,
 let me give unstintingly ...
 like God's own.

(2)

God of Life,
 prepare our hands for a touch,
 a new and different touch.
 Prepare our hands for a touch,
 a touch of encounter,
 a touch of awakening,
 a touch of hope,
 a touch of feeling.
 Many are the worn-out gestures.
 Many are the movements frozen in time.
 Many are the useless excuses just to repeat attitudes.
 Give us daring
 to create new titles of community,
 new kinds of affection,
 breaking away from old ways of relating,
 encouraging true, meaningful ways to move into closeness.

(3)

Lord, help us see in the groaning of creation not death but birth pangs;
 help us see in suffering a promise for the future,
 because it is a cry against the inhumanity of the present.
 Help us glimpse in protest the dawn of justice,
 in the cross the pathway to resurrection and in suffering the seeds of joy.

(4)

By the rivers in Fortaleza,
 we sat down and cried for the cholera victims;
 in those who lived there we saw sadness
 and we didn't know what to say.
 People who lived there did not have songs on their lips.
 They wanted joy
 but, with neither water nor health,
 there was no way to be joyful.
 How could we sing praise to the Lord
 in the midst of such suffering?
 If we forget you may we also go thirsty.
 May our lips be dry if we forget you,
 if we don't bring back water, health and joy.
 Judge, Lord, our elites,
 for their neglect and greed have long mistreated us.
 But remember Fortaleza,
 your children in Ceara
 who suffer from thirst and cholera;
 don't let the earth go dry.

(5)

And the waters will flow from your altar, Lord
 and flood the earth.
 And we will be like a garden watered,
 cared for,
 exposed to life.
 Oh! let these waters come,
 impetuous and pure,
 and destroy the powers
 and clean the paths

which my people will take,
singing and rejoicing
in an endless celebration,
the Word, Life, Freedom
and the Resurrection!

And the waters will flow from your altar, Lord,
and clean away the debris
and we will have courage to act,
to serve,
to change the world.

And the waters will flow from your altar, Lord,
life will be rekindled,
and we will see the new creation,
act
of your love.

(6)

Lord of the field,
we invoke your name,
we worship you,
we bless you.

We invoke your name
because from the start
you give us a vocation
to participate in your mission.

We worship you
because all growth in your creation comes from you.

We bless you
because the product of our work
is first of all the product of your grace.

Lord of the field,
we surrender at your feet,
and contemplate your face.

We listen to your voice.
 To your call we answer:
 "I am here, send me."
 Now, we humbly ask you:
 confirm our vocation,
 in the love of Jesus Christ,
 Lord of Lords,
 Lord of the field.

(7)
 Lord,
 may your word
 be in our words,
 and become embodied in our bodies
 by the sacred breath of the Holy Spirit.

(8)
EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER
 Jesus Christ, our Lord,
 in the same way you blessed the five loaves
 to satisfy five thousand starving people in the desert,
 so now we ask you to bless this bread.
 Sanctify all who eat of it.
 May it always be enough,
 not only for us here
 but also for all the people in the world, wherever they may be.
 Because it is you, Jesus Christ,
 who bless and sanctify all things.
 Yours is the glory with the eternal Father and the Holy Spirit,
 Giver of life, now and for ever.

(9)
 Serving God,
 at your feet a woman bent over in service,
 bringing neither soap nor water
 but perfume and tears.
 She humiliated herself so we could understand
 that we depend on each other.

She exposed herself so we could see that service is not only help or solidarity,

but also intimacy.

By her example,

you show us how to serve one another,

not out of our superiority, competence or strength,

but out of humility, inferiority and weakness,

not because we have more resources,

are more powerful or in a better situation,

but because we have no other option,

than to bend over and wash your feet,

and the feet of all you love.

Make us, God, the servants you intended us to be,

because serving belongs to who we are as your children.

(10)

You, God, are named after the name of our deepest desires.

If plants could pray,

they would invoke your spirit

with the image of their most beautiful flowers

and they would say you have the most delicate scent.

You would be a butterfly among the butterflies,

the most beautiful one,

with the brightest colours,

and your universe would be a garden.

Those who are cold call you "Sun".

Those who live in the desert say your name is "Spring of Water".

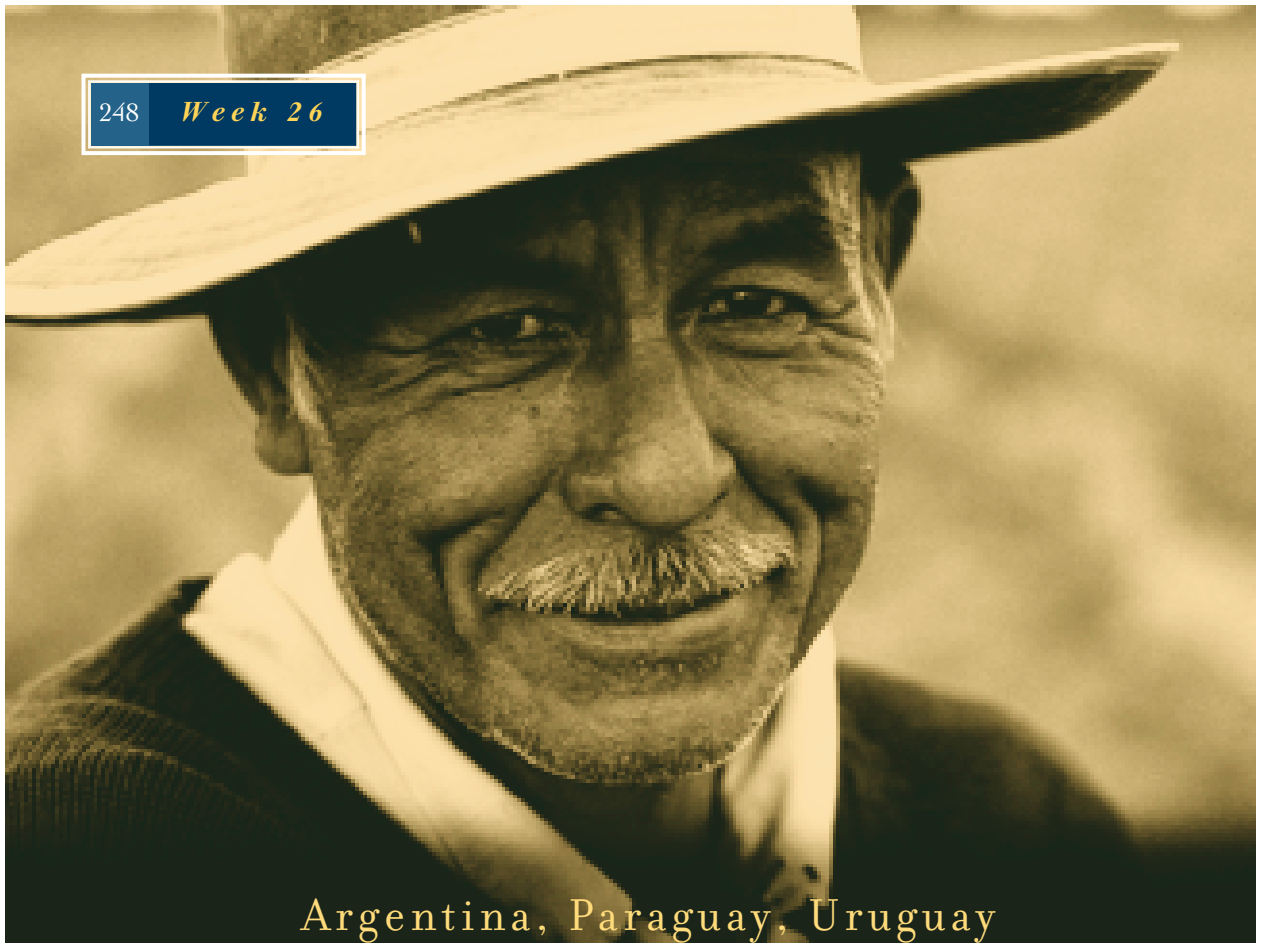
The orphans say your face is the face of a "Mother".

The poor pray to you, "Bread of Hope".

God, name of all our desires,

you have as many names as we have hopes and desires,

Poem, Dream, Mystery.



Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay

So when I am tempted to cherish too much my own experience of salvation, almost reducing Jesus Christ to a psychological factor or emotion in my mind or my heart, I am imprisoning him in the limited categories of my feeling, my perception and understanding. If I want to impose my marvellous experience of Jesus Christ on everybody, I am reducing him to the character of my private fetish, and I am not serving the Lord of the world. When we pretend to keep him within the confines of our own church, or even of the whole church, without realizing his impact on the totality of creation, we reduce him to the level of a partisan in our own religious war.

Emilio Castro

Argentina (Argentine Republic)



Statistics

Population: 39 million

Government: Federal republic

Language: Spanish; also Italian and others

Literacy: 96%

Religion: *Christian 93% (predominantly nominal Roman Catholic), Muslim 2%, Jewish 3%*
WCC member churches: *Anglican Church of the Southern Cone of America, Association the Church of God, Christian Biblical Church, Evangelical Church of the Disciples of Christ in Argentina, Evangelical Church of the River Plate, Evangelical Methodist Church Argentina, United Evangelical Lutheran Church*

History

Argentina occupies a large portion of the southern and eastern part of South America. The Atlantic Ocean defines Argentina's eastern coastline, while Uruguay and Brazil provide a border on the northeast, with Paraguay and Bolivia on the north and Chile along the west.

Europeans first occupied Argentina in 1516. In 1580 the Spanish established a permanent colony on the site of Buenos Aires. Missionary work was begun by the Franciscans in 1539, soon followed by the Jesuits with their commitment to both protect and Christianize the Indians. They established cooperative villages until the Spaniards expelled the Jesuits in 1768 because they opposed the enslavement of the indigenous peoples. By the 1880s there were almost no Indians left and today very few exist in Argentina.

Argentina became independent in 1816 and adopted a constitution in 1853 which stressed national unity. Following independence, waves of immigrants arrived and Protestant missionaries were allowed to begin evangelizing the country. Foreign investment also followed, constructing railways and ports. Political parties known as Radicals and Conservatives controlled and exchanged governments democratically through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, until the first military coup in 1930.

In 1943 Colonel Juan Peron took power with the support of many of the poor and in 1946 was elected president. He pursued a dynamic programme aimed at giving political and economic voice to the working classes who had been ignored from the beginning of Argentina's inde-

pendence in favour of a developing middle class. In 1947 Peron announced a five-year plan which relied on nationalization and industrialization. His energetic wife, Eva Duarte Peron, enhanced his appeal to labour and women's groups, bringing the vote to women in 1947. Peron was reelected in 1952, but was ousted by the military in 1955.

Government alternated between military and civilian administrations. Peron returned to power in 1973 with his third wife, Isabel de Peron, as vice-president. Extremists engaged in terrorism and Peron imposed emergency rule to contain violence and allowed the state to imprison people indefinitely without charge. When he died in 1974 he was succeeded by his wife, who became the first female president in the Americas. Economic deterioration, intraparty struggles and continuing terrorism undermined her administration, leading to another military coup in 1976. The military quickly put down the armed opposition and restored order during the "dirty war" which took the lives of at least 10,000 people (Argentinian human rights groups insist it was more than 30,000). Many of these were young people who were "disappeared". Many tortured and mutilated bodies were found, but many more are still unaccounted for. Strong grief and anger continue to exist about the fate of the disappeared. For the last 20 years the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo have marched every Thursday afternoon at the plaza facing the seat of governmental power in Buenos Aires, asking for the truth about those who disappeared.

By 1982 the military had almost destroyed the economy. They then decided to invade the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas). The Argentinians were defeated by the British in a costly war. The military was discredited and a gradual return to democracy began with the election of President Raul Alfonsin in 1983. He lifted the military's ban on political parties and restored other basic civil liberties, but was reluctant to pursue justice for the victims of the dirty war, a war which was widely supported by the Reagan administration.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s economic conditions worsened, with inflation reaching 900 per cent and high levels of international debt. In 1994 Argentina adopted a new constitution. In 2001 it defaulted on its international debt and experienced considerable political and economic instability.

Indigenous religions, once practised by the nomadic peoples who originally inhabited Argentina, have largely disappeared. Today, Argentina consists of a mainly white European population who nominally belong to the privileged Roman Catholic Church. That church has been widely criticized for failing to confront the dirty war and the military who ran it, although many individual bishops and priests did stand up for justice and human rights. Mainline Protestant churches were usually actively involved in organizing for the defence of human rights. Today, while Roman Catholicism constitutes the largest religious base, less than 20 per cent identify themselves as practising Catholics.

Protestants arrived in Argentina at the end of the nineteenth century. Later, Presbyterian and Methodist missions arrived from North America. Although relatively small overall, mainline Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal churches continue to increase in numbers. Nine Protestant and Evangelical denominations support a Union Theological Seminary in Buenos Aires. It is one of the most significant Protestant theological influences in South America. The Argentine Federation of Evangelical Churches has 30 member churches. The largest Jewish population in Latin America is located in Argentina and wields considerable influence.

Paraguay

(Republic of Paraguay)

Statistics

Population: 6.1 million

Government: Constitutional republic

Language: Spanish and Guaraní

Literacy: 90%

Religion: Christian 98% (mostly Roman Catholic), Other 2%

WCC member churches: None



History

Paraguay is a landlocked country in the central part of South America, with Brazil to the east, Argentina to the south and west, and Bolivia to the north. The majority of the population live in the fertile plains east of the Paraguay River. The Grand Chaco region to the west is still inhabited by nomadic Indians and cattle ranchers. The country has the most homogeneous population in South America, with 95 per cent of mixed Spanish and Indian ancestry.

In 1811 Paraguay claimed independence from Spain. From independence until recently the country has known little but mismanagement, exploitation and corruption by a long series of military dictators. From 1865 to 1870 the dictator Francisco Lopez waged a war against neighbouring countries in which over half of the male population of Paraguay was killed. From 1932 to 1935 Paraguay fought with Bolivia in the Chaco War. From the 1950s to the 1980s Paraguay had another dictator, Alfredo Stroessner, who committed massive human rights violations and killed thousands of political opponents. This led to his overthrow in 1989, with multiparty elections held soon after. In 1992 Paraguay instituted a new constitution, although widespread government

corruption continued under the leadership of the Colorado Party. In 2000 the Liberal Party came to power, instituting reforms designed to stabilize the country, and beginning the process of bringing to trial those accused of human rights violations and corruption.

Roman Catholicism came to Paraguay with the Spanish. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Jesuits had a number of missions in Paraguay. For many years the Roman Catholic Church was subservient to the government, but wielded much economic and political power. However, since Vatican II, many Roman Catholic leaders have spoken out against violence, immorality and corruption. The Mennonites are the largest Protestant group in Paraguay. Mennonite refugees from Russia have been working with the Chaco Indians and have received support from the Mennonite Church in the United States.

Uruguay

(*Oriental Republic of Uruguay*)



Statistics

Population: 3.3 million

Government: Republic

Language: Spanish

Literacy: 97%

Religion: Christian 60% (mostly Roman Catholic), Non-religious/atheist 33%, Jewish 6%, Baha'i 1%

WCC member churches: Methodist Church in Uruguay

History

Uruguay is the smallest republic in South America, with Argentina to the west, Brazil to the north and east, and the Atlantic Ocean to the south.

When Europeans arrived in what is now Uruguay (then part of Brazil) in 1516, they found a population of only 10,000 indigenous people. The region was unattractive to the Spanish because of the absence of mineral resources and such small potential for an unpaid workforce, but the Portuguese were interested in its vast pampas. From 1825 to 1828 Argentina and Brazil fought a war over the territory; the British eventually brokered a treaty, creating Uruguay as a buffer state between the two.

During much of the twentieth century Uruguay was known as one of the most progressive societies of Latin America. It had advanced social legislation, political stability and a relatively high standard of living. It was the first country in South America to have a social welfare system. During the late 1960s, however, economic problems arising from the stagnating agricultural economy caused social unrest. This led to urban civil unrest and a guerrilla war fought by the Tupamaros, or National Liberation Army, as a result of which the government cracked down on labour unions and students. The military was called in to fight the Tupamaros, who were defeated at the cost of huge human rights violations and a military dictatorship from 1973 to 1985. During this period all opposition was suppressed and Uruguay had the highest ratio of political prisoners in the world, several hundred of whom were executed or disappeared. When civilian rule returned, a general amnesty was granted to the military and police, despite popular demands that the security forces be brought to trial.

Roman Catholicism was brought to Uruguay by Spanish colonizers, and today most Christians in the country are Roman Catholic. Methodists were

the first Protestant group to enter Uruguay. They have maintained the national ecumenical movement, which seeks an ecumenical relationship between the Roman Catholics and other Protestant churches. Emilio Castro of Uruguay was the general secretary of the World Council of Churches from 1985 to 1992. Waldensians and Methodists are numerically the largest Protestant groups. Pentecostism is growing rapidly.

Uruguay also has a large minority Jewish population, established by those fleeing Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. There is growing secularization, and the proportion of the population who claim to be non-religious or atheist is higher than in any other South American country.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Lay persons who participate in local communities of faith, church leaders who continue to nurture congregations, and instructors who educate and nurture pastors.
- o Composers and poets who have brought new songs to the churches of these countries and to Christians all over the world.
- o Bishops and pastors who take courageous stands on behalf of their people.

Pray for:

- o Families and friends of those who were murdered or disappeared in Argentina and Uruguay.
- o Guidance to those in the government of Paraguay as they work to remove corruption and bring justice to those who have abused power.
- o Those who experience poverty and struggle for daily bread, who live without security, safety and shelter.
- o Those who must live far from their families and homes in order to make a living and provide for their families.

PRAYERS

(1)

O God, Lord of the wind and the sea,
of the mountains and the valleys,
of the world and of the church:
in the midst of fear and insecurity
give us trust and hope in you.

We live in a world
where the gales of power
blow strong enough to shake life itself,

where from the arrogant and the interests of the powerful
roll the waves of injustice and violence.

We pray for those suffering
because of their poverty, their ignorance,
their limitations,
because of their colour or status, social or sexual.

We think of your church sailing on a sea
where the waves of racism, militarism, sexism
and economic marginalization hurt human life.

Take care of your church and put in it
a sincere love for those who suffer,
a clear vision of your will,
healing, pastoral words for the needy,
and a valiant, prophetic proclamation
against those who create violence and pain.

O God, rebuke the uncontrolled wind of terrorism and war.
Turn it towards peace and human development
so that in place of lies, truth is strengthened,
in place of weapons, there are schools for all children,
in place of luxury, the world adorns itself
with bread for the hungry
and life blossoms everywhere.

O God, Lord of the wind and the sea,
may your strong mercy calm the whole earth.
In the name of Jesus Christ.

(2)

PRAYER AGAINST VIOLENCE

For the faith which moves us
to fight against the violence
to which women are subjected,
for hands of solidarity, which extend themselves
to ask for help for the victims of violence,
for persons who are determined
to find a way towards more harmonious relationships,
because God in Jesus Christ strengthens our hope
for a more human world,

a world more just,
 a world without violence,
 we sing, "Glory to God in the highest
 and on earth peace among us."

(3)

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

I believe in God.

The God of all creeds with all their truths.

But, above all, in the God who rises from the dead words
 to become part of life.

I believe in the God who accompanies me
 along every step of my path on this earth,
 many times walking behind me,

 watching me and suffering with my mistakes,
 other times walking beside me, talking to me and teaching me,
 other times walking ahead of me, guiding and marking my pace.

I believe in the God of flesh and blood, Jesus Christ,
 the God who lived in my skin and tried on my shoes,
 the God who walked in my ways,

 and knows of lights and shadows,
 the God who ate and starved,
 who had a home and suffered loneliness,
 who was praised and condemned, kissed and spat on,
 loved and hated,

the God who went to parties and funerals,
 the God who laughed and cried.

I believe in the God who is attentive today,
 who looks at the world

 and sees the hatred that segregates, divides,
 sets people aside, hurts and kills,
 who sees the bullets piercing flesh,
 and the blood of innocent people flowing on the earth,
 who sees the hand that dips into another's pocket,
 stealing what somebody needs to eat,
 who sees the judge who favours the highest bidder,
 the truth and justice of hypocrites,

who sees the dirty rivers and the dead fish,
 the toxic substances destroying the earth
 and piercing the sky,
 who sees the future mortgaged and human debt growing.
 I believe in the God who sees all this ...
 and keeps on crying.

I also believe in the God
 who sees a mother giving birth – a life born from pain,
 who sees two children playing – a seed growing,
 who sees a flower blooming out of the debris – a new beginning,
 who sees three crazy women claiming justice – an illusion that doesn't die,
 who sees the sun rising every morning – a time of opportunities.
 I believe in the God who sees all this ...
 and laughs,
 because in spite of it all,
 there is hope.

(4)

God of love,
 we pray for the victims of violence, the hungry,
 the homeless, the unemployed, the ill,
 those who are on the edge of losing hope that things might change,
 so there might come a reconciliation between society and these persons
 towards respecting their human dignity.

**We do not have in our hands
 the solutions to the problems of the world,
 but you, O God, have the power to use our hands.
 Help us to love.**

God of life, we pray for families who live in conflict,
 where there is no forgiveness or reconciliation
 between partners, sisters and brothers, young and old,
 that they might find forgiveness, reconciliation and the joy of peace.

**We do not have in our hands
 the solutions to the problems of the world,
 but you, O God, have the power to use our hands.
 Teach us to love.**

God of solidarity, we pray for those who suffer,
 the elderly, those who mourn,

those who live in the street,
that they may find in others attitudes of compassion, caring and support.

**We do not have in our hands
the solutions to the problems of the world,
but you, O God, have the power to use our hands.
Push us to love.**

(5)

God of life,
you put in human beings
the imprint of your image and likeness
and made us to participate with you in your creation.
Forgive our incapacity to respect and protect life in all its forms.

God of justice,
you call us to travel this path
which is the only route leading to true peace.
Forgive our daily acts of injustice
which condemn many, many persons to death
by hunger, exclusion and war,
and lead us to the abyss of endless violence.

God, incarnate in history,
forgive us because we imprison you in our dogmas,
limiting you to our religious institutions
and crucifying you alongside the vulnerable of our time.

O God, strengthen us in our daily work for a world more just,
accepting differences, built on diversity.

Renew our commitment to peace with justice,
a commitment which denounces the arrogance
of those who believe that they are powerful
and own the lives of all the rest.

Give us a vision to banish violence in all its forms.

Establish as the foundation of our lives,
and the lives of our people,
respect, equality, truth and justice.

(6)

INVOCATION

Help us, Lord, to make a memorial of your cup and your bread
 given to all equally
 from your open hands.

Help us, Lord, so we don't forget to drink your truth
 and follow exactly on your way
 without looking back.

Help us, Lord, to nourish us with your justice and peace
 so that the leftovers
 will be converted into abundant bread.

Help us, Lord, to make a memorial, over and above a ritual,
 and feel your presence among us,
 calling us to give.

Alleluia for your table, your cup, your bread,
 for your invitation eternal.
 Alleluia.

(7)

And the word became flesh
 living
 sensitive and tender
 warm and close
 intimate
 God made affectionate
 God made human
 son and brother
 free and tangible
 Yes
 he made himself grace and a caress
 a scream and a cry
 a laugh and a conversation
 silence sounding
 the babbling of an infant
 echoing those who have no voice
 good news
 song of joy
 bell of freedom.
 And he makes us human.

(8)

Cure us, Lord, of this distress
because the globalized world is fenced off,
inside the feast without cholesterol,
outside our hunger inducing heart attacks.

Cure us, Lord, of this distress
because the planet is becoming embossed in plastic.
There are countries digesting their fullness;
those from the South emaciated to extinction.

Cure us, Lord, of this distress
because they disrobe the earth with obscene exploitation,
taking away our lungs,
plundering our very breath.

Cure us, Lord, of this distress.
They take all the heart out of the world.
They do not know, those powerful ones,
that love is a better investment.

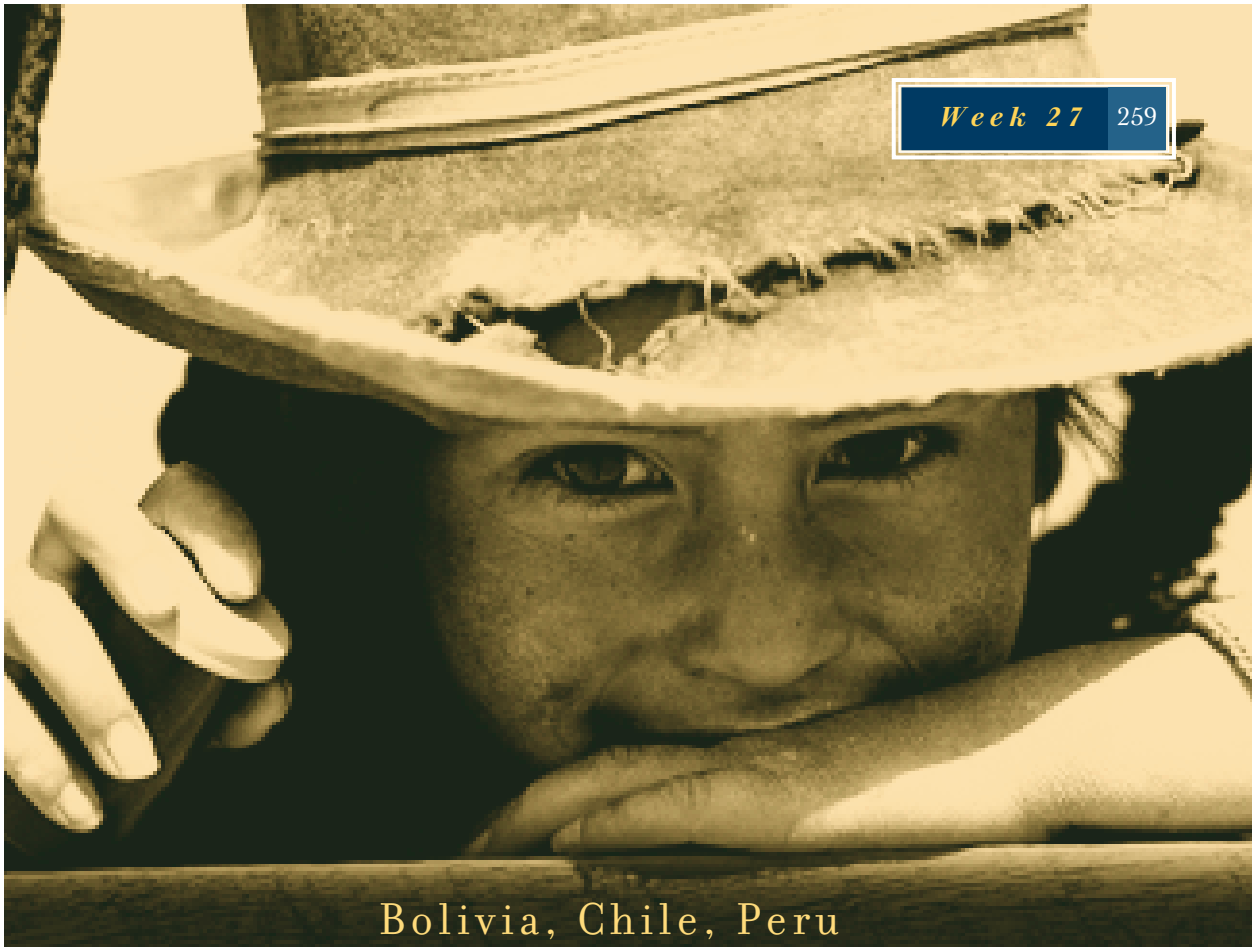
Cure us, Lord, of this distress.
They auction off work, health, all kinds of education.
The money at the IMF disappears
for the life they killed.

Cure us, Lord, with the hope
that joins hands and bodies and souls
and puts us straight upright into the fight
with steps ready for marching.

Therapeutic Lord,
cleaning the world,
kill the bacteria with which they infect us.
If we are sick, remove the tumours, Easter Surgeon.

We would fulfil strictly the recipe of your realm.
With you we would exchange the cancer of profit for new cells
creating a young world, sane and sisterly,
fit with brotherhood.

Jesus, make your healthiness contagious in us.
By your mercy heal us, Lord,
with the treatment of solidarity.
Then there will be no more wars.
Then justice and peace will kiss.



Bolivia, Chile, Peru

AYMARAN WOMAN

Illuminated by Father Sun and
 Mother Moon
 and our sisters the stars,
 in the middle of nature,
 sheltered by the snow-covered
 mountains and hills,
 we were growing in liberty.

Supported by the Achachilas, and the
 Awichas,
 strengthened by the Andean wind,
 the *quena*¹ and the *sampoñas*².
 Nourished by the earth and the rain,
 brought up by hail, snow and ice.
 Surrounded by the support,
 understanding and love
 of our partner and our community,
 we were growing before our Pachamama.³

Together, we suffered as our life was
 stripped from us, mistreated and
 destroyed.

We saw how they took everything of ours,
 leaving us only inequality with our
 partner.

Today, we seek together a partner,
 together with the community,
 our equality, our liberty.

Ana María Vargas

1. an indigenous flute

2. an indigenous pan flute

3. the divine name for the earth in Aymaran

Bolivia

(*Republic of Bolivia*)



Statistics

Population: 8.7 million

Government: Democratic republic

Language: Spanish; also Quechua, Aymara and other indigenous languages

Literacy: 83% (men 90%, women 77%)

Religion: Christian 94% (predominantly Roman Catholic), Baha'i 3%, Ethnic/other 1%

WCC member churches: Bolivian Evangelical Lutheran Church, Evangelical Methodist Church in Bolivia

History

Bolivia is landlocked, bordered by Brazil to the north and east, Paraguay to the southeast, Argentina to the south, and Peru and Chile to the west. It is the only country in the world with a majority of indigenous people. Despite its powerful Inca culture, it was one of the last of the Spanish colonies in South America to achieve independence, in 1825, despite many bloody revolts. After independence the country was named after the great South American revolutionary who headed its liberating army, General Simon Bolivar. About two-thirds of the Indians and *mestizos* live in the high plateaux of the Bolivian Andes at elevations above 6,000 metres and have done so for more than 20,000 years. La Paz is the highest capital city in the world.

Bolivia was part of the Inca Empire centred around Lake Titicaca from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, when it was conquered by Spain. One of the reasons Spain fought to keep Bolivia was its huge silver deposits, which made it the world's largest silver producer from 1545 to 1745.

Since 1825 Bolivia has been politically unstable, enduring some 250 governments and 16 constitutions in 170 years. In 1932 a war with Paraguay cost Bolivia 90,000 lives. Nearly 200 coups and counter-coups have caused great instability. In 1952 the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR) took power. It instituted agrarian reform (which settled more than 600,000 people) and nationalized the tin industry. Possibly its greatest accomplishment was to extend suffrage to indigenous peoples and women. A military coup ended the experiment in 1964.

While some political leaders successfully introduced reform measures, others committed serious human rights violations, promoted corruption and developed coca-growing, leaving the country open to the cocaine trade to the extent that for several years in the 1980s cocaine exporters ruled the country. Bolivia has the second largest natural gas reserves in South America. In 2006 the newly elected indigenous president, Evo Morales, announced the nationalization of energy production facilities.

Bolivia is one of the poorest, least developed and most highly indebted countries in Latin America. There is a huge disparity between the postmodern business world and the majority of Bolivians who remain subsistence peasants. While nearly 90 per cent of children attend primary school, it is often for a year or less. Meanwhile, as a result of deforestation and unregulated land settlements, Bolivia's rich natural resources are in great jeopardy.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Franciscans and Jesuits established a number of missions and cooperative Indian villages throughout Bolivia. As a result, "popular folk Catholicism" exists today, which is a mixture of sixteenth-century Spanish Catholicism and

traditions from indigenous religions of that era. This combination of doctrines and traditions has been further consolidated due to a scarcity of clergy, particularly in rural areas. Since nearly two-thirds of Bolivia's population is indigenous, Christian churches have recently encouraged the blending of beliefs and practices to provide a more meaningful expression of faith and worship. Church-state relations have remained strained since the mid-1970s, when the government opposed the Roman Catholic Church's Justice and Peace Commission.

Compared to other Latin American countries, Protestant missions arrived relatively late in Bolivia. The Seventh-day Adventists are currently the largest Protestant church. Pentecostals are gaining members, but not as rapidly as in other Latin American countries, primarily due to lack of urbanization. Since its introduction in 1956, the Baha'i faith has become increasingly popular in Bolivia, especially among the Quechua Indians.

Chile

(*Republic of Chile*)

Statistics

Population: 8.7 million

Government: Democratic republic

Language: Spanish; also Quechua, Aymara and other indigenous languages

Literacy: 83% (men 90%, women 77%)

Religion: Christian 94% (predominantly Roman Catholic), Baha'i 3%, Ethnic/other 1%

WCC member churches: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile, Free Pentecostal Missions Church of Chile, Methodist Church of Chile, Pentecostal Church of Chile, Pentecostal Mission Church

History

Chile is a long, narrow country along the Pacific coast of South America, bordered by Peru, Bolivia and Argentina. Surrounded on three sides by virtually impassable barriers, Chile's rich central valley remained largely unknown to the outside



world until the middle of the fifteenth century, when the Incas began their great conquests of much of South America. An Inca army succeeded in crossing 800 kilometres of desert, moving from oasis to oasis and finally coming to the central valley, where they met the Mapuche, one of three Indian tribes who lived in the region.

The Inca were decisively defeated by the Mapuche.

In 1541 a Spanish army tried to do the same trek as the Incas and succeeded. For the next 400 years the Spanish, like the Incas, were forced to maintain a massive defensive presence in the central valley. Finally, after seven years of war, Chile obtained its independence in 1817. The Mapuche, who had resisted the Spanish, continued to resist the new independent government.

Independence from Spain brought little social change, however, as Chilean society preserved colonial social structures and family politics. But it did sustain electoral democracy and a stable multiparty political system. Later, new forces shifted the political spectrum to the left, which made the powerful Roman Catholic Church nervous. It helped to form a new party called the Falange, which offered a strong non-Marxist vision that developed in the 1950s into a Christian Democratic Party. In 1964 a centre-left government initiated a period of major reform, which led to far-reaching social and economic policies, particularly in education, housing and farming.

In 1970 Salvador Allende, leader of Chile's Socialist Party, was elected, much to the alarm of the US, the wealthy classes and the military.

Allende attempted to improve the lives of the poor by nationalizing some key institutions, including banks and some industry. US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and the CIA provided massive resources for the Chilean military and right-wing politicians in order to destabilize the Allende government. In 1973, with significant help from the CIA, General Augusto Pinochet seized power in a bloody coup, killing Allende and some 2,000 of his supporters, burning the presidential palace and arresting thousands.

The armed forces enshrined the National Security Doctrine, which defined their primary task to defeat domestic opponents who had infiltrated national institutions including schools, churches, political parties, unions, student groups and the media. Military officers took over government positions, suspended elections and the Congress, made Pinochet president (a post he held for more than 16 years) and launched a rapid demobilization of perceived enemies, depoliticizing all organizations. The armed forces treated Allende's Popular Unity as an enemy to be obliterated. Human rights were suspended and thousands of civilians were murdered, disappeared, tortured, brutalized and forced into exile. The secret police, reporting directly to Pinochet, kept dissidents living in fear for years. They purged universities, burned books, declared political parties outlawed and banned union activity.

Throughout the second half of the 1970s the Roman Catholic Church and other churches and international organizations concerned with human rights denounced these widespread violations. The Roman Catholic Church, although officially neutral, became the primary sanctuary for the persecuted in Chile from 1975 to 1985 with its Vicariate of Solidarity. Thus the churches came into open conflict with the junta.

The Popular Unity went underground or into exile, suffering brutal repression but managing to keep their organization intact, although the socialists splintered so badly their party disappeared by the end of the 1970s. The Popular Unity mobilized world opinion against the regime and

helped to keep it diplomatically isolated. By the end of the 1970s even the Christian Democrats opposed the regime. Pinochet and the army evolved into a one-man dictatorship with the junta acting as a kind of legislature. By the 1980s all active-duty generals owed their positions to the dictator. Although aid and loans from the US increased spectacularly during the first three years of the junta, relations soured when Jimmy Carter took over the US presidency.

Recession led to a series of popular uprisings and calls for reform. In 1990, having failed in his bid to gain popular ratification for his rule, Pinochet handed over the presidency to the rightfully elected Patricio Aylwin Azocar and civilian rule was restored. Pinochet retained a place in the military and the Senate and was granted lifetime immunity for any crimes committed during his rule. During the 1990s Chile enjoyed economic reform and real growth. Today, activists in Chile continue to seek justice for past crimes against humanity. Pinochet is still fighting legal attempts to have him tried for crimes against humanity.

While it has an extremely high literacy rate and among the best health care in Latin America, over 30 per cent of people in Chile live in poverty and there remains a visible and significant distinction between the classes. There is also a continuing struggle with terrorism and drug trafficking.

Catholicism remains the strongest religious presence in Chile. Since 1960 it has experienced significant renewal, including greater involvement from women's communities and an enhanced understanding and appreciation of the social and economic issues facing the country. In Chile, Roman Catholicism has had a longer tradition of social concern and involvement than anywhere else in Latin America. During the Allende regime the Roman Catholic Church supported an approach of dialogue and collaboration, at the same time acknowledging ideological differences. During the atrocities committed after the coup, the churches (Methodist, Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed, Pentecostal and Roman

Catholic) as well as the Jews united to establish an Ecumenical Peace Committee, which for some years was the only place to which victims of the repression could turn for help. The committee provided legal and humanitarian aid on a large scale throughout the country. In 1975 it was closed by the junta, its German Lutheran director refused entry and its personnel arrested.

Protestants have also been involved in mission in Chile since before 1970. While participation in Protestant churches has remained steady at approximately 10 per cent of the country's population, the surge in Pentecostal and charismatic membership is having a significant impact, especially in the older churches. The number of non-religious in Chile, as well as the number who disaffiliate from the Catholic Church, is expected to increase.

Peru

(Republic of Peru)



Statistics

Population: 27 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: Spanish; also Quechua, Aymara and over 100 other languages

Literacy: 88% (men 94%, women 83%)

Religion: Christian 97% (mostly Roman Catholic), Ethnic/other 2%

WCC member church: Methodist Church of Peru

History

Situated on the Pacific coast of South America, Peru is bordered by Ecuador and Colombia to the north, Brazil and Bolivia to the east and Chile to the south. Its history goes back 20,000 years and it was the seat of several Andean kingdoms, the most recent being the ancient Inca Empire. It was first conquered by the Spanish *conquistador* Francisco Pizarro in the 1520s and for the next 200 years Peru's capital, Lima, was the political, social, cultural and economic centre of Latin America.

Peru achieved its independence in 1824, although it continued to struggle with Chile and Ecuador over borders for most of the twentieth century. The country has struggled from crisis to crisis. The vast majority of people are extremely poor, despite mountains of gold and silver taken by Spain. Two-thirds of the population live in cities and a quarter of that population lives in Lima. Although Peru has vast expanses of land, very little of it is arable and the interior is rugged terrain.

In 1968 a coup brought to power a junta of progressive officers who instituted agrarian reform, nationalized whole industries, and extended education to the countryside, making it free, compulsory and secular. In 1985 the young and charismatic Alan Garcia was elected president. He shocked the international economic world by refusing to spend more than 10 per cent of export earnings on Peru's foreign debt of US\$14 billion. The International Monetary Fund retaliated by making Peru ineligible for further loans and the economy slid deeper into crisis. During the 1980s the Maoist Shining Path guerrillas also disrupted the economy and killed many people, giving the army a licence to repress.

Despite its democratic government, Peru has experienced popular uprisings and strikes, and charges of governmental corruption. In 1995 a blanket amnesty was granted to those in the military who were involved in the human rights abuses between 1980 and 1995. President Alberto Fujimori was elected in 1990 and made significant progress in curtailing guerrilla activity and improving the economy, but his increasingly

authoritarian measures and corruption scandals led to his ousting after being reelected in 2000.

The main threat to domestic stability is unemployment and poverty. About a third of Peruvians continue to live far below the poverty level, and inflation is high. Cultivation of illegal coca (used to manufacture cocaine) is pervasive throughout the country, and drug trafficking rife. Environmental issues include the destruction of rainforests and other natural habitats, and increasing pollution. Every few years there are heavy rains and flooding. Peru is also prone to earthquakes.

The Roman Catholic Church has maintained a strong and influential presence in Peru since Lima became the Metropolitan See for the Pacific

coast in 1546. In 1845 Roman Catholicism was made the official state religion. With only one priest for every 6,000 people, Peru is suffering from the same shortage of clergy as neighbouring Bolivia. In recent years Roman Catholic clergy in Peru have become more outspoken in matters of political and social justice.

The earliest Protestant mission workers in Peru, in the early 1800s, were agents of Bible societies. While Protestants have continued to maintain a presence in Peru, their mission work appears to have lost momentum as a result of differing mission theories and conflicting personalities. Meanwhile, the Pentecostals in Peru continue to grow rapidly.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Those who feed the poor, even when they do not have much themselves.
- o Charangos, pan pipes and drums, sounds which give glory to God.
- o Liberation theology and those who put it into practice by working for social justice with and for the poor.
- o Saint Martin de Porres, the first black Catholic saint from Latin America, who spent his life caring for the poor of Lima.
- o Languages and cultures which try to retain an old identity while coming to terms with the modern world.
- o Machu Picchu, Lake Titicaca, and the Andes.

Pray for:

- o The rights of indigenous and mestizo (mixed race) peoples in these countries.
- o Social, economic, and political reforms, that they bring justice for all.
- o Economic improvement in Bolivia so that people do not need to migrate in order to send their children to school, to buy medicine for their grandparents, or to feed those left behind.
- o Those whose loved ones have been killed or disappeared under repressive regimes.
- o A healing of all the wounds that people have had to endure.
- o An end to drug trafficking throughout the region, and the availability of other economic means of support.
- o The impoverished and oppressed.

PRAYERS

(1)

Blessed are the poor ...

not the penniless, but those whose hearts are free.

Blessed are those who mourn ...

not those who whimper but those who raise their voices.

Blessed are the meek ...

not the soft but those who are patient and tolerant.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice ...

not those who whine but those who struggle.

Blessed are the merciful ...

not those who forget but those who forgive.

Blessed are the pure in heart ...

not those who act like angels but those whose life is transparent.

Blessed are the peace-makers ...

not those who shun conflict but those who face it squarely.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for justice ...

not because they suffer but because they love.

(2)

In the face of poverty that is particularly intolerable,
and for the gap between the rich and the poor that is increasing at an
alarming rate –

Lord, have mercy.

In the face of unequal access to adequate working and living conditions,
health care, justice systems and educational opportunities for all people
of Peru –

Lord, have mercy.

In the face of new displays of violence in the streets,
the emergence of juvenile gangs, and overall lack of public safety –

Lord, have mercy.

In the face of dishonesty and corruption that publicly manifests itself
and penetrates all levels of society –

Lord, have mercy.

In the face of mutual understanding, for peace and justice
and reconciliation based on the truth –

we pray to you, O Lord.

We thank you, gracious God, for all blessings that you have bestowed upon us,
and for progress that has been made.

We recognize that the greatest challenge facing us today is change –
change in the political, economic and cultural times in which we live.

For strength, for courage and for wisdom –

Lord, hear our prayer.

(3)

PRAYER FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE IN BOLIVIA

O God, from Bolivian soil,

The Bolivian people implore you to listen to their voice,

feel their sadness and see the tears of your people,

which are also your tears.

So many bodies without any life left

have fallen in the streets,

in the roads and in the fields,

leaving behind pain and sorrow within the Bolivian family.

In those moments in which their hearts are mourning from such suffering,
give them consolation.

Do not allow them to relinquish their self-control,

but give them a vision

so they can see with their own eyes the way they ought to go,

so they can reach life by the path of justice.

Hear, O God, the voices of the multitudes

who march in the streets and highways

crying for justice,

tired of so much misery,

the lack of work, corruption and violence;

tired of so much authoritarianism by the people in power,

who take decisions without consulting the people

and who are guided by their own stingy interests;

tired that the natural resources

that you have given for the well-being of all the people

are once more being used to benefit the economic interests of the large
transnational corporations.

Hear the voice of the Bolivians

and give them discernment and strength

so that they can respond
 to hatred with love,
 to injustice with righteousness,
 to apathy with commitment to their people,
 to individualism with solidarity,
 to violence with peace.

Hear their voice and inspire within their hearts (and within ours)
 the knowledge of peace,
 the strength of justice,
 the joy of being close to one another.
 Guide them to walk with the crowds on the way of peace with the signs of justice.
 O God, hear their voice
 and grant to them (and us) your eternal peace.

(4)

Lord, Grant that I may be successful in moulding one of my pupils into a perfect poem, and let me leave within her my deepest-felt melody that she may sing for you when my lips shall sing no more.

Make me strong in my faith that your gospel is possible in my time, so that I do not renounce the daily battle to make it live.

Let your luminous radiance descend upon my modest school, as it did upon the barefoot children who surrounded you.

Make me strong even in my weakness as a woman, and particularly as a poor woman.

Make me scorn all power that is not pure, and all duress that is not your flaming will upon my life.

(5)

AN AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

When life arrives
 sadness will become lost in the immensity of love.
 When life arrives
 hunger will become silent in the sharing of love.
 When life arrives
 pain will become exhausted in the warmth of love.
 When life arrives
 loneliness will vanish in the tenderness of love.
 When life arrives
 infidelity will die in the sincerity of love.

When life arrives
 injustice will totally disappear in the justice of love.
 When life arrives
 the destiny of love will be attained
 and you and I will be united in the equality of love.

(6)

A WOMAN'S AFFIRMATION

Because God created me with great sensitivity
 I feel the world differently within me.
 Because God created me in mystery
 I look at the stars and sense what they tell me.
 Because God created me with my face against the wind
 I feel the pain of my people as they go through it.
 Because God created me with a voice of truth
 I cry out that which stirs me,
 although they pursue me on account of it.
 Because God created me full of life and love
 I look for a thousand reasons to be able to continue.
 Because God created me from light and truth
 I want to plant timely illusions.
 Because God created me out of freedom
 I want my people free in their thinking.
 Because God created me from warmth and fragility
 I can see the love hidden further within you.
 Because God did not create me in solitude nor in oblivion
 I search for you and feel the lack of your love.
 Because God made me a woman I am fruitful
 in thinking I harbour the history of sorrow and joy
 wherein lie the secrets of the world.

(7)

A WOMAN'S PRAYER

How could I approach you, Heavenly Father,
 without adoring you,
 without praising your holy name,
 without thanking you for all your goodness
 and infinite grace towards me?
 I am a humble slave

who bows before you to ask your pardon for all my sins.
Sometimes I wonder
 if you hear the anguish your daughter comes to tell you.
I ask myself
 if you have time to meet me and listen to all my hurt.

Among the multitude of people who crowd around you
 to plead for their needs,
 asking you to be the one
 who rescues them from spiritual death,
I pray that I may become like the woman
 who touched the hem of your garment.
Let me come before you with the same simplicity,
 with the same certainty,
 to plead that you would heal my pain.
Give me the strength to carry on with my difficult life.

I pray to you, Lord,
 for all those women who suffer in silence,
 the victims of discrimination and violence,
 who can only yearn to touch the hem of your cloak,
 but whose pain is so great
 that they cannot even take one step
 to bow in front of you and ask for your help.
Lord, give them your peace.

Give us the faith necessary,
 so you can take us by the hand and raise us up.
Keep us from being dazed by this passing world.
Give us the power to continue, with your help,
 to be a lamp for those around us.

Hear my prayer, Father.
I ask you in the name of your beloved Son.

(8)
Our Father in heaven, holy is your name.
We thank you for the gift of life,
 which is renewed every moment with your beauty.

Your mercy, God, confirms your love.

In your hands are our destiny and our life.

All-powerful and merciful God, we pray for the future of Peru,

for the poor who often go hungry,

for the victims of disasters.

Provide them with all they need from you,

with all they require of you.

For the salvation of our souls through the death of your Son,

we thank you,

but we pray for those who are left out,

who do not have a relation with you,

who do not even know of your existence.

Lord, no longer allow human evil to go forward.

Keep corruption, which often touches the life of churches,

from proliferating.

We especially pray for the authorities of Peru,

that they be given the wisdom to plan towards a better future.

We pray for justice because here, too, the rich dominate

while justice is denied to the poor.

Lord, we pray for the leaders of your churches,

give them courage to bear with the poor, and the ignorant,

but also with those educated, who in their hypocrisies scorn your people.

Grant, O Lord, peace in all the world

and an end to war which only destroys and kills.

May the strength of the Holy Spirit dwell in our hearts.

May we live under your refuge and protection.

Bless our families.

Give us your happiness.

Thank you, Lord, for turning your ears towards our requests.

Give us the humility to accept your will.

In your hands we place our future and our livelihood.

Thank you, Lord, for giving us much more than we deserve,

especially for giving us the happiness

of having access to your word.

Receive our adoration and our prayers.

Thank you, Lord, for answering us.



Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela

[Liberation theology] awoke in Latin America and Venezuela a tremendous joy and enthusiasm. People were very happy seeing priests coming to their level, having a voice in their church, organizing themselves – that was a wonderful thing for them that gave them great hope.

The church can't be a church of masses and leaders, but an organic church where everyone gives and receives. So where is that supposed to start? Well, with those privileged by Jesus, who are the poor. Those are the base communities. The church starts to articulate itself from the base, and that's why I [say] that the communities come first.

Father Pedro Trigo

Colombia

(Republic of Colombia)



Statistics

Population: 42 million

Government: Unitary multiparty republic

Language: Spanish; also English, German and approximately 90 tribal languages

Literacy: 91%

Religion: *Christian 97% (predominantly Roman Catholic)*

WCC member churches: *Presbyterian Church of Colombia*

History

Located on the northwestern coast of South America, Colombia has a diverse landscape, with the Andes Mountains in the west, *llanos* (grasslands) and *selva* (rainforest) in the east, and coasts on both the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Venezuela lies to the east, Brazil to the southeast, and Peru and Ecuador to the southwest. Panama lies to the north and was lost to Colombia at the turn of the twentieth century in a deal to build the Panama Canal.

Colombia was one of three countries that emerged from the collapse of Gran Colombia in 1830 (the others being Venezuela and Ecuador). The land that was Gran Colombia has been inhabited for about 11,000 years. Most prominent of the pre-Colombian cultures were the Chibchas, an agricultural people of the highlands.

The first Spanish settlement was founded in 1525 on the Caribbean coast and the capital: a company of Spanish soldiers looking for El Dorado established Bogota in 1538. New Grenada, as Colombia was called then, became for a time Spain's principal source of gold. Emeralds, tobacco and sugar cane added to the colonial wealth.

Independence came in 1819. By 1845 two contending political parties had formed which still continue to dominate Colombian politics: the Conservative Party, which favoured strong central government and close ties to the Roman Catholic Church; and the Liberal Party, which favoured states' rights and separation of church and state.

Colombia has one of the most violent histories in the Americas. A civil war (1899–1902) claimed 100,000 lives and during the political unrest in the countryside known as La Violencia (1948–62) more than 200,000 were killed. Rapid migration from country to city coincided with a shift from agriculture to industrial production. This has

intensified the concentration of wealth and led to political instability. Four different guerrilla groups fought the government for more than forty years. The situation escalated during the 1990s, undergirded in part by funds from the illegal drugs trade. Except for the largest of these groups, M-19, which put down its arms in 1991 and joined the political process, they all continue their efforts to lead a revolution. The violence is deadly and large swathes of the countryside are under guerrilla influence, but the various movements lack the military strength or popular support necessary to overthrow the government. An anti-insurgent army of paramilitaries has grown to several thousand strong in recent years, challenging the guerrillas for control of territory and illicit industries such as cocaine. While Bogota steps up efforts to reassert government control throughout the country, neighbouring countries worry about the violence spilling over their borders.

Colombia's reputation for being one of the most violent countries in the world is supported by statistics: more than 3,500 civilians are killed each year and more than 2.4 million people have been displaced since 1985. Colombia is also the world's largest producer of cocaine and a major supplier of heroin to the world's markets.

In addition to political turmoil, more than 20 per cent of the population is unemployed. Natural disasters include floods, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. In 1999 an earthquake killed more than 1,100 people and affected more than 1.2 million.

Christianity was brought by Spanish Roman Catholics beginning in the sixteenth century, and missions were firmly established by the seventeenth century. Today, nearly 90 per cent of the population identifies itself as Roman Catholic. During the late twentieth century Roman Catholic Church leaders were actively involved in mediation between guerrilla groups and the government.

Presbyterian missionaries from the US arrived in 1856, setting up hospitals and schools, and a number of independent churches were established in the twentieth century. The largest

Independent churches are the Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. Protestants were granted more freedom to evangelize and worship after the constitution of 1991, and throughout the 1990s there was a Pentecostal–Evangelical revival in the country.

Ecuador

(*Republic of Ecuador*)



Statistics

Population: 13.2 million

Government: Unitary multiparty republic

Language: Spanish; several Amerindian languages, especially Quechua

Literacy: 90%

Religion: Christian 97% (predominantly Roman Catholic), Other 3%

WCC member churches: None

History

Ecuador lies along the equator on the northwestern Pacific coast of South America, bordered by Colombia to the northeast and Peru to the east and south. Ecuador also includes the Galapagos Islands, an archipelago with many diverse species and sub-species of fauna found nowhere else on earth.

During the fifteenth century the Quito kingdom in what is now Ecuador was invaded by the Incas. A little over a century later the Spanish arrived and defeated the Inca armies. Native populations were decimated, first by disease and

later by *encomienda*, a system of forced labour imposed upon indigenous peoples. In 1822 independence leader Simon Bolivar defeated the Spanish in the Ecuadorean region of what was then called Gran Colombia. In 1830 Ecuador became its own nation.

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century Ecuador experienced a series of short-lived political administrations and military juntas, public opposition and rioting, and a generally poor economy. Beginning in 1971, the export of oil resulted in economic growth and prosperity. However, it also led to an increasing gap between rich and poor and high levels of international indebtedness, as massive amounts of consumer goods were imported. During the 1980s and 1990s this debt, plus a global economic downturn, corruption, and a series of natural disasters, led to the stagnation of the economy, with high inflation and unemployment. There were strikes, violent uprisings and continued government turnover as leaders tried to implement various reforms. At the same time, Ecuador was involved in border disputes with neighbouring Peru. In 1997 the weak economy was exacerbated by flooding and a sharp drop in oil prices. During this crisis, which lasted from 1997 until 2001, 70 per cent of the population fell below the poverty line. In 1998 the border dispute with Peru was settled, and by 2001 the economy began to improve as Ecuador worked to curb corruption and reduce its foreign debt.

The Roman Catholic Church was established during Spanish rule and remains the dominant Christian presence in Ecuador. Although the first Protestants visited Ecuador from the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1824, Protestant churches did not have a sustained presence until 1896, beginning with the Gospel Missionary Union and the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Since 1960 there has been an increase in Protestant and Independent churches, due in part to the translation of scripture into Quechua dialects, and efforts to pair evangelism with action for social justice. In the early 1970s three missions – the Evangelical

Alliance Mission, the Church of the Brethren and the United Andean Indian Mission – discussed the possibility of forming an Ecuadorian evangelical church. More conservative missions viewed this attempt with concern. Earlier, the Ecuadorian Evangelical Fraternity had tried to present a united front to government and defend freedom of conscience. Other organizations in Ecuador include the Quito Corps of Pastors, which meets monthly, attended by an average of 100 pastors, and the Ecumenical Fraternity, which brings together Catholic and Protestant church leaders and non-governmental organizations to promote Christian unity. The Society of Evangelical Theological Education Institutes groups together all the seminaries in Quito.

The Latin American Council of Churches, with headquarters in Quito, was formed in 1982 and relates to more than 100 Protestant churches and organizations in Latin America. The Council is active on several fronts, and it attempts to overcome the false dichotomy between evangelism and social action.

Venezuela

(Republic of Venezuela)



Statistics

Population: 25 million

Government: Republic

Language: Spanish; also Italian, English,

Portuguese, Arawak, Carib, Guajico, Chinese and 30 others

Literacy: 91%

Religion: Christian 95% (predominantly Roman Catholic), Spiritist/ethnic 2%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Venezuela is on the Caribbean Sea in northeastern South America, bordered by Guyana to the east, Brazil to the south and Colombia to the west.

When Columbus landed in present-day Venezuela in 1498, at the mouth of the Orinoco River, about 400,000 indigenous people lived there. In the second half of the sixteenth century the Spanish began effective colonization, producing (by means of indigenous slave labour) sugar, tobacco, cocoa and beef for export. When the indigenous proved too weak for forced labour and began dying off, slaves were brought in from Africa.

Venezuela was always one of the more autonomous colonies, due to the power of the local Creole (native-born whites), who owned most of the agricultural land. They declared independence in 1797 but were unable to defeat the Spanish until 1823. General Simon Bolivar received help in that war of independence from the new Republic of Haiti and a foreign legion of Irish and British soldiers. After independence Venezuela briefly joined the Gran Colombia, but broke away in 1828. For the next 130 years Venezuela was ruled by a series of caudillos. Powerful warlords with private armies to back them, the caudillos put the government to work for them. A popular revolt in 1958 led to civilian government with democratic elections held first in 1961, along with a new constitution. The civilian government under the populist leader Hugo Chavez weathered a number of attempted military coups, most recently in 2002.

Early in the century, oil was discovered in Venezuela in enormous quantities and by 1928 Venezuela was the world's second largest producer and a founding member of OPEC

(Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) in 1964. It continued for another ten years as the largest exporter of oil. Thus a poor agrarian society became a highly urban and relatively wealthy one. Sadly, the petrodollars raised the standard of living and education of only a small percentage of Venezuelans. By the 1960s, 80 per cent of land and wealth was owned by 2 per cent of the people.

During the 1990s a series of economic disasters led to reform measures and a new constitution in 1999. That same year, torrential rains and mudslides resulted in around 30,000 deaths and 400,000 people were left homeless. Other prob-

lems include increasing drug abuse and drug production, and destruction of the rainforests.

The vast majority of the population identifies itself as Roman Catholic. For the most part, church and state have enjoyed a harmonious relationship in the past century. The church has seen education as among its primary roles. Many Venezuelans associate themselves only loosely with the established church. The constitution of 1961 established religious freedom in the country. Since then evangelical and Pentecostal churches in particular have increased, with the Assemblies of God and the United Pentecostal Churches as the largest denominations.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Those who pay the high cost of working for justice and peace.
- o Christians who live faithfully in the midst of violence.
- o Fishermen and farmers who feed their families and their countries.
- o *Llapingachos* (potato and cheese pancakes), *aji* (hot sauce), *locro* soup (made with cheese, avocado and potato), *choclo* (barbecued Andean corn), *ceviche* (a seafood dish marinated in lemon and onions, which is always served with popcorn), and *pabellon* (seasoned shredded beef, served with beans, rice and fried plantains).
- o Giant tortoises, iguanas and other unique wildlife on the Galapagos Islands, and those trying to preserve their environment.
- o CLAI, the Latin American Council of Churches, whose headquarters is in Quito, Ecuador.
- o Those who work on behalf of the poor.

Pray for:

- o An end to war and violence in Colombia and the establishment of a safe environment for all people.
- o The creation of a stable and fair economy in Ecuador.
- o An end to corruption by government officials.
- o An end to drug production and trafficking, and the availability of other methods of economic activity.
- o The indigenous peoples of these countries, who often bear the brunt of poverty amid growing economic disparity.

- o Those who are poor, unemployed, and grieving, and those who work with them.
- o Those affected by flooding and earthquakes.
- o A renewal of faith by Christians in these countries.
- o Those kidnapped or held hostage and their families.
- o Those who have left their families and friends to go to another country to support those back home.

PRAYERS

(1)

O Christ, as the spear opened a passage to your heart, we pray that you would keep a way open to the hearts of your people everywhere.

(2)

To be more patient

give us strength, Lord.

To become peace-makers,

equip us, Lord.

To be right,

give us your light, Lord.

To accept our faults,

give us humility, Lord.

To be in solidarity with those who suffer,

make us sympathetic, Lord.

That our actions will be guided by love,

give us your Spirit, Lord.

(3)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of love, grace and hope,

having celebrated your promise

we would like to build a road of freedom.

But to do it we need to confess to you our weaknesses.

Forgive us our disunity.

Forgive us because at times we made ourselves into the judges of our sisters and brothers.

Forgive us because we have not taken care of our bodies, which enthrone the life you gave us.

Forgive us because we have not taken the time necessary to cultivate friendship.

Forgive us for our incapacity to console those who suffer pain or loss
or find themselves in crisis.
Forgive us our egotism when we receive consolation and do not share it with others.
Forgive us because it is very hard to accept the forgiveness that you offer us.
We continue carrying our guilt, rather than your pardon.
For all this pardon us, Lord,
so that your love, grace and hope flood over us
and we attain the enjoyment of your peace.

(4)

AN ECUMENICAL PRAYER FOR PEACE

From a common heart and homeland,
as men and women in that great community of churches,
we profess, with all the variety of our creeds,
that you, O God of life, are one.
We perceive your presence in the face of a man and a woman,
discovering you in the faces of indigenous people
and in those of African descent,
in the countryside and in the city,
in the church, the people of God,
living in diversity around a common table.
You have made yourself human in Jesus of Nazareth,
the revelation of the Father and of the Spirit of love.

You hold the dream of life, worthwhile and fulfilled,
with equality and justice through freedom and faith.
We believe in the strength of your Spirit to renew all
that overcomes injustice and death,
that illuminates the truth and defends the rights of the people.

Because of this, God of life,
we express our sadness for those people caught in war,
we cry out with one voice our outrage at the denial of human rights,
the dirty war, the foreign intervention
and the domination of the oppressor.

Rain down justice
so that, like an early morning dew,
hope is sustained in an ongoing design towards life.
Accompany our path of faith and resistance
so that solidarity and camaraderie shoot up among peoples

and peace with social justice becomes the goal
 through which a new society is centred on your reign of love.
 Today, from all the creeds, the diversity of cultures and peoples
 may we build peace

with the blood of the martyrs,
 with your word made alive,
 with resistance and dreams,
 with dance, song and praise,
 with the rainbow lighting the way,
 with our lives converted into hope,
 with justice, the fruit of truth.

Oh, that your peace would arrive today, Lord.

(5)

Beloved Father and Mother of all,
 how lovely it is to walk along the roads of Colombia
 with all its variety of climates,
 full of the human warmth of the peasants and the well-off
 who work and enjoy the countryside of a land which has been a wonder for us.

We have a profound sadness.

There are over three million men, women and children
 wandering around these lovely roads, without direction,
 because they were obliged to leave behind everything they ever had,
 because others, by the sheer force of their power, became the owners
 of that which had cost them all their lives to sustain.

"What can a peasant know?" they wonder,
 those that say they know all, but know nothing except to snatch everything
 even up to life itself.

Their simplicity had been underestimated as they dealt with you,
 when in the middle of taunts and false accusations they murdered you.

These sons and daughters of yours,
 walking through every part of the country,
 fighting for life, surviving, wandering, hungering,
 weeping for that which has been left behind,
 ruminating on dreams that will not come to pass,
 humiliated by the great fear of losing the one thing left, life.

Show us what to do,
what to do so that hearts hardened
by the thirst for power used for evil purposes
be changed to the honour and glory of your name.

(6)

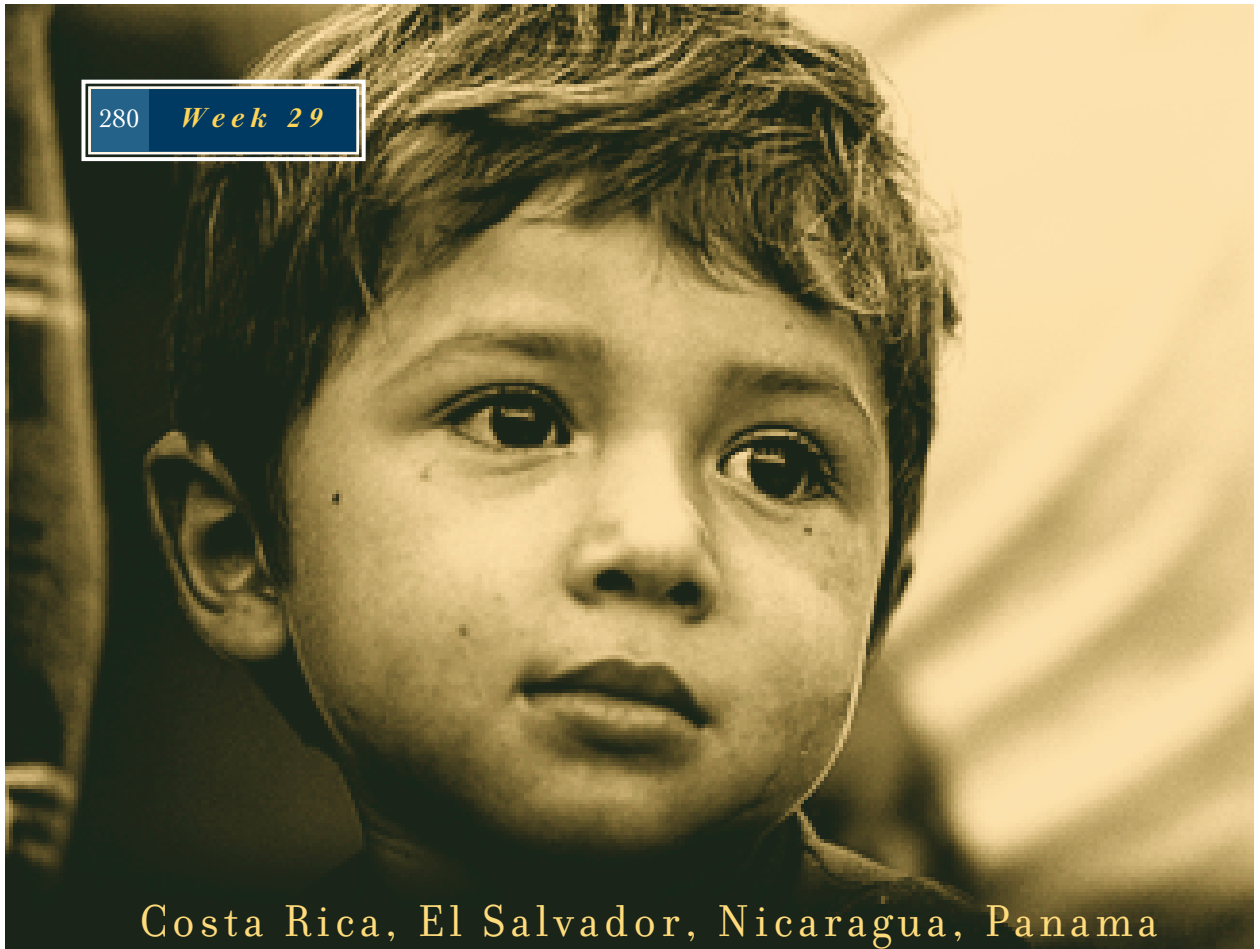
Loving God,
we give you thanks for your constant presence in our lives.
You know us, understand us, and accompany us all the time.
Help us to be humble and sensitive towards the labours, the burdens and
the pains of our sisters and brothers,
in such a way that with our words, our gestures and our actions
they find the rest that you promise.

(7)

Surrounded by difficult situations,
our community suffers the consequences
of the mistaken politics and economics of our leaders.
There is only hopelessness, scepticism and a lack of vision.
In spite of all these circumstances,
help us not to lose sight of your marvellous works, O God,
in your creation,
in the faces of children,
in radiant youth,
in the wisdom and placidity of the elderly,
so that nothing or no one can separate us from our mission,
to fulfill your will,
and follow your example.

(8)

God, we pray for all those
who, following the example of Jesus,
search and work for peace,
proclaiming and building your reign.
Increase their strength and fill them with your grace.



Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama

A church that doesn't provoke any crisis,
 a Gospel that doesn't unsettle,
 a word of God that doesn't get under
 anyone's skin,
 a word of God that doesn't touch the real sin of
 the society around it,
 what Gospel is that?
 Very nice, pious considerations
 that don't bother anyone;
 that's the way many would like preaching to be.
 Yet does such a Gospel
 light the world we live in?
 The Gospel of Christ is courageous;
 it is the "good news" of him
 who came to transform
 and take away the world's sins.

Oscar Romero

Regional History

This region of Central America possesses a long and distinguished pre-Colombian history dominated, particularly in the northern areas, by the powerful Mayan civilization and later by the Toltec peoples. The arrival of Columbus in 1502 and the subsequent invasion of the area by the Spanish brought death and destruction to the people. The lives of the indigenous were severely disrupted: hundreds of thousands were killed, uprooted, enslaved, and forced to work in the mines. Many more succumbed to European diseases such as measles, smallpox, dysentery and influenza, for which they had no immunity. In Nicaragua, for instance, in the 25 years after the arrival of the Spanish, the indigenous population dropped from an estimated 1 million to less than 12,000. Slaves were then imported from Africa to work on plantations established by the Spanish. Today, much of the population in the region is of mixed Spanish and Native American or African ancestry, with the exception of Costa Rica which is over 90 per cent Spanish-descendents.

Only the tiny all-powerful oligarchies claim to be “blanco” (white) and they still control the lives and future of the descendants of the Indians.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Spanish rule weakened in the region, and strong local powers arose, often supported by the Roman Catholic Church. By the nineteenth century, these autonomous powers sought independence, and the regions now known as Costa Rica, El Salvador and Nicaragua achieved independence from Spain in 1821, while Panama became an independent nation in 1903 after leaving Colombia.

Central America is geologically unstable and topographically rugged, with several active volcanoes and frequent earthquakes. In 1972 the capital of Nicaragua, Managua, was flattened by an earthquake which killed more than half the population. The city has never been rebuilt. Similar earthquakes in El Salvador have killed many. The area is also prone to hurricanes, and in 1998, Hurricane Mitch killed some 11,000 people and displaced more than 2 million. Other environmental problems in the region include deforestation and soil erosion, which exacerbate the effects of the hurricanes. Air and water pollution are also becoming serious problems, particularly in growing urban areas.

Under Spanish rule, the region was introduced to Roman Catholicism, which remains today the dominant religion, claimed by 80-90 per cent of the population in each country. Until the mid-twentieth century the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church was largely allied with the interests of the wealthy ruling oligarchies. Following the Second World War, however, in response to the devastating poverty and the mistreatment of people, and the gross violations of their human rights particularly in rural areas, renewal movements arose and a distinctly Latin American theology known as liberation theology began to develop. This theology emphasizes the dignity and equality before God and society of all persons. It proclaims the realm of God as a present reality and preferential option for the poor and oppressed. God’s will for solidarity among

all of creation and an equitable sharing of God’s gifts among the human family is emphasized. These actions and reflections have led the Roman Catholic Church in recent decades to exercise bold and prophetic leadership in addressing the related issues of poverty and agrarian reform. Such efforts have met with resistance by the elite classes, who control the majority of arable land. Pressure has also been directed at individual church leaders who advocate for reform on behalf of the poor and marginalized. In many cases, church leaders and advocates have been murdered for their beliefs and activism.

During the nineteenth century, an organized Protestant presence began in Central America. Groups represented in the early history of Protestantism include Methodists, Congregationalists, Anglicans, Reformed, Baptists, the Salvation Army, Seventh-day Adventists, and Moravians. Pentecostal groups have been active and rapidly growing, including the Church of God and Assemblies of God, the largest denomination in the region. The work of the Central American Mission (and of the Latin American Mission in Costa Rica), an ecumenical effort dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, has been largely absorbed by local organizations within the region; but this work has created partnerships that continue with Protestant groups in the United States.

Costa Rica

(Republic of Costa Rica)

God is in solidarity with humanity in Jesus Christ, the prototype of the excluded. In this way, God summons all men and women on earth to the practice of brotherhood and sisterhood based on God’s justice.

Elsa Tamez

Peace is a never-ending process, the work of many decisions by many people in many countries. It is an attitude, a way of life, a way of solving problems and resolving conflicts. It cannot be forced on the smallest nation or enforced by

the largest. It cannot ignore our differences or overlook our common interests. It requires us to work and live together.

Oscar Arias Sanchez



Statistics

Population: 4 million

Government: Parliamentary republic

Language: Spanish; also English, Chinese and Mekitelyu

Literacy: 94%

Religion: Christian 97% (mostly Roman Catholic)

WCC member churches: None

History

Costa Rica, with the Caribbean Sea to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west, Panama to the south, and Nicaragua to the north, is one of the few countries in the world without an army and is one of the success stories in a deeply troubled region, with only two brief periods of violence marring its democratic development. Until recently, it also had one of the finest social welfare programmes in Latin America.

Costa Rica was one of the last areas to be conquered by the Spanish, due to the violent resistance of the native population. By 1570, however, it had become a dependency of Nicaragua as part of the kingdom of Guatemala, and it remained so until independence from Spain in 1821. From 1823 to 1840 it was part of the United Provinces of Central

America, after which it became a separate nation.

In 1948 the nation abolished its army in order to devote more resources to education and social development. Since then, Costa Rica has been a stable democratic republic. Recently, however, economic changes related to globalization have led to new problems, including loss of a great deal of arable land by small farmers. Unemployment and rapid population increases in urban areas have created social unrest. There is a growing burden of international debt and an increasing gap between rich and poor. Homelessness is increasing dramatically, as is the incidence of "land invasions", in which groups of displaced persons band together and occupy a vacant tract. There is also an alarming increase in the number of street children in the capital city. These pressures have forced the government to scale back its commitment to social policies aimed at equitable provision for the entire populace. The government has worked hard to make education and health care widely available, and Costa Rica has striven to preserve its rainforests and protect its remarkable biodiversity, resulting in a substantial and growing ecotourism industry.

The Latin American Biblical University in San Jose is an ecumenical Protestant centre for Latin American theology. It draws students and faculty from throughout Latin America.

El Salvador

(Republic of El Salvador)

It is clear that it is more important for Christianity that the Christian reality take place than that it be correctly understood, and that what is most fundamental for Christians is that love happen in this world.

Jon Sobrino

Statistics

Population: 6.5 million

Government: Democratic republic

Language: Spanish; also English, Pipil, Lenca

Literacy: 72% (men 82%, women 77%)

Religion: Christian 97% (mostly Roman Catholic), Baha'i and other 1%

WCC member churches: Baptist Association of El Salvador, Salvadorean Lutheran Synod



History

El Salvador is on the Pacific coast, with Guatemala to the northwest and Honduras to the northeast and east. It is a tiny country with one of the highest population densities in the world. It also has a violent history and a record of persecuting those church people who have stood with the poor. One of the twentieth-century's most revered martyrs is Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero of San Salvador (the capital city), who was assassinated while saying mass in 1980.

Throughout the twentieth century El Salvador experienced almost constant military dictatorships, assassinations, death squads, disappearances and torture, alongside urban overcrowding and desperate poverty. More than half the population lived on less than US\$10 a month, while less than 1 per cent of all landowners held 91 per cent of arable land. Fourteen families (oligarchs) controlled the economy. The growing disparity between rich and poor, and the call for land reform, led to civil war and low-intensity conflict in the 1970s and 1980s, when the US feared that the unrest of the campesinos (peasants and poor) would lead to a Marxist revolution similar to Cuba and Nicaragua. As many as 75,000 people were killed between 1977 and 1989, and several hundreds of thousands were displaced.

Since the end of the war in 1992 conditions have improved slightly; elections have been held and the nation's economy has improved. However, the disparity between the wealthy and the impoverished continues to increase.

While the end of the civil war brought a reduction in human rights violations, El Salvador is plagued by desperate poverty, as well as severe environmental degradation due to deforestation (only 2 per cent of original forests remain) and overuse of land. The United Nations and other agencies are seeking to address these related issues of rural poverty and environmental distress.

The Roman Catholic Church was active in promoting land reform and investigating the violence perpetrated on the population by the military and death squads. Priests, Protestant pastors, health promoters, university professors, union leaders and religious sisters were killed in large numbers.

While about three quarters of the population is Roman Catholic, there is also a strong Protestant presence in El Salvador, and Evangelical churches, in particular, have grown considerably in the last two decades, with more than a million members.

Nicaragua

(Republic of Nicaragua)



Statistics

Population: 5.3 million

Government: Republic

Language: Spanish; also English, Miskito and a dozen others

Literacy: 65%

Religion: Christian 91% (mostly Roman Catholic), Other 9%

WCC member churches: Baptist Convention of Nicaragua, Moravian Church in Nicaragua

History

Nicaragua is the largest nation in Central America, lying between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean, with Honduras to the north and Costa Rica to the south. The Pacific coast of Nicaragua was settled as a Spanish colony from Panama in the early sixteenth century and independence from Spain was declared in 1838. Britain occupied the Caribbean coast, inhabited by the Miskito Indians, in the first half of the nineteenth century, but gradually ceded control to Nicaragua over subsequent decades. Since its independence, Nicaraguan history has been shaped by internal strife and the intervention of the US.

Beginning in the 1930s, Nicaragua was led by a military dictatorship under the Somoza family, who were a heavily supported puppet regime of the US. Opposition grew as the Somozas' corruption and mismanagement spread to all the elite classes, creating great suffering for the majority poor. The massive earthquake of 1972 that destroyed much of Managua, killing some 50,000 and making a million homeless, elicited a worldwide reaction. Money and material aid flowed into Nicaragua, where it was looted by the Somoza family and its coterie of corrupt officials. The city was never rebuilt and the suffering victims received no help. This was the spark that led to conflagration: a small liberation movement known as the Sandinistas slowly moved out of the bush and overthrew the Somoza government in 1979.

The Sandinistas took power with a mix of Marxists, Christians, peasants and workers and began to rebuild the country along socialist lines. Their obvious success worried the US Reagan administration, and pressure from the surviving supporters of Somoza led to another low-intensity

conflict, with the US supporting a ragtag rebel group called the Contras against the legitimate government of Nicaragua. This brutal war lasted throughout much of the 1980s, leaving thousands dead and a ruined countryside and economy. Inflation rose to 13,000 per cent. A peace agreement and elections in 1990 led to the Sandinistas' defeat. Desultory attempts at economic reform simply exacerbated the huge gaps between rich and poor. The easy availability of weapons, high unemployment (up to 70 per cent) and overwhelming poverty contributed to ongoing urban violence. Nicaragua was hit hard by Hurricane Mitch and landslides in 1998, which killed several thousand people and left millions homeless. Relief and rebuilding efforts are still going on. Nicaragua is also burdened by massive foreign debt.

Panama

(Republic of Panama)



Statistics

Population: 3 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: Spanish; also English, Guayami, Cuna, Choco and others

Literacy: 90%

Religion: Christian 88% (predominantly Roman Catholic), Muslim 4%, Baha'i 2%, Buddhist 1%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Panama is the southernmost country in Central America, lying between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean, and bordered to the west by Costa Rica and to the east by Colombia.

With US backing, Panama seceded from Colombia in 1903 and promptly signed a treaty with the US allowing for construction of a canal and US sovereignty over a strip of land on either side of the canal, known as the Panama Canal Zone. The canal was built by the US Army Corps of Engineers between 1904 and 1914, linking the Caribbean to the Pacific. It remained under US control until 1999. Throughout the twentieth century the US continued to have a role in Panama, using it as a military base to train Latin American soldiers and to infiltrate regimes which challenged US hegemony. In 1989 the US invaded the country, toppling and imprisoning President Manuel Noriega on drug charges. Since

then, the country has experienced government reforms and free elections.

A crucial issue in Panama (as it is throughout Latin America) is land: its distribution, use and preservation. Deforestation in Panama has not been as severe as that in El Salvador and Nicaragua, and its economy is more developed. Even so, about a third of the populace lives in poverty, especially in rural areas, and indigenous people are increasingly being forced off their land by cattle ranchers. Efforts are being made to address rural poverty, improve rural health care, and tackle growing environmental abuse.

As in the other Central American nations, the Roman Catholic Church is the largest religious body, but indigenous religions still exist in Panama, where indigenous peoples make up 8 per cent of the population. Panama also has significant numbers of adherents of several world religions, including Muslims, Baha'is and Buddhists.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Those who send money back home so their families can live.
- o Those who, like Christ, have endured humiliation, torture and death because of their embodiment of love, freedom and justice.
- o Continuing efforts by the church, civil governments, the UN and other agencies to create an enduring culture of peace.
- o The continuing beauty and richness of the land, and those who advocate its wise and equitable use.
- o The Latin American Council of Churches, especially its Mesoamerica Region, and its realization of a holistic mission of evangelism and social witness.

Pray for:

- o Those people who live with the hard realities of persistent poverty, hunger, malnutrition, homelessness and unemployment.
- o Farm workers and indigenous peoples, who are endangered by the loss of their lands and livelihoods, and those already displaced who seek shelter in land invasion communities.
- o Street children, especially in urban areas.
- o Women exploited in jobs where they are often treated as slaves.

PRAYERS

(1)

AN AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

I believe, Lord, that everything good in the world comes from you.

I believe in your great love for all people.

I believe that, because you preached love, freedom and justice
you were humiliated, tortured and killed.

I believe that you continue to suffer in our people.

I believe that you call me to defend your cause,

but I also believe that you accompany me
in the task of transforming this world into a different one

where there is no suffering or weeping;

a world where there is a gigantic table set with free food where everyone is welcome.

I believe that you accompany us in waiting for the dawning of a new day.

I believe that you will give us strength so that death does not find us
without having done enough,

and that you will rise in those who have died seeking a different world.

(2)

May it come soon

to the hungry,

to the weeping,

to those who thirst for your justice,

to those who have waited centuries

for a truly human life.

Grant us the patience

to smooth the way

on which your kingdom comes to us.

Grant us hope,

that we may not weary

in proclaiming and working for it,

despite so many conflicts,

threats and shortcomings.

Grant us a clear vision,

that in the hour of our history

we may see the horizon,

and know the way

on which your kingdom comes to us.

(3)
 You are the God of the poor,
 the human and simple God,
 the God who sweats in the street,
 the God with the weather-beaten face,
 that's why I can talk to you
 the way I talk with my people,
 because you are God the worker
 and Christ the worker, too.

You go hand in hand with my people.
 You struggle in countryside and town.
 You line up in the work camp
 to get your daily wage.
 You eat snow cones there in the park
 with Eusebio, Pancho and Juan Jose.
 And you even complain about the syrup
 when they don't give you much honey.

I've seen you in the grocery store,
 eating in a snack-bar.
 I've seen you selling lottery tickets
 without being embarrassed about that job.
 I've seen you in the gas stations
 checking the tires of a truck,
 and even filling holes along the highway
 in old leather gloves and overalls.

(4)
AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

We believe in God,
 who created us free
 and walks with us in the struggle for liberation.

We believe in Christ,
 crucified again in the suffering of the poor,
 a suffering which calls out to the conscience of people and nations,
 a suffering which ends in resurrection.

We believe in the power of the Spirit,
 capable of inspiring the same compassion
 which has led our best brothers and sisters to martyrdom.

We believe in the church,
 called forth by Jesus and by the Holy Spirit.

We believe that when we gather,
 Jesus is with us,
 Mary, our Mother, is at our side, a sign of faithfulness to the Lord.

We believe in the Christian community
 where we proclaim our ideals,
 through which we practise our Christian faith.
 We believe in building a church
 where we pray and reflect on our reality,
 and share in the prophetic, priestly and pastoral mission of Jesus.
 In this way we make the Kingdom of God present on earth.

We believe in unity in the midst of differences.

We believe that Christ calls us to communion
 and to live as sisters and brothers.

We believe that we need to love one another,
 to correct one another compassionately,
 to forgive each other's errors and weaknesses.

We believe that we need to help one another recognize our limitations,
 to support each other in the faith.

We believe that the poor, the illiterate and the sick,
 the persecuted and tortured, are closest to the Gospel of Jesus.
 Through them, Christ challenges us to work for justice and peace.
 Their cause is our cause.

We believe that Christ is also present
 in those who are slaves to their passions, to vices, lies and injustice, to power and money.

We commit ourselves never to give up hope in the possibility of their conversion,
 to love them even though they slander, persecute and kill us;
 to pray for them and to help them
 so that one day they may live simply and humbly
 in the way that the Gospel calls all of us to live.

(5)

Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Lord, my God, you are great.

You are clothed with the energy of atoms
 as with a mantle.

From a cloud of whirling cosmic dust,
 as on the potter's wheel,

you began to tease out the whorls of the galaxies,
 and the gas escapes from your fingers, condensing and burning,
 and you were fashioning the stars.

You made a spatterdash of planets like spores or seeds
 and scattered comets like flowers.

(6)

MORNING PRAYER

Lord, in the silence of this newborn day
 I am praying to you for peace, wisdom and strength.
 Today, I want to look at the world with eyes full of love,
 to be patient, understanding, humble, gentle and good,
 to see behind the appearances of your children,
 as you yourself see them,
 appreciating the goodness of each one.

Close my ears to all gossip.
 Keep my tongue from all cursing,
 so that only thoughts which bless remain in me.

I want to be well-intentioned and just with all who come close to me,
 so they can sense your presence.
 Show me again your goodness, O Lord,
 so that during this day and all the days of my life
 I reflect you.

(7)

Loving God, I offer myself to you.
 May my mind think of you,
 and my eyes see the needs of others.
 May my ears hear the cries of the world
 and my voice speak of you.
 May my hands work for your reign
 and my feet walk on your path.
 May my life be used in your service
 and my heart love you more than anything else.
 May the joy of the Lord be my strength to serve him
 all the days of my life.

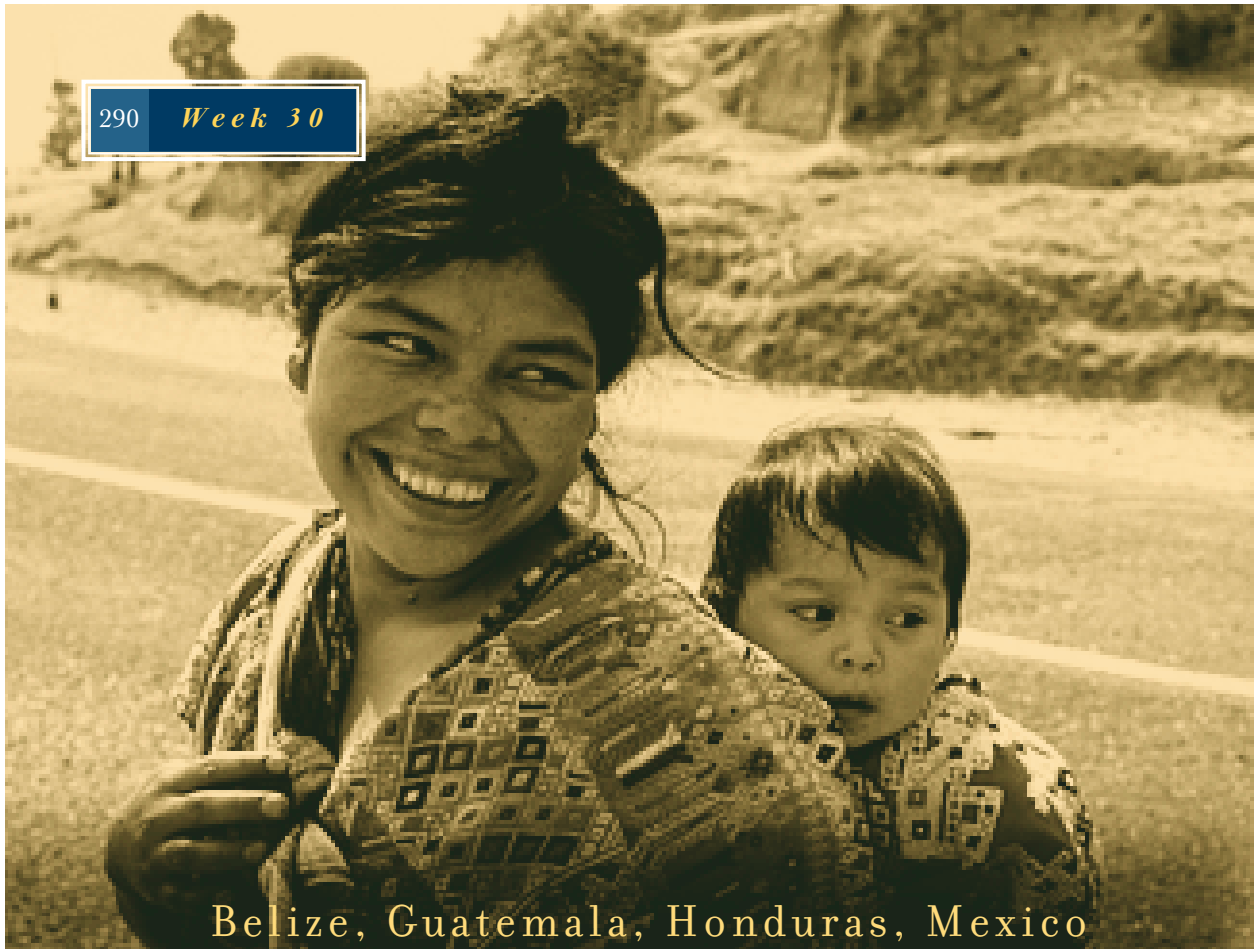
(8)

BLESSING

Christ our true God,
 risen from the dead,
 whose tomb is brighter than any royal hall,
 will have mercy on us,
 and save us,
 for this is a good God who loves us all.

(9)

We offer you, Lord,
 the bustle of each day,
 all the energy created by our work
 and the enthusiasm of our eager hearts.



Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico

B e l i z e

Statistics

Population: 240,000

Government: Parliamentary democracy

Language: English; also Spanish, Creole

Literacy: 70%

Religion: Christian 91% (mostly Roman Catholic), Baha'i 3%, Hindu 2%, Jewish 1%, Traditional 1%, Non-Religious 1%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

H i s t o r y

Belize is the second-smallest country in Central America and the most sparsely populated. It is bordered on the east by the Caribbean, on the south and west by Guatemala, and on the northwest and north by Mexico. Numerous ruins indicate that for hundreds of years it was heavily populated by around a million Mayan Indians, whose advanced civilization reached its zenith between 250 and 900. Today, a small population still exists in Belize, predominantly in Toledo, the southernmost district.

When it is necessary
to drink so much pain,
when a river of anguish
drowns us,
when we have wept many
tears and they flow like rivers
from our sad eyes,
only then

does the deep hidden sigh
of our neighbour
become our own.

Julia Esquivel



The first reference to European settlement was in 1638, when British woodcutters known as Baymen settled there. The Baymen seized the Mayans and used them as slave labour for their logwood operations. Logwood was used to produce purple and red dyes. These early settlements were subject to attacks from neighbouring Spanish settlements for the next 150 years. The Treaty of Paris in 1763

allowed the Baymen to return, but Spanish attacks continued until 1798, when the settlers won a decisive victory with British naval support.

British control gradually expanded until the area became British Honduras in 1840. It gained independence as Belize only in 1981 due to constant interference from its neighbour, Guatemala, which regarded the country as one of its own provinces. It is now a stable parliamentary democracy, a member of the Commonwealth and the Organization of American States (OAS).

Because of its small population and major tourist potential, Belize has achieved a better standard of living than comparable countries in the region, and has more in common with the countries of the Caribbean than with its neighbours. Human rights are constitutionally guaranteed and legally enforced, and the official Women's Bureau has worked to improve the status of women.

Christianity came to Belize in 1848, when Roman Catholics from Mexico arrived following an Indian revolt there. Today, the Roman Catholic Church is the largest Christian group in Belize. Methodists from Britain arrived in 1825, followed by British Anglicans, and these form the second and third largest religious groups.

Guatemala

(*Republic of Guatemala*)

I dream of the day when the relationship between the indigenous peoples and other peoples is strengthened; when they can combine their potentialities and their capabilities and contribute to make life on this planet less unequal.

Rigoberta Menchu Tum



Statistics

Population: 14.2 million

Government: Republic

Language: Spanish; also Quiche, Cakiquel, Mam, Kekchi, English and 40 others

Literacy: 55% (men 62%, women 48%)

Religion: Christian 98% (almost entirely Roman Catholic), Non-religious/other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Guatemala is bordered by the Caribbean on the east, Honduras and El Salvador on the southwest, by the Pacific on the west, and by Mexico and Belize on the north. It is Central America's third-largest country and more than 55 per cent of its people are Mayan Indians who live mostly in the rural highlands, or *altiplano*. *Ladinos* – people of mixed blood or whites – live in Guatemala City and the coastal and eastern lowlands.

Guatemala was the centre of the Mayan culture until the fifteenth century. Along with most of Central America it was under the control of

Spain, from 1523 until it achieved independence in 1821. Thereafter it suffered under a series of brutal military dictatorships. There were two periods of peace and democracy in 1945–51 (President Areval) and 1951–54 (President Arbenz), when laws supporting the peasants were passed and feudalism abolished. Arbenz passed agrarian reform laws which enraged the American-owned banana companies, who had enjoyed tax-exempt export privileges since 1901 and controlled a tenth of the country's economy. The United Fruit Company possessed 550,000 acres of land and when Arbenz demanded his country's taxes the company enlisted US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his brother CIA director Allen Dulles. In June 1954 the CIA led a ragtag army against Guatemala, alleging that Arbenz was a communist. He was forced from office and from then on American-backed presidents, dictators and generals ran the country for the banana companies. The repression of Indians and democrats began and lasted almost to the end of the century.

Large-scale killings occurred from the mid-1960s, when the CIA and the Committee Against Communism drew up a hit list of 70,000 political suspects. Hundreds were assassinated. In one day a union meeting was raided and 200 leaders killed. Beginning in 1960 Guatemala began receiving more than \$65 million in military aid from the US and sent its army officers to Panama for training by US instructors. Death squads were also organized. The *Mano Blanca* (white hand) was one of dozens of death squads funded and backed by the oligarchy and the ruling party to eradicate opposition politicians. The media was muzzled and a reign of terror launched against priests, religious sisters, Protestant pastors and ordinary base community Christians. By 1970 some 10,000 non-combatants had been killed in ruthless counter-insurgency warfare.

In 1978 General Lucas Garcia became president with full US support and launched a wave of massive violence and terror that lasted until 1982. Priests, labour leaders, academics, jour-

nalists, lawyers and student leaders were assassinated, but it was the Indians who bore the brunt. During Lucas Garcia's rule more than 10,000 Indians were killed and unknown thousands driven out of the *altiplano*.

There followed the dictatorship of born-again Christian General Rios Montt, whose savagery of "bullets and beans" killed some 20,000. Since his time, the country has faced two abortive presidential elections, two coups, two states of emergency, two constitutions, an 11-month state of siege, four amnesty periods and four heads of state, three of them generals. US Green Berets serving as military advisers brought in scorched earth tactics, strategic hamlets and civil guards, imprisoning some 70,000 peasants behind barbed wire. Mostly, the mass media ignored this entire period and the atrocities were largely unknown except to progressive Roman Catholics and ecumenical church agencies. These church people paid a high price, with more than thirty priests and innumerable lay pastors killed.

The Roman Catholic Church carried out an investigation into the violence, titled *REMHI – The Project to Recover Historic Memory* – in which more than 6,500 survivors were interviewed. In 1998 the results of these interviews were published by the Guatemalan Roman Catholic Bishop Juan Gerardi Conedera, who was assassinated two days after the report was released. Since his death the political situation has stabilized somewhat, but the basic oligarchic system remains. Churches and ecumenical groups have been working to bring home the refugees, resettle the displaced and support flagging UN reconciliation efforts.

Today, over three-quarters of all Guatemalans are associated with the Roman Catholic Church, and it remains the state church. However, there have often been severe tensions, since the leadership of the church tends to be foreign, while the membership is Indian. Tension also exists between those members of the hierarchy identified with the repression and the many Christians who stood up for the rights of the poor.

Pentecostalism has swept into Guatemala in the last two decades. The Assemblies of God Church is now the second largest church body in the country. The churches are extensively involved in health care, literacy and leadership training.

Honduras

(*Republic of Honduras*)



Statistics

Population: 6.8 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: Spanish; also English, Miskito, Pipil, Lenca and others

Literacy: 72%

Religion: Christian 97% (almost entirely Roman Catholic), Ethnic 2%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Honduras is bordered to the north and east by the Caribbean, to the south by Nicaragua, to the southwest by the Pacific, and to the west by El Salvador and Guatemala. Once part of Spain's vast empire in the New World, Honduras, like Guatemala and other Central American nations, had been a proud centre of the Mayan civilization. Spain took control in 1524 and the country achieved independence in 1821.

Dictators, initially benevolent but increasingly autocratic and militaristic, controlled the government until 1978. In 1982 the country adopted

a new constitution, making it a multiparty republic. Honduras has always had close ties to US fruit companies, and during the 1980s it was a staging area for US-supported Contra rebels attempting to overthrow the Sandinista government of Nicaragua. The United States also used Honduras for military exercises and built bases there to train Honduran and Salvadorean troops to maintain the policy of low-intensity conflict. Despite all this American attention Honduras has always been the poorest country in Central America, often at war with El Salvador and Nicaragua. It has been host to many thousands of people from both countries over the decades as they tried to flee the violence in their home countries.

Always prone to hurricanes, floods and drought, in October 1998 Hurricane Mitch killed about 13,000 Hondurans, left 2 million homeless and caused more than US\$5 billion in damage. At that time, Honduras had already been battered by high unemployment, inflation and other economic and political ills resulting from decades of corruption, mismanagement and an ever-present oligarchy. Drought caused further misery in 2000. Economic reform and the modernization of government are badly needed and have begun, but the lack of basic necessities (shelter, potable water, sanitation) saps the country's vitality.

As in other Central American countries, the Roman Catholic Church was brought by the Spanish, and remains the largest religious influence. Methodists were the first Protestants to arrive (in 1860), although the largest Independent churches in Honduras today are Pentecostal. Guarantees of religious freedom were first granted in 1880, and the church has often addressed social problems and been involved in education and medical work.

Mexico

(*United Mexican States*)

Statistics

Population: 104 million

Government: Federal republic

Language: Spanish; also English, Nahuatl, Maya, Chinese and over 200 Indian languages

Literacy: 89%

Religion: Christian 96% (almost entirely Roman Catholic), Non-religious/other 4%

WCC member churches: Methodist Church in Mexico



History

Mexico is the largest Spanish-speaking nation in the world. It is believed to have first been settled in 21,000 BC, and was home to the ancient cultures of the Olmec, Maya and Toltec. The Aztecs, a military, artistic and intellectual society, founded Tenochtitlan on the site of present-day Mexico City. The conquest led by the Spaniard Hernan Cortes in 1519 subdued the Aztecs and Mexico became a Spanish colony until 1821, when Mexico won the rebellion started in 1810 and achieved its independence.

In 1836 Texas declared its independence from Mexico. As a result of the Mexican–American War (1846–48), Mexico lost about half of its territory to the US. In 1857 Mexico adopted a new constitution which took control of education away from the Roman Catholic Church and forced the bishops to sell its vast and exploitative landholdings. This led to a civil war that lasted four years.

Dissatisfaction after a series of dictators at the end of the nineteenth century led to a revolution in 1910 and seven years of turmoil, which ended

with the drafting of another constitution in 1917. During the rest of the twentieth century Mexico remained a nominally democratic state, although some of its governments were marked by corruption and police brutality in quelling popular uprisings. In 1929 the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was formed and won the election, setting the stage for seven decades of uninterrupted and increasingly autocratic and corrupt rule. In 1938 Mexico's most beloved president, Lazaro Cardenas, nationalized Mexico's oil industry (infuriating the US) and instituted a sweeping populist programme that strengthened labour unions and redistributed millions of acres of land from wealthy to poor farmers.

During the 1990s Mexico experienced political and economic turmoil and violence in the southern provinces, especially Chiapas. Many Guatemalan refugees had crossed the border to flee the violence in their own country and escape exploitation by huge landowners. In 1994 a group of Indians called Zapatistas captured several towns and called for political and economic reform. Later that same year, a presidential candidate and a high-ranking political officer were assassinated. In 1996 another rebel group, the Popular Revolutionary Army, attacked a memorial service and several police stations. In response to calls for reform, Mexico held its first open democratic primary in 1999, in which the PRI was defeated for the first time in ten years.

In Mexico's cities a few enjoy living standards comparable to those of the US and Europe, while others live in vast and overcrowded slums. In rural villages life has changed only slightly since the revolution of 1910. Although there is an extensive social security system whose benefits are supplemented by a Mexican institution known as the Civil Association, many suffer from unemployment, malnutrition and hunger. During the 1970s the discovery of more oil reserves led to a brief economic boom, but during the 1980s the price of oil dropped and the economy was devastated. In 1985 a massive earthquake destroyed parts of Mexico City. Other issues include serious air, soil

and water pollution stemming from urbanization and overpopulation.

Although the country is constitutionally a secular society, Mexico is almost entirely Roman Catholic, which includes all baptized Amerindians, many of whom practise folk-Catholicism (combining Catholicism with traditional Amerindian religion). Many Protestant groups, both denominational and independent,

are present in small numbers, and other bodies include Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. As elsewhere in Latin America Pentecostals are growing rapidly and eating away at Roman Catholic domination. Legislation exists that regulates and limits the internal structures and social functions of the churches. These anti-clerical laws are rarely applied, so the state and the Catholic Church peacefully coexist.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Those who have taken in refugees and the exiled.
- o Communities that have cared for one another.
- o Church leaders who have spoken on behalf of the downtrodden.
- o Those who try to tell the stories of the poor to those who are rich.
- o Tortillas, burritos, enchiladas, cactus, corn and beans.
- o Ancient temples and ancient civilizations.

Pray for:

- o A peaceful settlement of the border dispute between Guatemala and Belize.
- o Comfort and healing for the families and loved ones of Guatemalans killed and disappeared, and due process of law and justice for their killers.
- o An end to human rights abuses by the military.
- o The repentance and conversion of those who benefit from corruption.
- o Justice, education and empowerment for the Maya and other indigenous peoples.
- o Those who are unemployed, and those who must work in sweatshops under difficult and often dangerous conditions.
- o Street children.
- o All those living in poverty.
- o Strength, wisdom and patience for the churches and church organizations.

PRAYERS

(1)

Our Father and Mother,
you are on the streets,
in the everyday things of our lives and in our struggles.
May your name and message be recognized,

may justice be done,
 so that the sharing you have proposed to us be lived out;
 so that the exploited from this place,
 and from other places, have bread;
 so that all the oppressed have dignity.
 Give us strength to continue what you have started.
 Show us how to build a new society
 in which women and men live new patterns of relationships.
 Deliver us from our self-sufficiency
 and from all our thirst for power.
 May we continue doing what Jesus did
 when he shared with the hungry and walked with the poor.
 Jesus, look upon us and help us to overcome barriers.
 Give us strength
 to overcome the attraction of money and privilege,
 to resist the consumerism of society and false security.
 Instil in us a spirit of solidarity
 that will withstand all trials.

(2)

Your death, good shepherd, has not been in vain.
 Guided by your example we will follow you,
 forging truth and justice,
 giving voice to the silenced song,
 giving hope to the journeying people,
 giving light to the reign of the poor.
 The shadows of the powerful – power and deceit –
 seek futilely to hide your image.
 But indeed you are fully in the light,
 in plain view,
 on the frontier of peace;
 you are the living church,
 the new Guatemala.

(3)

Jesus, clothe us with the capacity to communicate faith and love to each and everyone who is needy. Empower us to see them with eyes of compassion. May we identify with their problems and demonstrate our concern by lending a helping hand at the appropriate moment. Open our minds and hearts so that we may be able to reach across all barriers. Give us the means necessary and the genuine desire to become a people of God, instruments for healing.
In the name of Jesus may we become truly the people of God.

(4)

PRAYER BEFORE CLEARING A FIELD

O God, my mother, my father,
 Lord of the hills,
 Lord of the valleys,
 Lord of the forest,
 be patient with me.
 I am about to do what has always been done.
 Now I make you an offering,
 that you may be warned:
 I am about to molest your heart.
 Perhaps you will have the strength to endure it.
 I am going to work you in order that I may live.
 Let no animal pursue me,
 no snake, no scorpion, no wasp annoy me,
 no falling timber hit me, no axe, no machete catch me.
 With all my heart I am going to work you.

(5)

I am hungry and thirsty, hungry and thirsty for growth,
 like many women in our churches and in our countries.
 I would like to attain my real stature,
 taking the place to which I have been called
 by the most high from a very long time ago.

I am hungry and thirsty, hungry and thirsty for equality,
 like many women in our churches and in our countries.
 I would like to be able to look each person in the eyes,
 living in the dignity which was given to me at great price
 by the most high from a very long time ago.

I am hungry and thirsty, hungry and thirsty for recognition,
 like many women in our churches and in our countries.
 I would like to be able to call my work, work,
 building the places from which I can say that I am by pure grace
 by the most high from a very long time ago.

I am hungry and thirsty, hungry and thirsty for justice,
 like many women in our churches and in our countries
 (victims of the most brutal and the most subtle violence).
 I no longer want to be raped or maltreated, reduced to silence or assassinated.
 Because of the most high and from a very long time ago
 I am, along with every other human being,
 the image and likeness of the one who created me.

(6)

THE ONE THING NECESSARY

We confess, O Lord,

that we have been preoccupied
 by the many demands this life makes on us,
 that we have urgently sought
 the comforts that society offers,
 that we have become involved in disloyal competition
 which nullifies the life of others
 while we totally disregard their pain,
 that a culture of busyness has dazed us
 so that we have lost the blessing of your presence.

Help us to see "the one thing necessary", your presence,
 which comforts, inspires and commits us
 to labour for your reign.

Strengthen our decision to walk with you
 with the certainty
 that neither anything nor anyone
 can separate us from your side.

(7)

SEED OF LIFE

Lord, in this world
 you have sown the seeds of life
 in the hearts of our daughters and sons,
 seeds which are growing slowly and quietly,
 seeds whose fruit is the strengthening of hope.

But weed seeds have also been sown.
 Their fruit is sadness, sorrow and death.
 They try to suffocate all efforts to build a different world.

We draw closer to you in prayer
 so we can perceive these situations
 which discourage and confuse, causing dejection.

Equip us to uncover and denounce evil
 without hurting the lives of those sowing love and justice.

Fortify the weak stalks
 so that hope and patience flower in us,
 to follow you without ever halting our sowing.

(8)

MORNING PRAYER FOR PEACE

God of life,
 in the early light of this new day
 I want to treasure the opportunity you give me
 to wake up enveloped in your peace.
 I know that today I will face many different situations.
 The world, unfortunately, has not changed much
 since last night, which you prepared for me to rest.
 But knowing that your peace accompanies life encourages me.

Son of Peace,
 today, make of me an announcer of your peace,
 which breaks down hatred, egotism, abuse, lies, intolerance,
 which ends the conflicts between peoples,
 families and persons,
 which reconciles all human beings with God,
 with themselves, and with all who surround them,
 making them new women and men.

Spirit of Unity,
 gather in this humble prayer
 the prayers from all your people in the world,
 that your peace, your justice and your mercy enfold us
 and enable us to live as one,
 the new humanity of peace.

(9)

LAMENTATION OF LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN

We lament that society and the church do not value, nor respect
 the wisdom and creativity of women.
 In whom can we believe? How is it possible to see such injustice around us?
 The power pours down on the weak (my indigenous sisters and brothers)
 without giving them time to breathe,
 no option but to scream or to flee.
 Our arms fall, our heads spin and there we are left
 behind the railing of forgetfulness,
 trying to scream at a system deaf, dirty and without feeling.
 We lament that our foremothers were slaves, beaten and sold like animals.
 We lament that many women and girls are poor,
 marginalized by white people,
 by their economic condition, which keeps them suffering,

and that few women participate in the church
because it does not allow them to participate.

Our God, come and free us. Lord, come quickly to our help.

As women, we lament that men are always given the opportunity
to study and gain qualifications,

to be outside the house for much of the time.

But when women do try to study and gain experience

they are not understood, nor given an opportunity.

We have to encourage our children and worry how to clothe them,

how to care for their health.

Women are sacrificed and do not have opportunities.

Our God, come and free us. Lord, come quickly to our help.

We are women.

We must think about managing the house by ourselves,
and the man cannot do anything.

But we can show in the Bible that we can do all these things together

because we are the people of God.

We lament the death of thousands of cultures and people in all the world.

How sad it is that some Christians do not recognize

the image of God in all human beings.

How difficult it is to work with persons

who in reality do not understand the true mission of Christianity.

How lamentable it is to be doing nothing, when all the possibilities are in your hands.

Our God, come and free us. Lord, come quickly to our help.

How impotent we feel when we cannot change things

because as women we don't count.

How much we would like to be respected and valued as women and be understood.

Our God, come and free us. Lord, come quickly to our help.

For all this suffering and everything else going on in the country,

poverty, hunger, contempt of the young,

mothers who weep for their families,

God help us.

We lament that indigenous and peasant women are assigned as domestic servants

where they are mistreated by other women,

raped by their bosses and the sons of their bosses.

We lament that many indigenous and peasant women

because of exclusion and oppression become prostitutes at a very early age.

Our God, come and free us. Lord, come quickly to our help.

(10)

Lord, may the woman be taken into account in our society,
and not only she who has money, or a position,
but also the widow, the single mother,
the woman who has been beaten,
and continues to be so because of injustice
protected by laws and fed by greed,
which lets some people accumulate for themselves
that which belongs to the whole society.

Lord, teach me, guide me so that I can unite with other women,
and make our voice of protest heard.

In this way, we shall make our rights be valued so that our country
might be free and democratic,
a land where the resources are shared as you meant them to be.


 A young boy is shown from the chest up, carrying a large, overflowing basket of produce on his head. He is looking slightly to the right with a neutral expression. The background is a blurred outdoor setting. The image has a warm, golden-brown color palette.

The Caribbean

Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Cuba, Dominica,
Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica,
St Kitts-Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent
and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago

It is easy to betray freedom in the pursuit and exercise of freedom. Nowhere does this become more evident than when individual freedom ignores community and, as a result, becomes a threat. When this becomes a way of life, the whole human enterprise comes under a canopy of darkness. It is, indeed, a particularly deceptive temptation to pursue individual self-interest in the exercise of individual autonomy at the expense of community responsibility ... True human fulfillment is achieved when individual freedom affirms and is affirmed in community.

Burchel Taylor

History

Ecumenically speaking, the Caribbean, also known as the West Indies, includes the islands of the Caribbean Sea, an archipelago that stretches from Florida in the US to the coast of Venezuela, and two nations in South America which border the Caribbean Sea: Guyana and Suriname. The Caribbean includes 13 independent nations, the rest of the islands being colonies, territories and possessions of France, the Netherlands, the UK, the US, and Venezuela. While it is a region of almost bewildering diversity, there is a common history of colonialism and neocolonialism, imperialism, exploitation, conquest and slavery, as well as resistance, dignity and struggle for sovereignty.

Indigenous peoples – the peaceful Arawaks and the not-so-peaceful Caribs – inhabited these lands for more than 2,000 years. Today, most of them have disappeared, wiped out (except for those still living in Dominica and Trinidad) by European explorers, led by Christopher Columbus, who arrived in the area in 1492. This began a time of European economic domination based on slavery

and sugar, which resulted in the deaths of millions of indigenous peoples. On the island of Hispaniola (today's Haiti and the Dominican Republic) where Columbus first landed, the Arawaks were annihilated by the Spanish in less than 25 years. These were people with their own religions, culture and languages, but the harsh treatment meted out by the colonial Christian missionaries who regarded their religious practices as demonic amounted to genocide, and their religions were stamped out.

The slaves brought from Africa to work on the sugar plantations also had their own languages, culture and religions, but these too were wiped out. A triumphalistic form of Christianity was imposed (often brutally) on the remaining natives and Africans, so that outwardly Christianity became the religion of the newly settled colonies.

French and Spanish colonizers brought Catholicism to the French Antilles, Cuba, Trinidad, St Lucia and Dominica, while the Church of England became prominent on the British Antilles. These historic patterns remain today. Later came Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists and Moravians, whose influence also continues.

After the abolition of slavery in the 1800s, there was a period of "indentured labour" in which workers from India, Indonesia and China (the latter brought to Cuba) were forced to work on the plantations, each bringing their own cultures and religions to such countries as Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname and Guyana.

Haiti (one-third of Hispaniola) was ceded to the French in 1697 and became one of the wealthiest countries in the Caribbean due to the heavy importation of slaves. In the late eighteenth century, Haiti's nearly half-million slaves revolted under Toussaint l'Ouverture and after a prolonged struggle became the first black republic to gain independence, in 1804. However, Haiti has been plagued by dictatorships, political violence and invasions for most of its history. Today, it is the poorest country in the western hemisphere.

In Cuba, the War of Independence in 1868 claimed the lives of many. In 1959 it once again threw off the cultural and economic domination

of the US and toppled a repressive dictatorship, developing its own form of socialism.

There have also been repeated political skirmishes and coups in the history of Grenada, Jamaica and Trinidad. The twentieth century heralded resistance movements all around the Caribbean. Most of the British Caribbean gained independence in the 1960s. This began a new era with leaders who, in general, were chosen by the people, but since independence many countries have suffered from weak governance and corruption, and the following four decades have been convulsive, characterized by dramatic cultural, political and economic transformations.

The nations of the Caribbean have been defined economically as "developing". This means that, despite their independence, most of the countries are not able to support themselves without fiscal aid from first world countries. Much of the Caribbean is renowned as a "vacation paradise" and tourism is vital for many of these countries. Even so, poverty is rampant and most countries are economically unstable. In many countries the inflation rate is high, creating the conditions for violence, made worse by the illegal drugs trade. Other problems in the Caribbean include hurricanes and increasing water and soil pollution. Situated between the rich North and the poor South, the Caribbean region shares the poverty of the South while its peoples aspire to the materialistic lifestyles of the North, whose consumerism bombards them in the mass media.

Throughout all eras of Caribbean history, there have been persons or groups who have fought for the recognition of the humanity of oppressed peoples. For instance, Montesinos and Bartholme de las Casas were Dominican friars who became known as the "protectors of the Indians". Anti-slavery movements were often spearheaded by Protestant groups such as the Quakers, Anglicans, Methodists and Baptists. These groups were also instrumental in helping the freed blacks establish some degree of autonomy. These churches soon found their membership increasing to include many of the families that they helped.

With the Caribbean's diversity in religious groups and cultures, different traditions and practices are often blended together. Even so, the dominant religion is Christianity. Liberation theology is important in the Caribbean, as people are able to identify easily with the Old Testament theme of God as liberator of the oppressed. The church is often ecumenical in nature and mission oriented, and many denominations in the Caribbean are members of the World Council of Churches. The Caribbean Conference of Churches is the major regional ecumenical body and includes the Roman Catholic Church.

Bahamas

(Commonwealth of the Bahamas)

The northernmost islands of the archipelago, with about 700 islands, of which 40 are inhabited.



Statistics

Population: 310,000

Government: Constitutional monarchy independent from the UK since 1973, democracy since 1992

Language: English; also Creole

Literacy: 98%

Religion: Christian 92% (mostly Protestant), Spiritist 2%, Other 6%

WCC member churches: Church in the Province of the West Indies

Antigua and Barbuda

(State of Antigua and Barbuda)



Statistics

Population: 68,000

Government: Constitutional monarchy (UK), independent since 1981

Language: English; also Creole

Literacy: 90%

Religion: Christian 94% (mostly Protestant), Spiritist 3%, Other 3%

WCC member churches: Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas, Moravian Church, Eastern West Indies Province

Barbados

(Dominion of Barbados)



Statistics

Population: 270,000

Government: Constitutional monarchy, a democracy independent from the UK since 1966

Language: English; also Bajan (Barbadian dialect)

Literacy: 97%

Religion: Christian 97% (mostly Protestant), Baha'i 1%, Muslim 1%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

Indian population and was the last to be colonized, due to the Caribs' fierce resistance. It became independent from Britain in 1978.



Cuba

(Republic of Cuba)

The largest island in the West Indies, along with several smaller islands.



Statistics

Population: 71,000

Government: Republic

Language: English; also Creole, French patois

Literacy: 90%

Religion: Christian 94% (mostly Roman Catholic), Spiritist 3%, Baha'i 2%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

Statistics

Population: 11 million

Government: One-party socialist state

Language: Spanish; also Russian, Chinese, English

Literacy: 95%

Religion: Christian 45% (mostly Roman Catholic), Spiritist 18%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Methodist Church in Cuba, Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba

Dominican Republic

The eastern two-thirds of Hispaniola, shared with Haiti.



Statistics

Population: 8.5 million

Government: Republic

Language: Spanish; also English, Creole, French

Literacy: 82%

Dominica

(Commonwealth of Dominica)

Dominica, a single volcanic island, is the only island in the region with a pre-Colombian Carib

Religion: Christian 95% (almost entirely Roman Catholic), Spiritist 2%, Non-religious 2%, Other 1%
WCC member churches: None

Grenada

Several of the Windward Islands in the West Indies. It was invaded by the US in 1983 to reverse an alleged Marxist military coup.



Statistics

Population: 94,000
Government: Constitutional monarchy with parliamentary democracy
Language: English; also French patois
Literacy: 85%
Religion: Christian 97%, Spiritist 1%, Hindu 1%, Other 1%
WCC member churches: None

Guyana

(Cooperative Republic of Guyana)

On the north coast of South America, parts of Guyana are claimed by Venezuela and Suriname.

Statistics

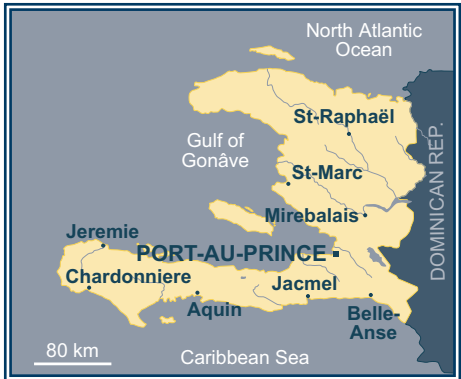
Population: 705,000
Government: Parliamentary republic
Language: English; also Creole, Hindi, Amerindian dialects
Literacy: 98%

Religion: Christian 51%, Hindu 33%, Muslim 8%, Ethnic/Spiritist 4%, Baha'i 2%, Other 2%
WCC member churches: None



Haiti

(Republic of Haiti)



The western third of Hispaniola, shared with the Dominican Republic.

Statistics

Population: 8.2 million
Government: Multiparty republic
Language: French; also Haitian Creole, Spanish, Arabic
Literacy: 45%
Religion: Christian 96% (mostly Roman Catholic, 90% of whom are estimated also to practise Spiritist Christo religions called Vodoun), Spiritist 3%, Other 1%
WCC member churches: Baptist Convention of Haiti

Jamaica

(Dominion of Jamaica)

The third largest island in the Caribbean.



Statistics

Population: 2.6 million

Government: Parliamentary democracy

Language: English; also Jamaican Creole and others

Literacy: 85%

Religion: Christian 84%, Spiritist 10%, Non-religious 4%, Hindu 1%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Jamaica Baptist Union, Moravian Church in Jamaica, United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands

Literacy: 96%

Religion: Roman Catholic 72%, Pentecostal 5%, Protestant 3%, Seventh-day Adventist 3%, Methodist 3%, Other 14%

WCC member churches: United Protestant Church

Puerto Rico



Statistics

Population: 3.9 million

Government: unincorporated, organized territory of the US with commonwealth status

Language: Spanish, English

Literacy: 94%

Religion: Roman Catholic 85%, Protestant and Other 15%

WCC member churches: Methodist Church of Puerto Rico

Netherlands Antilles



Statistics

Population: 221,750

Government: Parliamentary; autonomous within the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Language: Papiamentu; also English, Dutch, Spanish, Creole

St Kitts - Nevis

(Federation of St Kitts and Nevis)

Two islands in the Leeward Islands.

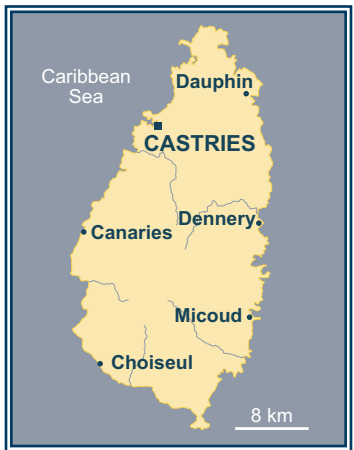


Statistics

Population: 38,000
Government: Federal parliamentary democracy
Language: English
Literacy: 90%
Religion: Christian 95% (mostly Protestant), Hindu 2%, Spiritist 2%, Other 1%
WCC member churches: None

St Lucia

One of the Windward Islands.



Statistics

Population: 150,000
Government: Parliamentary democracy since 1979; member of the Commonwealth
Language: English; also French patois, Creole
Literacy: 80%
Religion: Christian 96% (mostly Protestant), Spiritist 2%, Hindu 1%, Other 1%
WCC member churches: None

St Vincent and the Grenadines

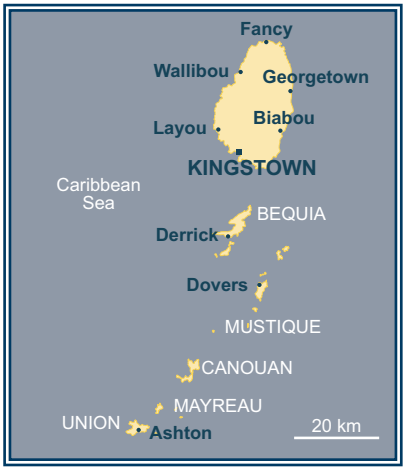
Seventeen islands in the Windward Islands.

Statistics

Population: 117,000
Government: Republic; member of the Commonwealth

Language: English

Literacy: 96%
Religion: Christian 89% (mostly Protestant), Hindu 3%, Non-religious 2%, Spiritist 2%, Muslim 2%, Baha'i 1%, Other 1%
WCC member churches: None



Suriname

(*Republic of Suriname*)

On the Caribbean coast of South America.



Statistics

Population: 420,000
Government: Republic of coalition governments
Language: Dutch; also English, Sranang Togo, others

Literacy: 93%

Religion: Christian 50%, Hindu 18%, Muslim 14%, Ethnic/Spiritist 9%, Baha'i 2%, Buddhist 1%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Moravian Church in Suriname

Literacy: 98%

Religion: Christian 65%, Hindu 23%, Muslim 7%, Non-religious 2%, Spiritist 2%, Baha'i 1%

WCC member churches: Presbyterian Church in Trinidad and Tobago

Trinidad and Tobago

(Republic of Trinidad and Tobago)

The southernmost island nation of the Lesser Antilles, near Venezuela.

Population: 1.3 million

Government: Parliamentary republic

Language: English; also Spanish, Hindi, Chinese, Portuguese, French



INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The Caribbean Council of Churches.
- o Warm seas and idyllic beaches.
- o Calypso, reggae, plena, merengue, salsa, and all the new rhythms being created in these islands.
- o Pepperpot stew, cou-cou, bananas, sweet potatoes, conch.
- o Patois, Creole, Srana, Bajan and other languages which fill these islands with meaning.

Pray for:

- o Political stability and ethical, honest leadership from those in power.
- o Improved economic status for all peoples.
- o An end to exploitation and oppression based on race, religion or rank.
- o Church leadership, ecumenism, and tolerance.
- o Improved health for all.
- o Those affected by hurricanes and floods.

PRAYERS

(1)

Glorious God, who makes your face shine upon your servants
and from whose love nothing can separate us,
grant us a discerning heart, so we may affirm
the inestimable love
which led your Son to Calvary
and makes available to us
the salvation that money cannot buy,
the privilege of the divine-human relationship
that is richer than bauxite ore,
more to be desired than marvellous beaches
and more precious than any costly pearl.

(2)

Eternal God, grant us to understand
that when we submit to the influence of your transforming love,
and our sense of values is inspired
by a vision of your rule of justice and righteousness,
we experience a willingness
to sacrifice all that the world values most highly
for the gift of righteousness that affirms the worth and dignity
which you entrust to us.

(3)

God,
I dream of a loving world
where we see each other
with your eyes.

I dream of a resourceful world
where we cherish the unique gift
of each other.

I dream of a hopeful world
where we recognize the power of your grace
to transform and make new.

I dream of peace.

(4)
 Hope is there
 like a smouldering fire
 that cannot be extinguished ...
 Some day that purifying furnace
 will heat a decent poor person's stove.

(5)
 Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.
 In the face of the relentless and apparently merciless progress of globalization,
 the Caribbean knows a new vulnerability.
 As the virus that collapses national economies moves closer to our shores,
 some of our economies already show symptoms of effective contagion.
 Drug abuse rages, crime increases;
 the chaos of changing values and mindsets is upon us;
 and the validity of religious faith meets new challenges.
 Lord God, Ruler of the universe,
 Creator, loving and just,
 with groaning, we approach you to make intercession
 for the people of the world.
 There is new strife, daily.
 There is new strife, constantly.
 Speed the diplomacy that can ease tensions between countries and regions.
 Let your kingdom of justice, peace and love rule in our hearts.
 We pray for the day when the corruption of one
 will signify a call to prayer and redemptive activity by all.
 We pray for the day when the hunger of one
 is an abomination to all,
 when the poverty of one is an anathema for all,
 when the distress of one is a burden we all will bear.

(6)
 Make us wise as to how fragile and dependent and connected we are,
 that in the indulgence in the destruction of others,
 we inevitably destroy ourselves.
 Save us from the callousness
 that causes domestic and political bickering
 that drowns out our concern for people in other lands,
 who are worse off than ourselves.

Give us the grace to be thankful for what we have, and the willingness to share.
 And yet, help us not to forget
 our responsibility to our nearer communities,
 and the people with whom we share life in the immediate surroundings:
 the sick, the homeless, the hungry,
 those who mistakenly seek solace in drugs and drunkenness,
 those who think they have power when they abuse our roadways
 to cause the carnage that brings sorrow into our lives.
 As your church labours in the world,
 cause it to be more interested
 in your reign of righteousness
 than in its own survival,
 so that the world may grow into a kinder, gentler, safer place
 in which to live.

(7)

PEACE PRAYER

When
 the rhythm of life
 is death
 and each breath
 a smoke-filled tear;
 when the siren sings
 the songs of lullaby:
Grant us your peace.

When
 humanness
 is trampled
 and lives are
 the currency we spend;
 when the stench of death
 rises with the morning sun:
Grant us your peace.

When
 the darkness
 is unending
 and each wall seems unyielding;
 when hope and despair conflict
 in ever-deepening fray:
Grant us your peace.

That we may anchor our souls
 in the One who is just,
 who renews our strength
 for the work to be done;
 may we look up
 to the One who is peace:

O Lord,
Grant us your peace.

(8)

AFFIRMATION

The Word, for our sake, became poverty, clothed as the poor.
 The Word, for our sake, became a path in the jungle,
 a decision in the fields, love in a woman,
 unity among workers, and a star for the few who sow dreams.
 And all those of goodwill hear the angels sing.

(9)

God, we ask that you be with those who travel;
 the tourists,
 who spend and collect and then forget –
 that they might remember what is real of what they live;
 the refugees and migrants,
 who save and lose but always remember –
 that they might forget
 what is inhuman of what they experience;
 the sojourners,
 who flee from injustice,
 who wander,
 who search for guidance,
 who seek to serve others – that they might find
 your voice,
 your touch,
 your love and presence.

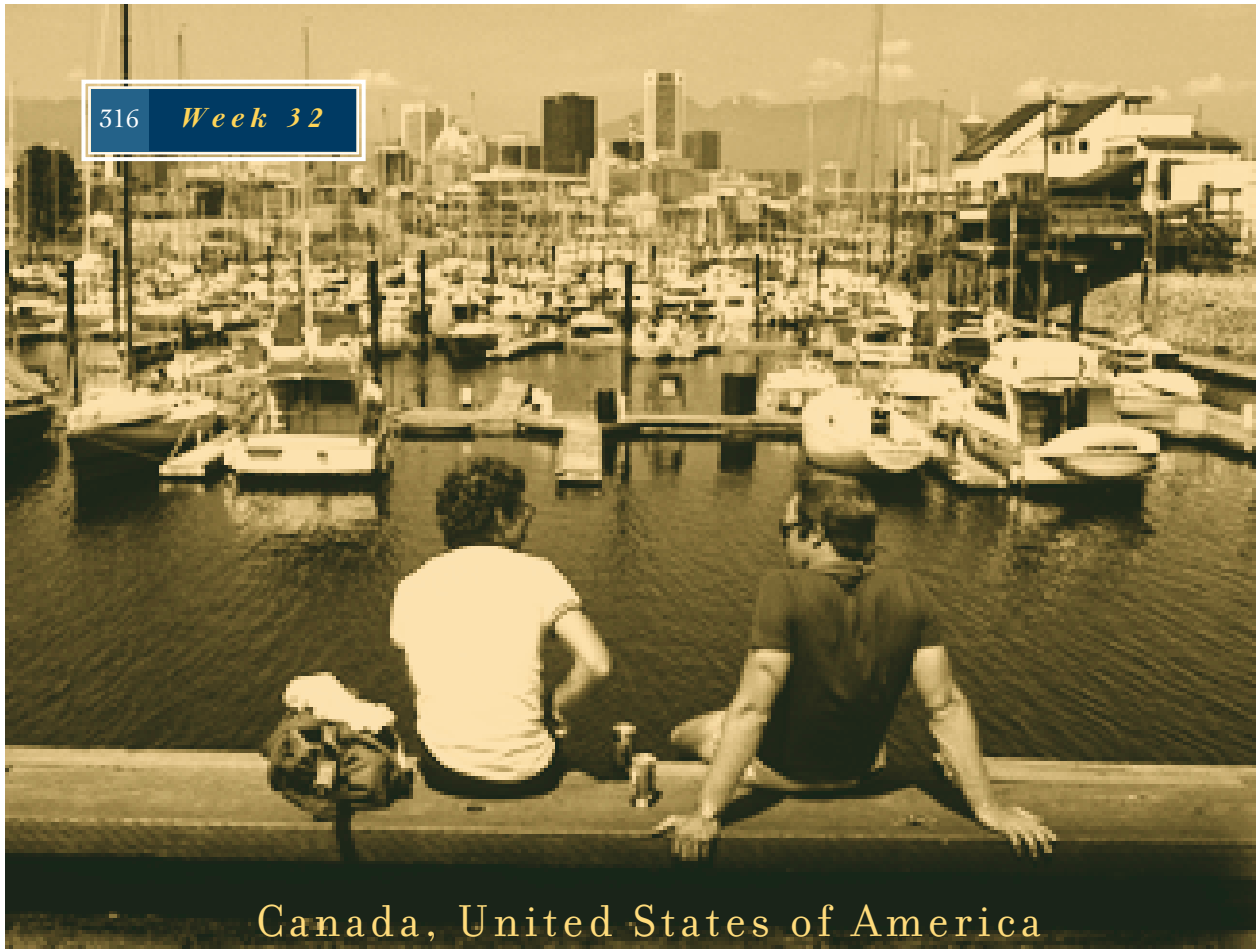
May we pay attention to the world around us,
 take the risks of change and hope,
 follow the call – always knowing
 that you travel with us.

(10)
Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
the privilege is ours
to share in the loving, healing, reconciling mission
of your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord,
in this age and wherever we are.
Since without you we can do no good thing:
May your Spirit make us wise;
May your Spirit guide us;
May your Spirit renew us;
May your Spirit strengthen us;
so that we will be
strong in faith,
discerning in proclamation,
courageous in witness,
persistent in good deeds.
This we ask through the name of the Father.

(11)
Creator God,
how could we possibly not thank you
for the earth you have given to us!
With joy we praise you
for the high mountains and their trees,
for the rushing waters of Caribbean rivers
which give the breath of inspiration
and the joy of fruitfulness,
for the forests so luxuriant in foliage,
the glorious tall trees
and the abundance of temperate climes.
Still more, we praise you
for the wisdom for living,
and the commitment which our dignified
and courageous ancestors taught us,
the neighbours in whom we became acquainted with you.

(12)
Gracious and compassionate God,
faithful to all your promises,
supplier of our needs,
may we never underestimate
the value of all that you afford us;
nor the usefulness of the endowments you give
for the realization of your purposes.
May we never so take for granted
the gifts your bounteous grace provides
as to become victims of the callousness
that produces an abundance of waste.
And save us, we ask you, from becoming
purveyors of the careless and irresponsible disposal
of the waste we produce.

(13)
God of truth and justice,
help us, your children, to understand that
it is more the Christ-like generosity and solidarity
displayed among the needy
that account for their survival
than the beneficence of the affluent.
Help us to discern that the transformative impact
of such generosity and solidarity
with the little resources available
remains a challenge and a rebuke
to the unrealized potential of the much
in the hands of the affluent
who do so little for the common good.



Canada, United States of America

Canada

Jesus is calling us into this world of pain, and to discover that we're blessed. What does that mean? That he is there, he is present. He's calling us to become more and more open, and thus to become freer and freer from fear. To be blessed is: we found our place. It's okay to be myself, it's okay to be there where I am, because I know that God is living in my heart, and I know that he is calling me to give life to others. Somewhere inside of me there's a deep peace. And there, I'm beginning to discover the harmony of the marriage between pain and joy, between death and resurrection. Joy flows from love. There is no such thing as true joy if it's just a flight from pain. And so as we enter reality, as we enter into the truth, as we enter into the truth together, in love, and in Jesus then our hearts spring forth in resurrection.

Jean Vanier



Statistics

Population: 32 million

Government: Confederation of ten provinces and three territories with parliamentary democracy, independent since 1867

Language: Officially bilingual English and French; also more than 70 other languages

Literacy: 96%

Religion: Christian 80%, Chinese folk religion

3%, Jewish 1%, Muslim 1%, Hindu 1%, Sikh 1%, Buddhist 1%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: *Anglican Church of Canada, Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Canada, Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Presbyterian Church in Canada, United Church of Canada*

History

A land of vast distances and rich natural resources, Canada is the second largest country in the world (after Russia). It is bordered by three oceans (Arctic to the north, Pacific to the west and Atlantic to the east) and has an unbroken border with the US across the North American continent. Much of Canada has a harsh Arctic or sub-arctic climate and is sparsely populated.

The indigenous people of Canada, called the First Nations, had already established complex societies and nations by the time the first Europeans (Vikings of Nordic origin) arrived on the Atlantic coast in the eleventh century. It was not until the sixteenth century, however, that European colonization began, first by the French, and later by the British. In 1760 these two fought a war over the territory, with France losing much of its land. In 1867 three of the British colonies formed a self-governing confederation, and in 1931 the Dominion of Canada achieved full independence from Britain, though retaining the British monarch as chief of state, represented by a governor-general appointed by the elected parliament. In the 1960s a strong nationalist movement arose in the predominantly French-speaking province of Quebec, and since then there have been calls in this region for separation, a move which has been defeated in a number of referenda. Quebec has, however, been granted increased autonomy, and reform measures such as the establishment of Canada as an officially bilingual state have been enacted.

Indigenous peoples in Canada have also lobbied for increased autonomy, the settlement of

their claim to their traditional aboriginal lands and the fulfilling of treaties that were enacted at the time of European colonization. The Northwest Territories were divided into two indigenous controlled regions in 1999: Denendeh, the land of the Dene nation, and Nunavut, an Inuit territory. In 1997 the government and the main churches that had managed Native residential schools made formal and separate apologies and were forced to pay some reparations to indigenous peoples for abuses they suffered while they attended government-funded schools. These were operated by the Anglican, Roman Catholic, United and Presbyterian churches as official agents of the government's policy of total assimilation of First Nations into a white European society. Thousands of lawsuits were brought for hundreds of millions of dollars against the government and the churches in the 1990s by the descendants of the abused First Nations' peoples. The suits (which still continue) almost bankrupted the four churches involved.

Multiculturalism is a defining characteristic of Canadian society. Approximately 40 per cent of the Canadian population have one origin other than British, French or First Nations. In 1971 Canada became the first country in the world to adopt a multiculturalism policy, directing the federal government to work towards achieving equality in the economic, social, cultural and political life of the country.

Air pollution and acid rain are significant problems in Canada, due to the concentration of industries in the southern part of the country, as well as pollution that is carried across the border from the US.

French priests brought Christianity to Canada in 1608; British Anglicans arrived in the early 1700s. They were followed by Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest Christian denomination, particularly among those of French descent. The United Church of Canada was formed in 1925 by the merger of Methodist, Congregational and half of existing Presbyterian churches, and is the sec-

ond largest church in Canada. The Anglican Church, which up until 1852 was the state church, is also sizeable. Immigration has brought communities of Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists and Chinese folk-religionists.

The Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) was formed in 1944, although one of its parent organizations dates to 1907. Protestants, Orthodox and Roman Catholics participate in the CCC. One important aspect of ecumenical work in Canada is to foster relationships between churches in the French and English-speaking communities. As in many other predominantly Christian countries, rising secularism has made a significant impact on the churches of Canada, which have lost both numbers and influence.

While Canada and the US share a continent and some cultural and religious commonalities, they are distinct countries: Canada follows more central policies, with greater national involvement in social, cultural and economic concerns. Canadians cherish their own political, cultural and religious history. There are few cross-border ecumenical initiatives for this reason and there is no regional council of churches in North America.

United States of America

The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. So it goes. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night

already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction ... The chain reaction of evil – hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars – must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation.

Martin Luther King, Jr



Statistics

Population: 280 million

Government: Federal republic

Language: English; also Spanish, German, Italian, Polish, indigenous languages and many others

Literacy: 95%

Religion: Christian 85%, Jewish 2%, Muslim 1%, Other 3%

WCC member churches: African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, American Baptist Churches in the USA, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Church of the Brethren, Episcopal Church in the USA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East (N.A. Diocese), Hungarian Reformed Church in America, International Council of Community Churches, International Evangelical Church, Moravian Church in America, National Baptist

Convention of America Inc., National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., Orthodox Church in America, Polish National Catholic Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc., Reformed Church in America, Religious Society of Friends, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church

History

The US is bordered to the north by Canada, to the east by the Atlantic Ocean, to the south by Mexico and to the west by the Pacific Ocean. The state of Alaska, by far the largest of the US's 50 states, is in the northwestern corner of the continent, bordered by Canada. The state of Hawaii is a chain of islands located in the Pacific Ocean, and there are also several partly autonomous territories in the Pacific and the Caribbean Sea.

Prior to the arrival of colonizers and settlers in the "New World", the continent was inhabited by thousands of "Indian" tribes who lived by hunting and fishing and who had developed complex and sophisticated societies and a deeply spiritual faith rooted in the integrity of creation. North America, called Turtle Island by many indigenous people, was lost to the tribes by a policy of settlement, forcing Indians onto reservations or into assimilation.

Immigration by Europeans began in the sixteenth century along the eastern coast, with Britain, Spain, France and the Netherlands establishing colonies. As the colonies gradually extended westward, settlers were joined by other immigrants and several hundred thousand Africans, who were forcibly transported to the Americas as slaves. The American colonies broke from Great Britain in 1776, defeating the British in the Revolutionary War. Wars continued to be fought throughout the continent as the US spread westward, displacing Native Americans and taking over territories settled by the Spanish, French and Dutch. During the 1860s a Civil War was fought over issues of power between the northern and southern parts of the country, one aspect of which was the institution of slavery. When the Civil War ended in 1863, there were nearly 4 mil-

lion African slaves in the US. Even after emancipation, African American citizens continued to experience segregation and discrimination. During the 1950s and 1960s the civil rights movement helped establish equal rights for all persons regardless of race, the integration of schools and an end to state-supported segregation. Discrimination based on race, however, continues to plague American communities.

During the twentieth century the US emerged alongside the Soviet Union as a superpower, with a strong economy, military infrastructure and advanced technology. The democratic form of US governance and free market economy have been viewed by many (but by no means all) as a model for nations around the world. After long struggles, the voting rights of women and minorities were constitutionally guaranteed. Immigration has made the US one of the world's most culturally diverse nations.

The US has been involved in numerous wars and conflicts, recently including the Cold War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, two Gulf Wars, and war in Afghanistan and Iraq. In 1945 America dropped nuclear bombs on two cities in Japan, killing hundreds of thousands of civilians, the only nation ever to have used nuclear weapons in a time of war. The US has by far the largest nuclear arsenal of any country in the world. The military and cultural aggressiveness of the world's only superpower, coupled with its economic dominance, have made it the object of anger and resentment in many parts of the world. During the 1980s and 1990s the US was the target of several terrorist attacks, the most devastating of which were those on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon outside Washington in September 2001. More than 3,000 people were killed. In response, the government of President George W. Bush detained more than 1,000 non-US nationals and attacked Afghanistan, as a beginning of the "war on Terrorism". Later, the US launched a "pre-emptive strike" on Iraq that killed many thousands of civilians.

The United States continues to struggle with issues of justice for all its citizens. The widespread use of handguns contributes to a high murder rate and to firearms accidents. In spite of its being one of the wealthiest nations, poverty and malnutrition exist in some segments of society.

Protestantism is by far the largest religion, and has been a formative element throughout the country's history. It was brought to the Americas in the sixteenth century by several different religious groups, some of which were fleeing persecution in Europe. Various other denominations were established in the country during a time known as the Great Awakening, including Baptists, Disciples of Christ, and numerous Evangelical, Independent and Pentecostal churches, as well as predominantly African American churches. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many US churches sent missionaries to Africa, Latin America and Asia.

The Roman Catholic Church came to the Americas with the Spanish in the early sixteenth century, and today is the single largest Christian denomination. A number of Orthodox churches

have been established by different immigrant groups. There are also several religious groups that arose out of American Christianity, including the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists and Scientologists.

The Jewish community is the largest in the world. Islam, originally practised only by immigrants from Arab and Asian countries, is a growing faith community, particularly among African Americans. There are also significant communities of Buddhists, Hindus, Baha'i and indigenous religions.

The primary national ecumenical body is the National Council of the Churches of Christ, which was founded in 1950 and includes Protestant and Orthodox churches. A previous Protestant council had been founded in 1908. The National Association of Evangelicals is another interchurch organization. There are also many state and local ecumenical and interfaith bodies. As in many developed nations, growing secularism has led to a decline in the numbers of some churches. In addition, there is a severe shortage of clergy in many churches.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Churches that see beyond their own congregations and countries to reach out to others in the name of Christ.
- o The National Council of the Churches of Christ USA, and the Canadian Council of Churches, and their efforts towards unity.
- o Those who tell stories from other parts of the world linking the poverty of the developing world to the consumerism and wealth of North Americans.
- o Those who work for the rights of women and children.
- o Those who walk instead of driving a car, who take the public bus instead of their own van, who call for an end to the wasteful use of the earth's resources.
- o Maple syrup and pumpkin pie.

Pray for:

- o Continued efforts to ensure the rights of all peoples in Canada: First Nations, English and French speaking, and all immigrants.
- o An end to the creation and proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.
- o Those who experience poverty, discrimination and lack of opportunity amid great wealth, and for the growing gap between rich and poor.
- o Those affected by terrorist attacks.
- o Revitalization in the churches and renewed leadership.

PRAYERS

(1)

Grandfather, grandmother, look at our brokenness. We know that in all creation only the human family has strayed from the Sacred Way. We know that we are divided, and we are the ones who must come back together to walk in the Sacred Way. O Creator God, Sacred One, teach us love, compassion and honour, that we may heal the earth and heal each other.

(2)

O God, you taught our [African American] ancestors
to sing the songs of Zion from their souls,
even as their hearts were breaking.
Under the tyranny of the Middle Passage and slavery,
auction blocks and shackles,
our oppressors attempted to humiliate and destroy us.
Melodious God, through our music we persevered,
we pressed forward, we trusted you,
and sang your praises, even in a strange land.
With the spirituals and hymns of the African American church,
we have moaned, hummed, sung, and shouted
to your glory for the release of our oppressed souls.
We sing with the Spirit; and we sing with understanding also.
For us there has been no liberation movement without a song.
From across the continent of Africa and throughout the diaspora,
let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

(3)

O God, we thank you for this worship time.
We pray that all ways of all peoples come together in understanding.
We pray that world leadership come together

to end the needless waste of war spending.
 We pray that the ways of the Native people live on.
 We pray that our environment may become cleaner and less polluted.
 We pray for our friends who are sick and need help.
 O God, we pray for this world so that all these nuclear weapons
 and other bad things that we point at each other
 will some day soon be destroyed.
 We pray that adversaries will communicate
 and all of the mistrust will be healed.
 We pray for the renewal of our Mother Earth. *Hetchetu aloh* (It is good).
Mitaquye oyasin. (All is related. All the four-legged, the winged, the swimming,
 the two-legged, even the rock, are all related to one another and all are equal.)

(4)
 Your bread-body broken,
 your wine-blood shed,
 have I ever really come to your table?
 Feeling enough
 to break?
 Caring enough
 to bleed?
 Have I ever really come to your table
 sustained
 by your life-giving bread?
 Or consumed
 by my bread-seeking life?
 Breaking and bleeding
 for my Judases?
 Or breaking and making
 my Judases bleed?

But still you invite me
 to come to your table.
 Break my stubborn indifference.
 Shed my venomous pride.
 Make me one with the ones
 whose life in the Son
 I share
 in the Bread
 and the Wine

(5)

God of all hope;

hear our prayer.

When money becomes a prison:

free us to choose life.

Where wealth turns into addiction:

free us to choose life.

When income determines worth:

free us to choose life.

Where poverty equals invisibility:

free us to choose life.

When economies deepen injustice:

free us to choose life.

Where greed invents new oppressions:

free us to choose life.

when finance rules every decision:

free us to choose life.

where consumption replaces compassion:

free us to choose life.

(6)

To wake from sleep into this day

is gift enough for thanks.

To hear a child's delight in laughter

is gift enough for thanks.

To sip a glass of clean, cold water

is gift enough for thanks.

To watch the sunset paint the sky

is gift enough for thanks.

To share a moment with a friend

is gift enough for thanks.

To smell the fragrance of moist soil

is gift enough for thanks.

To feel the comfort of clean clothing

is gift enough for thanks.

To form the words that make a prayer

is gift enough for thanks.

(7)

V1 In the beginning was God.

V2 In the beginning, the source of all that is,

V3 In the beginning, God, yearning,

V4 God, moaning.

V1 God, labouring

V2 God, giving birth.

V3 God, rejoicing.

V4 And God loved what God had made.

V1 And God said, All this is good.

V2 Then God, knowing that all that is good is shared,

V3 held the earth tenderly in God's arms.

V4 God yearned for relationship.

V1 God longed to share the good earth.

V2 And humanity was born in the yearning of God.

V3 We were born to share the earth.

V4 In the earth was the seed.

V1 In the seed was the grain.

V2 In the grain was the harvest.

V3 In the harvest was the bread.

V4 In the bread was the power.

V1 And God said, All shall eat of the earth.

V2 All shall eat of the seed.

V3 All shall eat of the grain.

V4 All shall eat of the harvest.

V1 All shall eat of the bread.

V2 All shall eat of the power.

V3 God said, You are my people,

V4 my friends

V1 my lovers

V2 my sisters

V3 and brothers.

V4 All of you shall eat

V1 of the bread

V2 and the power.

V3 All shall eat.

V4 Then God, gathering up God's courage in love said,

V1 Let there be bread.

V2 And God's sisters, God's friends and lovers,

knelt on the earth

V3 planted the seeds,

V4 prayed for the rain,

V₁ sang for the grain,
 V₂ made the harvest,
 V₃ cracked the wheat,
 V₄ pounded the corn,
 V₁ kneaded the dough,
 V₂ kindled the fire,
 V₃ filled the air with the smell of fresh bread,
 V₄ and there was bread!
 V₁ And it was good!

V₂ We, the sisters and brothers of God say today,
 V₃ All shall eat of the bread,
 V₄ and the power.
 V₁ We say today,
 V₂ All shall have power
 V₃ and bread.
 V₄ Today we say,
 V₁ Let there be bread.
 V₂ And let there be power!
 V₃ Let us eat of the bread and the power!
 V₄ And all will be filled
 V₁ for the bread is rising!

V₂ By the power of God
 V₃ women are blessed.
 V₂ By the women of God
 V₃ the bread is blessed.
 V₄ By the bread of God
 V₁ the power is blessed.
 V₄ By the power of bread,
 V₁ the power of women,
 V₂ the power of God,
 V₃ the people are blessed.
 V₁, V₂, V₃, V₄ The earth is blessed.

And the bread is rising.

(8)
 God, we want to choose a life of nonviolence,
 to hiss, but not to harm;
 to hear the voice that calls us beloved,
 to be compassion within compassion;
 to choose right action, not results;
 to cry out for righteousness, but not kill for revenge,
 to throw star after star against a dark sky;

to stretch out our hands and reach what we cannot.
 Give us the strength and courage not only to believe but to act;
 to recognize our own participation in violence
 and our need for conversion;
 to challenge the unjust and violent structures of our day;
 to gather, time and again, around the table in dialogue;
 to create and promote peaceful alternatives wherever we are;
 to continue to be a voice and witness of nonviolence.

Our journey through the doorway to peace
 begins with the step we choose to take today.
 Be with us. Guide us. Love us into your love beyond measure.

(9)

CALL TO WORSHIP

Let all who are thirsty come;
let them drink of the water that has no price.

Let all who are hungry come;
let them eat of the bread that has no cost.

All without money, come, buy, and eat!
Drink what is good, and delight in the Lord.

(10)

O Lord of the Good Harvest,
 receive the prayer of those who plough fields
 and scatter seed upon the earth,
 those who build barns and fill them with the fruit of their labours.
 We come before you humbly,
 asking that you enter our barns and inspect our crops.
 Look within us and judge whether we are rich towards you
 or for ourselves.
 Where we are found wanting, convict us, and create in us a new heart.
 Our barns are full, O Lord, but they are bursting with bitter fruits.
 Where we keep anger, you would have stored compassion,
 where we keep malice, you would have stored love;
 where we keep deception, you would have stored truth.
 Compassion, love, truth:
 these and more you would have us sow and reap,
 increase and multiply, that all might eat and be filled,
 drink and be satisfied, make merry and be thankful,
 being rich towards you, the Provider of Life.

(11)
 When I have thought on all of you
 my meagre soul can bear,
 O God,
 still turn my thoughts to you again;
 pursue me,
 my relentless Lord,
 to corners where I crouch and quake,
 for your name's sake.

(12)
GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Sursum corda

Holy God, Holy One, Holy Three!
 Before all that is, you were God.
 Outside all we know, you are God.
 After all is finished, you will be God.
 Archangels sound the trumpets,
 angels teach us their song,
 saints pull us into your presence.

And this is our song:

Sanctus

Holy God, Holy One, Holy Three!
 You beyond galaxies,
 you under the oceans,
 you inside the leaves,
 you pouring down rain,
 you opening flowers,
 you feeding insects,
 you giving us your image,
 you carrying us through the waters,
 you holding us in the night;
 your smile on Sarah and Abraham,
 your hand with Moses and Miriam,
 your words through Deborah and Isaiah,
 you lived as Jesus among us,
 healing, teaching, dying, rising, inviting us all to your feast.

Words of institution

Holy God, we remember your Son,
 his life with the humble,

his death among the wretched,
 his resurrection for us all:
 your wisdom our guide,
 your justice our strength,
 your grace our path to rebirth.

And so we cry, Mercy:

Mercy.

And so we cry, Glory:

Glory.

And so we cry, Blessing:

Blessing.

Holy God, we beg for your Spirit.
 Enliven this bread,
 awaken this body,
 pour us out for each other.
 Transfigure our minds,
 ignite your church,
 nourish the life of the earth.
 Make us, while many, united;
 make us, though broken, whole;
 make us, despite death, alive.

And so we cry, Come, Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit.

And so the church shouts, Come, Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit.

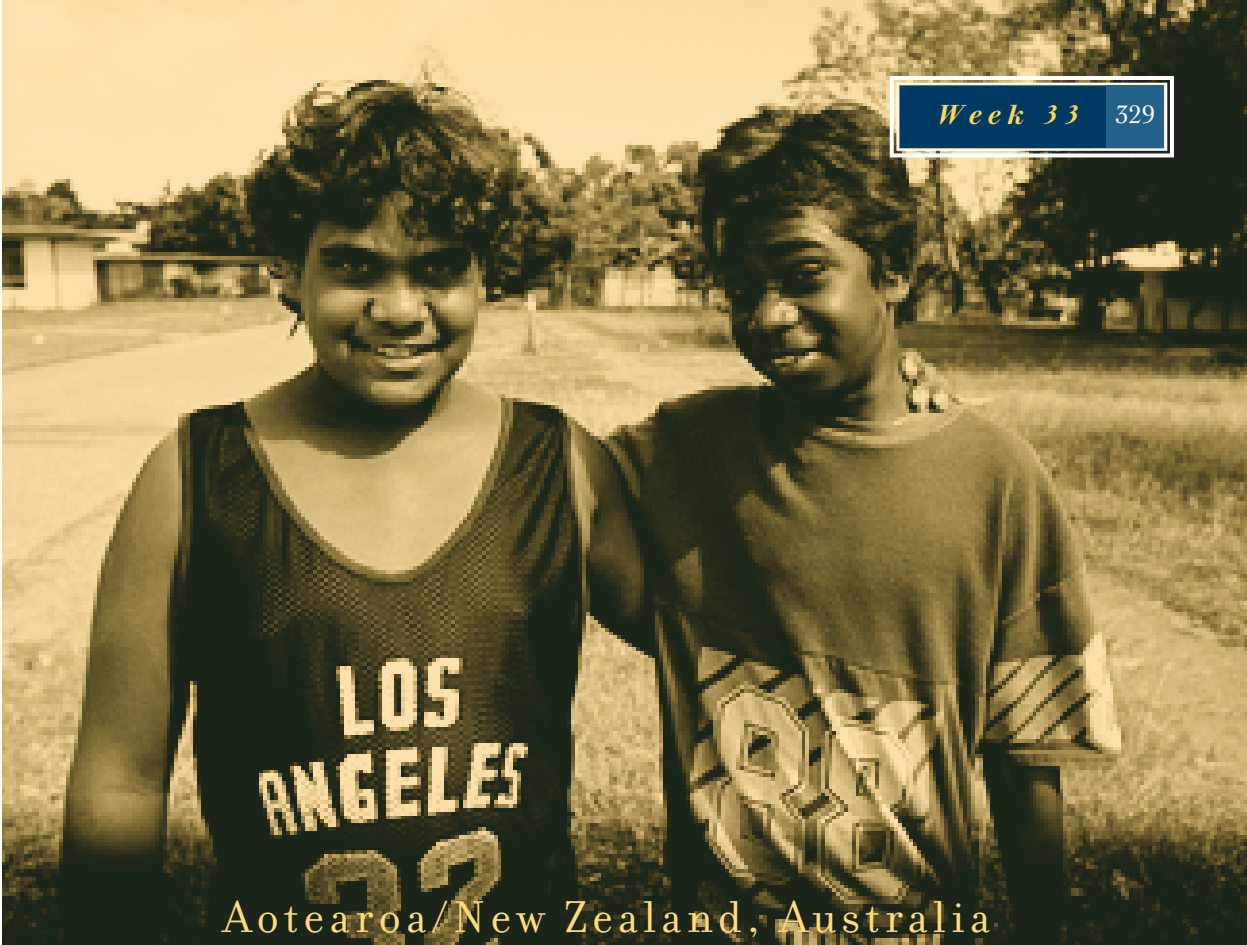
And so the earth pleads, Come, Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit.

You, Holy God, Holy One, Holy Three –
 our Life, our Mercy, our Might,
 our Table, our Food, our Server,
 our Sovereign, our Water, our Wine,
 our Light, our Treasure, our Tree,
 our Way, our Truth, our Life –
 You Holy God, Holy One, Holy Three!

Praise now,
 praise tomorrow,
 praise forever.
 And so we cry, Amen.

Amen.



Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia

When the Lord calls Aboriginal men and women out of this world to do his work, he does not take away their culture or language and their true identity as Aboriginal people. He blesses them and gives them his word of commission to go into the world and preach the Gospel ... and he wants his disciples to communicate his words in the context of their own culture, so that the people can understand and make their response to the Gospel in their own understanding ... I believe that the role of the church is to help people develop without losing their true identity – both as individuals and ... as a people.

Djiniyini Gondarra

Aotearoa/ New Zealand



Statistics
Population: 3.9 million
Government: Parliamentary democracy
Language: English and Maori, both official; Samoan, Tongan, Chinese and others

Literacy: 100%

Religion: Christian 84%, Buddhist 1%, Hindu 1%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, Associated Churches of Christ in New Zealand, Baptist Union of New Zealand, Methodist Church of New Zealand, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

H i s t o r y

Located southeast of Australia in the South Pacific Ocean, Aotearoa/New Zealand consists of two main islands (North and South) and a number of smaller islands.

The Polynesian Maori reached the volcanic islands of New Zealand in about 800. In 1849 Christian missionaries persuaded Maori chieftains to enter into a compact with Great Britain, called the Treaty of Waitangi, in which they ceded sovereignty to Queen Victoria while retaining their territorial rights in perpetuity. Promptly, that same year, the British violated the treaty and began the first organized white colonial settlement, causing a series of land wars between 1843 and 1872, which the Maoris lost. This resulted in a period of forced assimilation which the Maori steadfastly resisted.

The British colony of New Zealand became an independent dominion in 1907, with the British monarch as head of state. Maoris, however, always called their islands Aotearoa (land of the long white cloud). Gradually, it was unofficially incorporated into the country's name, even though Maoris constitute only 13 per cent of the population. Tensions continue between ethnic Maori and *pakeha* (whites) over the rights of Maori to their land as guaranteed by the Treaty of Waitangi. During the 1980s and 1990s, tribunals began to hear and settle claims by the Maori about breaches of the treaty.

New Zealand has a diverse ecology, with over 1,500 indigenous species of plants and animals that are found nowhere else in the world. It has strong conservation policies to preserve the

environment. In 1987 New Zealand declared itself a nuclear free zone, forbidding testing on its islands and nuclear powered or armed ships from entering its ports. During the 1990s the country restructured its voting procedures and dismantled parts of its humane social welfare system. In some areas there is high unemployment.

While most people are nominally Christian, New Zealand is increasingly secular. The Anglican Church of New Zealand is the single largest denomination, followed closely by the Roman Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand. The Conference of Churches in Aotearoa/New Zealand was an ecumenical group composed of Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches throughout the country. It ceased operation at the end of 2005. The Maori ecumenical body in Aotearoa/New Zealand is associated with the WCC.

A u s t r a l i a
(Commonwealth of Australia)



Statistics
Population: 19.9 million
Government: Federal parliamentary state
Language: English and over 260 Aboriginal languages
Literacy: 99%

Religion: *Christian 79%, Buddhist 2%, Muslim 1%, Jewish 1%, Other 1%*

WCC member churches: *Anglican Church of Australia, Churches of Christ in Australia, Uniting Church in Australia.*

H i s t o r y

Australia is an island continent in the South Pacific, settled by Aboriginal people more than 40,000 years before the first white exploration began in the early seventeenth century. Its terrain is mostly low plateau, with a vast interior desert. A fertile plain exists in the southeastern part of the continent. Much of the country is sparsely populated despite high concentrations of people in metropolitan centres.

Australia's first people are today known by the generic name "Aboriginal". Australia was relatively unknown to the outside world until the eighteenth century, when British Captain James Cook landed at what is now Botany Bay. In 1787 Britain established a penal colony there, and continued to send British convicts to the island until 1850. In 1901 Australia became independent of Britain. Today, it has a prosperous capitalist economy. Australians struggle, however, with the residual effects of years of injustices suffered by the Aborigines, who continue to be marginalized, poor and victims of racism. Immigration laws are discriminatory towards non-whites and Orientals.

Some regions of Australia suffer regular droughts, while others are prone to floods and typhoons. Southeastern Australia has a high incidence of bushfires. The continent has a large number of animal and plant species that are found nowhere else on earth; however, some of these are threatened by the introduction of non-native species that spread rapidly, wiping out native populations. Pollution is a serious problem in some areas.

Although the majority of Aboriginal people today are Christian, ancient religious traditions are widely practised. As with many other nations, the religious life of Australia is shaped by the countries of origin of its immigrants. The two largest Christian bodies are the Roman Catholic Church (which arrived from central Europe and the Philippines) and the Anglican Church (with its roots in England). The National Council of Churches in Australia is an ecumenical association of churches. A church born of ecumenical union, the Uniting Church in Australia, consists of former Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians. In addition to the Anglican Church of Australia and the Churches of Christ, there are a number of evangelical and Pentecostal churches, and a sizeable Orthodox population. Churches are also associated with the regional Pacific Conference of Churches and with the Christian Conference of Asia.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The wondrous diversity of creation and those who seek to be good stewards.
- o Aboriginal and Maori cultures and those who try to preserve the best of them.
- o Gum trees and kangaroos, wallabies and kiwi fruit, Aoraki/Mt Cook and Uluru/Ayers Rock.
- o Coral reefs and the wonders of life they contain.
- o Societies becoming multicultural and learning to be more open to those who are different.
- o Lively debate and political wit.

Pray for:

- o The rights and lives of Aboriginal peoples, who have lived in Australia for thousands of years.
- o The rights of Maori people, who were the original inhabitants of Aotearoa/New Zealand.
- o Those who witness to the strength of the Gospel to highly secularized cultures.
- o An end to discrimination against refugees and migrants seeking a better, safer life.
- o Those who oppose violence and war.

PRAYERS

(1)

God of the southern sea
and of the islands of Aotearoa/New Zealand,
of Maori, Pakeha
and of all who dwell in that land;
We give you thanks and praise for their country,
and for what they have achieved together.
Increase their trust in one another;
strengthen their quest for justice,
and bring them to unity and a common purpose.
You have made them of one blood;
make them also of one mind.

(2)

God, we are very conscious of the barriers we have built so high between ourselves. We are ashamed of all the time and energy we have spent barricading ourselves from each other.

Jesus, who breaks down all barriers, help us to demolish ours and to be willing to make friends with others.

We bring to you our petty and self-centred anger of hurt pride and wounded feelings that readily lashes out with tongue or fist. And yet not all anger is wrong. We are thankful for that anger which we can be proud of – the sort of anger which berates injustice and fights for the underdog.

Jesus, who shares all our emotions, but who chose always the way of love, forgive us our wrongful anger. Take away our smallness of mind and fill us instead with your far-seeing compassion.

We bring to you our grudges, our hurts and disappointments. We confess that we have nursed them so closely and covered them up so well that they have festered within us. The pain of unreleased hurts is too much to bear.

Jesus, our healer, clean out these wounds within us today, we pray. Help us to allow the healthy scar tissue of forgiveness to form.

We remember with shame those we have hurt, trodden on, ignored or dismissed.

Jesus, friend of the outcast, forgive us our insensitive pride. Forgive us for taking as a right all the good things your world offers with no thought for others.

We confess that in all our absorption with self, we have rarely heard your "still small voice". We hear it now though, with frightening clarity. "I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not invite me in. I needed clothes and you did not clothe me. I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me."

Jesus, forgive us. Open our eyes. We hear your call at last to open our hearts and homes to the needy around us. You who held nothing back from us expect us to go the extra mile. Help us to give willingly and even joyfully.

Our prayer is heard, we are forgiven. Jesus says, "I love you, live in my love." We are the continuing ministry of Christ's love.

(3)

God of holy dreaming, Great Creator Spirit,
from the dawn of creation you have given your children
the good things of Mother Earth.

You spoke and the gum tree grew.

In the vast desert and dense forest,
and in cities at the water's edge,
creation sings your praise.

Your presence endures
as the rock at the heart of our land.

When Jesus hung on the tree
you heard the cries of all your people
and became one with your wounded ones:
the convicts, the hunted and the dispossessed.

The sunrise of your Son coloured the earth anew
and bathed it in glorious hope.

In Jesus we have been reconciled to you,
to each other and to your whole creation.

Lead us on, Great Spirit,
as we gather from the four corners of the earth.

Enable us to walk together in trust
from the hurt and shame of the past
into the full day which has dawned in Jesus Christ.

(4)
 Everliving God,
 your Son Jesus Christ
 gave himself as living bread
 for the life of the world;
 give us such knowledge of his presence
 that we may be strengthened
 and sustained by his risen life
 to serve you continually;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(5)
 Keep your church alert, Holy Spirit,
 ready to hear when you are calling,
 and when you challenge us.
 keep us hopeful, Holy Spirit,
 knowing that Christ will come again.

Rouse our spirits, Lord Jesus,
 that whenever you come to the door and knock
 you may find us awake,
 ready to admit and serve you.

Stir up, O Lord,
 the wills of your faithful people
 that, richly bearing the fruits of good works,
 they may, by you, be richly rewarded;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(6)
CALL TO WORSHIP

God who walks on the water of our fears,
 stretching out a hand to hold us firm,
 and telling us not to be afraid:
we come to worship you in faith.

God who speaks to us in story and word,
 in each other, and in life itself:
**we come to worship you in faith,
 for you are our God and we are your people.**

(7)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Dear God, as we think about our life,
as individuals and together,
we are facing times
when we choose to remain in the boat of security,
rather than stepping over the side into the waters of your mission.

Silent reflection

There are also times when we do take some steps in faith,
but when we sink a little,
we forget to reach for your hand, Jesus Christ,
relying on our own strength to save us
and the life we try to live in your name.

Silent reflection

For we are those of little faith sometimes, O God,
your vulnerable and fragile people.

**Forgive us and build us up in hope and faith,
that we may be true to our calling.**

Words of assurance

The hand of God reaches out to save us,
to forgive us and to hold us in the rough waters of life.
Take hold of that hand in faith
and accept the grace of God,
for it is ours today and every day.
We are forgiven.

(8)

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

We thank you, O God,
that you call to us to walk on water,
as though miracles are indeed possible
and the life of faith a glorious hope for different things.
We thank you that you step into the water ahead of us,
as our saviour and our guide.

(9)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

O God, faced with the dimensions of your life,
we are as specks of dust.
We live our little lives with ideas of great things
and then lose heart when we cannot see
the fruits of what we do.

Silent reflection

Hold us into your way, Jesus Christ.

Forgive us when we choose another.

Forgive us if we think we have found treasure,
choosing things which give us instant gratification
or experiences of personal power.

Forgive us if we place our faith in false places,
looking to those who seduce us with easy answers
or move us towards self-righteousness.

Hold us into your way, Jesus Christ.

Forgive us when we choose another.

Be gracious to us if we take from others,
holding to ourselves treasures which would bring them justice,
turning our eyes away from the harder path
which would transform the world.

Hold us into your way, Jesus Christ.

**Forgive us when we choose another,
for we long to be your true people.**

Words of assurance

God is never discouraged by our human failures.
This God turns us round and leads us on
into the ways of eternal truth and love.

We are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

(10)

CALL TO WORSHIP

God who live and breathe in all time,
all space, all histories,
and all people in every age,

God of eternity:

**we bow before you,
for we are your humble people.**

Christ, Bread of life,
living witness to eternal life
in all its costliness and joy:

**we bow before you,
for we are your humble people.**

Holy Spirit, our company for ever,
leading us, guiding us in eternal faithfulness:

**we bow before you,
for we are your humble people.**

We worship you this day.

(11)

Blessed are you, God of the Universe.
you have created us and given us life.

Blessed are you, God of the planet earth.
You have set our world like a radiant jewel in the heavens,
and filled it with action, beauty, suffering, struggle and hope.

Blessed are you, God of Aotearoa/New Zealand,
in all the peoples who live there,
in all the lessons they have learned,
in all that remains for them to do.

Blessed are you because you need us;
because you make us worthwhile,
because you give us people to love
and work to do
for your universe, for your world and for ourselves.

(12)

MORNING BLESSING*Haere mai te Wairua Tapu**Aio kit e whenua*

Come, Holy Spirit.

Deep peace to the earth.

*Haere mai te Wairua Tapu**Aio kit e moana*

Come, Holy Spirit.

Deep peace to the sea.

*Haere mai te Wairua Tapu**Aio ki nga tangata*

Come, Holy Spirit.

Deep peace to the people.

*Haere mai te Wairua Tapu**Aio ki ahau*

Come, Holy Spirit.

Deep peace to me.

(13)

Kia ora, my friend. Welcome.You bring honour to my house
and a blessing to my *whanau*.Come in, spend time with us
and we will talk. You and I,
of good things.You know, when I was young
I had a picture of you in my head,

a young Jewish man in a long robe,
 and that is true, my friend, that is true,
 But you grew with me over the years
 and now I know that your *whakapapa*
 belongs as much here, as over there
 or anywhere else.
 You are one of our people,
 one with these mountains,
 one with this land.
Haere mai e Hehu Karaiti,
 Welcome, Christ Jesus,
 this is your home.

(14)

GREENNESS

Dear God, there are times
 when I hear your voice most clearly
 in greenness: in the singing of sap,
 the conversation of the leaves, the whisperings
 of shoot and stem, root, sap and cell,
 calling me back to creation
 to feel again the freshness of you
 running through everything
 like a bright emerald current.

God of greenness, you know well my tendency
 to fill my life with my own methods of communication.
 Thank you for constantly returning me to the simplicity of yours.
 Again I experience you in the rejoicing
 of bare feet on a damp forest path,
 in the wonder of light thrown against
 a kaleidoscope of tree ferns,
 in the myriad textures of moss-clad trees,
 in the shining of you beneath every surface.

Beloved Creator, coming to our greenness
 is always a coming home,
 a time of peace and grace
 as the unimportant in me falls away
 and I know again that bright green shoot
 of my own beginning
 which comes from you
 and is one with you,
 bright and beautiful God.



Oceania

Fiji, French Polynesia, Kanaky, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu

We are just small dots in the vast Pacific Ocean. Now is the time for us to become more visible or we will disappear. Global warming and resulting climate change is not a theoretical issue. For us it's a matter of life and death. How much more can we adapt? The Kyoto Protocol on climate change is a milestone, but there are continued threats to the survival of our region that must be addressed.

Selai Cati

History

The area known as Oceania includes more than 2,000 islands in over 30 groupings. The Pacific Ocean covers one half of the maritime surface of the earth: about 176 million square kilometres, of which only about 10 million square kilometres is land (9.2 sq. km of which is New Zealand and Australia). The island states discussed here fall culturally and geographically into three main areas: Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia. They cover a geographical area bounded on the west by the Philippines, on the south by Australia and New Zealand, and on the northeast by Hawaii.

While they share some traits, these island nations vary widely. Kanaky and Nauru consist of a single island, while the Marshall Islands includes over 1,000. New Guinea is by far the most diverse, with over 1,000 distinct ethnic groups speaking over 800 languages. A few island definitions: an atoll is a ring-shaped coral island that nearly or completely surrounds a lagoon; an archipelago is a group or chain of islands; and an islet is a very small island.

Ancient customs often predominate in these islands. They were uninhabited 50,000 years ago, but gradually people began to arrive in small numbers from Asia. In the sixteenth century the first Spanish explorers began to penetrate the region with their missionaries. The western world brought dramatic transformations over the last 150 years. Changes in technology, energy, social services, education and health care have trapped most island cultures in dependence on developed nations. While people on the islands were once able to lead simple and independent lives, in the midst of the world economy they have become marginalized and poor. The one exception is the island nation of Nauru, which once had the richest source of phosphates in the world. Profits from the mining and now from offshore banking have made it by far the wealthiest in the area, at least for some of the population. However, the mining has left 80 per cent of the island unusable, leading to overcrowding.

In addition to economic difficulties, violence and political instability mark several of these island nations. In Fiji there has been political turmoil between the 60 per cent of the population who are Melanesian and the 40 per cent who are ethnic Indian. Bougainville Island in Papua New Guinea has also been the scene of violent upheaval and is attempting to become a separate state. A coup in the Solomon Islands in 2000 has left that nation without a working government. There is also political unrest on Vanuatu. Two nations, Kanaky and Tonga, are in the midst of difficult political transitions, and French Polynesia is still negotiating with its colonizing country. The United States and France continue to use some islands for military purposes. Throughout the islands, indigenous peoples find their traditional cultures, languages and human rights endangered.

These nations are prone to volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and hurricanes. Nuclear fallout from weapons testing by France in French Polynesia and the United States in the Marshall Islands has caused radiation sickness. Global warming is

causing the sea level to rise, and many islands are disappearing or shrinking. Tuvalu is particularly endangered by global warming, since most of its land lies only 2 metres above sea level.

In 1797 the London Missionary Society brought Christianity to Tahiti. During the 1800s the Methodists, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics and Anglicans established churches on the larger islands. During the 1900s the Seventh-day Adventists, the Baha'i faith and the Mormons arrived. Today, Christianity is the primary faith of most of the islands. In the face of the vast distances, the isolation, and the enormous cultural and linguistic disparities of the Pacific, the Christian church has acted as a powerful centre and uniting force in Pacific society, though it has itself been greatly hampered by its own denominational insularity. The Pacific Conference of Churches has worked to overcome this insularity through workshops, and the encouragement of Pacific-wide research and scholarship. There are also several ecumenical councils operating in the region, including the National Council of Churches in American Samoa, the Papua New Guinea Council of Churches, the Samoa Council of Churches, and the Tonga National Council of Churches. WCC member churches of the independent island nations in the Pacific region are listed below. However, there are three WCC member churches on islands that are still in association with colonial powers: the Congregational Christian Church in American Samoa (US), the Cook Islands Christian Church (New Zealand) and the Congregational Christian Church of Niue (New Zealand).

Fiji

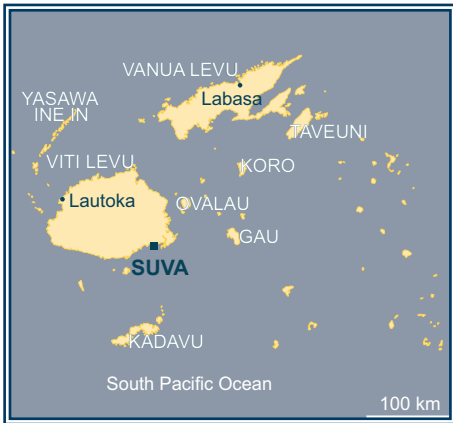
(Sovereign Democratic Republic of Fiji)

Two main islands and over 100 smaller islands.

S t a t i s t i c s

Population: 820,000

Government: *Independent of Britain since 1970; political coups in 1987 and 2000 have left the nation politically unstable*

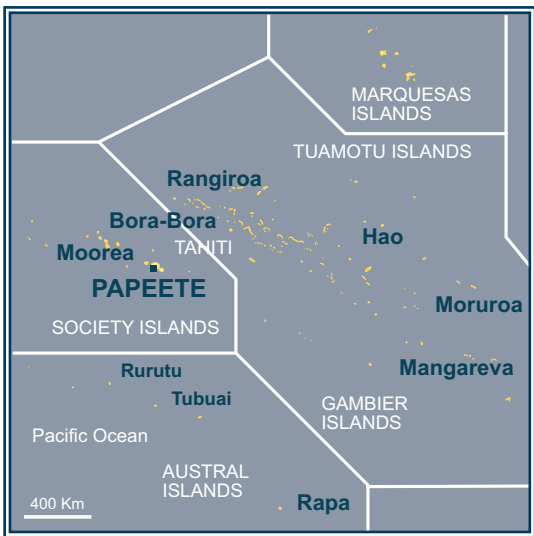


Language: English, Fijian, Hindustani
Literacy: 95%
Religion: Christian 57% (mostly Protestant), Hindu 33%, Muslim 7%, Other 2%
WCC member churches: Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma

French Polynesia

(Overseas Territory of French Polynesia)

Five island archipelagos with over 100 islands, of which Tahiti is the largest.



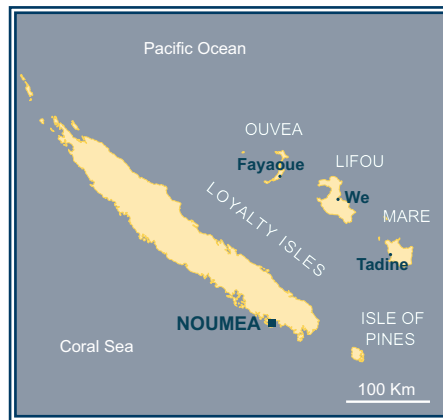
Statistics

Population: 260,000
Government: Overseas territory of France since 1946; received some autonomy from France in 1977, but retains representation in the French Senate and Assembly
Language: French; also Tahitian, Chinese
Literacy: 95%
Religion: Christian 88%, Chinese folk religion 8%, Other 4%
WCC member churches: Maòhi Protestant Church

Kanaky

(New Caledonia)

Single island, originally a French overseas territory.



Statistics

Population: 213,000
Government: Autonomous partnership since 1998, with former French colonizers
Language: French; also Melanesian, Uvean, Javanese, Tahitian, Vietnamese and 20 others
Literacy: 57%
Religion: Christian 87% (mostly Roman Catholic), Muslim 3%, Buddhist 1%, Other 3%
WCC member churches: Evangelical Church in New Caledonia and the Loyalty Isles

Kiribati

(Republic of Kiribati)

Three archipelagos with 33 coral atolls.



Statistics

Population: 100,000

Government: Democratic republic, independent of Britain since 1979; formerly known as the Gilbert Islands

Language: English; also Gilbertese (Kiribati), Chinese

Literacy: 90%

Religion: Christian 94% (almost entirely Roman Catholic), Baha'i 5%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Kiribati Protestant Church

Marshall Islands

(Republic of the Marshall Islands)

Thirty-four atolls with more than 1,000 islands.

Statistics

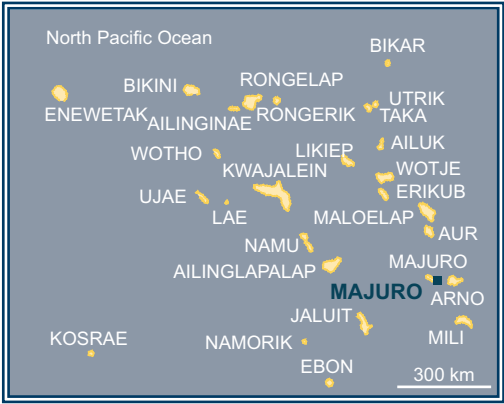
Population: 57,000

Language: Marshallese and English

Government: Independent republic, which still maintains an army base on the Marshalls

Religion: Christian 96%, Baha'i 1%, Non-religious/other 3%,

Literacy: 91%



WCC member churches: United Church of Christ – Congregational in the Marshall Islands

Micronesia

(Federated States of Micronesia)

Four federated states, including over 600 islands.



Statistics

Population: 108,000

Government: Federal republic, in free association with the United States

Language: English; also Trukese, Ponapean, Yapese, Mortlock, Kosraen and others

Literacy: 76% (men 67%, women 87%)

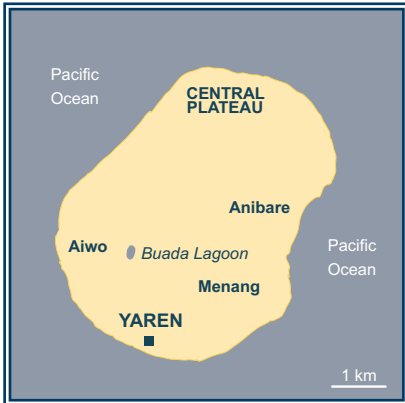
Religion: Christian 93% (mostly Roman Catholic), Ethnic 4%, Baha'i 2%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

Nauru

(Republic of Nauru)

Single island. World's smallest independent republic.



Statistics

Population: 19,000

Government: Republic in free association with the United States since 1982

Language: Palauan, English

Literacy: 97%

Religion: Christian 96%, Buddhist 1%, Baha'i 1%

WCC member churches: None

Papua New Guinea

(Independent State of Papua New Guinea)

Eastern half of the island of New Guinea (the western half of which is Irian Jaya, part of Indonesia), Bougainville Island, and a number of smaller islands.



Statistics

Population: 12,000

Government: Republic

Language: Nauruan, English

Literacy: 99%

Religion: Christian 75% (mostly Protestant), Chinese folk religion 11%, Baha'i 10%, Non-religious/other 3%, Chinese 1%

WCC member churches: None

Palau

(Republic of Palau)

Twenty-six islands and over 300 islets; part of the West Carolines.



Statistics

Population: 5.4 million

Government: Constitutional monarchy

Language: English; over 800 other languages

Literacy: 72% (men 81%, women 62%)

Religion: Christian 95% (mostly Protestant), Ethnic 4%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea, United Church in Papua New Guinea

Samoa

(Independent State of Samoa)

Two larger islands (Savai'i and Upolu) and seven smaller islands.



Statistics

Population: 180,000
Government: Parliamentary democracy since 1962; changed name from Western Samoa to Samoa in 1997
Language: Samoan, English; also Chinese
Literacy: 100%
Religion: Christian 97%, Baha'i 2%, Other 1%
WCC member churches: Congregational Christian Church in Samoa, Methodist Church of Samoa

Solomon Islands

Six volcanic islands and several coral atolls.



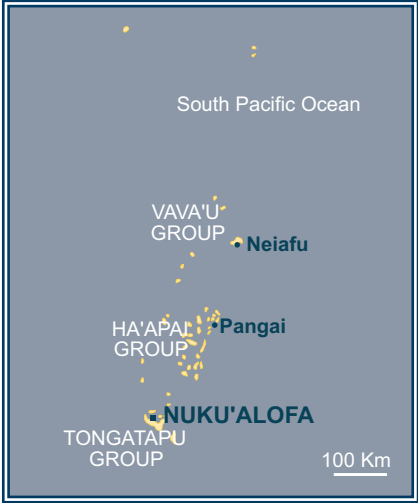
Statistics

Population: 523,000
Government: Parliamentary monarchy since independence from Britain in 1978; ethnic violence, government malfeasance and endemic crime resulted in the prime minister requesting help from Australia in reestablishing law and order; a multinational force arrived to restore order and disarm militias
Language: English, Solomon Pidgin, more than 100 other languages and dialects
Literacy: 54% (men 62%, women 44%)
Religion: Christian 96%, Ethnic 3%, Baha'i 1%
WCC member churches: Church of Melanesia, United Church in the Solomon Islands

Tonga

(Kingdom of Tonga)

Archipelago of 171 islands

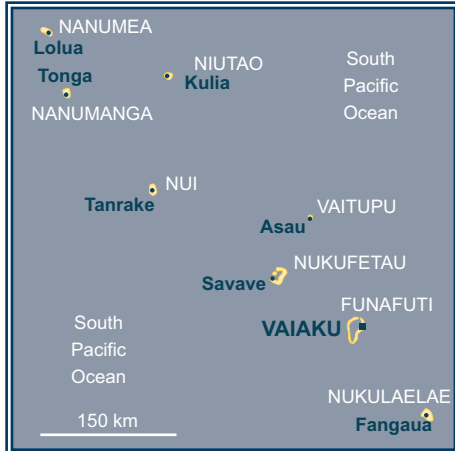


Statistics

Population: 110,000
Government: Constitutional monarchy since independence from Britain in 1990
Language: Tongan, English
Literacy: 92%
Religion: Christian 92%, Baha'i 7%, Non-religious/other 1%
WCC member churches: Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga

Tuvalu

Nine coral atolls, formerly known as the Ellice Islands.



Statistics

Population: 12,000

Government: Parliamentary monarchy since independence from Britain in 1978

Language: English, Tuvaluan

Literacy: 95%

Religion: Christian 89% (mostly Protestant), Non-religious 5%, Baha'i 5%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Congregational Christian Church of Tuvalu

Vanuatu

(*Republic of Vanuatu*)

Twelve large and 70 small islands, formerly known as the New Hebrides.



Statistics

Population: 202,000

Government: Parliamentary republic since independence from Britain and France in 1980

Language: Bislama (Pidgin English), English, French and over 100 others

Literacy: 52%

Religion: Christian 93%, Ethnic 4%, Baha'i 3%

WCC member churches: Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The amazing diversity of these islands in the Pacific.
- o Fish, oysters, deep blue waters, and those who know how to live in harmony with the sea.
- o The strong presence of the church in these nations.
- o Welcoming smiles.
- o Communities that take care of one another.

Pray for:

- o The preservation of these island nations in the midst of global warming and rising sea levels.

- o Those affected by earthquakes, volcanic activity and typhoons.
- o The rights of indigenous peoples throughout these islands, and particularly in New Caledonia and New Guinea.
- o An end to political unrest, violence and ethnic tensions in Fiji, New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.
- o An end to political corruption and crime.
- o Those who have been affected by nuclear weapons testing by France in French Polynesia and the United States in the Marshall Islands.
- o Those who are impoverished and hungry, those who are unable to find employment or to make a living, and those who are unable to attend school.

PRAYERS

(1)

Lord of the Fonua ["land and people" in Tongan language]
 you have blessed us with the beauty of our lands and sea
 you have blessed us with fish, shells and mighty whales
 you have blessed us with palms and coconut trees
 you have blessed us with children of the Pacific
 glory be to your name, today and forever.

(2)

Our Heavenly Father,
 Sometimes we forget to notice the things you have given us.
 Every now and then we take something
 and we do not recognize your kindness.
 At times we even waste food we don't want.
 Today, the whole family gathers together to thank you
 for all that you have done for us.
 We ask your Son, Jesus Christ, to accept our prayer
 and to bless this food which we are now going to eat.

(3)

Loving God, provide a voice for our struggles.
 Provide extra paddles to bring us together.
 Grant peace to our hearts, our ears and our eyes
 to forgive and to love our neighbours and our enemies.
 O Lord, give us a chance to redeem the Fonua
 and to reclaim paradise.

(4)
 Go with the strength you have.
 Go simply
 lightly
 gently
 in search of Love.
 And the Spirit go with you.

(5)
 Lord,
 Oil the hinges of my heart's door,
 That it may swing gently and easily to welcome your coming.

(6)
 O God, save our shores from the weapons of death,
 our lands from the things that deny our young ones love and freedom.
 Let the seas of the Pacific Ocean carry messages of peace and goodwill.
 Turn away from our midst any unkind and brutal practices.
 Let each child swim and breathe the fresh air
 that is filled by the Holy Spirit.
 O Lord Jesus, bless all who are makers of that inner peace
 that breaks down the barriers of hatred,
 and unite us with the open arms of your cross,
 that all the peoples of the world may live happily together.

(7)
 O Jesus, be the canoe that holds me up in the sea of life;
 be the rudder that helps me in the straight road;
 be the outrigger that supports me in times of temptation;
 let your Spirit be my sail that carries me through each day.
 Keep my body strong, so I can paddle steadfastly on in the voyage of life.

(8)
 For the earth, and all that is part of it:
we praise you, Father.
 For rocks, signs of your strength and your steadfast love:
we praise you, Father.
 For shells, signs of your variety and your joy in creating this world,
 which you have given to our care:
we praise you, Father.
 For coconuts and taro, signs of your providence to us:
we praise you, Father.

For the birds, signs of the freedom that is ours
when we recognize that we are your children:

we praise you, Father.

For the fish of the sea and animals that walk on the land, a reminder to us
that the new earth is to be a place where your people live, work and share in
peace:

we praise you, Father.

For insects, their variety, spontaneity and way of growth, signs of the dying
and rising to new life that is the central message to us of your Son Jesus:

we praise you, Father.

For the similarities of one group of people to another,
signs of your desire that there is but one fold, and one shepherd:

we praise you, Father.

For the difference between one group of people and another expressed in
these islands through the variety of language, tradition, custom, denomina-
tions, signs of the challenge of your word and your message to each person:

we praise you, Father.

For the people present at this celebration, who by their commitment,
readiness to learn and listen, and openness of heart and mind are signs of
your readiness to forgive the wrongs we commit against you:

we praise you, Father.

(9)

Lord, in your mercy, help all the peoples of the vast Pacific Ocean to be
good stewards of the sea and its resources; help all people everywhere to
acknowledge that you alone have spread out the heavens, and rule over the
seas, and that the waters are a gift from you.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord, in your mercy, help the scientists and technicians of the world to use
their knowledge and skills for the good of all, and not for destructive purposes.
May the countries which produce nuclear energy channel such bounty for the
good of humankind.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

(10)

O God of love and mercy,
your Son Jesus Christ has commanded us to preach and teach
and baptize people in Jesus' name.

Help us to carry out this great commission with humble hearts.

(11)

PRAYER BEFORE COMMUNION

May the presence and the love of God be rediscovered through this open table,
 the open table where Christ has reconciled us to God,
the open table where the Lord is made known in his love and his openness,
 the open table where sharing is available and practised,
where forgiveness is possible and becomes meaningful,
 where fellowship of Christian families is enriched,
where our unity in diversity is accepted and valued,
 where our eyes are cleaned and opened to see and to care,
where our whole being is renewed and resurrected now and for ever more.

(12)

Great and merciful Chief, the Chief of Chiefs,
 your life is the source of the whole world's life;
 your mercy is our only hope,
 your eyes watch over all your creatures,
 you know the secrets of our hearts.
 By your life-giving Spirit,
 draw us into your presence,
 that we may worship in the true life of your Spirit
 with lives moved by your love,
 through him who has led us to your heart of love,
 even the *Ravouvou* [Jesus Christ our Lord].

(13)

O Great Chief, you own our islands, our forests, our reefs, our seas and the heavens.
 We pray for the sustenance of our beautiful environment,
 our own safe journey as we go through life, our families.
 Guide us in the deep, that our canoes may arrive safely to our respective shores.
 Be our light in the dark, our strength in weakness,
 our power in ministry, and pave the way for our future.
 O Great Chief, we come to you in faith.

(14)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

O God of truth, we recognize that violence is part of our lives.

It is a sin because we have violated the fullness of life
of the one who is dear to you and dear to us.

We confess that we have favoured physical abuse to discipline others.

We have called mental abuse part of our education.

We have called verbal abuse part of normal discussion.

O God of light, we confess that we have considered violence at home to be,
most of the time, a private matter.

We confess that violence with its diverse expressions and consequences
has become a habit within our community.

O God of peace, we confess that we have shut our eyes and our ears
to the cries, fears and pains of many victims.

O God of love, we claim our responsibility for creating and prolonging
the sorrow unnecessarily.

We seek your healing and peace for our homes,
our community and your whole world.

O Lord, give us the courage to help each other, to end the violence,
to envisage a new beginning, to regain the confidence of one another.

O God, we also know that it is not easy to change, to be born anew.

We ask you to come and heal our wounded hearts, minds and bodies.

(15)

God of our birth and our life,

God of our joy and our pain,

we trust that beyond our pain, there can be healing.

Beyond the brokenness within our hearts, our families and our community
there can be reconciliation.

We trust that beyond our anger can be peace.

We trust that beyond our hurting hearts there can be forgiveness.

We trust that beyond our silence God's presence speaks.

Challenge us to enjoy life and affirm our belief
that life may come to be the place where our faith remains,
where our hope endures, and love abides forever.

Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania

Where did the words go?

My lord, look, the houses are being searched
and the thatch is set to fire, the moss,
the branches, the oakum,
the land on a black-and-white photo,
the paper twists:

Where did the words go?

Air from the hay my letters are opened
suitcases turned, notebooks, coins, dust,
the earth under the moon bereft of villages
gravelly under your hand:

Where did the words go?

My lord, hallo there, are you with me
when night approaches, brother, nephew, sisters,
Mars approaches in slow motion, breathe in!

Where, where, did the words go?

Asko Künnap

Estonia

(Republic of Estonia)

Statistics

Population: 1.5 million

Government: Unitary multiparty republic

Language: Estonian; also Russian, Finnish and
Ukrainian



Literacy: 99%

Religion: *Christian 63%, Atheist 36%, Other 1%*

WCC member churches: *Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church*

History

Located in northeastern Europe on the Baltic Sea, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania comprise the Baltic States. To the east of Estonia is Russia, and to the south is Latvia.

Estonia has been settled for more than 5,500 years. After centuries of Danish, Swedish, German and Russian rule, it attained independence in 1918. Forcibly incorporated into the USSR in 1940, it regained its independence in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since the last Russian troops left in 1994, Estonia has been free to promote its own political and economic ties with western Europe. It joined both NATO and the European Union in 2004.

The newly independent nation faces great challenges, including high inflation, widespread corruption, drug abuse, and a large number of homeless children and the elderly. Many of the elderly existed on Soviet state pensions which are now gone. They have no marketable skills and do not know how to survive in an independent environment. In this discouraging situation there has also been an increase in reports of spouse abuse and domestic violence. Other problems include the treatment of the large permanent Russian minority which makes up about a third of the population. They do not have the same rights and freedoms as ethnic Estonians, and the government has been accused of violence against ethnic Russians.

Christianity claimed participation by most of the population of the Baltic states before the Second World War. However, a half-century of Soviet occupation and the persecution of church members fundamentally changed the religious scene. Church buildings were turned into warehouses or museums. Those who worshipped regularly were subject to harassment, both at work and by local state officials. As political freedom dawned in the late 1980s, there was a time of

renewal and rebirth as seminaries and churches were reopened and expanded.

The Christian community is approximately half Orthodox and half Protestant. By far the largest single denomination is the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church, which is under the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople but is also claimed by the Russian Orthodox Church – a source of considerable tension. The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church is the second largest denomination. There are two ecumenical groups: the Estonian Council of Churches and the Estonian Evangelical Alliance.

Latvia

(Republic of Latvia)



Statistics

Population: 2.4 million

Government: *Unitary multiparty republic*

Language: *Latvian; also Latgalian, Russian, Belarussian, Ukrainian*

Literacy: 99%

Religion: *Christian 67%, Atheist 32%, Jewish and other 1%*

WCC member churches: *Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia*

History

Latvia is on the Baltic Sea in northeastern Europe. Estonia lies to the north, Russia and Belarus to the east and Lithuania to the south.

Most of the country is low-lying coastal plain. Prior to 1918 the Russians and Germans occupied Latvia.

After a brief period of independence between the two world wars, Latvia was annexed by the USSR in 1940, overrun by the German army in 1941, then retaken by the Soviet Union in 1945. With the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the departure of Russian soldiers in 1994, the status of the Russian minority (some 30 per cent of the population) remained a source of tension with Moscow. In 1998 Latvian voters eased citizenship laws that had discriminated against the almost half-million ethnic Russians who lived in Latvia during the era of the USSR. In 1999 Latvians elected their first woman president. Latvia joined both NATO and the European Union in 2004.

Current problems in Latvia are similar to those of the other Baltic states as they introduce sweeping economic, social and political changes following several decades of communist rule. Other challenges include severe environmental pollution from heavy industries and untreated wastewater.

Under the influence of Russia, Orthodox Christianity came to Latvia during the twelfth century. The Roman Catholic Church arrived in the thirteenth century and spread throughout the region with the help of soldier-missionaries under the auspices of the pope. Roman Catholicism was the state religion for about two centuries. Lutheranism was introduced in the 1520s. Today, Christians in Latvia are about evenly split between these three groups. During the communist era, atheism was actively promoted. Since then, however, there has been a revival of Christianity. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia is the largest Protestant denomination. During the 1980s it was instrumental in supporting Latvian independence. In 2001 the church entered into partnership with the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod in the US, announcing its official opposition to women's ordination. This led many ordained female clergy to leave the country to follow their call to ministry.

Lithuania

(*Republic of Lithuania*)



Statistics

Population: 3.7 million

Government: Unitary multiparty republic

Language: Lithuanian; also Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Belarussian

Literacy: 99%

Religion: Christian 88% (primarily Roman Catholic), Atheist 11%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Lithuania is in northeastern Europe, with Latvia to the north, Belarus to the east, Poland to the south and Kaliningrad (a territory of Russia) to the southwest. Like the other Baltic states, Lithuania only briefly knew independence between the two world wars. During the First World War it was occupied by the German army. When the Germans withdrew, Lithuania declared itself an independent state, but was almost immediately invaded by the Russian Bolshevik army, who were repelled in 1919, and then by Poland, which occupied the capital city of Vilnius. The independent Lithuanian government remained in control of the rest of the country until 1939, when the Soviet Union annexed Lithuania. Lithuania formally achieved its inde-

pendence from the Soviet Union in 1991. The last Russian troops withdrew by 1993, and the first elections were held in 1996.

Lithuania has fared better than some of the former Soviet states due to its location (a hub for much of the surrounding region), its sound infrastructure and its large skilled workforce. Like the other Baltic states it struggles with corruption, environmental degradation and the large-scale transition from communism to pri-

vate enterprise. It joined NATO and the European Union in 2004.

The Roman Catholic Church has always been strong in Lithuania and continues to be the largest Christian presence in the country. Under Soviet influence the churches experienced severe repression, but the Roman Catholic Church was influential in the struggle for Lithuanian independence.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The new life which has emerged from the ashes of communism.
- o The churches, which have experienced new vitality among the people of the Baltic states.
- o Krisjanis Barons, who collected more than a million *dainas* (Latvian folk-songs) – some dating back 1,000 years.
- o The Hill of Crosses near Siauliai, Lithuania, and for all the carved wooden crosses and saints which mark crossroads throughout Lithuania.
- o Ancient Estonian runic chants based on lines of eight syllables with a theme gradually developing from line to line.
- o Smoked fish, hearty breads, pancakes and berry pies.

Pray for:

- o Economic improvement and stability as these countries convert their economies and experience opportunities that were not available in the past.
- o Justice and strength for those who speak out against corruption and make a stand for the homeless and poor.
- o The large ethnic minorities in each of these countries who have found themselves marginalized, vilified and at times attacked.
- o Care and guidance for women clergy who seek ways to respond to the call of God in their lives.
- o The shrinking of the gap between rich and poor, and for resources and conscience to care for those who have been left destitute in a new economic system.
- o The environment that has been severely degraded by heavy industrialization and urbanization, and those who must live with the results of polluted air, soil and water.

PRAYERS

(1)

O Holy Spirit, flow over us as rain over parched fields
 so that new life enters into the hearts of all.
 Pour yourself over our land so that it blooms and bears the fruit of righteousness.
 Encourage all to renew themselves in their mind and spirit!
 You, Spirit of Strength, make the weak strong,
 the fearful confident, the doubting faithful.
 You, Spirit of Love, tie us all together with your bond of completeness
 so that we live with our neighbours in peace and harmony without hate and envy.
 Refresh those who are in trouble and sorrow
 and make us all worthy to praise and glorify you, O God our Father,
 with new hearts and tongues.

(2)

I pray to you, gracious and merciful God,
 I pray to you even though I dwell in darkness,
 I pray to you because you are the Light of the World.
 Unable to escape from the trap of myself,
 I pray to you because you are the Door.
 Lonely and alone, I pray to you
 because you are the Good Shepherd.
 Having lost my way, I pray to you
 because you are the Road.
 Depleted and empty, I pray to you
 because you are the Bread of Life.
 Dying daily, I pray to you
 because you are the Resurrection.
 Gracious and merciful God, I pray to you:
 enlighten me, open me, comfort me, feed me, lead me, and be my life.

(3)

You, O Lord, are the one
 who makes the wishes of the humble come true.
 You strengthen their courage and turn your attentive ear to them.
 Heavenly Father, hear us.
 Jesus the Saviour, bring light into our hearts.
 Holy Spirit, sustain us in faith and hope,

so that wherever we go, we remain close to you;
valuing your will more than our personal wishes;
not forgetting to forgive, to love and to feel compassion;
enjoying giving more than receiving;
striving to build rather than destroy,
not seeking a tiny cross and a big crown of victory,
not drowning in our own lives,
not getting lost in hopelessness and despair,
receiving strong faith from the miracle
of your coming to this earth and dwelling in human flesh,
from your baptism, fasting, temptation,
from the suffering of your cross and your death;
from the miracle of your resurrection, wondrous ascension
and the sending of your Holy Spirit, our Counsellor.

God, Holy Spirit, we pray:

awaken in us trustful reliance on your presence,
so that in the church we remember the world,
and in the world we dare to be your church.

Lead us so that we understand the needs of others
and help them without expecting rewards.

We pray that we remember those who suffer in body and soul:

the dying, the injured, the disabled,
orphans, refugees, the imprisoned or captured,
the hungry, the lonely, the sad, the desperate;
sustain us in faith that we continue to hope in the coming of your reign,
now and forever, here and everywhere.

God Father, have mercy on us,

Christ, be with us,

Holy Spirit, give us strength.

(4)

You come through thick stone walls, armed guards and bars.
You bring me a starry night and ask about this and that.
You are the Redeemer. I recognize you.
You are my way, my truth and my life.
Even my cellar blooms with stars, and peace and light pour forth.
You sprinkle beautiful words on me like flowers:
"Son, [Daughter], what are you afraid of? I am with you."

(5)

When my soul sheds its tears,
when my heart languishes in longing,
when my whole being shivers in fatigue,
come, O Jesus, I beg you to come.
Draw near, Reviver and Consoler!
What is it you wish to tell me by means of these people,
by these circumstances,
by this stretch of time?
Jesus, I implore you to shorten the time of trial for us,
for my dear ones, for my exhausted nation.
Jesus, I ask you, help those
who laid down their lives for our well-being:
assist those for whom you wish me to pray.

(6)

You, O Christ, have the words of eternal life.
You are the Holy One of God,
but most Estonians don't know you.
They don't know to whom they can go.
Many individuals are desperate, addicted to alcohol or drugs.
Many families are broken, without love or peace.
They need you, Saviour, and so do we.
May you be seen clearly through your church
so that others may find your spirit which gives life.



Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia

Czech Republic

In all these temptations and seductions of our body and spirit it is necessary to stand firm and to endure. In this situation of overwhelming wealth and luxury, but also of unspeakable poverty and misery, the Christian church has a unique, irreplaceable and glorious task: to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom by our words and deeds, to witness and preach to all nations that God in Jesus Christ reigns. The witnesses can be limited and chained in a different way, but the Word of God is not chained. It is not possible to chain the Gospel. It runs and spreads like a fire.

Milan Opocensky



Statistics

Population: 10.2 million

Government: Unitary multiparty republic

Language: Czech; also Slovak, Hungarian, Romany, Russian, German, Polish and Ukrainian

Literacy: 100%

Religion: Christian 63% (mostly Roman Catholic), Atheist 37%

WCC member churches: *Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, Czechoslovak Hussite Church, Orthodox Church in the Czech Lands and Slovakia, Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Czech Republic*

History

The Czech Republic is located in central Europe. A landlocked nation, it borders Poland to the north, Germany to the northwest and west, Austria to the south and Slovakia to the east.

Around the fifth century, Slavic tribes settled in the historic regions of Bohemia and Moravia in central Europe. The Czech peoples, descendants of these Slavs, established the Kingdom of Bohemia and the Premyslide dynasty, which ruled over Bohemia and Moravia from the 900s to the 1500s. The Czechs were conquered by the Habsburg Empire in 1620, and were ruled for the next 300 years by the Austrian monarchy. In the nineteenth century Bohemia and Moravia emerged as the industrial centre of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, setting the stage for development of one of the most highly industrialized economies in east and central Europe. The First World War led to the collapse of the monarchy, and the closely related Czechs and Slovaks formed the independent country of Czechoslovakia in 1918.

Czechoslovakia was invaded by Nazi Germany in 1939. Slovakia declared independence, but became a puppet state of Germany. Following the Second World War, the Czechs and Slovaks reunited. National elections were held in the spring of 1946, and in 1948 the Communist Party seized power. Czechoslovakia fell under the leadership of communist hardliners until 1968, when Communist Party leader Alexander Dubcek sought greater economic reforms and cultural liberalization. This caused concern among other leaders of Warsaw Pact governments, and in August 1968 Czechoslovakia was invaded and occupied by Soviet, Hungarian, Bulgarian, East German and Polish forces. Dubcek was replaced.

In the late 1970s the populace again began agitating for human rights reforms. In November

1989 a peaceful pro-democracy demonstration turned violent when police brutally beat student participants. In a movement that was to become known as the Velvet Revolution, citizen groups led by dissident playwright Vaclav Havel rose in opposition to the communist regime. A coalition government in which the Communist Party held a minority of positions was formed in 1989, and Havel was elected president. In 1990 free elections took place without incident and the new parliament began moving rapidly towards the democratization of Czechoslovakia. In 1993 the Czech Republic and the Republic of Slovakia were peacefully founded following a vote by the federal parliament in support of separation.

The post-communist economy of the Czech Republic continues to experience increasing budget deficits, debts and unemployment are a concern. Other issues include air and water pollution and acid rain. In 2002 severe flooding took a heavy toll. In 1999 the Czech Republic joined NATO and in 2004 it became part of the European Union.

Roman Catholicism became established in the Czech region between the sixth and tenth centuries, while the southern areas came under the influence of Byzantine Orthodoxy. During the Reformation the Lutheran Church became a strong presence. Under the influence of communism, atheism was actively promoted by the government, and the church, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, was heavily persecuted.

Today, the Roman Catholic Church is the single largest denomination in the Czech Republic. The second largest is the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, which broke off from the Roman Catholic Church after the First World War over the issue of performing the liturgy in Czech rather than Latin. The Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Czech Republic was originally established in 1956, and continues to act as a strong ecumenical voice in the country. In spite of new religious freedom, decades of atheism and secularization have led to a serious decline in church participation.

Poland

(*Republic of Poland*)



Statistics

Population: 39 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: Polish; also Ukrainian, Russian, Belarussian, German and others

Literacy: 98%

Religion: Christian 97% (almost entirely Roman Catholic), Non-religious/other 3%

WCC member churches: Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Poland, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, Old Catholic Mariavite Church in Poland, Polish Catholic Church in Poland

History

Located in north-central Europe, Poland is bounded by the Baltic Sea to the north, Russia and Lithuania to the northeast, Belarus and Ukraine to the east, Slovakia to the southeast, the Czech Republic to the southwest and Germany to the west.

The nation now known as Poland began to take form around the middle of the tenth century. Its golden age occurred in the sixteenth century, but it declined in the next century due to internal disorders. In a series of agreements between 1772 and 1795, Russia, Prussia and Austria partitioned Poland among themselves. Poland regained its independence in 1918, only to be overrun by the Nazis and the Soviet Union during the Second World War. More than 6 million Poles perished in

the war, including 3 million Polish Jews killed in death camps. Poland was secured from Germany by the Soviets in 1944, and the 1947 elections were dominated by the communists.

In 1955 Poland became a member of the Warsaw Pact, but its government was comparatively benign and tolerant. This was reversed in 1968, when student demonstrations were suppressed. Shipyard strikes in the 1970s spread to other industries and in 1980 the government recognized the right of workers to organize independent unions. Under the leadership of Lech Walesa and the Solidarity trade union, workers sought improved conditions and liberty, but martial law was declared from 1981 to 1983 in an effort to crush the union. Walesa and other Solidarity leaders were arrested. A failing economy led to further strikes in 1988. The government re-legalized Solidarity and permitted it to compete in elections, thus allowing Solidarity members to win many government seats in 1989. Walesa became the first popularly elected president of Poland in 1990, with free parliamentary elections held in 1991. Poland has been a member of the European Union since 2004.

High unemployment and a struggling economy continue to plague Poland. Environmental degradation is also a serious problem.

The Roman Catholic Church has been the primary religious force in Poland since the tenth century. During the communist regime the Roman Catholic Church was also persecuted, its clergy imprisoned and property confiscated. However, the church persevered and today 95 per cent of Christians are Roman Catholics. In 1978 Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, the Bishop of Krakow, became Pope John Paul II. The Orthodox Church was established in Poland in the tenth century, but has always been a small minority. Protestantism was established in Poland during the sixteenth century, and it faced persecution during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The first ecumenical work in Poland dates back to joint synods between the Lutherans, Calvinists and Moravian Brethren in 1570. The Polish Ecumenical Council was estab-

lished in 1945, and continues to be an active ecumenical body.

Slovakia

(Slovak Republic)



Statistics

Population: 5.4 million

Government: Unitary multiparty republic

Language: Slovak; also Hungarian, Czech

Literacy: 100%

Religion: Christian 86% (mostly Roman Catholic), Atheist 14%

WCC member churches: Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia, Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia

History

Slovakia is a landlocked republic located in central Europe. It is bounded on the northwest by the Czech Republic, on the north by Poland, on the east by Ukraine, on the south by Hungary and on the southwest by Austria.

In about the sixth century the area of present-day Slovakia was settled by a group of Slavs who, in the ninth century, became politically united in the Moravian Empire. The Moravian state was conquered and fell under Hungarian rule in the tenth century, remaining so for nearly a thousand

years until 1918, when the First World War brought about the collapse of the Habsburg Empire. Under Hungarian domination, Slovaks were pressured to assimilate into the Hungarian culture, and Slovakia became the centre of Hungarian politics and culture. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a Slovak national movement aimed at maintaining Slovak culture and language began to grow. Following the First World War, Slovak territory was joined to the Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia to form the new state of Czechoslovakia. In 1939 Hitler's Germany invaded Czechoslovakia. Slovakia declared its independence, but the nation became a puppet state of Germany. Freed from German control by the Soviets in 1945, Slovakia again became part of a new Czechoslovakian state.

When the Communist Party took control of Czechoslovakia in 1948, Slovakia became subject to a centralized government dominated by ethnically Czech people. Communist rule ended with the election of Vaclav Havel in 1989. A strong Slovak nationalist movement gained new strength after the demise of communist control, and rivalry between the Czech and Slovak republics continued to increase. A general election in 1992 decided that two fully independent states should be created. The Republic of Slovakia came into being on 1 January 1993.

The Roman Catholic Church has played an important role in Slovak history. Today, approximately 85 per cent of all Christians in the country are Roman Catholic. The Orthodox Church is a small minority in the south of the country, and there has been some strife between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches in that region. Protestantism accounts for 14 per cent of the Christian population, with the Lutheran Church the dominant denomination. The Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Slovak Republic is the major ecumenical organization.

INTERCESSIONS***Give thanks for:***

- o Those heroes, known and unknown, who threw off Nazi and Soviet domination.
- o Pastors and priests who remained faithful to their calling even when they were persecuted.
- o Traditions which hold people together and give them strength in difficult times.
- o Lead crystal glassware in intricate shapes and designs.

Pray for:

- o Economic stability in the transition from communism to a free-market economy.
- o The poor and the elderly, who bear the brunt of economic reforms.
- o The unemployed, and all who suffer the loss of state social services.
- o The victims of anti-semitism, and ethnic, gender, and social intolerance in the midst of rising nationalism and the search for identity.
- o The environment, especially where it is heavily polluted.
- o Renewal of the church in the midst of both growing freedom and growing secularization.

PRAYERS

(1)

When I am down and helpless, when lies are reigning,
when fear and indifference are growing, may your Kingdom come.
Into our churches, into our praying, into our singing,
may your Kingdom come.

Into our hearts, into our hands, into our eyes, may your Kingdom come.
Soon.

(2)

Holy Spirit, touch the hearts of those who have power.
Let them realize the greatness of the responsibility
they have taken upon themselves.
Lead them to set right the broken relationships
between people and nations.
May they turn all their strength and ability
towards creating a better world
which provides sufficiently for all people on earth.

Jesus Christ, teach us your new justice and unite us into one.

(3)

I will come to you, Lord, with the heavy day on my shoulders. I have done my simple duty; I could not continue on my knees, but I was walking and working. I call to you from the depths of tiredness that surrounds me now and at the end of each day. I offer you all the simple tasks that I must daily repeat. I offer you, too, all that my neighbour does. I offer you my transient life, my sorrows and my joys. I offer you my weary feet and my tired hands.

(4)

God,
 hear our prayer for those
 who are unhappy,
 who are lonely and neglected,
 who are of broken heart,
 for those whose life has been darkened by fear, pain or sorrow.
 Give us strength to help them.
 Give us the faith to look beyond all difficulties.
 You are a friend who never fails.
 Let us find a new direction in life,
 so we can walk this path with a new courage,
 with renewed hope through Jesus Christ.

(5)

Thank you, our Heavenly Father
 that you have given us a wonderful country,
 high mountains,
 fertile lands and woods,
 which provide a natural habitat for
 wildlife.
 You have protected us
 from the extreme natural disasters
 that have afflicted other countries.
 We cannot sufficiently express our gratitude
 for this undeserved mercy.
 But even when strong wind or flood
 endangers our mountains or villages,
 help us recognize in these
 a warning against self-satisfaction
 and indifference towards your will.

Adaptation for those outside Slovakia

Thank you, our Heavenly Father
 that you have made Slovakia
 a wonderful country,
 with high mountains,
 fertile lands and woods,
 which provide a natural habitat for
 wildlife.
 You have protected it from the extreme
 natural disasters
 that have afflicted other countries.
 Words of gratitude are never enough
 for this undeserved mercy.
 But even when strong wind or flood
 endangers their mountains or villages,
 help them recognize in these
 a warning against self-satisfaction

May we always treasure the gift of eternal life that you have prepared for us.

Even though a majority in our country claim membership to one of the

Christian churches,

very often your admonition is true for us:

“These people worship me with their mouth, but not with their heart.”

Please forgive us our shallowness of faith, our inconsistent fellowship with others

who follow our Lord Jesus Christ,

and our readiness to adapt to this world.

Please teach us true and sincere godliness and merciful righteousness.

Make us instruments of your love,

so that our small nation may be a blessing for the whole world.

and indifference towards your will.

May we, with the people of Slovakia, always treasure the gift of eternal life that you have prepared for all your people.

Very often your admonition is true for us:

“These people worship me with their mouth, but not with their heart.”

Please forgive us our shallowness of faith, our inconsistent fellowship with others

who follow our Lord Jesus Christ,

and our readiness to adapt to this world.

Please teach us true and sincere godliness and merciful righteousness.

Make us instruments of your love,

so that we may be a blessing for the whole world.

(6)

Dear Lord, thank you for your generous patience with us.

We make you sad

when we are not satisfied with the many good gifts you give us daily.

We often compare ourselves

with those who are richer,

and forget those who are much poorer,

very often incomparably poorer.

We are motivated more often by envy than by compassion.

Forgive us our lack of thankfulness and love.

Teach us to be satisfied with the things we need in life

and silence our desire for unnecessary luxury.

If we feel we lack something,

turn this experience into wisdom and modesty.

so that we empathize with the destitute

and gain willingness to help them.

Keep us from falling into passivity and indifference.

Give us energy, creativity and humbleness to do your will

when solving everyday problems.

In doing your will we can find true meaning for life

and real happiness.

(7)

Lord God, you are the master of history.
 As you led your chosen nation of Israel through times of change,
 so now lead your new chosen people, your church.
 We give you thanks and praise
 for everything you have done for us through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.
 Through Christ's gift of reconciliation, enable us to live in peace with others,
 especially our Christian brothers and sisters.
 Give us a healthy self-confidence and the courage of your children
 so that in firm hope and with childlike trust
 we can give ourselves into your merciful hands and not fear the present or future.
 We ask you, Lord, free our country from the fear of big nations.

Adaptation for people outside Slovakia:

This week, when we pray for Slovakia,

We ask you, Lord, to free them from the fear of big nations.

Open our eyes, so that we see your love and mighty deeds
 by which you enter into our national and personal history.
 You always forgive us our failures;
 help us to willingly forgive those who have painfully wronged us.
 Through your Holy Spirit, open our hearts to receive your Word
 and open our hands to express a faith active through love.
 Give us power to bravely overcome evil by doing good,
 so that we live to give you honour and praise.

(8)

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Almighty God, we thank you for more than a thousand years of Polish history,
 for the heritage of faith and culture passed on from generation to generation.
 We thank you for our guides and teachers, who in the past taught us your truth,
 and who continue to do so now. We thank you, that you did not let us go away
 from your light. We thank you for historical transformations in the last
 decades and ask you: support us, that we may properly take advantage of the
 freedom we have, and always remember that the most important
 commandment is to love God and to love our neighbour.

We thank you, God, that you call women to serve you in all fields of life. We
 give thanks to you for all your blessings and we want to use them for your glory
 and for the benefit of human beings.

We thank you for all you give us. We thank you, that you are raising us up from our downfalls, comforting us in our sorrows and that you steadfastly await our return when we stray from you. Please, give us such faith that we can humbly say: "Your will be done."

(9)

CONFESSION OF SIN

God, you are Eternal Light. In the beginning of the third millennium we come before you with a burden of many sins. We confess them humbly to you.

Voice 1: Lord, who in love brought the world and us into existence, we confess that we do not always love as we should, that we often ignore human poverty around us, both spiritual and material. We are not always effective in our attempts to help. We often begrudge our neighbours some of our time, attention and bread, but we know that kindness can be given by everybody.

Forgive us, Lord, send your light upon us.

Voice 2: God, you are Eternal Light. The power of our countries and nations is found in strong Christian families, in which young generations are growing up. We confess that as mothers and fathers, on whom depends the nature of the families, we do not care enough for our relatives. We do not defend enough the stability of families, we do not care that you are present in them. Let us also try to influence our rulers so that they may introduce and provide policy in favour of the family.

Forgive us, Lord, send your light upon us.

Voice 3: God, you are Eternal Light. You presented women with many talents. Living creatively they can fill the world with love, and help to restore harmony and peace. We confess that often we do not value our own personal gifts. We do not try to develop our inner selves. We hide our light under a bushel basket and bury our talents. The world needs people who are loving, wise, honest and brave.

Forgive us, Lord, send your light upon us.

Voice 4: God, you are Eternal Light. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Ps 119:105). We confess that our words so often are not words of truth and love. They are harsh, unfair, and unjust and often kill hope in people. We forget that psychological violence also exists and words can hurt and be as destructive as deeds.

Forgive us, Lord, send your light upon us.

Voice 5: God, you are Eternal Light. We know that your light shines in those in whose heart you live. We confess that we are not acting as "children of light". We choose dark paths, we smother the voice of conscience. Preoccupation with possessions can darken in us the brightness of your Word. We often neglect to develop a deeper bond with you. We pray too seldom. We forget that in order to do your will, we must convert every day.

Forgive us, Lord, send your light upon us.

God, we ask you to forgive us our sins and not to remember our wrong deeds. Let the darkness in us go away and let us be filled with your light. In the light of your Truth may we see our lives, our duties to you, to the world and to ourselves. Give us power to go straight the way we are led by Christ. Those who follow Him "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life".

(10)

PRAYER BEFORE READING THE BIBLE

Graceful God,

you are not hidden in silence.

You have spoken and you speak to us even today.

We thank you and we ask you:

Let us preserve your Word

and let it bear fruit in our lives.

(11)

God, you are our Father and Mother,

you have given us the earth,

which is the theatre of your glory,

the space of our life.

Hear the groaning of your creation.

Look at the wounds which are bleeding.

We ask you: Make us sensitive and attentive
also for the still voice of suffering.

Give us courage and strengthen our hands

to do confidently what serves your creation.

O Christ, you promised to be with us to the end of the age.

We ask you: Be close to us

and liberate us for life.

Holy Spirit, eternal Divine Wisdom,
you are our comforter and our help.
We ask you: Strengthen our faith,
multiply our love,
hold us in hope.
We expect the arrival of your Kingdom,
in which all darkness will be overcome
and the face of the earth will be restored.
We adore you, eternal God, and we praise you,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
now and evermore.

(12)

God,

from you all thoughts about peace and truth proceed.
Cultivate in our hearts the love which directs us to peace.
Guide by your wisdom those who govern our nations.
Give free space to your Kingdom
until the earth is filled by the knowledge of your love.
Your Son came to be the Saviour of this world and the Prince of peace.
Give us the grace to be the followers in his footsteps
and to fulfill our mission as peacemakers in Christ's name.
May the Holy Spirit remove and destroy the barriers of fear and hatred,
so that all people in the world may be united in peace and righteousness.



Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia,
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,
Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia

Albania

(Republic of Albania)

Prayer for unity of all Christians is essentially prayer for conversion of all Christians, so that we would be able by the Holy Spirit to change in our hearts, and so to be reconciled deep in our hearts by the mercy of God and the redemption of Jesus Christ, to be open to each other for a conversation in sincerity, respect, and love... Ecumenism is respect for another in faith, in conviction, in conscience; it is deep respect for the dignity of the human being.

Cardinal Franjo Kuharic



Statistics

Population: 3.5 million

Government: Unitary multiparty republic

Language: Albanian; also Greek, Macedonian and Romany

Literacy: 91%

Religion: Muslim 39%, Christian 35%, Atheist 26%

WCC member churches: Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania

History

Throughout much of its history Albania has been subject to occupation by more powerful forces in the region, such as Italy and neighbouring countries on the Balkan Peninsula. At the time of Christ, Albania was part of the Roman Empire. By the fourth century, it became part of the Byzantine Empire. From the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, Albania established itself as a separate entity, with a system of feudal lordships. It was invaded by the Turks at the end of the fourteenth century and became part of the Ottoman Empire, from which it gained its independence only in 1912. Independence was difficult for Albania, with several different factions fighting for power. By 1944 communist leaders had seized control and the country underwent a radical restructuring, with private farms abolished and collectivized. Under a particularly xenophobic form of communism, repression was severe, and many dissidents were killed or imprisoned in labour camps. Albania was politically and economically isolated from the rest of the world, including the communist world, until 1990. Then, under internal pressure both within the Communist Party and by the people, the government announced plans for a gradual move to a democratic form of government.

Throughout the 1990s Albania was mired in near anarchy as it struggled to create a new constitution and to elect a parliament and president. The country was beset by fraud and corruption, popular protests, the assassination of candidates, and the inability of coalition groups to agree. Civil war in neighbouring Yugoslavia caused hundreds of

thousands of refugees to flee to Albania in 1998. The country continues to struggle to avoid its own civil war and to create a stable government and economic system.

Although rich in mineral resources, Albania has one of the lowest standards of living in Europe, due in part to economic upheavals during the early years of democracy. Farms are now privatized and along with mineral resources provide possible export earnings. Albania's gross domestic product is on the increase and, as a new member of the International Monetary Fund, the country has received assistance to reduce poverty and aid economic growth.

Christianity was established in Albania by the middle of the first century and Paul preached to the people of that region (Rom.15:19). During the eleventh century, when the eastern and western churches split, the southern half of Albania became Orthodox, while the northern regions retained allegiance to Rome. Under Ottoman influence, Islam spread, and by the time of communist rule over two-thirds of the country was Muslim. In 1967, under the communist regime, all religions were banned, church property was confiscated and the country became officially atheist. Today, churches and mosques are beginning to reopen, following many decades of secular use. The ban against religion was lifted in 1990 and religious freedom was explicitly guaranteed by the constitution of 1998. Since the 1990s the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania has experienced a revival, and has established a seminary for the training of its priests. Along with other faith communities, the church has been involved in supplying much needed aid for the Albanian Kosovar refugees. The church has also been a voice for peace in the region.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

(Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Statistics

Population: 4 million

Government: Federal multiparty republic

Language: Serbo-Croatian; also Bosnian and Romany

Literacy: 86% (men 96%, women 76%)

Religion: Muslim 60%, Christian 35%, Atheist 5%

WCC member churches: None



prise about a third of the population, with ethnic Serbs primarily members of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and ethnic Croats members of the Roman Catholic Church. Protestants and Independent churches account for only a few thousand people.

Croatia

(Republic of Croatia)



History

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a landlocked nation on the Balkan Peninsula. It has a long and complex history, with various parts of the country under the influence of many different powers throughout the last 2,000 years. It has been part of the Ottoman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Yugoslavia. This is the origin of the violent ethnic conflict that has shaken the country since it declared independence from Yugoslavia in October 1991. From 1992 to 1995 a full-scale civil war raged between Bosnian Serbs, supported by Serbia, and Bosnian Muslims and Croats, supported by Croatia, with brutal violence and massacres. Over a million people became refugees or were internally displaced. Under provisions of the peace accord, the country has been divided into separate regions for different ethnic groups, making it unlikely that most of these people will be able to return home. Elections were held in 1996 and 1998, but the country continues to struggle with ethnic hatred and violence.

Islam came to Bosnia during Turkish occupation, and it is currently the only European country to have a Muslim majority. Christians com-

Statistics

Population: 4.5 million

Government: Parliamentary democracy

Language: Croatian; also Serbo-Croatian, Romany, Italian, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak and German

Literacy: 96%

Religion: Christian 95% (mostly Roman Catholic), Muslim 2%, Atheist 2%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

The lands that today comprise Croatia were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the end of the First World War, when Croatia joined the kingdom which, in 1929, became Yugoslavia. Croatia is surrounded by Slovenia and Hungary to the north, Serbia and Montenegro to the east, Bosnia and Herzegovina to the south, and the Adriatic Sea to the west. It declared its independence in 1991. The new republic was almost immediately embroiled

in civil war, as the Serbian minority (in control of much of the army), supported by Serbia, fought to create a Serbian state. The war raged until 1995, when the Dayton peace accords were signed. There were serious human rights violations by both Croats and Serbs, including massacres and the widespread use of rape, as well as considerable destruction of villages and houses.

The Roman Catholic Church has a long history in Croatia, but in 1945 a bloody era of persecution began that lasted into the early 1950s. Church lands were confiscated and many clergy were imprisoned, tortured and even executed. As part of the propaganda campaign, communist media attacked church and clergy. The 1974 constitution of Yugoslavia required each republic to set its own policies concerning religion. Croatia was the last to do so, passing its law in 1978 after vigorous debate. In 1990 Roman Catholic clergy succeeded in reestablishing mandatory religious instruction in public schools. There are sizeable Orthodox communities, as well as Muslims and Jews, each tending to follow ethnic lines. Ecumenical activities have resumed recently; the first observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity since warfare curbed such activities brought all the country's Christian churches into cooperation. The central prayer meeting took place in a packed Catholic cathedral in Zagreb.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia



Statistics

Population: 2 million

Government: Unitary multiparty republic

Language: Macedonian; also Albanian, Turkish, Serbo-Croatian

Literacy: 89%

Religion: Christian 64% (primarily Orthodox), Muslim 28%, Atheist 8%

WCC member churches: None

History

Landlocked on the Balkan Peninsula, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) (there is no country today called Macedonia) is bordered by Yugoslavia to the north, Bulgaria to the east, Greece to the south and Albania to the west. International recognition of its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991 was delayed by Greece's objection to the new state's use of what it considered a Hellenic name and symbols. Greece lifted its trade blockade in 1995 and the two countries agreed to normalize relations despite continued disagreement over FYROM's use of "Macedonia". FYROM's large Albanian minority launched an armed insurgency in 2001 and the status of neighbouring Kosovo continues to be a source of ethnic tension.

Macedonia has a rich history dating back to the fourth century BC. From the fourth century AD to the late fourteenth century, it was successively part of numerous empires and acquired its complex ethnic mix before achieving almost 500 years of stability under the Ottoman Empire. In 1878 it was ceded to Bulgaria, but regional politics forced it to return to Turkish rule. It was not until 1943, after two Balkan wars and the two world wars, that its status as a full republic within Yugoslavia was determined.

The Macedonian Orthodox Church is the largest faith community and is specifically named in the constitution, although the Greek Orthodox Church does not recognize its autocephaly. A small minority of residents are Roman Catholic, and a few thousand belong to Protestant or Independent churches, the largest of which is the

Methodist Church. About a quarter of the population is Muslim.

Montenegro

Statistics

Population: 600,000; in addition, 270,000 residents of Serbia have Montenegrin citizenship

Government: Multiparty republic; independence from union with Serbia voted in May 2006

Language: Serbo-Croatian; also Albanian, Romany

Literacy: 94%

Religion: Christian 65% (mostly Orthodox), Muslim 20%, Atheist 15%

WCC member churches: (in the former Serbia and Montenegro): Reformed Christian Church in Serbia and Montenegro, Serbian Orthodox Church, Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia and Montenegro



History

“Montenegro” was the Venetians’ translation of the ancient name *Crna Gora* or “black mountain”. It is a nation on the coast of the Adriatic Sea bordered by Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Albania. A province of the Roman and Byzantine empires, the region took shape as the semi-independent duchy of Duklja in the tenth century. Two centuries later, Raska (later Serbia) launched a series of military campaigns and occupations of Duklja. In the fifteenth–sixteenth centuries, Duklja was ruled by a prince-bishop as a Christian theocratic principality within the Ottoman Empire.

In the twentieth century, Montenegro became part of the kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and was then a constituent part of Yugoslavia from 1929 until 2006. By 1992, only Serbia and Montenegro remained within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia [see Serbia’s *History* in this chapter]. Following the positive results of a referendum on separation from Serbia, Montenegro’s independence was proclaimed on 3 June 2006. With peace in the aftermath of the Balkan wars and Kosovo conflict of the 1990s, Montenegro’s coastline and mountains have attracted increasing numbers of tourists as the economy becomes more stable.

From Roman times there was strong Catholic influence throughout the coastal region, with a rising number of Benedictine monasteries appearing in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The Raska invasions brought Eastern Orthodoxy and attempted to establish that tradition as the dominant Christian force, though Roman Catholicism re-emerged prior to the Ottoman seizure of the Balkans. The Ottoman Empire established Islam while tolerating Christians, with Eastern Orthodox churches shown preference over Catholicism. After the withdrawal of the Ottomans from Montenegro in the nineteenth century, Orthodoxy retained dominance. Nevertheless, Montenegro remains a meeting place of both Eastern and Western Christianity with Islam.

Serbia

Statistics

Population: 10,400,000

Government: Federal multiparty republic

Language: Serbo-Croatian; also Albanian, Romany

Literacy: 91%

Religion: Christian (mostly Orthodox) 68%, Muslim 16%, Atheist 16%

WCC member churches: (in the former Serbia and Montenegro): Reformed Christian Church in Serbia and Montenegro, Serbian Orthodox Church, Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia and Montenegro



H i s t o r y

Serbia is a landlocked nation on the Balkan peninsula in southeastern Europe. It is surrounded by Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro. Serbia and Montenegro formed a federated republic in 2003, but the latter voted in favour of independence in 2006 [see Montenegro’s *History* in this chapter].

The kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was formed in 1918, and its name was changed to Yugoslavia in 1929. Occupation by Nazi Germany in 1941 met resistance from diverse paramilitary bands that fought each other as well as the invaders. The group headed by Marshall Tito took control of the country after the Germans were defeated in 1945. During the cold war, Tito’s communist government sought to steer a diplomatic and economic path between fellow members of the Warsaw Pact and the West. In the early 1990s, Yugoslavia began to unravel along ethnic lines. In 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia declared themselves independent nations. Serbia and Montenegro remained as the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia under president Slobodan Milosevic. In ensuing years, hostilities with neighbouring countries and within the Kosovo region of Serbia resulted in thousands of deaths, the bombing of Serbia by NATO forces

and intervention by United Nations peace-keepers. Milosevic was arrested and put on trial at The Hague for alleged war crimes while pursuing the cause of a Greater Serbia, but he died of natural causes before a verdict could be rendered.

Ethnic suspicion, nationalism and recrimination continue to pose significant concerns within Serbian society. A decision has yet to be taken on the future status of the Kosovo region, an area rich in Christian cultural history with an ethnically Albanian, Muslim majority and a recent history of civil war based on religion.

The Serbian Orthodox form the majority church, but there is a large Catholic presence among certain ethnic communities. Most Protestant churches participate in either the Ecumenical Council or the Evangelical Alliance.

S l o v e n i a

(Republic of Slovenia)



S t a t i s t i c s

- Population:** 2 million
- Language:** Slovene; also Serbo-Croatian, Hungarian
- Government:** Unitary multiparty republic
- Religion:** Christian 92% (mostly Roman Catholic), Atheist 7%, Muslim and others 1%
- Literacy:** 99%
- WCC member churches:** None

H i s t o r y

Slovenia is located on the northwestern part of the Balkan Peninsula. Italy lies to the west,

Austria to the north, Hungary to the east and Croatia to the south. The southwestern corner of Slovenia borders the Adriatic Sea. The Slovene lands were part of the Holy Roman Empire and Austria until 1918, when they joined the Serbs and Croats in forming a new multinational state, renamed Yugoslavia in 1929. Unlike most of the other former Yugoslav republics, Slovenia has avoided ethnic bloodshed. Disputes with neighbouring Italy and Croatia were settled during the

late 1990s, and the country continues to grow economically. Slovenia has granted political asylum to over 75,000 refugees, many of them Muslims, as a result of conflict in neighbouring Bosnia.

There are small Orthodox communities, and a few thousand Protestants (mostly Lutherans), who have been in Slovenia since the time of the Reformation.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Those who work to build bridges between various ethnic groups.
- o Those who labour to rebuild economies shattered after the war.
- o Those who refuse the rhetoric of hatred and fear.
- o Wonderful beaches along the Adriatic coast.

Pray for:

- o New governments and guidance for leaders.
- o Displaced persons and refugees.
- o An end to ethnic hatred and the establishment of human rights for all.
- o Women who were raped during the wars.
- o Healing and renewal in the church, and unity through the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- o Those who mourn.
- o Young people as they try to find a way forward.

PRAYERS

(1)

Once more may the houses become homes,
not monuments to a way of life abandoned.

Once more may the hospitals become preoccupied
by accidents, tumours and viruses.

Once more may the museum, now a barracks,
become a museum,
with an annex on the subject of war,
in honour of a new and permanent peace.

(2)

Through a hole in the roof, O my God, I am trying to see you;
trying to tell you that all your people are suffering,
trying to ask you to bring peace,
to please stop this awful killing and destruction,
this murderous frenzy of nationalism!

(3)

Dear Jesus,
help me to spread your fragrance everywhere I go.
Flood my soul with your spirit and love.
Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly
that all my life may only be a radiance of yours.
Shine through me and be so in me
that every soul I come in contact with may feel your presence in my soul.
Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus.
Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as you shine,
so to shine as to be a light to others.

(4)

O Jesus, through your passion,
teach us to forgive out of love,
teach us to forget out of humility.
Help us to examine our hearts
and see if there is any unforgiven hurt
or any unforgotten bitterness.
Allow the Holy Spirit to enter our spirits
and remove all traces of anger.
Pour out your love, peace and joy into our hearts
in proportion to our emptying ourselves
of self-indulgence, vanity, anger and ambition.
Help us willingly to shoulder the cross of Christ.

(5)

Set our hearts on fire with love for you,
O Christ, our God,
that in its flame we may love you
with all our heart, with all our mind,
with all our soul and with all our strength,
and love our neighbours as ourselves,
so that by keeping your commandments
we may glorify you,
the giver of all good gifts.

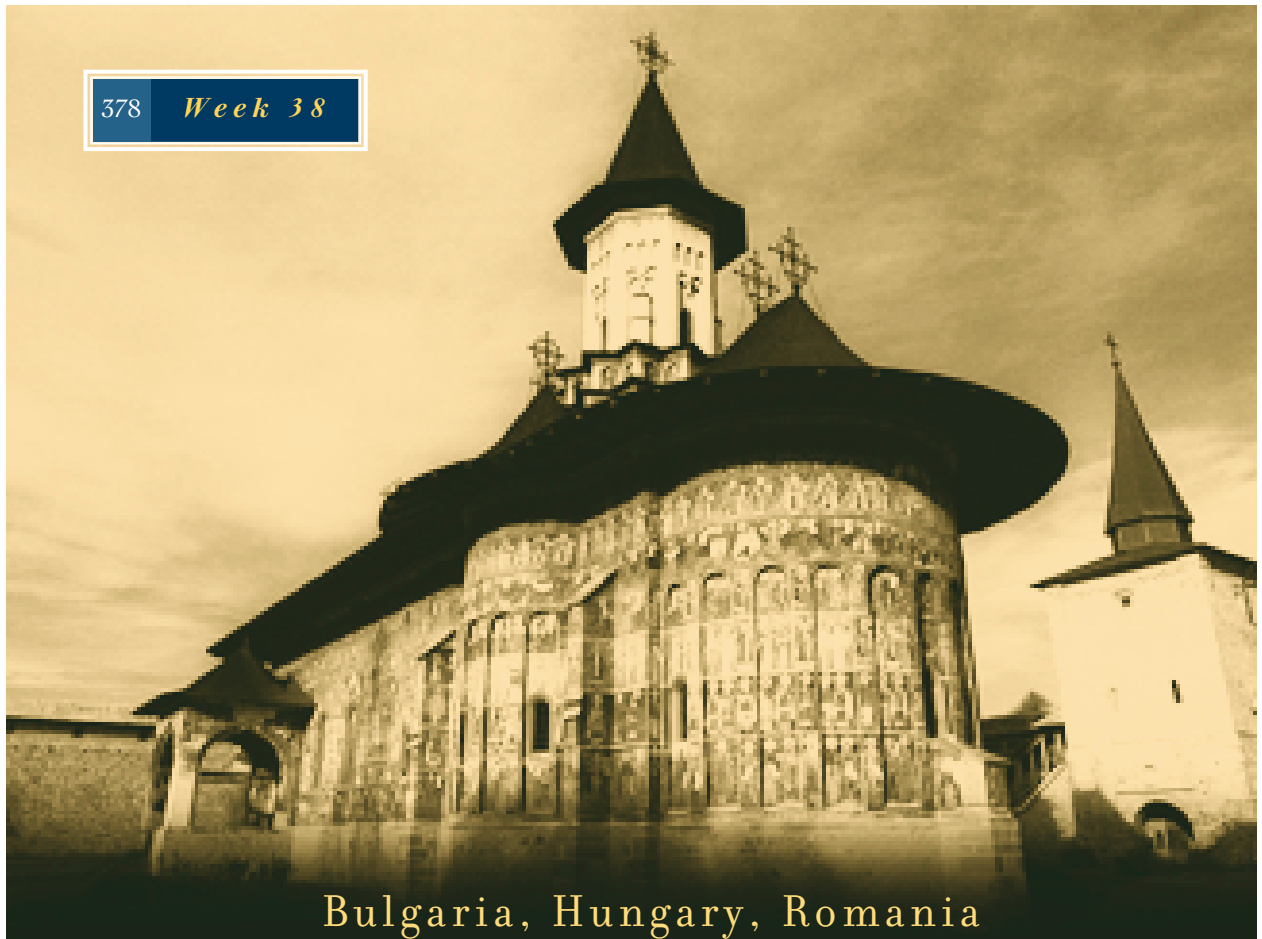
(6)
 Before your perfect goodness
 we bow our heads.
 Into your hands we surrender our souls and our bodies.
 May your Kingdom come.
 may your will be done.

(7)
 Come, let us worship the Tri-Personal Godhead,
 the Son in the Father with the Holy Spirit,
 the Father timelessly begets the co-reigning and co-eternal Son.
 The Holy Spirit was in the Father,
 glorified equally with the Son.
 One Power, One Substance, One Godhead!
 In worshipping him, let us all say:
 Holy God,
 who made all things through the Son,
 with the cooperation of the Spirit.
 Holy Mighty,
 through whom we know the Father,
 through whom the Holy Spirit came into the world!
 Holy Immortal,
 the comforting Spirit,
 proceeding from the Father and resting in the Son.
 O Holy Trinity: glory to you.

(8)
 God, you are the God of life.
 Transform us in the depths of our hearts
 into people through whom your peace is carried out into your world.
 Send your Spirit into the hearts of those
 who are captured in the net of violence,
 be it as perpetrators or as victims,
 and let us never give up the search for the chance to talk to them.

(9)
 Lord, open our eyes, that we may see you in our brothers and sisters.
 Lord, open our ears, that we may hear the cries of the hungry,
 the cold, the frightened, the oppressed.
 Lord, open our hearts, that we may love each other as you love us.
 Renew in us your spirit.
 Lord, free us and make us one.

378

Week 38

Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania

Bulgaria

(Republic of Bulgaria)

Christian community can only proclaim the Gospel – and be heard – if it is a living icon of Christ. The equality of the brothers [and sisters] and freedom in the Spirit, experienced in the Liturgy, should be expressed and continued in economic sharing and liberation in the field of social oppression.

Ion Bria



Statistics

Population: 7.5 million

Government: Unitary multiparty republic

Language: Bulgarian; also Turkish, Romany, Russian, Armenian, Greek, Macedonian and others

Literacy: 97%

Religion: Christian 81% (mostly Eastern Orthodox), Muslim 12%

WCC member churches: None

H i s t o r y

Bulgaria, located on the Balkan peninsula in southeastern Europe, is a mountainous country on the Black Sea. Turkey and Greece lie to the south, Macedonia and Yugoslavia to the west and Romania to the north.

The Bulgars, a central Asian people, merged with the local Slavic inhabitants in the seventh century to form the first Bulgarian state. Bulgaria struggled with the Byzantine Empire to assert its place in the Balkans, but by the end of the fourteenth century the Ottoman Turks overran the country. Northern Bulgaria achieved independence from the Turks in 1878 and all of Bulgaria became independent in 1908. After having fought on the losing side in both world wars, Bulgaria fell into the Soviet sphere by 1946. Communist domination ended in 1990 when Bulgaria held its first multiparty election since the Second World War and began the contentious process of moving towards political democracy and a market economy while combating inflation, unemployment, corruption and crime. Today, reforms and democratization keep Bulgaria on a path towards eventual integration with the European Union. In 2004 it joined NATO.

During the 1980s non-Slavic Turks were forced to take Slavic names and were prohibited from speaking Turkish in public. Over 300,000 Turks fled to Turkey during these years. The minority churches include the Methodist, Baptist, Adventist, Pentecostal and Armenian Apostolic Orthodox churches. Under communist rule, atheism was promoted, but the new constitution guarantees freedom of religion, with Eastern Orthodoxy given a place of prominence as the "traditional religion of Bulgaria". Just before the 1998 WCC assembly, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church withdrew its membership from the Council, citing the WCC's "liberal Protestant

bias", joint services of worship and an alleged lack of interest in Orthodoxy.

While the state provides funds for the Orthodox Church, youth movements and church schools other than seminaries are forbidden. The Turkish Islamic population is gradually coming out of its isolation, and the old idea that Muslims may not live and work with Christians is being overcome.

H u n g a r y

(*Republic of Hungary*)

Statistics

Population: 10 million

Government: Unitary multiparty republic

Language: Hungarian; also several others

Literacy: 98%

Religion: Christian 87% (mostly Roman Catholic), Atheist 11%, Muslim 1%, Jewish 1%

WCC member churches: Baptist Union of Hungary, Lutheran Church in Hungary, Reformed Church in Hungary



H i s t o r y

Landlocked Hungary is bordered by Austria to the west and Slovakia to the north, and Ukraine and Romania to the east, as well as Austria, Croatia and Serbia.

Hungary was part of the polyglot Austro-Hungarian Empire, which collapsed during the First World War. It fell under communist rule fol-

lowing the Second World War. In 1956 Hungary revolted and withdrew from the Warsaw Pact. Massive military intervention by Moscow resulted in many deaths and many Hungarians fled as refugees to the west. Under the leadership of Janos Kadar in 1968 Hungary began liberalizing its economy, introducing so-called "goulash communism". It held multiparty elections in 1990 and initiated a free market economy. It joined NATO in 1999 and the European Union in 2004.

The history of Hungary has often been linked to the history of the church. Catholic and Orthodox missionaries were active during the third century. The Magyars (Hungarians) came from the east and adopted Roman Catholicism around 1000. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, Lutheran and especially Calvinist Protestants were in the majority. In 1944 the German army occupied Hungary and within six months had sent over 600,000 Hungarian Jews to concentration camps, where they were killed.

Along with economic and political struggles, Hungary has experienced widespread destruction of its forests from acid rain and air pollution, and its heavy industry contributes a great deal of pollution to the region. Alcoholism is a serious health problem. There is also discrimination against ethnic minorities such as the Roma and Jewish people.

Roman Catholicism has long been the dominant force in Hungary, although it was heavily persecuted by the communist regime. The Hungarian Reformed church remains the largest Protestant community. A theology of service has encouraged church ministry among children with disabilities, older people and the sick. Ecumenism and mission remain ecclesiastical priorities through the work of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary, which was established in 1948.

R o m a n i a



S t a t i s t i c s

Population: 22 million

Government: Republic

Language: Romanian; also Hungarian, German, Romany and others

Literacy: 96%

Religion: Christian 88% (mostly Orthodox),

Atheist 11%, Muslim 1%

WCC member churches: *Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania, Reformed Church in Romania [Cluj], Reformed Church in Romania [Oradea], Romanian Orthodox Church*

H i s t o r y

Romania is in southeastern Europe and borders the Black Sea between Bulgaria and Ukraine.

The principalities of Walachia and Moldavia – for centuries under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire – secured their autonomy in 1856 and they united in 1859 under the new name of Romania. The country gained full independence in 1878 and added to its territory by backing the Allies in the First World War. However, in the Second World War, Romania allied itself with the Axis powers and participated in the 1941 invasion of the USSR by Hitler's Germany. Three years later, overrun by the Soviets, Romania signed an

armistice which led to the abdication of the king in 1947 and the establishment of a communist people's republic. The decades-long rule of dictator Nicolae Ceausescu (who took power in 1965) became increasingly oppressive and draconian throughout the 1980s. Eventually, Ceausescu was overthrown and executed by a popular uprising. Former communists dominated the government until 1996, when they were swept from power by a fractious coalition of centrist parties. The government faced rampant corruption, a lagging economy and weak democratic reforms.

Christianity reached the area of what is now Romania very early; tradition dates it to the apostle Andrew. Many local martyrs suffered under the Emperor Diocletian. Romanian Orthodoxy has been the main Christian tradition for centuries. A large Hungarian population in Transylvania was Roman Catholic and later Protestant, especially Calvinist and Unitarian, while Saxon Germans were Lutheran. Following the change from an oppressive communist regime in 1989, new pastoral and missionary opportunities emerged amid spreading secularization, rural depopulation, and efforts to refashion an outmoded system of industrialization.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The long history of Christianity in these countries.
- o Those who give their lives to Christian prayer and service.
- o The care given to places of worship as, with icon and art, they proclaim the Gospel.
- o Those caring for orphans, the elderly, and others without resources or family to take care of themselves.
- o Those who make peace between ethnic groups.
- o Those who fight against the abuse of women.

Pray for:

- o An end to corruption and organized crime, high unemployment, and limited supplies of food and housing.
- o The environment, which continues to suffer severe degradation, and for all those who must deal with the pollution of the air they breathe and the water they drink.
- o A renewed ecumenical spirit among the churches.
- o Those who face discrimination, hatred and violence on the basis of their ethnicity and religion.
- o The creation of stable economic and political systems that allow for the participation of all the peoples in these countries.
- o Healing for those who suffered under Marxist regimes.

PRAYERS

(1)

You, O Christ, are the kingdom of heaven; you the land promised to the gentle; you the grazing-lands of paradise; you the hall of the celestial banquet; you the ineffable marriage chamber; you the table set for all; you the bread of life; you the joy and the rest; you the delight and the glory; you the gaiety and the mirth; and your grace, grace of the Spirit of all sanctity, will shine like the sun in all the saints; and you, inaccessible sun, will shine in their midst and all will shine brightly to the degree of their faith, their asceticism, their hope and their love, their purification and their illumination by your Spirit.

(2)

Your steadfast love and faithfulness, God, are the source of our life.
 Your steadfast love and faithfulness are the reliable foundation for our faith.
 Your steadfast love and faithfulness are guide and companion
 to the future of your world.
 You let your Son, Jesus Christ, take the sin of the world to make us whole.
 You grant us communion with people,
 making your love and faithfulness present and alive to us.
 We pray that you will make us, too,
 witnesses of your steadfast love and faithfulness.
 Join the members of your people
 to a communion of practised love and faithfulness.
 Help us to forgive as you are forgiving.
 Help us to seek others as you have sought us.
 Let the spirit of your Son, Jesus Christ,
 dwell in us in steadfast love and faithfulness.

(3)

Lord God, it's a big, wide, troubled sea out there, and our lifeboat, your church, seems so very small. It would be easier to stay in a safe harbour – but that's not what we're here for. In storms of hatred, you call us to speak of love. Into depths of war, you send us to be peace-makers. Into waves of despair, you send us to bring a message of hope. Dear Lord, keep us on your course.

(4)

Come, true light.
 Come, life eternal.
 Come, hidden mystery.
 Come, treasure without name.

Come, reality beyond all words.
 Come, person beyond all understanding.
 Come, rejoicing without end.
 Come, light that knows no evening.
 Come, unfailing expectation of the saved.
 Come, raising of the fallen.
 Come, resurrection of the dead.
 Come, all-powerful, for unceasingly
 you create, refashion and change all things by your will alone.
 Come, for you are yourself the desire that is within me.
 Come, my breath and my life.
 Come, the consolation of my humble soul.
 Come, my joy, my glory, my endless delight.

(5)

O, Lord, who give unto each nation its place and time and mission: grant us the gift of unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, that the ancient church, and all Christians of this land, each loyal to their confession, culture and nationality, may discover new forms of common Christian witness, and stand before the divided world as a united and humble fellowship.

O Lord, who commanded your disciples to pray both for their neighbours and their enemies: give us such love for one another, that with one voice and one heart we may glorify your name, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

(6)

May the God of peace bless this word, that the word of Christ may dwell in us richly, and that we may bear fruit to God's glory.

(7)

O God, we give you thanks for Saint Stephen,
 who led the Hungarian nation to the Christian faith
 and endeavoured to make your people blessed.
 We appeal to you with confidence.
 With him we pray for the benefit of Hungary and Hungarians.
 Lord, grant that understanding, love and respect for the law will rule.
 We pray that Saint Stephen,
 along with the Blessed Virgin, our protector,
 will cleanse us from all harm
 so that we might live in peace and contentedness
 and arrive safely in your land.

(8)

PRAYER FROM THE SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON

The wealth of blessings which you gave me, heavenly Father,
I have wrongly wasted and have become a slave of strangers.
Therefore, I cry aloud to you:

I have sinned against you;
receive me like the prodigal of old, opening your arms to me.

I have become enslaved to every evil
and in my wretchedness

I have bowed down before the demons that provoke the passions;
through heedlessness I have lost possession of myself.

O Saviour, heavenly Father, take pity on me
as I flee for refuge to your many mercies.

I am filled with every shameful thing
and dare not look up at the height of heaven,
for I have foolishly bowed down to sin.

But now I return and cry aloud in deep remorse:
I have sinned against you; receive me, King of all.

(9)

PRAYER FROM THE SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON

Behold, O Christ, the affliction of my heart; behold my turning back;
behold my tears, O Saviour, and despise me not.

But embrace me once again in your compassion
and count me with the multitude of the saved,
that with thanksgiving I may sing the praises of your mercy.

As the thief, I cry to you, "Remember me."

As the publican with eyes cast down to earth,
I beat my breast and say, "Be merciful."

As the prodigal, deliver me from every evil, O King who pities all,
that I may sing the praises of your boundless compassion.

Groan now, my soul, all-wretched, and cry aloud to Christ:
O Lord, who for my sake became poor of your own will,
in my poverty I lack every good work.

Make me rich with the abundance of your blessings,
for you alone are full of love and mercy.

O Loving Lord, once you rejoiced at the voluntary return of the Prodigal,
rejoice now because of me, wretched though I am.

Open your holy embrace to me,
that saved I may sing the praises of your boundless compassion.

(10)

PRAYER OF SOMEBODY CONTEMPLATING RELEASE FROM PRISON

What shall I do outside?

My Lord!

The days you have given me are slowly reaching an end.

What will I do outside prison?

Here I have everything I need.

I have a heated room and regular meals.

When did I drink coffee with milk or eat bread with honey outside?

Here I can watch colour TV.

My Lord, what shall I do outside?

Who is waiting for me?

Who needs me?

Where can I go?

Nobody loves me outside (of course, here neither)

and I, myself, cannot stand on my own two feet.

Nobody will employ me with a criminal record;

nobody needs my work.

Jesus! The pastor here was talking about you with such enthusiasm.

Could you really help me?

Are there people outside who could set me up?

Are there Christians who could forgive me

and could I have hope again?

Could it happen, with the help of the people who believe in you,

that I will have a good time once again, even outside?

Jesus, show me the people who consider me to be important too.

Holy Spirit, only you can show me that it is better outside than here!

Make a miracle with me!

Send me your people, who want to help even me!

(11)

PRAYER FOR ASTRONAUTS

Our Father in heaven!

You created everything and left it for people to watch over and take care of.

You made the earth a part of their realm.

You gave them enough ability and technical knowledge

so that human beings could leave the atmosphere of the earth for outer space.

Our Father in heaven,

you cannot be reached by our spaceships but by our prayers.

I am praying to you for the astronauts.
 Save them and the spaceship that keeps them alive!
 Lord Jesus Christ, help them there, in their present workplace,
 so that all of their experiences and observations
 might serve our benefit and our earthly happiness!
 Every minute, night and day, spent in the spaceship is a service.
 Through their work and schedule,
 teach us to take every minute of our lives seriously!
 At their workplace, in the spaceship, they cannot make a mistake.
 My Lord, we make so many mistakes on earth.
 They have to live there in a community of peace and harmony.
 It is very hard for us here to work together in peace.
 Holy Trinity, listen to our prayers said for them!
 Holy Spirit, be with them
 and give them back to their earthly loved ones after their service is finished.

(12)

I would like to be purified, Lord.
 I cannot do it on my own.
 I swore and promised you several times
 that I would be a renewed, different personality,
 but you see, I just remained as I was.
 I do not want to blame my company, my environment,
 but I would like to ask you to turn me off,
 purify me
 and turn me on again,
 so that I could be a light with more power.
 Give me as much rest and time for recreation as I need
 for switching off and wiping the dusty light bulb,
 which shines more brightly after that.
 My Lord, purify me so for the praise of Jesus.

(13)

PRAYER BY THE BOSS

My Lord!
 You are the only one who knows how much I suffer
 and what kind of inner fight upsets me.
 My humanity fights with my Christianity.
 My role as boss fights with my faith.
 My Lord, give me a clear vision.

What should I do?
 Again and again I catch one of my colleagues telling lies.
 He misleads people and does not meet his commitments.
 He just talks and talks, snobs his environment
 and keeps others away from their work.
 He is rude and there are many who complain about him.

Lord Jesus Christ,
 you taught that it was not enough to forgive seven times
 but seventy times seven.
 I did not count how many times I forgave him,
 because I considered his family, his job,
 and I feared that he would be devastated if he were sent away.
 But this is also an intolerable situation.
 Many of us warned him several times.
 His negligence, and malicious decisions were not made public, but covered up,
 as a good mother with her apron covers up the problems of the family.
 But yesterday I realized that he cheated me again.
 My Lord, where is the limit of Christian love,
 how far should I go with forgiveness?
 How much do I have to overlook?
 How long do I have to keep my mouth shut?
 How long can one indulge and cover up mistakes, bad decisions,
 and protect somebody who does not protect others,
 and follows only his selfish goals?
 Spirit of Power, thank you that you have filled me and I am not without you.
 Thank you that you did not give me only a task, but power as well.
 Give me guidance, as you gave in the Gospels.
 Should I send him away or once again should I give him another year,
 just as I did several times before?
 Eternal God, Holy Trinity, help me decide.
 I know that the judgment is yours.
 You will give as good as one gets,
 but the people expect me to make a decision, too.
 Show me the way.

(14)
 Heavenly Father,
 We thank you, that we may come before you as your people,
 called into fellowship with you and with one another.
 We thank you that we may know you

as you revealed yourself in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.
 In him you chose not to stay far from us,
 but came to us in the flesh
 and carried the burden of human suffering and pain.

We confess that we are often as perplexed and uncertain
 as your disciples were in the mountains above Caesarea Philippi.
 We are overwhelmed by opinions about you,
 by theologies trying to interpret you,
 and attempts to accommodate you
 to systems of teaching,
 human powers and ideologies.

We are ourselves often tempted to make a picture of you
 which is convenient, unchallenging and comfortable.

We thank you that you are different.

When you are expected to be a king and warrior,
 you choose to be a servant and a sacrifice.

You choose to be close to us,
 as we struggle with suffering from fear, disease, hatred, injustice
 and the brutal violence of terror.

Help us, our Lord, to follow you on the way of your Messiah.
 Forgive our sins, when we denied you by following our egoist nature,
 acting as lords instead of servants,
 causing suffering to others instead of walking the way of sacrifice.

Transform us by your Holy Spirit so that we may be your followers:
 saved by grace, certain of your love,
 serving each other with silent joy in our hearts
 and choosing to carry the cross with you.

Make us, Lord, bold witnesses of salvation through you,
 with integrity of word and life
 so that our churches might be fellowships
 living already in the power of your kingdom which is still to come.

Make us, Lord, instruments of your mission
 in the ecumenical fellowship of the church
 for yours is the glory: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, forever and ever.

(15)

Heavenly Father!

We come before you in worship and celebration
 of your love that you revealed to us in your Word.

We are the lost who are found.

We are the unfaithful who are restored again.
 We are the ones who once lived without hope
 and are now filled with the deep joy of being safe in your fatherly arms.
 We often wonder whether it is true
 but then it is confirmed by your Word
 in the fellowship of the church
 that your mercy, your grace,
 your unconditional love is truly extended to us, too.

We thank you, our Lord, for those who have shown us your true love,
 for the people through whom we encountered your true nature
 by experiencing undeserved love and acceptance.
 We thank you, Lord, for the fellowship of the church,
 where we experience the foretaste of your Kingdom
 where love and acceptance prevail in perfection.
 We thank you, Lord, for the vision of the new heaven and new earth
 when you will heal the wounds of humankind
 and restore life according to your intention.

But we also come before you confessing our sins.
 We have often acted like the Pharisees, like the scribes, like the elder brother.
 We enjoyed your blessings and closed them off from others.
 We acted as if we possessed your love and we did not share it with others.
 We encountered systems, ideologies and structures
 that destroyed and excluded love and we remained silent.
 We saw others – different from us – rejoicing in you
 and we became bitter in rejecting them.
 Change our hearts and our minds, Lord, by your Holy Spirit,
 so that we may be communities of healing and reconciliation.
 Heal the wounds which we have caused others
 and heal the wounds that others have caused us.
 Reconciled to you by your grace in Christ:
 help us to live in the fellowship of reconciliation,
 demonstrating the order of your coming Kingdom that is already present with us.
 Help us to be present in this world, wherever you send us as witnesses to you,
 accepted and accepting, reconciled and reconciling,
 loved and loving,
 expressing always that yours is the glory,
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit in eternity.

(16)

Oh my Lord Jesus Christ, I have nowhere to turn except to you. You are the only One who can heal me and who can cleanse me of my wounds. You are the only One who can save me from being trapped!

We thank you, our Lord, that we may call on you,
when we are down,
when we feel that we have made mistakes and done things wrong
from which we see no way out.
Help us to go back to you in prayer, convinced that you never despise us.

Light the lamp of your blessed and holy word, and raise in me the sun of your grace! Show the right path to me, your poor servant, so that I may walk pleasing your holy Majesty! I am waiting for you, my Lord, with hope in my heart, just as the watchmen are longing for the morning. Raise the beauty of the sun of the morning for me so that I may serve you with a diligent mind.

We thank you, Lord, that in your word we find comfort and restoration.
We thank you that your forgiveness is not limited
and we may live out of this forgiveness as your people.
Help us, Lord, to live in forgiveness.
Help us to create a fellowship within the church,
where forgiveness prevails,
where human lives are restored and where acceptance is the norm.
Help us to forgive those who have sinned against us,
even when they do not deserve forgiveness.
By the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to be ambassadors of forgiveness.
In proclamation of your word, in fellowship and in humble service,
make us faithful participants of your mission
setting up the signs of hope everywhere on the face of the earth.

Yours be the glory, Father God in the highest, one in majesty with Christ, our Lord, one in authority with the Holy Spirit! Oh Triune but One God, bless our works!



Belarus, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine

Belarus

(Republic of Belarus)

Love all creation
 The whole of it and every grain of sand
 Love every leaf
 Every ray of God's light
 Love the animals
 Love the plants
 Love everything
 If you love everything
 You will perceive
 The divine mystery in things
 And once you have perceived it
 You will begin to comprehend it ceaselessly
 More and more every day
 And you will at last come to love the whole world
 With abiding universal love.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky



Statistics

Population: 10 million

Government: Unitary multiparty republic

Language: Belarussian, Russian; also Polish, Ukrainian

Literacy: 97%

Religion: *Christian 70% (mostly Eastern Orthodox), Atheist 29%, Jewish and other 1%*
WCC member churches: *None*

History

Belarus is a landlocked country with large rivers emptying into the Baltic and Black Seas. Russia lies to the east, Ukraine to the south, Poland to the west, and Lithuania and Latvia to the north. Throughout its history, Belarus has been under the control of its neighbours, including Lithuania, Poland and Russia. In 1922 it was one of the four founding republics of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

During the Second World War the region was invaded by Germany, and more than 2 million people were killed. At the time of the invasion, Jews were the second largest ethnic group in the area, but most were deported to concentration camps and massacred, so that today less than 1 per cent of the population is Jewish. In 1990 Belarus became one of the first republics to declare sovereignty from the Soviet Union, but it retains closer political and economic ties than any of the other former republics. In 1999 Russia and Belarus signed a treaty on a two-state union, but it is yet to be seriously implemented.

Since independence the standard of living has decreased continuously; today, more than half the population lives in poverty. In 1994 a new constitution was adopted and Alexander Lukashenka was elected president. In 1996, however, he called for a referendum to expand his presidential powers and, amid widespread allegations of election fraud, dissolved the opposition-controlled legislature. He again claimed victory in the controversial 2006 election.

Belarus has few natural resources other than peat marshes, which means that the economy is dependent on heavy industry. Most of the population is urban, and environmental pollution is a serious problem. In addition, 70 per cent of the radio-active fallout from the 1986 explosion at Chernobyl in neighbouring Ukraine fell on Belarus, affecting the health of more than 2 mil-

lion people and leaving approximately 25 per cent of the land uninhabitable. This environmental contamination has resulted in an increase in cancer and other illnesses, and severely taxes the economy and health care system.

Most Christians in Belarus are Eastern Orthodox, which was adopted as the state religion following independence. There is a sizeable Roman Catholic minority, and a handful of Protestant churches. All were repressed under Soviet rule, and continue to struggle amid the widespread atheism that was encouraged for the previous several decades.

Moldova

(Republic of Moldova)

Statistics

Population: *4.4 million*

Government: *Republic*

Language: *Moldovan (same as Romanian); also Russian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian*

Literacy: *96%*

Religion: *Christian 69% (mostly Orthodox), Atheist 24%, Muslim 6%, Jewish 1%*

WCC member churches: *None*



History

Moldova is located in southeastern Europe, with Ukraine to the north, east and south, and Romania to the west. It was in the power of its

neighbours for most of its history, including Poland, Hungary, Russia, Ukraine and Romania.

In 1812 the area known as Moldavia was split, with the western half under the control of the Ottomans and the eastern half (called Bessarabia) going to Russia. After the First World War Bessarabia became independent of Russia and united with Romania, while the western half of Moldova became a separate Soviet republic. In 1944 the halves were reunited to become part of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Moldova became an independent nation, although parts of its traditional area joined Romania and Ukraine. In 1994 it ratified a new constitution and held its first multiparty elections. In 1992 two secessionist regions went to war with the new government. Under the 1994 constitution they were given a high degree of autonomy, and a peaceful solution to the conflict is still being sought.

Moldova is a fertile region and has a favourable climate for agriculture. It lacks mineral deposits and is highly dependent on Russia for its energy supply. Poor farming methods have resulted in erosion and the contamination of soil and ground water. Approximately 20 per cent of the population lacks access to safe water. The Russian financial crisis of 1998 hit Moldova particularly hard, and it is considered to be the poorest country in Europe. More than 600,000 people were displaced as a result of this economic disaster. Unemployment is high and alcoholism rampant. Other political challenges include Russia's ongoing war with Chechnya, ethnic unrest, the resolution of border disputes, the handling and dismantling of nuclear armaments, management of ageing infrastructure such as nuclear power plants, and access to health services.

Most Christians in Moldova are Orthodox. Prior to Soviet occupation the Orthodox churches were under the jurisdiction of the Romanian

Orthodox Patriarch of Bucharest, but under Soviet rule they became part of the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1993 about a third of the Orthodox churches split off and returned their allegiance to Romania. There are also a number of independent churches, established during the twentieth century, and a small Roman Catholic minority. Under the Soviet Union the church was heavily persecuted, its buildings and property confiscated, and its leaders were not allowed to perform their duties.

Russia

(*Russian Federation*)

Statistics



Population: 147 million

Government: Federal multiparty republic

Language: Russian; also Ukrainian, Uzbek, Belarussian, Tatar, Kazakh, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Georgian, Moldovan, Lithuanian and over 120 others

Literacy: 98%

Religion: Christian 57% (mostly Orthodox), Atheist 32%, Muslim 8%, Ethnic 1%, Jewish 1%, Hindu/Buddhist 1%

WCC member churches: Russian Orthodox Church

History

Russia is the largest country in the world, straddling both Europe and Asia. The Arctic Ocean forms its broad northern boundary, but access to major sea lanes is restricted. Broad plains and

rolling hills lie west of the Urals, while vast forests stretch across Siberia. The subarctic climate and terrain in Siberia is a major barrier to development. The country is rich in resources, but they are spread over a huge area. Serious ecological problems plague many parts of the country.

Founded in the twelfth century, the Principality of Moscow was able to emerge from 200 years of Mongol domination (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries) and gradually conquer and absorb surrounding principalities. In the early seventeenth century a new Romanov dynasty continued this expansion across Siberia to the Pacific. Under Tsar Peter I (1682–1725) hegemony was extended to the Baltic Sea and Russia was called an empire. It continued to expand in all directions until a few years prior to the First World War. Repeated and devastating defeats of the army in the war, rioting in major cities and the overthrow in 1917 of the Romanov imperial household spelled the beginning of the end of the Russian Empire. Communists under Lenin seized power soon after the execution of the last Tsar and formed the USSR. This was followed by the brutal rule of Josef Stalin (1928–53), who strengthened Russia's dominance of the Soviet Union at the cost of tens of millions of lives. The Soviet Union grew to be the largest grouping of nations in the world, but it was too huge to manage and the economy and society stagnated. In 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev began a modernization process that eventually splintered the USSR into 15 independent republics. Since then Russia has struggled to build a democratic political system and a market economy.

Russia has many different regions, each with distinct histories and ethnic groups. Approximately four-fifths of the population is ethnically Russian. In some areas ethnic unrest and the desire for autonomy have led to violence. In Chechnya there has been devastating violence since 1994.

The Russian Orthodox Church is by far the largest Christian body in Russia. It is active in ecumenical work and peace-making. There are a number of other Orthodox churches that were not

recognized under the Soviet Union, and were forced to meet secretly. This was also true of the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. Between 1917 and 1953 over 100 million people were killed or imprisoned in labour camps, about half of whom were Christian believers charged with alleged political offences. During this time those Christians who were not able to meet were sometimes able to listen to Christian radio broadcasts from foreign countries, resulting in millions of isolated believers. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, churches have been reopened and there has been strong growth in all churches, although a 1997 law forbids proselytism by foreign religious organizations. The Roman Catholic Church has over a million adherents in Russia, and has grown tremendously since 1991. The primary Protestant presence is that of the Baptists, who in 1944 merged with Evangelical Christian churches to form the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. They, too, were persecuted, but have seen a revival in recent years.

Ukraine



Statistics

Population: 51 million

Government: Unitary multiparty republic

Language: Ukrainian; also Russian, Polish, Romy, Belarussian

Literacy: 98%

Religion: Christian 83% (mostly Orthodox), Atheist 14%, Muslim 2%, Jewish 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Ukraine, part of the Russian Empire, was briefly independent from 1918 until 1920, and became a Soviet republic and one of the founding republics of the Union in 1922. It suffered greatly under Soviet rule, including two large-scale famines in the 1920s and 1930s that cost millions of lives. During the Second World War Ukraine was invaded by German forces and over 7 million people died in the fighting. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Ukraine, Russia and Belarus formed the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Independence has coincided with economic difficulties, rampant corruption and widespread unemployment. In 1994 Leonid Kuchma was elected president. He was reelected in 1999, but in 2001 violent protests and demands for his impeachment were brought amid accusations of corruption and extensive human rights violations. The disputed results of an election in 2004, culminating in street protests known internationally as "the orange revolution", led to the election as president of opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko in early 2005. Subsequent parliamentary elections have shown that the population is divided on questions of economic and political reform.

Inadequate supplies of potable water are an issue of environmental concern. Tuberculosis,

measles, diphtheria and cholera have increased, plus water-borne and parasitic diseases. In addition, radiation contamination from the Chernobyl disaster of 1986 continues in the northeast of the country.

Tradition dates Christianity in Ukraine from the arrival of the apostle Andrew. The church became firmly established in 988, when Prince Vladimir was baptized, leading to the founding of the Russian Orthodox Church. Under Soviet occupation the church was heavily restricted, church property was confiscated and many churches were banned and their leaders persecuted. However, many people of faith continued to worship in secret, and since 1991 the church has blossomed. Most Christians are Orthodox. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church was part of the Russian Patriarchate of Moscow, but the establishment of a Kievan Patriarchate in 1992 led to a split. There is also an autocephalous (independent) Orthodox church, which had been banned in 1930. The Ukrainian Catholic Church has a large following. There are many small Protestant and Independent groups, the largest of which is the Christians of Evangelical Faith. These churches are opposed by the Orthodox Church, and in 1993 a law was passed that limits the activities of foreign Protestant and Independent groups.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Priests, pastors and lay people who gave up their lives during communist times.
- o The long history of Christianity in these lands.
- o Those Christians who consider as important the dialogue with other Christians from different confessions.
- o Choirs that sing God's praises.
- o Beautiful churches which announce the community of the faithful.
- o Church bells, onion domes, deep bass voices chanting the psalms, and icons of the saints.

- o Ice cream, caviar and borsch.
- o Balalaikas and wooden dolls nested in each other.
- o Those who work for democracy and openness in government.

Pray for:

- o Guidance, as these nations work to reconfigure political and economic structures.
- o Compassion and integrity for all peoples in these nations with such diverse ethnic histories.
- o Those who suffer from alcoholism, HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and other life-threatening diseases.
- o The large numbers of people who now live in poverty and are unemployed.
- o Revitalization of the churches after decades of official atheism.
- o Those in Belarus and Ukraine who suffer from the continued effects of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.
- o Those who struggle for democracy and truthfulness in the media.

PRAYERS

(1)

How good you are, Lord, and how near you are to us –
 so near that we may always talk to you,
 be comforted by you,
 breathe through you,
 be enlightened by you,
 find peace in you,
 and gain spiritual nourishment from you.
 Grant that my fellowship with you may never be polluted
 by malice, pride, envy, greed, gluttony or falsehood.
 Grant that I may belong wholly to you.

(2)

How easy, Lord, it is for me to live with you.
 How easy it is for me to believe in you.
 When my understanding is perplexed by doubts
 or on the point of giving up,
 when the most intelligent
 see no further than the coming evening,

and know not what they shall do tomorrow,
 you send a clear assurance that you are there
 and that you will ensure that not all the roads of goodness are barred.

(3)

I want to live
 ... and not to die.
 I want to laugh
 ... and not to cry.
 I want to feel the summer sun,
 I want to sing when life is fun.
 I want to fly into the blue,
 I want to swim like fishes do,
 I want to reach out friendly hands
 to all the young in other lands,
 I want to laugh
 ... and not to cry.
 I want to live
 ... and not to die.

(4)

MORNING PRAYER

Lord, let me accept calmly all that this day might bring me,
 and let me devote myself completely to your sacred will.
 Direct me and help me each hour of this day.
 Control my thoughts and feelings in all my deeds and words.
 When unpredictable circumstances arise,
 do not let me forget that everything comes from you.

Teach me to be just towards my brother [and sister],
 never to provoke wrath or cause sorrow.
 Control my will and teach me to pray, to believe, to hope,
 to suffer, to forgive and to love.

Holy Spirit, help me to dedicate this day to my Lord and Saviour.

Lord Jesus, Son of God, it is better not to live than to live without you.
 I thank you, God, for the gift of this day
 and for all the good deeds that you will help me do today.

Merciful God, deliver me from the desire for comfort
 and make me worthy of denying myself for your sake

and for my brother's [and sister's] sake at any moment,
 for that is why you have given me life.
 Help me to reject anything that does not belong to you,
 and all that does belong to you to accept with devout faith, hope and love.
 Give me courage to serve you worthily,
 to place justice above profit,
 the realization of noble deeds above momentary pleasures,
 to put others before myself and to fulfil your commandment of love.
 Let the light of your beauty, goodness and love shine in my soul.

(5)

PRAYER BEFORE SUPPER

The poor shall eat and be satisfied,
 and those who seek the Lord shall praise him;
 their hearts shall live forever!
 Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
 now and ever and unto ages of ages.

Lord, have mercy! (*3 times*)

O Christ God, bless the food and drink of thy servants,
 for thou art holy, always, now and ever and unto ages of ages.

(6)

PRAYER FOR ENEMIES

Lord Jesus Christ,
 you commanded us to love our enemies,
 and those who defame and injure us,
 and to pray for them and forgive them.
 You, yourself, prayed for your enemies, who crucified you:
 grant us, we pray, the spirit of Christian reconciliation and meekness,
 that we may heartily forgive every injury
 and be reconciled with our enemies.
 Grant us to overcome the malevolence and offences of people
 with Christian meekness and true love of our neighbour.

We further beseech you, O Lord,
 to grant to our enemies true peace and forgiveness of sins;
 and do not allow them to leave this life
 without true faith and sincere conversion.

And help us repay evil with goodness,
and to remain safe from the temptations of the devil
and from all the perils which threaten us,
in the form of visible and invisible enemies.

(7)

AKATHIST (HYMN OF PRAISE) FOR HOLY COMMUNION

Jesus, break the bonds of sin whereby the enemy has bound me.

Jesus, grant me a humble heart and a broken spirit.

Jesus, drive far from me temptations and occasions for stumbling.

Jesus, establish me in faith and love for you.

Jesus, God of my heart, come and unite me to yourself forever.

Jesus, draw nigh unto one that seeks union with you:

Jesus, enter into my inmost parts, into all my members and bones.

Jesus, be a light unto my darkened mind.

Jesus, fill with yourself the abyss of my heart,
which the whole world cannot satisfy.

Jesus, speak through the voice of my conscience.

Jesus, stir and guide my will.

Jesus, God of my heart, come and unite me to yourself forever.

Jesus, receive me, as you received the publican, the harlot and the thief.

Jesus, disdain not to enter under the roof of my soul,
though it is all empty and fallen.

Jesus, open the eyes of my soul,
as you opened the eyes of the man that was blind from birth.

Jesus, say to me too, as to the paralytic: Arise and walk.

Jesus, stanch the flow of the impure desires of my soul
as you stanch the flow of the woman with an issue of blood.

Jesus, heal the leprosy of my soul and conscience.

Jesus, God of my heart, come and unite me to yourself forever.

Jesus, you call all that labour and are heavy laden to rest in you;
receive me, who labours under the vanity of this world.

Jesus, you came to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance;
absolve me of my sins and passions.

Jesus, you healed every infirmity and disease;
heal the wounds and festering of my soul.

Jesus, you satisfied the hungry; feed me with your body and blood.

Jesus, you raised the dead; quicken me who has been slain by my sins.
Jesus, Conqueror of hell, rescue me from the jaws of the spirit of malice.
Jesus, God of my heart, come and unite me to yourself forever.

(8)

Will you enlighten me so that I can recognize your light and perceive your love?

My God, give me a heart to love you and eyes to see you.

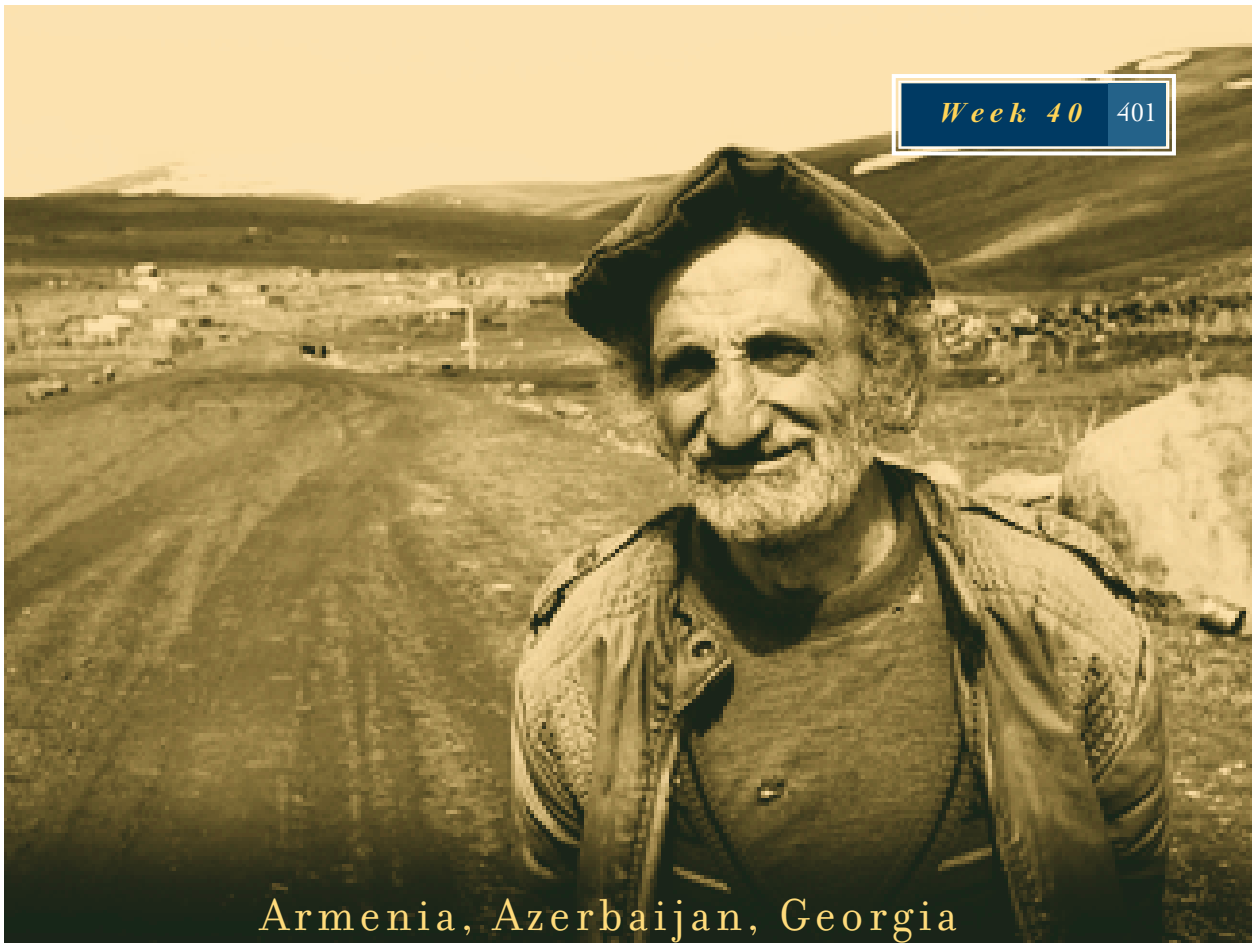
Give me ears to hear your voice and lips to speak about you.

Give me the taste to appreciate you, the sense of smell to catch your perfume.

Give me hands to touch you and feet to follow you.

On earth and in heaven, I desire only you, my God.

You are my sole desire, my consolation, the end of all anguish and suffering.



Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia

At that time also the Iberian [an ancient name for Georgia] nation, who live in the clime of Pontus, accepted the laws of God's word and faith in the kingdom of heaven. This so excellent deed was brought about by a certain captive woman [St Nino] who had fallen among them, and who led a life of faith and complete sobriety and virtue, and throughout the days and nights unceasingly offered up prayers to God. As often happens her very persistence aroused among the womenfolk a certain curiosity to see whether such devotion might not win some reward. [A child of a woman was cured by St Nino in the name of Christ.] The report of this spread to many, and the renown of the marvellous deed reached the ears of the queen who, being afflicted by some very grave bodily complaint, was in the greatest desperation. She commanded them to carry her to the captive's cell. After laying her on her hair cloak and calling on Christ's name,

the captive woman raised her up immediately after the prayer in good health and spirits. She taught the queen that Christ, Son of God Almighty, was the Deity who had bestowed this cure on her, and that she should invoke him, whom she ought to acknowledge as the source of her life and health. And the queen, returning joyfully homewards, in answer to her husband's enquiry revealed the source of her sudden restoration to health. But when in his joy at his wife's recovery, he ordered presents to be sent to the woman, the queen said, "O King, the captive woman prizes none of these things. She rejects gold, despises silver and nourishes herself by fasting as if by food. The only way in which we can reward her is by worshipping that God Christ who cured me according to her prayer."

Tyrannius Rufinu

Armenia

(*Republic of Armenia*)



Statistics

Population: 2.9 million

Government: Unitary multiparty republic

Language: Armenian; also Azerbaijani, Russian, Ukrainian, Kurdish

Literacy: 98%

Religion: Christian 94% (mostly Orthodox), Muslim 3%

WCC member churches: Armenian Apostolic Church

History

Armenia prides itself on being the first nation formally to adopt Christianity (in the early fourth century). Despite periods of autonomy, over the centuries Armenia came under the sway of various empires, including the Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Persian and Ottoman. It was incorporated into imperial Russia in 1828 and the Soviet Union in 1920.

Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, strategically located between the Black and Caspian Seas, have long histories of disruption and warfare. These ancient civilizations share a past and a people, but are divergent religiously. The three countries formed the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic from 1922 to 1936. Today, they are three independent nations, sometimes at odds

with one another. Armenia and Azerbaijan have been locked in a dispute since 1988 over the largely Armenian enclave within Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh. The struggle escalated after both countries attained independence from the USSR until a ceasefire in 1994. Armenian forces held not only Nagorno-Karabakh but also a significant part of Muslim Azerbaijan. Georgia and Azerbaijan are at odds over oil rights in the Caspian Sea. These conflicts, and the widespread corruption following freedom from the Soviet Union, have taken a toll economically, creating a great number of refugees.

Turks and Armenians lived for centuries in relative harmony in the Ottoman Empire. As other Christian minorities gained independence, Armenians began to agitate for independence. Pogroms began and in the 1890s hundreds of thousands of Armenians died. By the First World War almost a million were killed by Turkish soldiers or by starvation in forced deportation to Syria and Mesopotamia. On 24 April 1915 (commemorated worldwide by Armenians as Genocide Memorial Day) hundreds of Armenian leaders were murdered in Istanbul. The Armenians revolted against the Turks and were aided by the Russians. Armenia was later part of the Soviet Union until the latter's demise in 1991.

The Armenian Apostolic Church, also known as the Georgian Church or the Armenian Orthodox Church, traces its roots to the witness of Bartholomew and Thaddeus, two disciples of Christ. This church is one of the Oriental Orthodox churches. The establishment of the Christian faith in 301 brought with it the development of an Armenian alphabet so that the scripture and liturgy could become accessible to all. This time of scripture and liturgical translation is known as the Golden Age in Armenian history. The Armenian Apostolic Church remains the largest denomination in Armenia.

The Protestant mission began in Armenia in 1831 with the founding of churches, schools and seminaries. The Armenian Apostolic Church excommunicated anyone who converted to Protestantism. The 1990s brought a Pentecostal/

charismatic renewal that has spread rapidly across the country.

Azerbaijan

(Azerbaijani Republic)

Statistics

Population: 7.8 million

Government: Federal multiparty republic

Language: Azerbaijani; also Russian, Armenian, Ukrainian

Literacy: 97%

Religion: Muslim 83%, Christian 5% (mostly Orthodox), Jewish 1%

WCC member churches: None



History

Armenia's neighbour, Azerbaijan, is as different as a country with a shared history can be. Like the people of Armenia, the people of Azerbaijan once followed the prophet Zoroaster, who was born there in the seventh century BC. Unlike Armenia, Arab invaders brought Islam with them in the seventh century AD, supplanting Zoroastrianism and various pagan cults. In the sixteenth century Shah Ismail I established Shi'a Islam as the state religion, although many Azerbaijanis remained followers of the Sunni branch of Islam.

Azerbaijan is one of the world's oldest centres of oil production. Today, it is locked in a dispute with both Georgia and Iran over oil rights in the Caspian Sea. Azerbaijan is also engaged in a con-

flict with Armenia over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, located within Azerbaijan but populated mainly by Armenians. These two conflicts have led to an estimated million refugees and internally displaced people in Azerbaijan, and tens of thousands have been killed. There has been internal conflict as well, with an unsuccessful revolt in 1994, and charges of election fraud in 1998 and tens of thousands have been killed. Armenia continues to occupy 16% of Azerbaijan's territory. There has been internal conflict as well, with a 1994 coup attempt and charges of election fraud in 1998. Nevertheless, in 2001 Azerbaijan came into full membership of the Council of Europe.

Since independence, the Azerbaijanis have switched from Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet, causing some concern, particularly among older people and libraries whose books are mainly written in Cyrillic. The language of Azerbaijani is replacing Russian in television broadcasts and is the language of prayer for Muslims.

When Azerbaijan was part of the Soviet Union all religions were persecuted and about 2,000 mosques and churches were destroyed. Christianity first came to Azerbaijan during the third century, and approximately 6,500 believers, the Udin, remain of this original church. Most Christians belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church. There is a small minority of Catholics. Pope John Paul II, during a 2002 visit to Azerbaijan, prayed for reconciliation between the Orthodox and Catholic churches.

Georgia

(Republic of Georgia)

Statistics

Population: 4.6 million

Government: Unitary multiparty republic

Language: Georgian; also Azerbaijani, Armenian, Russian

Literacy: 100%

Religion: Christian 62% (mostly Orthodox), Muslim 19%, Atheist 18%, Jewish 1%

WCC member churches: None



H i s t o r y

Georgia borders the Black Sea and shares borders with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Of the three, Georgia is the most tolerant of religious and ethnic minorities. It is also the most economically developed of the three nations because of its access to the Black Sea. To the north is Russia and to the south-west Turkey.

Georgia was strongly influenced by Greece and Rome for 400 years until King Marian III accepted Christianity in 330. The Christian church in Georgia was crucial to the development of a written language. After Georgia was annexed by the Russian Empire in the early 1800s, the Russian Orthodox Church took over the Georgian church, whitewashing the colourful frescoes and wall paintings typical of Georgian cathedrals.

When Russian rule ended in 1918 Georgia remained independent for three years and the Georgian church regained its autonomy, if not its power and status within society. When the Soviet Union forcibly incorporated Georgia in 1921 the regime purged the Georgian church hierarchy and repressed Orthodox worship. Many churches were destroyed or converted into secular buildings.

In the 1970s, however, the Georgian church experienced a revival, following years of repression. In 1988 Moscow permitted the reopening of some churches, beginning a large-scale restoration process. In 1998 the Georgian Orthodox Church withdrew from the World Council of Churches, an indication of growing tension between Orthodoxy and other parts of the Christian community. In 2005 new conversations began concerning ecumenical relations.

While predominantly Christian, Georgia has enclaves of Jews and Muslims, and prides itself on its ethnic and religious tolerance. Even so, there are continuing threats of fragmentation within the country as separatist movements have grown since 1993. In 2003 an attempt by the government to manipulate elections touched off widespread protests that led to the resignation of the president. New elections in 2004 began a new democratic political dispensation.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Those Christians and Muslims who remained faithful to their traditions during Soviet domination.
- o Those who work for peace in a region of ancient animosities, as well as new ones created in the aftermath of the Soviet system.
- o Armenian khatchkars – intricately decorated crosses carved on monolithic rocks.
- o Monasteries and churches, lovingly being restored.
- o Musical traditions going back centuries.
- o Traditions of elaborate family meals and wondrous hospitality.
- o Movement towards democracy.

Pray for:

- o The Georgian Orthodox Church, that it may rediscover a rich relationship with the family of churches worldwide.
- o A foundation for peace among these countries, and an encouragement of new relationships with neighbouring nations.
- o An end to all the boundary disputes which threaten to erupt into violence.
- o Those suffering poverty and unemployment.
- o New concern for the environment.

PRAYERS

(1)

Lord, through the shedding of the blood of your saints, gather in joy all the scattered children of your church, and all who weep bitterly at the sadness of disunity, you who give grace for our salvation.

(2)

MORNING PRAYER

We give you thanks, O Lord our God, who have awakened us from restful sleep by the grace of your mercy. Awaken our minds in righteousness for you, Lord our God, so that our eyes may see your salvation. May your divinity come and abide in us, and may your mercy shelter and protect your servants. By day and by night and at all times make us, your servants, reflect always on the love of your commandments, in thanksgiving to glorify the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages.

(3)

PRAYER FOR TIMES OF TROUBLE

Now, Lord, save me and keep me, for I have put my trust in you. Liberate me from my trouble, so that the malicious one will not cast me into oblivion, for he battles against me in his insidious ways. Even over secrets you have dominion, Lord, and you search the hearts and innermost being. Purify my heart and my mind of all lewd and vile thoughts, so that I will not be lost into eternal perdition.

(4)

Go in peace;

The wisdom of the Wonderful Counsellor guide you,
the strength of the Mighty God uphold you,

the love of the Everlasting Father enfold you,
 the peace of the Prince of Peace be upon you.
 And the blessing of God,
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
 be upon you all this night and for evermore.

(5)

EVENING PRAYER

For peace, let us pray to the Almighty God,
 the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 the king of peace,
 that he may grant unto us yet many years of peace,
 and may send unto us peace-loving authorities
 to the glory and praise of his great and awesome name.
 Let us also pray to him to keep all peoples in peace
 and to overthrow the foes who wage war upon us.

(6)

O Light!
 Divine and one Holy Trinity,
 we who are born of the earth glorify you always,
 together with the heavenly hosts.
 At the rising of the morning light,
 shine forth upon our souls your intelligible light.

(7)

MORNING PRAYER

We give you thanks, O Lord our God,
 who by your visible light have given joy to all your creatures,
 and by the divine light of your commandments have enlightened
 all who believe in you.
 Strengthen us also, O Lord,
 to keep your commandments in this day and at all times,
 that having been enlightened in mind,
 we may do your will and receive your heavenly gifts with all your saints,
 through the grace and mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
 to whom be glory, dominion and honour,
 now and forever and unto ages of ages.

(8)

A PRAYER TO CHRIST FOR HEALING

Sun of justice,
ray of blessings,
form of light,
cherished desire,
exalted beyond understanding,
mighty beyond telling,
joy of goodness,
hope realized,
praised by heaven,
king of glory,
Christ creator,
life proclaimed,
finish, I pray,
the meanderings
of my wretched, errant voice
with your own mighty words.
Help me to polish
a pleasing prayer,
to bring before your Father on high.
You who took on my likeness,
submitting for my sake to trial and condemnation,
take pity on me.
You who bless all life,
God of Goodness,
who provide all things above and below,
who were willing to die for me,
God and Lord of all,
who have borne the pangs of mortal flesh,
take pity on me,
for I am wracked with pain.
Take pity on me, stay with me, a wretched sinner,
and pray with me to your Father, your equal in glory.

(9)

PRAYER FOR HEALING

Grant me life, compassionate Lord.

Hear me, merciful Lord.

Be charitable to me, forgiving Lord.

Save me, long-suffering Lord.

Protect me, defender Lord.

Be generous, all-giving Lord.

Free me, all-powerful Lord.

Revive me, restoring Lord.

Raise me again, awe-inspiring Lord.

Enlighten me, heavenly Lord.

Cure me, omnipotent Lord.

Grant pardon, inscrutable Lord.

Bestow gifts, bountiful Lord.

Adorn me with grace, generous Lord.

Let us be reconciled, healing Lord.

Be accepting, unvengeful Lord.

Wipe away my transgressions, blessed Lord,

so that on that Day of Misery,

when I stare at the abyss on either side,

I may also catch sight of your salvation,

my hope and guardian,

and on that terrifying journey

your angel of peace may sweetly guide me.

Endow me, Lord, on the day my breath is finished

with a clean spirit raised in light among

the joyful heavenly host,

with gifts of your love overtaking me.

May I arrive with the workers for justice.

Grant to my wayward soul an unexpected kindness

on that day of despair.

Do not assign, blessed Lord and Saviour,

a wild beast to guide your sick sheep,

but grant me health, for I am dying of sin,

grant me salvation, for I am ruined by transgressions.

(10)

For if we flee, it is you who come after us.
 If we are weak, you give us strength.
 If we falter, you set us on the right and easy path.
 If we faint, you encourage us.
 If we are ailing in body and soul, you heal us.
 If we lie, you justify us with your truth.
 If we stumble into the abyss, you direct us to heaven.
 If we do not turn from our willfulness, you guide us.
 If we sin, you weep.
 If we are just, you smile.
 If we are estranged, you mourn.
 If we approach, you celebrate.
 If we give, you receive.
 If we become stubborn, you are patient.
 If we are ungrateful, you grant abundantly.
 If we quit, you are sad.
 If we are brave, you rejoice.

(11)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

You are not the accuser, but the liberator,
 not the destroyer, but the rescuer,
 not the executioner, but the saviour,
 not the scatterer, but the gatherer,
 not the traitor, but the deliverer.
 You do not pull down, but lift up.
 You do not knock down, but stand upright.
 You do not curse, but bless.
 You do not take revenge, but give grace.
 You do not torment, but comfort.
 You do not erase, but write.
 You do not shake, but steady.
 You do not trample, but console.
 You do not invent the causes of death,
 but seek the means to preserve life.

You do not forget to help.
You do not abandon the good.
You do not withhold compassion.
You do not bring the sentence of death,
but the legacy of life.
You are not opposed for your generosity.
You are not blasphemed for your grace.
You are not cursed for your bounty.
You are not insulted for your free gifts.
You are not mocked for your patience.
You are not blamed for your pardon.
You are not accused for your goodness.
You are not dishonoured for your sweetness.
You are not despised for your meekness.
For these, we send not complaints,
but gratitude that cannot be silenced.
Take away my sins, Almighty.
Remove the curse from me, blessed.
Pardon my debts, merciful.
Erase my transgressions, compassionate.
Extend your hand of deliverance
and I will instantly be made perfect.
What is easier than this for you Lord,
and what is more important to you?
Thus, providential Lord, revive me,
made in your image and brought to life by your breath,
in order to renew the breath of your pure
enlightening grace,
protecting my sinful soul.

(12)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

All-provident Lord,
place your holy fear as a guard before my eyes
so they may not look lustfully;
before my ears so that they may not delight in hearing evil words;
before my mouth so that it may not speak any falsehoods;
before my heart so that it may not think evil;
before my hands so that they may not do injustice;
before my feet, that they may not walk in the paths of injustice;
but so direct them,
that they may always be according to all your commandments.
Have mercy upon your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

Christ, who are the Living Fire,
inflame my soul with the fire of your love,
which you did send forth upon the earth,
that it may burn the stains of my soul,
sanctify my conscience, purge the sins of my body,
and kindle in my heart the light of your knowledge.
Have mercy upon your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

You may wonder why I sit here
on this rock, by the river,
doing nothing.

There is so much work
to be done for my people.

We have little food.

We have few jobs.

Our fields are in shambles.
And still landmines everywhere.

I am here to hear the quiet,
the water and singing trees.
This is the sound of Peace,
in the presence of my Allah Almighty.

After thirty years as a mujahadeen ¹
I have grown old from fighting.
I resent the sound of destruction.
I am tired of war.

Even though the Russians destroyed
our entire Baharak valley,
when their first Hind helicopters
bombed my home in 1980,

they returned and bombed my village
more than 80 times
because they hated us so much.

Then came the Taliban.
We lost hundreds of our best men
to defeat their evil ways.

Listen to the stream,
Hear the sound of Peace.

Listen to the Trees,
Hear the song of Peace.

Look at the Mountains,
See the serenity of Peace.

Look at the Stones in the Mountains,
Each one is a Shaheed ².

Now it is our duty
to turn those Stones into Schools,
so that our Children may have Peace
and war may be no more, Inshallah,
in the name of Allah Almighty.

Commandhan Sadhar Khan Mujaheed

1. freedom fighter 2. fallen martyr

A f g h a n i s t a n

*(Transitional Islamic State
of Afghanistan)*



Statistics

Population: 25.8 million

Government: Coalition government

Language: Pashto, Dari and others

Literacy: 31% (men 47%, women 15%)

Religion: Muslim 98%, Zoroastrian 1%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Afghanistan is a mountainous landlocked country in central Asia bordered by Pakistan to the east and south, Iran to the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north, and China to the northeast. Its recent history is one of war, invasion and endless civil unrest. The Soviet Union invaded in 1979 but was forced to withdraw ten years later by a US-supported anti-communist mujahadeen. The Afghan communist regime in Kabul, the capital, continued the battle until its collapse in 1992. Fighting continued among warlords and other groups until a fundamentalist Islamic faction called the Taliban took over in 1996.

Afghanistan was attacked by the US following the attacks on New York and Washington in 2001. After fierce fighting the Taliban was removed and an interim coalition government of tribal leaders put in place. Elections were held in 2004 but the democratic process remains unstable and the

Taliban shows signs of re-establishing itself in southern regions. Fighting over the last several decades has destroyed most of the country's infrastructure, and Afghans make up the largest refugee population in the world. Conditions in the country have been further aggravated by several years of severe drought. At present, the UN is providing aid to over a million people in Afghanistan, but it is estimated that over 7 million are in need of food aid. Only in a few areas have women been allowed to return to work and school.

Afghanistan has been embroiled in similar wars and ethnic conflict and external invasion throughout its 5,000-year history. It has long been at the crossroads of two major trade routes. Today, its principal source of revenue is opium.

Islam is the official religion. Under the Taliban regime, practising or converting to Christianity was punishable by death. In 2001 several foreign Christian aid workers were imprisoned by the Taliban under charge of proselytization. These workers were released after the US attacked Afghanistan, but in most areas instability and religious fundamentalism continue to threaten the tiny Christian population.

K a z a k h s t a n

(Republic of Kazakhstan)



Statistics

Population: 1.2 million

Government: Unitary parliamentary republic

Language: Kazak; also Russian, Tartar,

Ukrainian, Turkish, Belarussian

Literacy: 97%

Religion: Muslim 43%, Christian 17% (mostly Orthodox), Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Kazakhstan is located in the west central portion of the Asian continent, with a small part west of the Ural River on the European continent. Russia lies to the north, China to the east, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to the south, and the Caspian Sea to the west.

Native Kazaks, a mix of Turkic and Mongol nomads who migrated to the region in the thirteenth century, were rarely united in a single nation. The area was conquered by Russia in the eighteenth century and Kazakhstan became a Soviet republic in 1936. During the agricultural Virgin Lands programme of the 1950s and 1960s, Soviet citizens were encouraged to help cultivate Kazakhstan's northern pastures. The influx of immigrants (mostly Russian, but also some deported nationalities) skewed the ethnic mix and enabled non-Kazaks to outnumber natives. Independence in 1991 caused many of these newcomers to emigrate.

Kazakhstan possesses enormous fossil fuel reserves, as well as plentiful supplies of other minerals and metals. It is also a large agricultural producer. The republic has maintained a presidential system of government since independence, and in 1995 it adopted a new constitution that granted extensive powers to the president.

The environment of Kazakhstan began to suffer serious harm during the Soviet period. Between 1949 and 1991 the Soviet government conducted about 70 per cent of all of its nuclear testing in Kazakhstan, and more than a million of its inhabitants were exposed to dangerous levels of radiation. Other environmental issues include radioactive and toxic chemical waste sites associated with former defence industries and test ranges, severe pollution of land, air and water, poor infrastructure and wasteful irrigation practices.

Religious freedom is guaranteed, and Muslim fundamentalists have made substantial inroads

into this secular society. With independence has come a dramatic revival of Islam.

Kyrgyzstan (Kyrgyz Republic)



Statistics

Population: 5.1 million

Government: Unitary multiparty republic

Language: Kyrgyz, Russian; also Uzbek, Kazakh

Literacy: 97%

Religion: Muslim 61%, Atheist 28%, Christian 10% (mostly Orthodox), Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Kyrgyzstan is a central Asian country of incredible natural beauty and proud nomadic traditions. It was annexed by Russia in 1884 and achieved independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. It shares borders with Kazakhstan to the north, China to the east and southeast, Tajikistan to the southwest and Uzbekistan to the west. The rugged Tien Shan mountain range covers nearly 95 per cent of Kyrgyzstan's territory. Throughout much of the twentieth century, when Kyrgyzstan was part of the USSR, there was a sizeable Russian population, but it has been declining since Kyrgyzstan became independent in 1991.

With its independence, Kyrgyzstan became a democratic, constitutional republic. However, influences from the Soviet era continue to dominate its legal and judicial system. Economically, the country is dependent on agriculture, herding and forestry.

Islam is the dominant religion. Though introduced into the region as early as the eighth century, it did not gain a substantial following until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the country's south and west, and the early nineteenth century in the north and east. During the Soviet era Islam was severely repressed, but today the majority of the population is Muslim, and Islam is growing. The Islamic communities of Kyrgyzstan tend to be isolated from the larger Muslim world and are moderate. Fundamentalist expressions of Islam have not been popular in Kyrgyzstan, but recently the country has been the target of Islamic terrorist activity from neighbouring Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. These tensions with bordering states are of increasing concern.

The Russian Orthodox Church, by far the largest Christian fellowship in the country, came to Kyrgyzstan in the nineteenth century when Russia began to colonize the region. Other Christian churches have few followers. There is a cooperative relationship between Muslims and Orthodox Christians.

Mongolia



Statistics

Population: 2.7 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: Khalka Mongol; also Russian, Kazakh, Buryat, Chinese

Literacy: 82% (men 88%, women 77%)

Religion: Ethnic/Shamanist 31%, Buddhist 23%, Muslim 5%, Christian 1% (mostly Protestant)

WCC member churches: None

History

The country of Mongolia is landlocked, with Russia to the north and China to the south.

The Mongols gained fame in the thirteenth century when, under Genghis Khan, they created a huge Eurasian empire. After it broke apart in the fourteenth century, the Mongols eventually retired to their original steppe homelands and came under Chinese rule. In 1921 Mongolia won its independence with Soviet backing and a communist regime was installed in 1924. During the 1990s the government implemented reforms to modernize the economy and institutionalize democracy, with a focus on social welfare and public order, and in 1992 a new constitution allowed opposition parties. The main economic base is agriculture. Shortage of water and droughts are serious problems, particularly in the Gobi Desert, and overgrazing has led to the desertification of pasturelands.

Before the sixteenth century, when Buddhism was introduced, most people in Mongolia were Shamanist. These religions were suppressed by the communist regime, so that today a large number of people identify themselves as atheist or non-religious. Christianity was introduced many times over the centuries, first with the Nestorians in the seventh century, then Roman Catholic Dominicans and Franciscans in the thirteenth century, Russian Orthodox and Anglicans in the nineteenth century, and Evangelicals in the twentieth. But Christianity has never had a large following.

Tajikistan

(Republic of Tajikistan)

Statistics

Population: 7 million

Government: Republic, multiparty elections first held in 2000

Language: Tajik; also Uzbek, Russian, Kirghiz, Persian (Farsi), Tatar

Literacy: 97%

Religion: Muslim 84%, Atheist 14%, Christian 2% (mostly Orthodox)

WCC member churches: None



Turkmenistan

(Republic of Turkmenistan)

Statistics

- Population:** 4.5 million
- Government:** Unitary republic
- Language:** Turkmen; also Uzbek, Russian, Kazakh
- Literacy:** 97%
- Religion:** Muslim 87%, Atheist 9%, Christian 2% (mostly Orthodox), Jewish 1%, Other 1%
- WCC member churches:** None

History

Tajikistan is a mountainous country in central Asia bordered by China to the east, Afghanistan to the south, Uzbekistan to the west and Kyrgyzstan to the north. It is a country rich in minerals, although it was the least economically developed republic of the former Soviet Union when the USSR disbanded in 1991. The environment suffers from severe pollution caused by the misuse it endured during the Soviet era. As a possible result, maternal and child mortality rates are high and birth defects frequent.

Tajikistan has completed its transition from a savage civil war in 1992–97. Attention from the international community in the wake of the war in Afghanistan has brought increased economic development assistance to the poorest country in the region. In 2001, as a result of drought, Tajikistan faced a serious food shortage for the second year in a row. There are over a million people in remote areas who need food assistance. In addition, the country’s irrigation infrastructure is collapsing, its farm equipment needs repair, and cereal crop seeds are not in adequate supply.

Although Sunni Muslims make up the majority of the population, Persian literature and music have had a great influence on Tajik culture. The Russian Orthodox Church is the principal Christian presence, and there are small but long-established communities of Jews and Buddhists.



History

Turkmenistan is located at the southeastern point of the Caspian Sea and bordered by Kazakhstan to the north, Uzbekistan to the north and east, Afghanistan to the southeast and Iran to the south. Approximately 90 per cent of Turkmenistan comprises the Kara-Kum Desert, one of the largest sand deserts in the world.

Turkmenistan was once part of the Persian Empire and from the thirteenth century was ruled by the Mongols under Genghis Khan. Annexed by imperial Russia in the 19th century, in 1925 it became the Turkmen Republic within the Soviet Union. It achieved its independence when the USSR dissolved in 1991. Since then the country has developed a more authoritarian form of government than many former states of the USSR. It is governed in a one-party system dominated by President-for-Life Saparmurad A. Niyazov. Political opposition is banned and civil rights are severely restricted.

Nearly half of the labour force is engaged in agricultural activity, although the most significant economic asset of the country is its large oil reserves, estimated to be 10 per cent of the world's total. Prior to 1993 Turkmenistan exported oil via a pipeline that ran through Russia, but Russia closed the pipeline to limit competition with its own oil exports. Arrangements to export oil through Iran have not worked out, and Turkmenistan now sells much of its oil to poorer central Asian neighbours that have limited means to pay.

Islam is the dominant religion of Turkmenistan. Soviet efforts to discourage religious affiliation encouraged some atheism in the country, but this decreased significantly after 1991. A small minority of Turkmenistan's population is Christian, with the Russian Orthodox Church the largest denomination.

U z b e k i s t a n

(*Republic of Uzbekistan*)



S t a t i s t i c s

Population: 26 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: Uzbek; also Kazakh, Tajik, Russian, Tatar, Kirghiz

Literacy: 97%

Religion: Muslim 76%, Atheist 21%, Christian 2% (mostly Orthodox), Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

H i s t o r y

Uzbekistan lies between the Amuy Darya and Syr Darya rivers, the Aral Sea and the Tien Shan Mountains. Kazakhstan is to the northwest and north, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the east, Afghanistan to the southeast, and Turkmenistan to the southwest and west.

Uzbekistan was once part of the Persian Empire and was later conquered by Alexander the Great. During the eighth century the land was controlled by Turkic tribes, who introduced Islam, and in the thirteenth century it was invaded by the Mongols. It was conquered by Russia in the late nineteenth century, but after the 1917 Russian Revolution the country fought hard against the Red Army for independence. It was eventually defeated and Uzbekistan became a socialist republic in 1924.

In June 1990 Uzbekistan became the first of the Soviet states in central Asia to declare independence. Islam A. Karimov became president and despite early claims about his commitments to democracy and human rights, he has ruled the country with a heavy hand. Opposition parties have been brutally suppressed, detention without charge is common, and there is no freedom of the press. In 1999 militant Islamic groups attempted to overthrow the government, carrying out a series of deadly bomb attacks. This threat from militant Islamic groups has led Uzbekistan to seek assistance from both Russia and China.

Uzbekistan receives little rainfall and depends heavily on irrigation to grow crops. During the Soviet era, cotton production was Uzbekistan's economic focus. To support extensive irrigation, water was drawn from the Aral Sea, which has shrunk as a result to less than half the size it was in 1960. Much of the seabed has become exposed, leading to dust and salt storms that wreak havoc with the ecosystem, agriculture and people's health. Salinized water has contaminated the soil, as have residues from chemical fertilizers used on cotton crops. Air pollution is also significant.

Despite Soviet attempts to suppress Islam, over three-quarters of Uzbekistan's population is

Muslim, and since independence Islam has experienced a significant revival. Christianity was introduced to the region now occupied by Uzbekistan during the third century. By the early fifth century as many as a quarter of people in the region may have been Christian. After Islamic

invasion in the eighth century, however, Christianity all but disappeared until the modern era. The largest church is Russian Orthodox. Pentecostal and charismatic groups have made some inroads and together constitute the next largest group of Christians in Uzbekistan.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Christians who, although they are a tiny minority, have courage to witness to the Gospel and find the strength to live according to God's word.
- o Those who in spite of danger give their lives to serve others.
- o Peace-makers struggling to end hostility and violence, particularly in Afghanistan.
- o Movements towards democracy.
- o Soldiers who refuse to kill their own people.
- o The International Red Cross and Red Crescent, Doctors without Borders, Amnesty International and all who work on behalf of political prisoners and the dispossessed.
- o Khoomi singing in Mongolia, a kind of singing where one person produces two different notes at the same time.

Pray for:

- o An end to war in Afghanistan, and the ability of tribal ethnic leaders to govern their country with peace and justice.
- o Those, especially in Afghanistan, still affected by war, violence, land-mines and drought, along with those who have lost their homes and become refugees.
- o Stability and justice for the countries of the former Soviet Union, as they continue to create new forms of government and life.
- o The land, air and water that have been damaged by human abuse.
- o Good relations between Muslims and Christians.
- o An end to oppression in many of these countries.

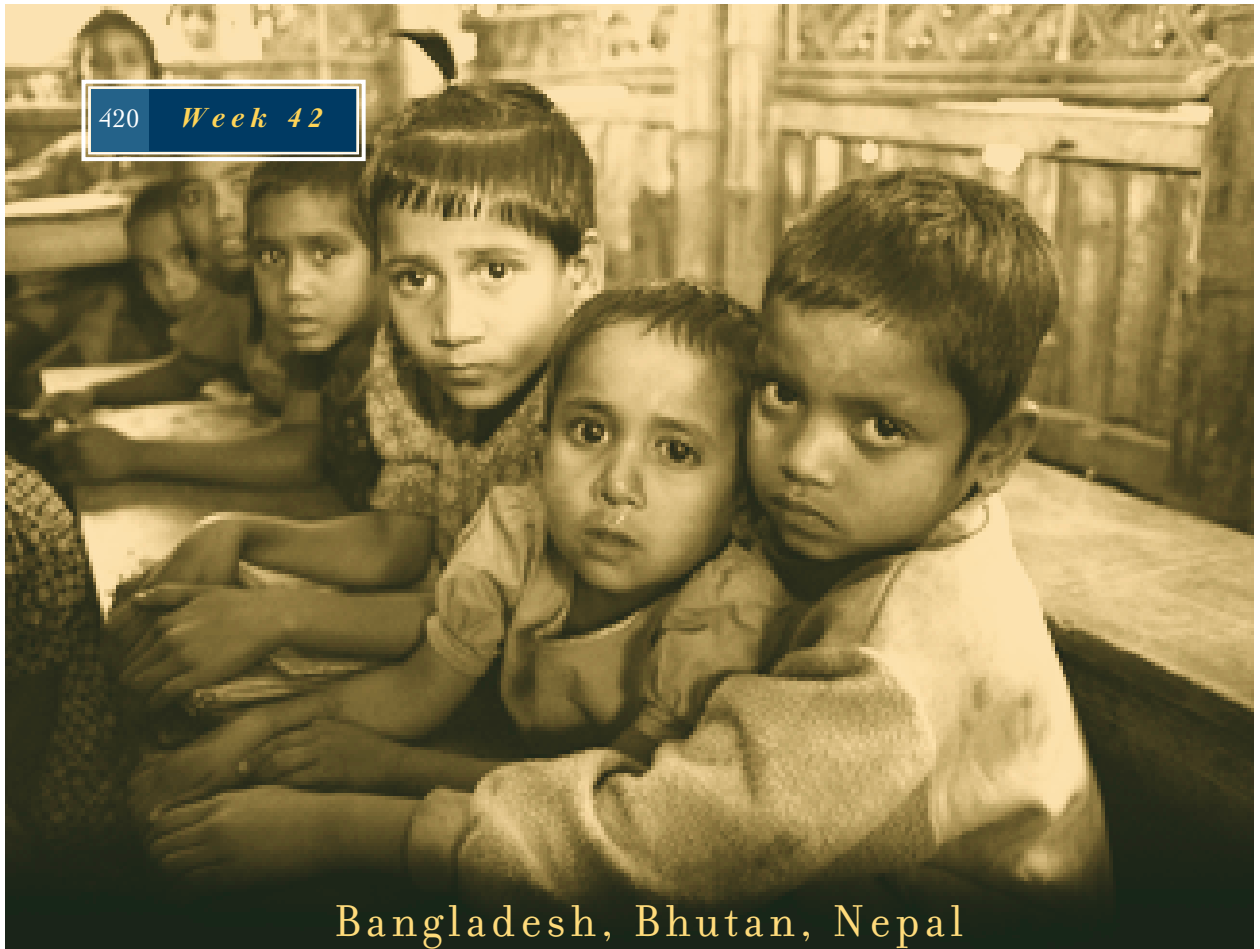
PRAYERS

(1)

O God,
that we may receive your blessing,
touch our brows, touch our heads,
and do not look upon us in anger.
In a hard year be our mercy;
in a year of affliction, be our kindness;
dark spirits banish from us;
bright spirits bring close to us;
grey spirits put away from us;
good spirits draw near to us.
When I am afraid, be my courage;
when I am ashamed, be my true face;
be thou over me like a blanket,
be thou under me like a bed of furs.

(2)

Know that it is the waves of love which turn the wheels of heaven.
Without love, the world remains inanimate.
How can something inorganic transform itself into a plant?
How can the plants sacrifice themselves to become gifts of the Spirit?
How can the Spirit sacrifice itself for the breath of which a single sigh
impregnated Mary?



Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal

The night is dark, the storm is great.
 You must look sharp, there is no time to hesitate.
 You must make haste or it would be too late
 to ferry the boat across the other side.
 The night is dark. Be your own guard,
 you, soldiers of the country.
 Age-old grievances have declared a fight,
 the deprived heart is demanding its right.
 You must take them along,
 the poor and the weak.
 You must make them strong,
 no longer mild and meek.
 You must lead them to victory.

 O captain, my captain,
 the helpless nation is going under water.
 It does not know how to swim.

I shall watch tonight
 your determination, grim yet bright,
 to free the country from slavery.
 "Are they Hindus or Muslims?"
 Who asks this question, I say.
 Tell him, my captain,
 the children of the motherland
 are drowning today.

 Doubts assail the mind of the travellers still,
 there is thunder in the sky
 and danger over the hill.
 Captain, will you lose the way
 and leave us in the lurch?
 You must not waver or sway.
 You must carry on the march.

Kazi Nazrul Islam

Bangladesh

(People's Republic of Bangladesh)



Statistics

Population: 141 million

Government: Unitary multiparty republic

Language: Bengali; also English, Urdu, Santali, Garo, Hindi, Lushai, Burmese and over 30 other languages and dialects

Literacy: 38% (men 49%, women 26%)

Religion: Muslim 86%, Hindu 12%, Christian 1%, Buddhist 1%

WCC member churches: Bangladesh Baptist Church Sangha, Church of Bangladesh, Communion of Baptist Churches in Bangladesh

History

Located between the Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh is one of the least developed and most densely populated countries in Asia. It sits at the confluence of three major river basins, and each year about a third of the country is subject to major flooding, tropical storms, tidal waves and cyclones. Known as East Pakistan following the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, it came into existence in 1971 after a vicious war of secession from West Pakistan in which millions died.

The first sustained Christian communities date from the late fifteenth century. Islam became the

state religion in 1988. Although the constitution supports freedom to practise religion, there are some restrictions placed on Christian churches and groups. Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists and Lutherans united in 1970 to form one of the dioceses of the Church of Pakistan, but were cut off when Bangladesh became independent, and now form the United Church of Bangladesh. The Roman Catholic and Protestant churches meet together on matters of common witness and service. Christians come mainly from poor Bengali communities and minority tribes, and the church is therefore a church of the poor.

Bhutan

(Kingdom of Bhutan)

Statistics



Population: 2.1 million

Government: Constitutional monarchy

Language: Dzongkha; also Shashap, Nepali, Assamese, Hindi, English and others

Literacy: 42% (men 56%, women 28%)

Religion: Buddhist 74%, Hindu 21%, Ethnic 4%, Muslim 1%, Christian less than 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Bhutan is a small country located in the eastern Himalayan Mountains in southern Asia. It is landlocked by China (Tibet) to the north and India to the south. Most of the country is mountainous, and violent storms that descend from the Himalayas are the source of the country's name, "Land of the Thunder Dragon".

In 1865 Britain and Bhutan signed a treaty under which Bhutan would receive an annual subsidy in return for ceding some border land. Under British influence a monarchy was established in 1907 and three years later another treaty was signed whereby the British agreed not to interfere in Bhutanese internal affairs and Bhutan allowed Britain to control its foreign affairs. In 1947 independent India assumed Britain's role.

Bhutan was impenetrable to foreigners until 1965, but has recently been developing links with other countries and became a full member of the UN in 1971. Since 1966 certain Christian agencies have been permitted to enter the country to engage in medical and educational work.

Life in Bhutan is based on subsistence farming, animal husbandry and forestry. Rugged mountains dominate the terrain and make the building of roads and other infrastructure difficult and expensive. There are frequent landslides during the rainy season. There is little access to potable water. During the 1990s the Nepali minority came under violent attack by the government.

Buddhism is the official religion and proselytism by other groups is forbidden. Christians make up less than half of 1 per cent of the population, mostly among indigenous Indians and Nepalis. Christians are free to worship, but not to preach or evangelize.

Nepal

(Kingdom of Nepal)



Statistics

Population: 27 million

Government: Constitutional monarchy

Language: Nepali; also Tibetan, Hindi, English, Newari, Tharuhati and 70 others

Literacy: 27% (men 40%, women 14%)

Religion: Hindu 77%, Ethnic 9%, Buddhist 8%, Muslim 4%, Christian 2% (mostly Pentecostal)

WCC member churches: None

History

Located in the Himalayan mountains of southern Asia, Nepal is a landlocked nation. The Tibetan region of China borders Nepal on the north, while India surrounds it on the east, south and west. Nepal first united as a kingdom during the eighteenth century. This form of government was retained through nearly two centuries of British colonial influence.

In 1951 the Nepalese monarch ended the system of rule by hereditary premiers and instituted a cabinet system of government. Reforms in 1990 established a multiparty democracy within the framework of a constitutional monarchy. The monarchy has been on shaky ground in recent years. A Maoist insurgency has garnered increasing support since 1996. In 2001, the crown prince murdered the king, queen and eight other members of the royal family before taking his own life. The new king claimed absolute power in 2002, dismissing the prime minister and parliament. It was only after street protests involving seven political parties and the Maoists that parliament was reinstated in April 2006.

Nepal is home to eight of the ten highest mountains in the world, including Mount Everest. It is also classified by the UN as one of the least developed nations in the world. Deforestation is a serious problem, as trees are cut for fuel and to make room for agriculture. Thunderstorms, landslides, flooding and drought are other problems. High population growth has strained the country's ability to feed its people, and food shortages and malnutrition are growing problems. Child labour and bond slavery are com-

mon, and Nepali girls are trafficked into the sex industries in Asia and the Middle East. There are also approximately 100,000 refugees from neighbouring Bhutan living in camps in Nepal.

Nepal is the world's only Hindu kingdom. Christians are a tiny minority, mostly made up of

Evangelical, charismatic and Independent churches that were established after 1951. During the 1990s Christians were arrested, imprisoned and sometimes murdered for preaching to Hindus.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The beauty of the mountains of Nepal and Bhutan.
- o Christians who work together to serve the poor.
- o Those who offer assistance during the many floods in Bangladesh.
- o Those who work for the rights of women and girls.
- o Royal Bengal tigers, hoolock gibbons (singing apes) and myna birds.
- o Misti dhohi (sweetened yogurt), green coconut water, hot curry powder, and rice.

Pray for:

- o A lessening of political unrest and terrorism.
- o Political leaders, that they will be guided by concern for all the people.
- o Women, that they be respected and have dignity in their work.
- o Children who must work to help feed their families, and girls who have been kidnapped or sold into the sex industry.
- o Strength for those Christians who live as a minority amid Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu brothers and sisters.
- o Those affected by frequent flooding, landslides, tropical storms and earthquakes.
- o Those who live as refugees or who are internally displaced to find shelter, food and a means to make a living.

PRAYERS

(1)

O Saviour Christ,

in whose way of life lies the secret of all life,

and the hopes of all the people,

we pray for quiet courage to meet this hour.

We did not choose to be born or to live in such an age.

But let its problems challenge us,

its discoveries exhilarate us,

its injustice anger us,
 its possibilities inspire us,
 and its vigour renew us,
 for your Kingdom's sake.

(2)

Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit, come into this church and lead us in our
 worship during these hours.

Those who are still coming, bring them safely.

Bless those who cannot come because of illness or work duty.

Those who are sick in bed, give them healing and peace.

Please heal those who are hurting and staying away from church.

God, be with the churches in Nepal, India and Tibet.

Lord, thank you for your guidance and leading during the past week.

Thank you for healing us and our children.

We thank you with a large voice.

Thank you for Jesus' sacrifice for us.

We want all Nepal to put you highest, higher than the king,
 make you the highest –
 most important of all.

We ask you to bless the offering
 like you blessed the five fish and two loaves near Lake Galilee.

We pray that you will be with today's speaker.

We ask you that the people here will know
 that Jesus came for all the Nepalese people.

The young people in the villages who are new believers
 do not know how to pray.

They are using their own ideas.

We pray that you will give them your wisdom.

There are so many small village fellowships without baptized members.

We pray that you will help them all.

May the love of God, the grace of Jesus Christ,
 and the fellowship
 of the Holy Spirit
 be with us until the second coming of Jesus.

(3)

A Nepali Christian woman asks prayer for the following which have touched her life:

“At an airport car park in the southern part of Nepal a 14-year-old boy grabs my suitcase and asks me to use his rikshaw. Though I could have taken a motor vehicle I take the rikshaw. We have a conversation along the way and I come to know that he is the breadwinner of his family of four. His father died of some kind of illness, so the responsibility of taking care of the family fell on his shoulders.”

O Lord, hear our prayer for your people.

“One early morning I received a telephone call from a friend who asked whether I could find any financial help for a girl in a remote village in Eastern Nepal who wants to continue her high school studies.”

O Lord, hear our prayer for your people.

“A small girl of eight or nine years goes to collect fodder with her mother. She is asked why she doesn’t go to school. She puts her head down and weeps. Later, I found out that her father does not allow her to go to school.”

O Lord, hear our prayer for your people.

“Many people do not like to disclose their last names because then they could be identified as low caste or untouchable.”

O Lord, hear our prayer for your people.

“Transparency International recently issued a report on a corruption level survey done of 146 countries. On a scale of 10 (the higher the score, the less the corruption) Nepal scored 2.8.”

O Lord, hear our prayer for your people.

“Many mothers and wives weep when their sons and husbands are taken forcibly to join the insurgents.”

O Lord, hear our prayer for your people.

“Thousands of people are internally displaced due to the insurgency. As winter is approaching people have no homes for warmth and no food.”

O Lord, hear our prayer for your people.

“Church members in some remote and isolated places are asked by the insurgents not to gather in the church.”

O Lord, hear our prayer for these your people.

(4)
 O God,
 we thank you for the gift of life.
 We thank you for the nourishment
 you provide us every day
 so we can lead a healthy life
 in body, mind and spirit.

Help us to overcome greed.
 Help us to understand
 that happiness and joy do not necessarily
 come from riches or material wealth,
 but from the freedom we have
 and the depth of relationship we form with you,
 as we strive to build a community of justice, love and peace.

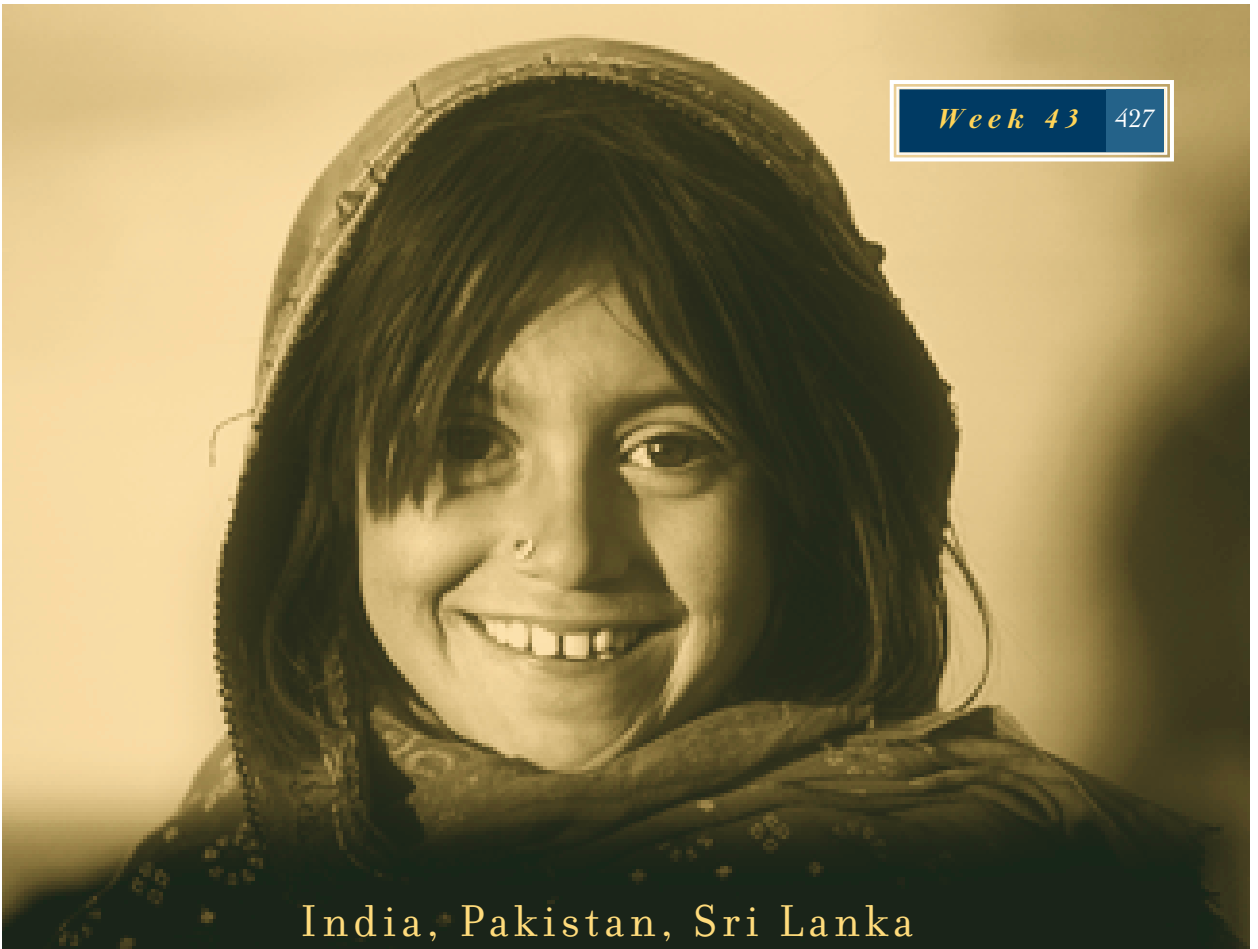
May all our endeavours pave the way towards eternal life in you.

(5)
 O God,
 we come before you
 with unclean hearts,
 selfish minds,
 and distorted bodies.

But, in your grace,
 you touch us
 and make us pure and whole.
 We dance with joy,
 we sing in freedom,
 we swim in love.

We thank you for your grace
 and pray that you continue
 to touch us ...
 so we'll find the way
 towards true happiness.

(6)
 O compassionate Lord,
 I would prefer power over the storm,
 a secure home,
 a life protected from the winds.
 But help me to live with storms,
 shelter with friends,
 see my plans broken
 but not my life:
 rebuilt again and again from the earth.



India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka

No spiritual resource or practice needs to be “out of bounds” in the exploration and expression of that love [of Christ] simply because it originated outside one’s own tradition. I have myself been deeply moved by the depth of devotion and the enormous sense of the overwhelming grace of God that is witnessed to in the Hindu scriptures like Tevaram, Tiruvagam, and the penetrating ethical-moral analysis and guidance given in the Tirukkural. I have had no difficulty turning to them often, as I turn to the Bible. The fact that these Hindu scriptures name the One beyond all names as “Sivan” has never bothered me. Syncretism is not innately present in other resources, as many seem to imply. Syncretism has to do with what one does

with these resources and what one does with one’s own faith in embracing them. Religions are not fortresses to be defended; they are springs for the nourishment of human life.

S. Wesley Ariarajah

India

(Republic of India)

Love is the ultimate goal we are looking for. That is, the recognition of persons in community. That is where human dignity is revered. It requires not merely interpersonal relations, but also structures of economics, politics, culture, etc., transformed in such a way that they help and not hinder interpersonal love. A community of persons supported by structures of justice is our goal.

M. M. Thomas



Statistics

Population: 1.65 billion

Government: Parliamentary federal republic

Language: Hindi, English and 14 other official languages; over 1,600 other languages and dialects

Literacy: 52% (men 65%, women 37%)

Religion: Hindu 75%, Muslim 12%, Christian 6%, Ethnic 3%, Sikh 2%, Buddhist 1%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Bengal-Orissa-Bihar Baptist Convention, Church of North India, Church of South India, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, Methodist Church in India, Samavesam of Telugu Baptist Churches, United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India

History

Located on its own subcontinent between the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal in southern Asia, India is the second most populated nation on earth. The northern third of the country borders on Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Civilizations have flourished in India for thousands of years, with waves of immigration and invasion. Aryan tribes from the northwest invaded in about 1500 BC; their merger with earlier inhabitants created classical Indian culture. Arab

incursions from the eighth century and Turkish in the twelfth were followed by European traders, especially the Portuguese, who arrived first in 1498. Soon thereafter, Muslim invaders from the north established the Moghul Empire, which was centred in Delhi. In 1612 the British set up the East India Trading Company. By the nineteenth century Britain had assumed political control of virtually all Indian lands. Non-violent resistance to British colonialism under Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru began in the 1920s, and led to the withdrawal of the British and independence in 1947. The subcontinent was divided into the secular but predominantly Hindu state of India and the smaller Muslim state of Pakistan. War between the two countries resulted in East Pakistan becoming Bangladesh.

The Pakistan civil war and the formation of Bangladesh were accompanied by massive migration of peoples, particularly in the border areas, and ethnic violence. It is estimated that as many as 17 million people were displaced, and over 1 million people were killed in violent riots. This strong enmity between Pakistan and India continues to the present, particularly in the Kashmir region, which is mostly Muslim, but is claimed by both India and Pakistan. Bitter war has erupted several times for control of the area, most recently in 1999.

There has also been violent ethnic strife in the region of Punjab, which has a majority Sikh community. In 1984 the Indian army attacked the Sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar, attempting to dislodge Sikh terrorists. This sparked violent riots throughout the country, and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who had ordered the attack, was assassinated. All sides in these conflicts have been guilty of human rights abuses. In addition, both Pakistan and India have developed functional nuclear weapons and have threatened to use them, creating serious tensions in the subcontinent.

India was also involved in the civil war in Sri Lanka, supporting Tamils who seek to create a separate state in the northern part of that island

nation. In 1991 Tamil militants who objected to India's mediation in the conflict assassinated Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Indira Gandhi's son and successor. Since then there has been political instability in India, with several different prime ministers forced to leave office after votes of no-confidence.

India's massive population taxes its abundant natural resources. Poverty and malnutrition are rampant, and it is estimated that 40 per cent of people are too poor to afford adequate nutrition on a daily basis. Some areas are prone to flooding, while others often experience drought. Cyclones, earthquakes and landslides are other problems. Environmental degradation and pollution are also severe. For several years a heavy smog has blanketed much of the region for months at a time. Called the Asian brown cloud, it is estimated to be 2–3 miles thick and spreads over the Indian subcontinent, decreasing agricultural production. As many as 2 million people in India die each year as a result of air pollution.

Throughout India's history, caste has been the most important social institution, determining social status, potential marriage partners, profession, and even allowable food. Jobs that were considered unclean were reserved for the "untouchables" – those who were not of the caste system. They were discriminated against, not allowed into temples, forced to do menial and dirty jobs, and not allowed to associate with people of caste. Mahatma Gandhi worked for the rights of untouchables, whom he called Harijan, or children of God. Today, they call themselves Dalits, meaning the downtrodden. Over the last century some Dalits have tried to improve their lives by converting from Hinduism to Buddhism, Islam or Christianity, although this is no guarantee of social improvement. Since India's independence, discrimination on the basis of caste has been illegal, but it continues in practice.

The dominant faith in India is Hinduism. Buddhism was founded in India from the 6th century BC and flourished until the arrival of Islam in the seventh century AD. Islam is India's

second largest faith, although many Muslims fled to Pakistan and those who remain have often been subject to violence. Sikhism, a reform movement to Hinduism, arose in the fifteenth century and today has over 20 million adherents. Jainism is another Hindu reform movement which dates to 600 BC, and today has almost 4 million followers in India.

According to tradition, Christianity arrived in India with the apostle Thomas in the year 52 AD. The Mar Thoma Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church – as well as the Syrian Orthodox Church – all trace their origins to this event. Roman Catholic missionaries arrived from Portugal during the sixteenth century. Anglican clergy first arrived with the British in 1612, and other Protestant missionaries came from Holland and Britain in the eighteenth century and the US in the nineteenth century. During the twentieth century several Protestant traditions – including Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists – joined in the creation of two united churches: the Church of South India and the Church of North India. Ecumenical groups include the National Council of Churches in India, which was founded in 1912.

Pakistan

(Islamic Republic of Pakistan)



Statistics

Population: 160 million

Government: Socialist Islamic republic

Language: Urdu and English; also Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto and over 40 other languages

Literacy: 37% (men 50%, women 24%)

Religion: Muslim 96%, Christian 3%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Church of Pakistan, Presbyterian Church of Pakistan

History

Located on the Arabian Sea in southern Asia, Pakistan is bordered to the east and southeast by India, to the west and southwest by Iran, to the north by Afghanistan, and to the northeast by China. Modern Pakistan stands on the major trade (and invasion) route between central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. By the mid-nineteenth century, Britain dominated the region, supporting the majority Hindu peoples over against the minority Muslims. This caused increasing resentment between the two groups, and movements arose for independence from the colonial powers and the creation of a separate Muslim state.

The partition of 1947 resulted in one of the most massive exoduses in history, as Muslims fled India and Hindus fled Pakistan in the midst of terrible violence. India and Pakistan are in constant military tension over the state of Kashmir. International law argues that Kashmir belongs to Pakistan as a Muslim enclave, or preferably should be granted independence. In response to Indian nuclear weapons testing, Pakistan conducted its own tests in 1988.

Pakistan was proclaimed an Islamic republic in 1956, but first promulgated a constitution in 1973. A coup in 1977 led to its suspension and martial law until 1985, when the civilian government was restored. Throughout the 1990s ruling parties frequently changed and the civilian government was considered by many to be inept and corrupt. In 1999 it was overthrown in a bloodless coup by the military, and Pervez Musharraf came to power, declaring himself president in 2001.

Musharraf was elected to the office in 2002, amid widespread allegations of election fraud.

Musharraf succeeded a number of allegedly democratic civilian governments who were highly corrupt and incompetent. He became president at a time when terrorist attacks in the US and elsewhere brought heavy fighting into Afghanistan, which shares an almost impenetrable border with Pakistan as well as close tribal and religious affiliations. American pressure on Pakistan to join the hunt for Osama bin Laden and his affiliated groups resulted in close military and economic relations between Pakistan and the US, creating further tension between Islamic factions in Pakistan, many of whom are highly anti-American and pro-Taliban.

There are many ethnic groups in Pakistan, and less than 10 per cent of the population speak Urdu, Pakistan's official language, as their first tongue. The multiplicity of voices often leads to internal strife and an inability of coalition governments to act. Other problems include frequent earthquakes, drought, limited freshwater resources, deforestation and soil erosion. Pakistan is also host to approximately 2 million refugees from neighbouring Afghanistan, who are housed in camps near the border in very severe conditions. Poverty is a serious problem, as is corruption and trafficking in drugs and weapons. Pakistan has a high foreign debt, with almost half of government expenditure used for debt service.

Nestorians came to Pakistan in the eighth century, and Jesuit missionaries arrived in the sixteenth century, but it was not until Christian missionaries from Britain and the US arrived in the late eighteenth century that Christianity became established. In 1970 the Church of Pakistan was formed from the union of Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran and Presbyterian traditions. There are several ecumenical organizations in Pakistan, including the National Council of Churches, and several cooperative ecumenical schools, institutions and medical associations.

Sri Lanka

(Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka)



Statistics

Population: 20 million

Government: Parliamentary socialist republic

Language: Sinhalese; also English, Tamil, Punjabi, Malay and Chinese

Literacy: 90%

Religion: Buddhist 68%, Hindu 11%, Christian 9% (mostly Roman Catholic), Muslim 9%, Other 3%

WCC member churches: Church of Sri Lanka, Methodist Church, Sri Lanka

History

Sri Lanka ("resplendent island") lies off the southeastern coast of India in the Indian Ocean. The island has three primary ethnic groups: the Sinhalese (approximately 74 per cent of the population), the Tamils (18 per cent) and the Moors (7 per cent). The Sinhalese are predominantly Buddhist, and the Tamils are mostly Hindu.

The Sinhalese arrived in Sri Lanka in the late sixth century, probably from northern India. Buddhism was introduced beginning about the third century BC and a great civilization developed from 200 BC to AD 1200. In the fourteenth century a southern Indian dynasty seized power in the north and established a Tamil kingdom. Occupied

by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and by the Dutch in the seventeenth, the island was ceded to Britain in 1796, became a Crown colony in 1802, and was united by Britain as Ceylon from 1815. As Ceylon it became independent in 1948, changed its name to Sri Lanka in 1972 and almost immediately tensions erupted between the minority Tamils and the Sinhalese majority, resulting in a violent and bloody civil war in the mid-1980s. Tens of thousands were killed in an ethnic war that continues to fester. After two decades of fighting, the largely Sinhalese government and the Tigers of Tamil Eelam called a ceasefire in late 2001, with Norway brokering peace negotiations. This remains fragile

On Christmas Day, 2004, Sri Lanka was one of the hardest hit countries by the tsunami waves which inundated both coasts, killing an estimated 38,000 people. Thousands are missing and may never be found and infrastructure, economy and health services were decimated. International humanitarian aid poured into the country but the long term impact will last for many years.

The civil war left a legacy of landmines and unexploded ordinance throughout the country. Approximately 100,000 Tamil refugees live in and around refugee camps in India, while another 200,000 Tamils have relocated to other countries. Hundreds of thousands of others are internally displaced. Unemployment stands at 10 per cent. Environmental problems include cyclones and tornadoes, monsoons, deforestation, the pollution of drinking water resources from industrial wastes and sewage, and air pollution in urban areas. Sri Lanka's rich wildlife, some species of which are found nowhere else, is threatened with extinction due to poaching and urbanization.

The state religion is Buddhism, which was originally established on the island in the third century BC. Tradition states that the apostle Thomas came to Sri Lanka in the first century, with Nestorians arriving in the fifth century. Each of the colonial powers introduced its own Christian witness: the Portuguese brought

Roman Catholicism (which remains the largest Christian body), the Dutch brought Reformed Protestantism, and the British brought

Anglicanism. The National Christian Council of Sri Lanka was established in 1923. Renewed hostilities broke out in 2006.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o A rich history and culture that spans several millennia.
- o Ethnic and religious diversity throughout this region.
- o The devotion and faith of those who work with the poor, refugees, orphans, the dying, and the hungry.
- o St Thomas who founded a church in India.
- o Those who cross boundaries of clan and religion in order to make peace.
- o Schools and hospitals founded by missionaries, which continue to serve.
- o Tablas, sitars, and innumerable ragas.

Pray for:

- o Government stability and the ability of different groups to work with one another.
- o Afghan refugees who live in Pakistan, internally displaced people in Sri Lanka.
- o An end to violence between Pakistan and India, both nuclear powers, and between Muslims and Hindus.
- o Those who must cope with grinding poverty.
- o Dalits and others who continue to be socially and economically discriminated against.
- o Those affected by flooding, drought, environmental pollution, cyclones, and earthquakes.
- o An end to the threat of nuclear war.
- o The peace process in Sri Lanka and the cessation of hostilities between the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

PRAYERS

(1)

O Lord Jesus Christ, who, in the day of your humanity, loved and respected women, and revealed yourself to them as the promised Messiah, we thank you for your presence in our midst. Bless us so that we may truly serve you. May your Holy Spirit guide us to understand your purpose in our lives. O servant God, sweep our hearts and minds clean of the dirt of prejudice, of cramping assumptions and narrow stereotypes, of unnecessary guilt and low estimation of our worth. O giver of bountiful life, give us your word on our lips, your love in our hearts and your fire of inspiration in our service to your great glory. O servant God.

(2)

This is my prayer to you, my Lord – strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart.
 Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows.
 Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service.
 Give me the strength never to disown the poor
 or bend my knees before insolent might.
 Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles.
 And give me the strength to surrender my strength to your will with love.

(3)

A child cries, she feels the cold
 that bites into her bones,
 for winter is on, and young and old
 huddle inside their homes.

No cosy home has Nellie,
 her clothes are cast-off rags
 her shelter a little thatched gullie
 patched with gunny bags.

Why, dear Lord, must Nellie suffer
 because her father is dead,
 her mother too weak to rough the weather
 or struggle for food and bed?

Why, dear Lord, should so much pain
 be borne by the innocent
 while stronger people, proud and vain
 have so much and aren't content?

(4)

O Lord who sent the Gospel of peace over the seas,
 as the white rice bird hovers over the swaying paddy fields, fill us with your peace.
 As the jasmine sends its fragrance out into the night,
 so send the fragrance of the Gospel into the world.
 As the lotus sways on its delicate stem and makes of the pond a thing of beauty,
 so make us lotus lives in the pond of life
 that the heart of the wanderer may rejoice. In Jesus' name.

(5)

O Creator and Mighty God,
 you have promised
 strength for the weak
 rest for the labourers
 light for the way
 grace for the trials
 help from above
 unfailing sympathy
 undying love.
 O Creator and Mighty God
 Help us to continue in your promise.

(6)

O God, the Parent of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our Parent: you who are to us both Father and Mother: We who are your children draw around your lotus feet to worship you. Your compassion is as the fragrance of the lotus. Though you are enthroned in the heavens, we may draw near to you; for your feet stand upon the earth where we humans dwell. Your son, our Lord, was a man.

We see your compassion in Jesus. He gives content to the Hindu name for you – Siva, the kindly one. He gives significance to the Muslim address of you – Allah, the Merciful. He embodies in the Godhead what the Buddhist worship in the Buddha – compassion itself.

O God of all the world, let our history teach us that we belong to you alone and that you alone belong to us. And you are enough, for in you we sinners find we are your children again – the thing we most need.

(7)

Eternal God,
 we confess to you our sinfulness.
 You made the world a paradise
 but we have turned our lands into
 places of tears and unhappiness.
 People are fighting with each other
 race against race.
 The holocaust of chauvinism
 sweeps through countries

devouring humanity
 terrorizing us into submission.
 Liberating One,
 free us from all bondage
 so that our faith in you
 will make us free
 to create with courage
 a new world—
 new societies.

(8)

Risen Christ Jesus, risen from your dark tomb
 death could not bind you, you broke out as from a womb.
Share through us your presence, risen Christ today.

Light of the whole world, you leave no one in despair,
 strengthen weak faith, that we with you great deeds may dare.
Share through us your presence, risen Christ today.

Chief Shepherd of us all, you gave your life for the lost
 help us guide the scattered; no careful counting of the cost.
Share through us your presence, risen Christ today.

Jesus the joy of life, now begin your dance of bliss,
 the whole world rejoices, tune each heart to ways of peace.
Share through us your presence, risen Christ today.

Companion of the needy, always near to those who seek,
 use us as your body to bind the wounds of all the weak.
Share through us your presence, risen Christ today.

Head of God's new creation, every creature now is called
 to live in your freedom, men and women, young and old.
Share through us your presence, risen Christ today.

Strong Hero of the lowly, may all oppressed find hope in you;
 turn every life to loving, your cross for us is powerfully true.
Share through us your presence, risen Christ today.

(9)

Let us respond with hope to the things that hold us back by saying:

God, give us the courage to change our society.

Give us the faith to change ourselves.

Our educational system has made Mary a drop-out.

God, give us the courage to change our society.

Give us the faith to change ourselves.

Poverty has kept Mary away from school.

God, give us the courage to change our society.

Give us the faith to change ourselves.

Gender, class, and caste blindness have alienated Mary.

God, give us the courage to change our society.

Give us the faith to change ourselves.

God of truth, source of courage,
it is hard to change society's systems.

Teach us, we pray:

to give and not count the cost,
to fight and not heed the wounds,
to resist and not seek rest,
to labour and not ask for any reward,
save that of knowing we do your will.

God of mercy, light of light

it is hard to change ourselves. Give us we pray:

**a new focus,
a new hope,
a new meaning,
a new direction,
a new purpose,
and a new radiance,
so that the world might know you and be free.**

(10)

Almighty Father, remove our despair and renew our faith.
Grant us a vision of your Son,
victorious over suffering and death,
so that we too may be filled with his faith
in the infinite power of self-emptying love.
Grant that we too may share your cross
and inherit your Kingdom.

(11)

When everything around seems to be collapsing into injustice and chaos
Creator God, teach us to love you
and to recognize that you hold the earth gently in your hands.
When we do not know just what to do and where to turn,
teach us to trust your wisdom,
so that we can discern your presence in events around us.
When we become unforgiving and vindictive,
teach us to grasp your tenderness,
and forgive us for all we do wrong.
When violence, fear and hatred seem to overtake us,
teach us to receive your compassion,
and steer our lives in the ways of justice and peace.
When we think we can go it alone,
teach us to depend on your grace,
so that with patience and persistence we can transform the world.
But most of all,
teach us to appreciate your goodness,
for in you we have new life!



Indian Ocean Islands: Comoros, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles

In Madagascar, when you feel lost in an unknown situation, the safest place to go is the church. There is always someone to receive you. This is partly a manifestation of Malagasy hospitality, but also it is a real manifestation of a caring church, the living image of God. God through his church always welcomes strangers no matter who they are or where they come from. There is always room for anybody who knocks at the door. The living condition of the church is its deeds towards needy people. We should know by now that actions are more important than words. There are many uprooted people around the world who seek refuge and shelter, with a load of despair and bitterness but full of hope. They feel lost and knock at the door of the church! Welcome them as God welcomes you!

Ranto Ranaivoson

Comoros

(Federal Republic of the Comoros)



Statistics

Population: 651,000

Government: Republic under revolutionary council

Language: Comorian, Arabic and French

Literacy: 57% (men 64%, women 50%)

Religion: Muslim 98%, Christian 1% (mostly Roman Catholic), Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Located in the Indian Ocean, Comoros comprises three volcanic islands: Njazidja (Gran Comoro), Nzwani (Anjouan) and Mwali (Moheli). Its nearest neighbours are Mozambique on the African mainland to the west and Madagascar to the southeast. Its indigenous people are of African, Arab and Indian descent. Beginning in the tenth century the country came under Arab rule. During the colonial period Comoros became a protectorate of France.

Comoros has experienced 19 coups or attempted coups (often involving mercenaries from France and South Africa) since independence from France in 1975. In 1995 the islands of Anjouan and Moheli declared their independence from Comoros, but this was not recognized by the international community. In 1999 military chief Colonel Azali seized power. He pledged to resolve the secessionist crisis and in December 2001 voters approved a new constitution. Presidential elections took place in the spring of 2002. Each island in the archipelago elected its own president and a new union president was sworn in.

The islands are volcanically active (eruptions occurred in 1965 and 1977). The country is also subject to severe weather and cyclones. Nearly half of the population is under the age of 14, but political instability has taken its toll on education, with scarce resources and reductions in the civil service that have led to teachers' strikes and student protests, plus a high drop-out rate.

The state religion is Islam (primarily Sunni). Most Christians are Roman Catholic. In May 2000 the country declared itself to be an Islamic state, and open witness by Christians is discouraged.

Madagascar

(Republic of Madagascar)

Statistics

Population: 17.5 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: Malagasy and French

Literacy: 80% (men 87%, women 72%)



Religion: Christian 49%, Ethnic 48%, Muslim 2%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar, Church of the Province of the Indian Ocean, Malagasy Lutheran Church

History

The Republic of Madagascar, located off the coast of Africa, consists of a main island (the world's fourth largest) and several smaller islands. Indonesians and Africans inhabited them as early as the fifth century. European explorers, then settlers and missionaries, arrived in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Formerly an independent kingdom, Madagascar became a French colony in 1896, but regained its independence in 1960, ending the monarchy and opting for single-party rule. In 1992–93 and 1997 presidential and national assembly elections were held, but in 2001 massive electoral fraud occurred and almost half the huge island country seceded. It took another year for the courts to rule on an election outcome, accompanied by months of mass demonstrations.

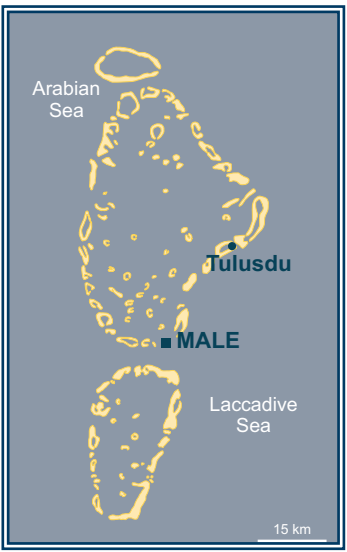
Chronic malnutrition and poverty are serious problems in Madagascar, as is the lack of medical and educational facilities. Environmental problems include deforestation and desertification. However, Madagascar has one of the most unique

ecologies in the world and many conservation organizations are eager to preserve flora and fauna, like lemurs, that exist nowhere else.

Portuguese Roman Catholics were the first missionaries to Madagascar in 1500, but were largely unsuccessful. During the 1800s, however, the Protestant London Missionary Society claimed many converts and opened schools. Currently, about half the population is Christian, evenly divided between Catholics and Protestants. The Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar was created as a union of Congregationalists, French Reformed and Quakers. The Council of Christian Churches in Madagascar was formed in 1958 and is particularly concerned with human rights and social problems.

Maldives

(Republic of Maldives)



Statistics

- Population:** 339,000
- Government:** Non-party republic
- Language:** Dhivehi, English
- Literacy:** 93%
- Religion:** Muslim 99%, Buddhist 1%, Christian less than 1%
- WCC member churches:** None

History

The Maldives comprise approximately 1,200 coral islands (200 inhabited) southwest of Sri Lanka. They were first settled by Buddhist traders during the fifth century. Islam came to the islands during the twelfth century. They were a sultanate under Dutch and then British protection, and subsequently became a republic in 1968, three years after independence. Currently, the country is an Islamic state and all other religions are forbidden.

There are two major environmental threats to the existence of the Maldives: inundation due to global warming and the melting of the polar ice caps (the islands are just 1–3 metres above sea level); and coral mining, which kills the coral that forms the very basis of the islands. The 26 December 2004 tsunami killed some 88 people and because of the low-lying nature of the islands damaged much of the infrastructure.

Mauritius

(Republic of Mauritius)



Statistics

- Population:** 1.2 million
- Government:** Parliamentary state
- Language:** English; also Creole, Bhojpur, French
- Literacy:** 82%

Religion: Hindu 44%, Christian 33% (mostly Pentecostal), Muslim 17%, Non-religious 3%, Baha'i 2%, Chinese folk religion 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Mauritius is surrounded by coral reefs and ringed by mountains formed by volcanoes. Its beautiful landscape and clear waters makes it one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Indian Ocean. Sugarcane and a growing high-tech industry also provide the island nation most of its income.

Arabs and Malays probably visited the island in the Middle Ages and the Portuguese and Dutch came in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was successively under French and British rule, with the French bringing African slaves to the island to work sugarcane fields. Slavery was abolished in 1835 under British rule, but indentured labourers were then brought from India. Mauritius obtained its independence in 1968.

One of the most vital and stable democracies in the area, Mauritius is highly democratic and a key member of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), although it maintains a healthy distance from the governments of many SADC countries.

About two-thirds of the population is of Indian descent and about a quarter is Creole (French and African). A lively mix of religions stems from these origins, including large minorities of Hindus, Christians and Muslims.

Seychelles

(*Republic of Seychelles*)

Statistics

Population: 80,400

Government: Parliamentary republic

Language: English and French

Literacy: 84%

Religion: Christian 97% (mostly Roman Catholic), Non-religious 2%, Hindu 1%

WCC member churches: None



History

Seychelles is located northeast of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. It is a major rival to Mauritius for the European tourist trade, which has been a mixed blessing for the population.

It is likely that Seychelles was known to the Arabs prior to 1502 when Vasco da Gama explored the islands. It was taken over by French planters and their slaves from Mauritius in the mid-eighteenth century. A lengthy struggle for the islands between France and Britain ended in 1814 when they were ceded to Britain. Independence came in 1976. Socialist rule was brought to a close in 1993 with free elections and a new constitution and there was a peaceful change of government in 2004.

The population is of Asian, African and European descent. The vast majority of the inhabitants are Roman Catholics, while a minority are Anglican (a legacy of British attempts to introduce Protestantism during the nineteenth century). The Evangelical Protestant presence has grown since the arrival of evangelical missionaries in 1971. However, Christianity is strongly influenced by the indigenous faiths that it supplanted.

INTERCESSIONS***Give thanks for:***

- o Religious freedom in Madagascar and the increase of church attendance due to mission outreach.
- o The in-depth growth of Christian spirituality and the spread of the charismatic renewal movement in all denominations.
- o Those who work tirelessly to bring healing to those who are hurting and suffering due to illness, unemployment and poverty.
- o Churches, which work for economic justice and engage in diakonia, especially among the poor in society.
- o Effective work for development among the poor in Christian humility and faithfulness.
- o Every Christian, who shares the good news of God's reign as well as their own lives with those who have not yet or no longer recognize Christ as their Lord and Saviour.
- o The shepherds, evangelists, lay leaders in the churches in Madagascar who work tirelessly to share the love of Christ with the whole nation through word and deed.
- o The empowering presence of the Lord who accompanies mission outreach throughout the Indian Ocean area.
- o Christians who accompany their repentance with service and support of the mission of the church.
- o The strengthening of ecumenical cooperation between the historical churches, including the Roman Catholic Church.
- o Peaceful coexistence and cultural and economic cooperation between the islands of the Indian Ocean.
- o Those in society who speak on behalf of the silenced or unheard until the blind in high places can see and until all the excluded find a home in the life of the nation.
- o The hope for a future where every citizen would live in the dignity of God's children.

Pray for:

- o An awakening of the churches' leadership in the political arena, that their eyes and ears be opened to the plights and cries of the people and that their hearts be wise to discern what makes for peace with justice.
- o Interfaith dialogue and cooperation.
- o That all believers assume their gift of priesthood and thus carry one another's burden for the sake of the mission of the church.

- o Good governance and leadership with vision.
- o Those living along coastal lines, that they may be protected from the devastation of annual typhoons and hurricanes, and those living in arid places that they may be saved from drought and famine.
- o The leading of the Spirit for churches to renounce self-justification and rather work for the establishment of justice and human rights for all.
- o Christians in the southern islands to be more eloquent with their deeds than with their words.
- o A faithful witnessing to the way of the Lord in political and economic arenas.
- o God's justice to prevail in the political arenas and for good results from elections.
- o God's love to permeate and transform all the work of the churches in the islands.
- o Churches to find ways to cooperate in love and trust in the common goal of pointing to the in-breaking reign of God in Christ.
- o Every Christian to gain understanding of and commitment to God's justice in society.

PRAYERS

(1)

Our heavenly Father,
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we glorify you,
we give thanks to you,
for in your infinite mercy you extended your family
to include the islands of the sea,
even islands at the end of the earth:
Comoros, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles.

We praise your name
for you moved your Holy Spirit
who stirred and sustained
a century-long revival movement in Madagascar,
an awakening to your power that brought transformation, reconciliation,
healing and empowerment.

We magnify your name
for through this revival the different denominations have discovered
a spirit-filled way to come to a unity in diversity.

Lord of the church,
we pray that the churches be strengthened in their spirituality,

one that would powerfully engage them
 in a priestly and prophetic way in the midst of their local contexts.
 Strengthen the churches to recover their sight
 and so to resist overt and covert manipulation
 in the political arena,
 from either government officials or politicians.

God of all creation and nature, we pray for the inhabitants of these islands,
 that they may be spared the devastation of cyclones or typhoons
 with the open seas lashing every year against the coastal areas,
 causing suffering and loss for the population.

(2)

Gracious God, our forgiving Father,
 in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 we thank you for your empowering presence
 with your church throughout the ages.
 We thank you, Lord Jesus,
 for the witness of your church in Madagascar,
 following the examples of their forebears
 who kept the faith at the cost of their own lives
 and received from you the martyrs' crown.
 We glorify your name for the growth of your church
 both in size and in geographical extent.

We humbly pray
 that the missionary zeal of your people in the island
 will continue to grow
 that the people may be enabled to respond faithfully
 to the call to global mission,
 to go across ocean boundaries
 and reach out to the whole African continent and beyond.

We pray for those who are called to work for justice and human rights
 that they may be led by your Spirit
 and be filled with faith and humility.

We pray for the partner churches and mission agencies
 working with churches in the islands of the Indian Ocean,
 that they would have more occasions to learn

and reap rich experience from their journey of faith
together with your people.

We ask that a new understanding and practice
of togetherness in mission, both ecumenically and internationally,
be experienced in the lives of the churches.

When these countries and others have elections.

we pray for the leading of the Spirit

to strengthen the churches in their prophetic role

and that they may be able to firmly stand for truth and justice for all.

In your mercy give these countries leaders who are wise and competent
to lead your people in peace with justice.

(3)

Everlasting God,

who love in justice

and whose justice is fulfilled in love,

we give thanks to you,

in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,

for the faithful witness of your churches in the islands of Comoros,
Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles.

We praise you for the lives and works

of those who witness in hardship,

in the midst of multi-cultural/religious contexts,

in deep poverty,

always exposed to killer diseases,

yet sharing the good news of your love

through their empowering word

and through work for social and economic justice.

We pray for your continued presence through the Holy Spirit,

to strengthen the ministry of the churches

in the public and political arenas

that the abundant life promised in the Gospel

may become real in the lives of people.

Teach us, Lord Jesus, to live your love in justice

and your justice in love throughout our daily lives.

Teach your church to love the Gospel it preaches

and to love those to whom the Gospel is preached.

(4)

I am blind. I cannot see.

This is my destiny.

But I thank you, God,

that through my dark colour

I can see the wonderful colours of your love.

And I prefer it

to the multiple colours of atrocity

this world is offering.

I am dumb. I cannot speak.

This is my destiny.

But thank you, God,

that through my mumblings I can speak to you.

And I prefer it

to the multiple words of nonsense

this world is saying.

I am deaf. I cannot hear.

This is my destiny.

But thank you, God,

that through my deafness I can hear you.

And I prefer it

to the multiple news of horror

this world is announcing.

I am physically handicapped.

This is my destiny.

But thank you, God,

I am still your child

whom you cherish.

and I take it for granted

as a special gift

to proclaim your deep love.

(5)

Almighty God, governor of all things in heaven and on earth;
receive our supplications for protection from storm and cyclone.
We acknowledge that we are unworthy of the least of your mercies,
yet we humbly pray you so to hold the winds of heaven
that we may dwell safely without fear of evil,
through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.

(6)

O God of all the people and all the nations of the earth,
we praise you for the loveliness and diversity of your creatures.
This day we thank you for Mauritius,
where you have gathered the people of Africa and Asia and Europe
into one island nation,
surrounded them with great beauty,
and blessed them with a spirit of tolerance
and with growing prosperity.
Defeat, O God, the forces of evil
which exploit human weaknesses and prejudices
for the selfish interests of the few.
Confirm the Christian churches in their struggle to be faithful to the Gospel,
and also open and loving in their relations
with the people and institutions of other faiths.
Strengthen, O God, all those who work for true justice and peace
among the people of Mauritius;
that tolerance may grow into understanding,
and that prosperity may benefit all.

(7)

Lord Jesus,
the storm is life and life is the storm
and there is no escaping it;
but what matters is that you are in the storm with us,
a beacon and a presence that is sure.

(8)

Lord Jesus, your love and forgiveness free us
so that we can serve you and humankind.
Free people so that their enthusiasms and talents,
their freedom from poverty and riches can serve you.
Free people from oppressive social structures,
abuses of ownership and power,
the exploitation of the poor, and injustice.
Free us from selfishness
so that we can work for better human conditions,
for the growth of knowledge, the acquisition of culture,
esteem for the dignity of others,
and the acknowledgement of supreme values, of God and faith.
Lord Jesus, enable us to comfort people in sadness and pain
and to share people's joy and pleasure.

(9)

O God, we have come together in prayer,
knowing that you are present in our midst.
We wish to know you better and worship you with joy.
We offer ourselves to be your servants
and to be good neighbours to one another.
We trust in you,
and with all our heart we praise you
for all the things you have done for us.
Jesus, fill us with your love.
We belong to you today, tomorrow, and for ever.



Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda

Burundi

(Republic of Burundi)

One cannot wait for conditions to be easy in order to act. And so, people of goodwill must never be disheartened when faced with the sudden unleashing of violence. In the midst of it all, the seed sown in our heart slowly germinates. When God becomes a child, he knows there is no better way to express himself than through the weakness of a child. That is love telling us that it comes unarmed.

Christophe Munzibirwa



Statistics

Population: 6.2 million

Government: Republic operating under transitional constitution since 1998

Language: Kirundi and French; also Swahili and others

Literacy: 35% (men 49%, women 22%)

Religion: Christian 67% (mostly Roman Catholic), Ethnic 23%, Muslim 9%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Province of the Anglican Church of Burundi

History

Burundi is a landlocked nation in eastern Africa, with Tanzania to the east and south, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DCR) to the west and Rwanda to the north. The Twa, a pygmoid tribe, were the original inhabitants of the area. The Hutus arrived in the fourteenth century, and during the fifteenth century the Tutsis came to the area, establishing cattle-based feudal kingdoms over the earlier inhabitants. Today, the Twa (primarily hunter-gatherers) are approximately 1 per cent of the population, with the Hutu (mostly subsistence farmers) approximately 85 per cent and the Tutsi 14 per cent.

Ethnic rivalry between these three groups was exploited by British, German and Belgian colonial powers who arrived in the late nineteenth century, granting significant wealth and powers to the minority Tutsis. Burundi gained independence from Belgium in 1962, becoming a kingdom under Tutsi rule. In 1965 the Hutus rebelled, and since then there have been violent clashes, numerous coups and massacres, and ongoing civil war. In 1988 tens of thousands of Hutus were massacred by the Tutsis, and in 1994 thousands of Tutsis were massacred by the Hutus. All sides have been involved in terrible human rights violations, including the use of rape, torture and brutal murder. In addition to internal fighting, Burundi is involved in a complex regional conflict with neighbouring central African countries. Hundreds of thousands have become refugees or internally displaced in neighbouring countries. Burundi troops (largely Tutsi), seeking to protect their borders, intervened in the conflict in the DCR in 1998. More recently, many of these soldiers have been redeployed in Burundi to deal with periodic upsurges in rebel activity. A new transitional government was inaugurated in 2001 through the mediation of South Africa's Nelson Mandela with

the intention to hold elections within three years. While the government of Burundi signed a cease-fire in December 2002 with three of the four Hutu rebel factions, implementation has been problematic, clouding prospects for a sustainable peace.

Burundi is one of the smallest countries in Africa but has one of the highest population densities. Most of the population live in rural areas with a subsistence lifestyle. Poverty, malnutrition and disease are serious problems, exacerbated by continuing violence. The life expectancy of Burundians is just 45 years, one of the lowest in the world. AIDS infects more than 10 per cent of the population, and malaria, tuberculosis, cholera, kwashiorkor, typhus, pneumonia and dysentery are other major health concerns. At one time the land was covered with forests, but farming, grazing and cutting of trees for fuel have destroyed all but a few protected areas. The remaining land suffers soil erosion from overfarming and overgrazing.

The Roman Catholic White Fathers established the first mission in 1879, although several of them were murdered soon after, and it was not until the turn of the twentieth century that the church became established. Today, the majority of the population is Roman Catholic, and the church plays an important role in social action and education. Lutheran, Pentecostal, Adventist, Quaker and Anglican missionaries arrived during the 1920s and 1930s, establishing schools and medical services. The Province of the Anglican Church of Burundi is currently the largest single Protestant denomination. During the 1990s a renewal movement spread through the country, particularly in the Pentecostal churches. However, there is little cooperation between these different churches.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Statistics

Population: 58.3 million

Government: Military dictatorship

Language: French and English; also Lingala, Kikongo, Swahili, Tshiluba and more than 200 other tribal languages

Literacy: 77% (men 86%, women 67%)

Religion: Christian 96%, Ethnic 2%, Muslim 1%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Congo, Church of Christ – Light of the Holy Spirit, Church of Christ in Congo, Church of Jesus Christ on Earth by His Special Envoy Simon Kimbangu



History

The DRC covers much of the Great Lakes region of central Africa. It has access to the Atlantic Ocean at the mouth of the Congo River. Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi lie to the east, as does Tanzania across Lake Tanganyika. Zambia and Angola are to the south, the Republic of Congo to the west, and the Central African Republic to the north. The DRC is home to many different ethnic groups.

When the Portuguese arrived in the fifteenth century, they encountered the Kongo kingdom descended from the Bantu-speaking peoples who migrated around 300 AD into an area which covered far more than today's DRC. One of their kings, Afonso I, became a major Christian figure in African history. The Portuguese claimed the area at the base of the Congo River, and with the

help of the Kongoleses engaged in slave trading. The interior was not explored until the end of the nineteenth century, when King Leopold II claimed Congo for his own and engaged in such brutal exploitation of slave labour in his desire for ivory and rubber that 10 million people were estimated to have been killed. International reaction wrested the colony from royal hands, creating the Belgian Congo in 1908.

Serious unrest began in the late 1950s, and in 1960 the colony became independent as the Republic of Congo under the leadership of its only democratically elected prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, who was murdered during an army coup. From 1971–77 the country was known as Zaire, after General Mobutu seized control in another military coup with active support from the US. His kleptocratic government was toppled by a rebellion led by Laurent Kabila in May 1997, since when the DRC has experienced ethnic strife, civil war and external invasion touched off partially by a massive outflow of refugees in 1994 from Rwanda and Burundi. In October 2002 the new president succeeded in getting Rwandan troops to withdraw from eastern Congo and two months later an agreement was signed by all remaining warring parties to end the fighting and set up a government of national unity. This tenuous ceasefire has been breached many times and the DRC remains one of the most unstable countries in Africa. It is estimated that in four years of struggle over 3 million people have been killed. Rape is endemic in some regions.

Despite its natural wealth the country is extremely poor, due to the massive corruption that flourished under Mobutu. Violence and warfare have destroyed much of the country's infrastructure. Resources have been further taxed by over a million refugees from civil conflicts in neighbouring Burundi and Rwanda. Deforestation and water pollution are significant environmental problems. In 2002 a volcano erupted in eastern DRC, destroying the city of Goma on the border with Rwanda. HIV and AIDS infects 15 per cent of the population.

Roman Catholic missionaries from Portugal arrived in the late fifteenth century. During the slave trade the church diminished, but it was revived in the late nineteenth century and used by the Belgian colonial regime to bolster its power. Today, a little more than half of all Christians in the DRC are Roman Catholic. The Church of Christ in Congo is a broadly ecumenical denomination encompassing Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Anglican, Evangelical, Mennonite and Presbyterian churches. There are also many independent churches, the largest of which is the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth by His Special Envoy Simon Kimbangu. These three churches and the Greek Orthodox Church are the only Christian denominations recognized by the government.

R w a n d a

(*Rwandese Republic*)



Statistics

Population: 7.9 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: Kinyarwanda, French, English (all official); also Kiswahili

Literacy: 60% (men 69%, women 51%)

Religion: Christian 82%, Ethnic 9%, Muslim 8%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Association of Baptist Churches in Rwanda, Province of the Episcopal Church in Rwanda, Presbyterian Church in Rwanda

H i s t o r y

Rwanda is a landlocked country in the Great Lakes region, with Tanzania to the east, Burundi to the south, the DRC to the west and Uganda to the north.

The Twa, often called pygmies, were the first inhabitants of the area, and today make up about 1 per cent of the population. The Hutus were already living in the region by the fifteenth century when Tutsis came from the north and established a feudal monarchy throughout Rwanda and Burundi, with the Hutus relegated to serf status. Today, more than 90 per cent of the population of Rwanda is ethnically Hutu, while 9 per cent of the population is Tutsi. During the 1880s German explorers came to the area, and Rwanda and Burundi became part of German East Africa. The Germans and later the Belgians, who took control during the Second World War, controlled the land by supporting the Tutsi chiefs over and against the Hutu. Racism was actively promoted by the colonial powers, Europeans regarding the lighter-skinned Tutsis as ethnically superior to the Hutus. After the Second World War Rwanda became a UN trust territory, obtaining its independence in 1962 with a Hutu-dominated government.

In 1959, three years before obtaining independence from Belgium, the majority ethnic group, the Hutus, overthrew the ruling king, a Tutsi. Over the next several years thousands of Tutsis were killed and more than 150,000 driven into exile in neighbouring countries. The children of these exiles later formed an exile rebel group, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), and began a civil war in 1990. The war, along with several economic and political upheavals, and a culture of impunity, finally flared into the worst genocide in Africa when in 1994 more than 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were slain in a crude but well-planned attempt to eliminate the minority Tutsis. The RPF defeated the French-backed Hutu regime within ten weeks and ended the bloodbath in July 1994. Approximately 2 million Hutus escaped to Zaire through a corridor opened by French troops, tak-

ing many of their country's foreign reserves, arms, soldiers and politicians bent on resuming the genocide. Other refugees fled to Burundi, Tanzania and Uganda. After several years of border warfare most of the refugees returned, while others were charged with genocide and crimes against humanity. Despite massive international aid – too late, considering the international community's unwillingness to stop the genocide – and local, national and presidential elections in 2003, the country struggles to boost international investment and agricultural output and to foster reconciliation. A nagging Hutu extremist insurgency, and Rwandan involvement in two wars with the DRC, continue to delay development.

Over 90 per cent of the population of Rwanda lives in rural areas, with hundreds of thousands remaining as refugees and internally displaced people, either in refugee camps or in the jungles of the DRC. Because of the lack of infrastructure, they are often unable to receive international aid, and tens of thousands have starved to death or died from cholera and other diseases. Throughout the country, malnutrition and protein deficiencies are severe problems, as is the lack of clean drinking water. Disease is rampant, particularly malaria, cholera, typhus, sexually

transmitted disease including HIV and AIDS, which currently infects over 15 per cent of the population and continues to spread.

Christianity was not established in Rwanda until the early twentieth century, but the church grew rapidly, and today the great majority of the population is Christian, with just over half of church members Roman Catholic. During the massacres of 1994 many people fled to the churches to take refuge. Some Christians protected threatened persons at great personal risk. Tragically, however, in most cases people were killed inside the churches and, in many cases, those seeking refuge were actually given over by clergy and other church members to be killed. The church has worked to recover from these terrible events, which also led to the deaths or flight of many church leaders and the destruction of churches. The Protestant Council of Rwanda, established in 1935, is an ecumenical group that includes Anglicans, Baptists, Free Methodists and Presbyterians. The All Africa Conference of Churches provided heroic support during the genocide and in 2004 a delegation of WCC leaders visited Kigali, the Rwandese capital, and offered prayers and apologies for their lack of effective action during the genocide.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Those who have given up their lives to protect others.
- o Those who work for reconciliation between people.
- o Those establishing a lasting peace with justice for people of all ethnic groups and nationalities.
- o The diversity of plants and animals in this region, and their protection.
- o Choirs and music, which abound in this region.

Pray for:

- o Women who have contracted HIV and AIDS after being raped in the DRC, Burundi and Rwanda.
- o Orphans, widows, street children, traumatized and disabled people, those in overcrowded prisons, and those who live in the squalour of refugee camps.

- o Those steeped in ethnic violence and hatred, that their hearts may be turned.
- o The establishment of a stable and lasting peace in the region, so that those who have been forced to leave their homes may return, families may be reunited, and those who have suffered may begin to heal.
- o An end to corruption and corporate greed, and the sustainable use of vast natural resources.
- o Those displaced by violence and by the volcano in Goma, that they may be able to rebuild their lives.
- o Children, that they may attend school and play without fear of violence.
- o An end to the violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, so that the country may begin to heal and rebuild itself.

PRAYERS

(1)

When lives are lost and families split,
 Lord, comfort those who mourn.
 Where homes are crushed and dreams destroyed,
 give shelter to the vulnerable.
 When people flee and hope departs,
 bring calm amid the fear.
 Where panic rules and courage fails,
 restore strength to all who carry on.
 And when the people cry out,
 Lord, open our ears to hear,
 our minds to comprehend,
 and our hearts to respond,
 with all compassion.

(2)

In the beginning was God,
 Today is God, tomorrow will be God.
 Who can make an image of God? God has no body.
 God is a word which comes out of your mouth.
 That word! It is no more, it is past, and still it lives!
 So is God.

(3)

Good Lord,
we pray for the generation in the third millennium,
so that through them
you would build a strong and spiritual church.

(4)

Almighty God, our Father, in the name of Jesus I come to you with supplications. You are Immanuel, God with us. You love us all. We know that you are not happy when your people are in desperate conditions. The hostilities have made us refugees in our own land. We are without enough clothes or enough food, and yet our gardens are not cultivated because we left them, and live in camps far away. One day we are under burning sun; another day under heavy rain. Our children do not go to school.

O Lord, help us to overcome this situation. O Lord, stop the fighting and resolve its original causes. O Lord, we pray for the restoration of peace in our country, so that we may go back to our own place and cultivate our gardens to feed our families.

O Lord, we know that you bore our nation's sin at the cross. Listen and intervene quickly. Many people – especially children and old people – are dying every day in our camps. Young people are weakened every day. Lord Jesus, look on displaced people's camps and react to their unhygienic conditions.

My Saviour, in you there is hope; you are the Risen Lord; you are the King of Kings; you are the Mighty Saviour; you are the Prince of Peace. Come, Jesus, come and bring us peace.

(5)

Lord Jesus,

Welcomed in infancy by the elderly widow Anna; moved to compassion by a sorrowing widow in Nain; touched by the giving of a poor woman in the temple; mindful of your widowed mother at the cross; and accepting the faithful support of widowed women among the travelling companions of your earthly life; we ask you to bless and to accept the ministry of all of those who are widowed in Rwanda in these days, and called to take on responsibilities formerly undertaken by their menfolk. Give them friends and a community to cherish both them and their gifts; and a lively sense of the communion of saints to encourage and support them; for your loving mercy's sake.

(6)

O Lord, father of all children,
 watch over your little ones
 who are poor and abandoned.

In their tender age, they've lost their parents:
 they've never known the tenderness of love,
 they don't know the smile of a mother,
 the kindness of a father.

Their heart is like the desert,
 their youth is without joy
 as they grow aimlessly.
 Life seems like endless unhappiness
 in their mind.

But you, Lord, you are a Father!
 Guided by your Spirit, we can say
 "Abba, Dawe, Father!"

Watch over your little ones:
 they cry, for they hunger for food,
 for the cold chills their bones,
 for their bodies suffer with disease,
 for they never knew the tenderness of love.
 Lord, grant that all these little ones come to you!
 Warm their tender hearts,
 gather them under your wings,
 that they may feel the care of your heart
 and ever enjoy your kindness as their Father.

(7)

O God, the source of our belonging to one another,
 none of us can give anything to our sisters and brothers
 if we have not first of all belonged to you;
 give us your Spirit in the bond of perfect unity
 so that the Spirit may transform us into a new humanity,
 free and united in your love,
 through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who is God,
 who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, world without end.

(8)

Lord, we pray for this place
and for those of us gathered here in faith.

We humbly ask you to be with us.

Bind us closer in friendship, tolerance and mutual acceptance.

You are our God and we want always to be the people
who are under the guidance of your Holy Spirit.

(9)

Lord, you call on us to pray for our enemies.

Have mercy on those who are disposed to do us evil
and who divide your church.

Deliver us, Lord, from every temptation.

Have mercy on our lack of belief and our wavering faith
as we travel the path towards the unity of your people.

You are our God and we want always to be your people
under the guidance of your Holy Spirit.



Republic of Congo, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe

In September, I was expected to make a medical call to a mission 120 miles upstream on the Ogooué River. At sunset of the third day, near the village of Igendja, we moved along an island set in the middle of the wide river. On a sandbank to our left, four hippopotamuses and their young plodded along in our same direction. Just then, in my great tiredness and discouragement, the phrase "Reverence for Life" struck me like a flash. As far as I knew, it was a phrase I had never heard nor ever read. I realized at once that it carried within itself the solution to the problem [concerning ethics] that had been torturing me. Now I knew that a system of values which concerns itself only with our relationship to other people is incomplete and therefore lacking in power for good. Only by means of reverence for life can we establish a spiritual and humane relation-

ship with both people and all living creatures within our reach. Only in this fashion can we avoid harming others, and, within the limits of our capacity, go to their aid whenever they need us.

Albert Schweitzer

Whenever I injure life of any sort, I must be quite clear whether it is necessary. Beyond the unavoidable, I must never go, not even with what seems insignificant. The farmer, who has mown down a thousand flowers in his meadow as fodder for his cows, must be careful on his way home not to strike off in wanton pastime the head of a single flower by the roadside, for he thereby commits a wrong against life without being under the pressure of necessity.

Albert Schweitzer

Republic of Congo

(Congo Brazzaville)



Statistics

Population: 3 million

Government: Military rule

Language: French; also Kongo, Lingala, Munokotoba, Kibougo, Teke and 30 other tribal languages

Literacy: 74% (men 83%, women 67%)

Religion: Christian 94% (mostly Roman Catholic), Ethnic 4%, Muslim 1%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Church of Christ in Congo, Evangelical Church of Congo

History

Popularly known as Congo Brazzaville to distinguish it from its neighbour, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Republic of Congo is located on the Congo River in western Africa along the Atlantic coast, with Gabon to the west, Cameroon and the Central African Republic (CAR) to the north, and the DRC to the east and southeast. There are four major ethnic groups in distinct geographic regions. About half the population is Kongo, and the remainder are M'Boche, Sangha and Teke.

Bantu peoples were some of the first in the region, and were established by the tenth century. During the fifteenth century European explorers arrived, and like its neighbours, Congo

Brazzaville was exploited by the Portuguese, Dutch, British and French for its natural resources, and its peoples were enslaved.

On independence in 1960, the former French region of Middle Congo became the Republic of Congo. Its single-party socialist government was abandoned in 1990 and a democratically elected government installed in 1992. A brief civil war in 1997 restored the former Marxist President Sassou-Nguesso, and ushered in a period of ethnic unrest. Southern-based rebels agreed to a final peace accord in 2003. During the civil war, much of Brazzaville was destroyed in the fighting.

The country is one of Africa's largest petroleum producers, with significant potential for offshore development. More than half the country is covered by tropical rainforest rich in natural resources and wildlife. However, deforestation and lack of potable water are serious problems. HIV/AIDS is becoming a major health problem. It is estimated that 6 per cent of the population is already infected.

Roman Catholic missionaries from Portugal first arrived during the sixteenth century, but it was not until Holy Ghost priests arrived in 1883 that Christianity was established. Today, the majority of the population is Christian, and the Roman Catholic Church is the largest church body. The Evangelical Church of Congo was established in 1909 by Swedish missionaries, and is the largest Protestant church in the country. A major revival movement occurred in the 1920s with the activity of preacher Simon Kimbangu, who established the Kimbanguist Church, which is the largest indigenous African church, and has a particularly strong following in neighbouring DRC. The Ecumenical Council of Christian Churches of Congo was established in 1970 and is an ecumenical organization that includes the Roman Catholic Church, the Salvation Army, and the Kimbanguist, Baptist and Evangelical churches. The church has often been repressed, sometimes violently, by the Marxist government. During the 1960s and 1970s church property, schools and medical facilities

were nationalized, and many priests and missionaries were imprisoned or expelled. In 1977 a Roman Catholic cardinal was murdered, and in 1978 over thirty religious groups were banned by the government. As a result, there has been a growing secularism and nominalism among Christians.

Gabon

(Gabonese Republic)

Statistics

Population: 1.3 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: French; also Bulu Fang, Eshira, Bandjabi, Kota and over 40 other tribal languages

Literacy: 63% (men 73%, women 53%)

Religion: Christian 91% (mostly Roman Catholic), Muslim 5%, Ethnic 3%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Evangelical Church of Gabon



History

Gabon is on the western coast of Africa, with Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon to the north, and the Republic of Congo to the east and south.

There is evidence that Gabon was inhabited as far back as the Stone Age, but little is known about its early history. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive, during the fifteenth

century, and (later joined by the Dutch, British and French) engaged in the slave trade for over three centuries. The French had the first permanent European settlement, and their influence grew steadily. In 1866 Gabon was made a part of French Congo, and in 1910 it became part of French Equatorial Africa. Following the Second World War it was declared an overseas territory of France. Gabon declared its independence in 1960 under the leadership of Leon Mba. After his death in 1967 he was succeeded by Omar Bongo, one of the longest-serving heads of state in the world, who has dominated the country for almost forty years. He introduced a nominal form of multiparty elections in 1990, along with a new constitution, but low turnout and allegations of fraud have exposed the weaknesses of political structures. Major strikes have underscored popular disenchantment with the political system. Despite these conditions, a small population and abundant natural resources help to make it one of the most stable and wealthiest countries in sub-Saharan Africa in terms of average income. Nevertheless, more than half the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture, little affected by the modern economy. Deforestation is a growing concern, and around 6 per cent of the population is infected with HIV/AIDS.

The Capuchins from Italy brought Roman Catholicism to Gabon in the seventeenth century, but when the Portuguese took control they were expelled. Holy Ghost missionaries arrived in the mid-nineteenth century, and Roman Catholicism grew steadily into the dominant faith tradition. There are four Protestant churches in Gabon, the largest of which is the Evangelical Church of Gabon. Scholar and missionary Albert Schweitzer arrived in 1913 and established a hospital, remaining in the country until his death in 1965. In 1952, Schweizer received the Nobel prize for peace. Technically, Gabon supports freedom of religion, but this has often been subverted by the state. During the 1970s President Bongo converted to Islam, and those in government positions were required to convert as well, or to join secret

indigenous societies. Today, the influence of Islam is growing, and that of Christianity is waning, due in part to lack of indigenous Christian leadership.

Sao Tome and Principe

*(Democratic Republic
of Sao Tome and Principe)*



Statistics

Population: 181,000

Language: Portuguese; also Fang and others

Government: Multiparty republic

Religion: Christian 96% (predominantly Roman Catholic), Baha'i 2%, Ethnic 2%

Literacy: 54% (men 70%, women 39%)

WCC member churches: None

History

The smallest country in Africa, Sao Tome and Principe consists of two main islands and several islets that lie on the Equator in the Gulf of Guinea to the west of Gabon. The islands were

uninhabited when discovered by Portuguese explorers in the 1470s. The islands of Sao Tome eventually became a major centre for the transportation of slaves from the African mainland to the Americas and elsewhere. When slavery was ended in Portugal in the late nineteenth century, cocoa plantation owners on the islands continued to import mainland Africans as contract labourers. These contract workers were harshly treated and virtually slaves. Decades of unrest led to the Batepa massacre in 1953 in which Portuguese rulers killed hundreds of rioting African workers. The people of Sao Tome began demanding an end to Portuguese rule and the country gained independence in 1975 as a single-party republic. Democratic reforms were instituted in the late 1980s, free elections were held in 1991, and in 1994 Principe was granted autonomy.

The recent discovery of large reserves of oil in the Gulf of Guinea is bound to have a major impact on Sao Tome and Principe, but recent events indicate major corruption and instability, as other African nations vie with the ruling party for control of the country's riches. Since independence, the country has relied mostly on external assistance to develop its economy and unemployment remains rampant. Although social indicators remain better than most for sub-Saharan Africa, poverty is the most important issue, with just under half of the population living below the poverty level. Sao Tome has to import most consumer goods, and a significant amount of food.

With its Portuguese heritage, Roman Catholicism remains dominant in Sao Tome and Principe. During the 1930s the Evangelical Church was established by the efforts of an exiled Angolan Christian. Portuguese Seventh-day Adventists also established missions on Sao Tome as part of their Angolan Union Mission.

INTERCESSIONS***Give thanks for:***

- o Christians who continue to witness to their faith even when it is disadvantageous to do so.
- o Those who work with people living with HIV and AIDS and who are searching for ways to defeat the disease.
- o Albert Schweitzer, and other missionaries like him, who devoted their lives to the health and betterment of the people they served.
- o The great tropical forest with its many forms of life.

Pray for:

- o An end to violence and instability in the Republic of Congo.
- o All leaders, to use their power justly in service to all of the people, and to refrain from corrupt practices.
- o An end to autocratic rule.
- o Those involved in subsistence agriculture, that their crops may be plentiful and they have enough food to eat and clean water to drink.
- o Women, who often bear the brunt of poverty and receive less education than men and fewer opportunities.
- o An end to deforestation and desertification, and for the sustainable and responsible use of natural resources.
- o The just sharing of these countries' natural resources, particularly oil, so that all the people reap the benefits of what God has given and not just those in power, or international corporations.

PRAYERS

(1)

Barriers, walls, and barbed wire mark the frontiers, O Lord.

Help us to transform them into places where we can meet,

with sincerity,

as countries and as persons,

so that the world will know that we are Christians

by the love with which our actions are marked.

(2)

Jesus, we want to touch you so we can be healed!

Look around us.

There are so many sick and suffering.

Touch them with your raiment of light.

When I see persons as sisters or brothers,

regardless of the colour of their skin,

their country, or their religion,

I bless you, for you are the God of the whole world.

May your church universal pray to you for healing and reconciliation,
life forever.

(3)

Lord, if you want that we should love you with all our heart,

without distraction or detour,

teach us to become constant in your love.

When those without faith or law insult us,

help us to forgive, O Resurrected One.

Jesus, the friend of the people of the Congo,

your Father is not a God of the dead but of the living;

therefore, guide us in your love,

so that we may live in your presence forever.

(4)

Sweet Jesus, I praise you!

Blessed are you

when difference becomes richness,

when disagreement produces dialogue,

when the storm breaks.

Blessed are you, for such moments announce a rainbow of hope

and in my life, reconciliation.

(5)

When we finally decide to trust you,

totally confident in your care,

we can receive the assurance of your love, Almighty God.

Help us, O God, to discover that your love

can be for each one of us a source of life and blessing.

By your grace, O God, transform your people.

(6)

PRAYER OF ADORATION

Your people praise you, O God,

Your people praise you.

Every day, you show forth your goodness,

Glorify to your holy name, wonderful Father.

Teach us to number our days,

so that we may receive a heart of wisdom.

Blessed are you, Father.

Praise, honour and glory are yours.

(7)

Lord, help us to keep watch,

because we do not know when you will come.

Keep us listening for the sound of your footsteps

so that in prayer we do not become weak.

O God, the truth is not in our mouths nor in our hearts.

Teach us, your servants,

to live with faithfulness and fidelity.

Lord, keep watch over your church, that it may proclaim your gospel,

and become a church transformed

in the midst of a world of tumult,

blown every which way by the winds of false doctrines.

Thank you, Lord.

(8)

Lord of lords, Creator of all things, God of all things,

God over all gods, God of sun and rain,

You created the earth with a thought and us with your breath.

Lord, we brought in the harvest.

The rain watered the earth,

the sun drew cassava and corn out of the clay.

Your mercy showered blessing after blessing over our country.

Creeks grew into rivers; swamps became lakes.

Healthy fat cows graze on the green sea of the savannah.

The rain smoothed out the clay walls,

the mosquitoes drowned in the high waters.

Lord, the yam is fat like meat, the cassava melts on the tongue,
 oranges burst in their peels, dazzling and bright.
 Lord, nature gives thanks, your creatures give thanks.
 Your praise rises in us like the great river.
 Lord of lords, Creator, Provider, we thank you in the name of Jesus Christ.

(9)

O God:

Enlarge my heart

that it may be big enough to receive the greatness of your love.

Stretch my heart

that it may take into it

all those who with me around the world believe in Jesus Christ.

Stretch it

that it may take into it all those who do not know him,

but who are my responsibility because I know him.

And stretch it

that it may take in all those who are not lovely in my eyes

and whose hands I do not want to touch.

Through Jesus Christ, my Saviour.

(10)

Hear our humble prayer, O God, for our friends the animals,

especially for animals who are suffering;

for animals that are overworked, underfed and cruelly treated;

for all wistful creatures in captivity

that beat their wings against bars;

for any that are hunted or lost or deserted or frightened or hungry;

for all that must be put to death.

We entreat for them all thy mercy and pity,

and for those who deal with them we ask a heart of compassion

and gentle hands and kindly words.

Make us, ourselves, to be true friends to animals,

and so to share the blessings of the merciful.

Cameroon, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea

Cameroon

(Republic of Cameroon)

Dear African sisters and brothers, we have heard words of repentance. But those who brought us here [the Western slave traders] were not alone in the making of this tragedy [the selling of slaves]. We Africans share in the responsibility. We have degraded ourselves by selling our brothers and sisters as goods. Is it because we have never had the courage to recognize it and to repent that we continue to do the same today – hence the disgraceful situation of Africa? We want to repent and ask for forgiveness and God’s mercy.

Aaron Tolen



Statistics

Population: 16 million

Government: Unitary republic

Language: French, English and 24 major African language groups

Literacy: 63% (men 75%, women 52%)

Religion: Christian 54%, Ethnic 24%, Muslim 21%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: African Protestant Church, Evangelical Church of Cameroon, Native Baptist Church of Cameroon, Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, Presbyterian Church of Cameroon, Union of Baptist Churches of Cameroon

History

Cameroon, in West Africa, borders the Atlantic Ocean, between Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea. Other neighbours include Chad, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo and Gabon.

Many different tribal peoples lived in the area when the Portuguese arrived in the late fifteenth century and began a brisk trade in ivory, rubber and slaves. In the late nineteenth century Germany declared Cameroon a protectorate, which lasted until the end of the First World War, when the land was invaded and divided between the French and the British. After the Second World War there were moves in each country towards self-rule and independence, but by 1961 former French Cameroon and part of British Cameroon merged (the northern part of British Cameroon joined Nigeria) to form the present country. Cameroon has generally enjoyed peace and stability. Despite movements for democratic reform, political power remains firmly in the hands of an ethnic oligarchy.

The country is rich with rainforests, and wildlife is diverse and abundant. The economy is dependent on timber resources and agriculture. Cameroon has significant reserves of natural gas, which are relatively unexploited, and petroleum products constitute more than half of all exports. The majority of the Cameroon people are farmers inhabiting small villages in southern and central Cameroon. Many of the northern people are semi-nomadic herders.

Cameroon has achieved one of the highest rates of school attendance in Africa. Mission schools play a key role in education and are partly subsi-

dized by the government. The people of Cameroon have not escaped the devastation of the AIDS epidemic, water-borne diseases, deforestation, overgrazing and poaching. Infant mortality remains high and the limited availability of health care contributes to an average life expectancy of just 54 years.

Christianity came to Cameroon with its European colonizers, who established missions and schools. Freedom of religion is guaranteed in the constitution, though all religious groups must register with the government. Ecumenical work is done by the Council of Protestant Churches of Cameroon, which was originally organized in 1943.

Central African Republic



Statistics

Population: 3.7 million

Government: Republic

Language: French; also Sango, Arabic, Hunsu, Swahili and other ethnic languages

Literacy: 60% (men 68%, women 52%)

Religion: Christian 67%, Muslim 16%, Ethnic 15%, Other 2%

WCC member churches: None

History

Located in central Africa on the northern edge of the Congo River basin, the Central African Republic (CAR) is surrounded by Sudan to the east, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo to the south, Cameroon to the west and Chad to the north. It is populated by a number of different tribal peoples, many of whom came to the area to escape European colonial slave traders in neighbouring regions. It became a French protectorate in 1894. European dominance included a system that abused the black Africans, who staged violent protests between 1928 and 1930. When CAR finally gained independence in 1960, the people endured the injustice of Jean Bedel Bokassa, who seized power in 1966 and had himself crowned as emperor in 1977. His reign began to fall apart in 1979, when he ordered school children to wear expensive uniforms made in his factory. Protests led to the imprisonment of many children, where they were massacred. This led to a full-scale uprising and two coups, which left the country under military rule until the first multi-party elections were held in 1992. Civilian rule was established in 1993. In March 2003 a military coup deposed President Ange-Felix Patasse and has since established a transitional government. Following elections in 2005, General Bozize was affirmed as president. The government does not fully control the rural countryside, where there are pockets of frontier lawlessness.

Though prone to harsh weather and flooding, CAR is rich in undeveloped resources. Subsistence agriculture, timber and diamonds maintain the economy. A poor transportation system, government mismanagement, poor education, an unskilled workforce, and ongoing violence and destruction hamper the country. One out of seven people is infected with the HIV/AIDS virus, and the average life expectancy is 44 years. Only about half of the children eligible for primary education receive it, and secondary and higher education facilities are limited.

Christianity came to CAR with Roman Catholic missions in the 1890s and Baptist missions from

the Congo-Kinshasa church and several European Protestant churches during the 1920s. There is no ecumenical council of churches in the country.

Equatorial Guinea

(Republic of Equatorial Guinea)



Statistics

Population: 525,000

Government: Republic

Language: Spanish, French; also pidgin, Fang, Bubi, Ibo

Literacy: 78% (men 89%, women 68%)

Religion: Christian 88% (mostly Roman Catholic), Muslim 4%, Ethnic 3%, Other 2%

WCC member churches: Reformed Presbyterian Church of Equatorial Guinea

History

Situated in west Africa on the Atlantic coast, Equatorial Guinea is bordered by Cameroon to the north and Gabon to the west and south. It became independent in 1968 after 190 years of Spanish rule. This tiny country, consisting of a mainland portion and five inhabited offshore islands, is one of the smallest in Africa. It has been ruled since 1979 by Colonel Teodoro Mbasogo, the president who seized power in a military coup, although it is nominally a constitutional democracy. Elections were held in 1999

and 2002, but were widely regarded as flawed. A conspiracy to overthrow the government involving foreign businessmen and mercenaries was exposed in 2004. Despite the country's economic windfall from oil production, there has been little improvement in living standards.

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood in Equatorial Guinea. Though the national economy and its potential have grown over recent years, the rural economy has deteriorated as a result of the corrupt government and its mismanagement.

Christianity was brought to Equatorial Guinea by Portuguese and Spanish Roman Catholic priests during colonial times, and today, the majority of the population is nominally Roman

Catholic. At the time of independence, many priests were arrested or expelled. Under the dictatorship of Macias Nguema during the 1970s, atheism was actively promoted and Christians endured harsh treatment, including anti-Christian propaganda, expulsion, arrests and murder. Since then, there has been more freedom of worship. There are a few Protestant churches, and since the 1980s the number of Pentecostal, charismatic and evangelical congregations has increased dramatically, though they remain a small minority. Ecumenical relationships between Protestant churches are promoted by the Council of Protestant Churches of Equatorial Guinea.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The rainforest and its gift of oxygen, so the world can breathe.
- o Mission schools providing learning and hope.
- o Those who have the courage to fight corruption.

Pray for:

- o Political stability and freedom for the people in all of these countries.
- o Those suffering from HIV and AIDS, and those who lack adequate health care.
- o Those living at a subsistence level, and those who lack clean water and enough food.
- o Monkeys and other animals that are threatened with extinction due to the destruction of their habitat.

PRAYERS

(1)

Strength, Lord,
 give me strength,
 the strength to bear,
 with some measure of happiness,
 my sorrows and cares,
 strength to make my love abundant in your service,
 strength never to reject the poor,
 nor to bend my knees before arrogant power,
 strength to live the life of the Resurrected One each day,
 strength to subject, with love, my strength to your will.

(2)

I am happy because you have accepted me, dear Lord.
Sometimes I do not know what to do with all my happiness.
I swim in your grace like a whale in the ocean.
The saying goes, "An ocean never dries up",
but we know that your grace also never fails.
Dear Lord, your grace is our happiness. Hallelujah!

(3)

Lord Jesus,
you who have marked seventy times seven our falls each day,
and who know the dull frenzy of our eyes, darkened with fever and rancid wind,
you who know the snares of the fowler,
and his net that circles our steps in the bush, and our paths to the villages,
here we are given over to the horn of the rhinoceros,
and here are hovering the vultures and goshawks.
But you, who know the frailty of our two feet of clay,
and the place of our weakness and that of our rousing again,
Lord, let us not yield to temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

(4)

When we contemplate such beauty,
the immensity before us,
 blossoming with colour and scent,
the surprising diversity of all that surrounds us,
the green forests, the animals,
the intelligence which allows us humans
 to create with you, God,
the acts of your grace on our behalf,
we can only express our joy at being your children
and gladly sing of the generosity of your love.

(5)

PRAYER FOR THE SICK

Merciful God,

this is the moment for which your children,

suffering in body or spirit, have long been waiting,

the moment when you look upon each one of them,

knowing their many illnesses,

and act, O Lord, according to your immeasurable goodness.

In developing countries, O God,

many don't even have an aspirin.

Worse still, there is no one to relieve their pain.

They need you, kind and gracious God,

to take the place of the ones they are missing.

Heal them, regardless of what name their sickness has.

Are there those the evil ones are disturbing?

You alone, God, have the strength to drive them away.

Give your servants the power to deliver your children

from all evil by the mighty wind of your Holy Spirit.

In your strong name, O Lord God,

we lay our hands on those who are here,

even as you are laying your hands

on those who are far from us.

To you be thanks and praise in the name of Jesus Christ.

(6)

The witchdoctors tremble

and the magicians die,

their work becomes as ashes.

But the word of Jesus is alive,

harder than a stone,

sparkling more than any diamond.

From East to West,

from North to South,

from America to Madagascar.

Black or floury white,

red or maize yellow,

your word gladdens all our hearts.

(7)

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Merciful God,
 at this moment, thanks to your power,
 we can bring with one heart our common prayers to you.
 You have promised
 that where two or three are gathered in your name,
 you will listen to their prayers.
 According to your will, hear, now, O Lord,
 the desires and requests of your servants.
 You know what will be the most advantageous for them.

Grant us the knowledge of your truth,
 which frees and liberates in this world,
 and which in the world to come,
 offers life with you in splendour,
 which you promise to those you love and who love you.

Save our continent
 so that it regains a true faith in Jesus Christ
 and recognizes all the goodness
 it has received from your hand.
 Help, O God, all of our sisters and brothers
 who have any bit of political power, at any level,
 to accomplish their difficult task of leading people fairly
 without prejudice and self-interest.

Keep those who do not love their countries
 from exercising any political authority.
 Punish those who, throughout the world,
 march on the bodies of the dead
 in order to enhance their petty vanity.
 Castigate those who build their fortunes on the blood of others
 without concern or scruples.

Grant to all peoples of the world the knowledge of peace,
 peace, without which nothing can be undertaken even in daily life,
 peace without which the Gospel cannot be proclaimed,
 peace which is at the centre of your Word of Life,
 which you have conferred on the fragile shoulders of us mortals.

God, do not regard our iniquity, but pardon us.
Look at us through spectacles
 tinted by the blood of Jesus Christ,
 the sacrificial lamb.
Open your ears to our prayers
and to the sighs,
 untranslatable into any language,
too deep for words
but which are carried to you by the Holy Spirit, our intercessor.

(8)

Come, Holy Spirit, you are the best of blacksmiths,
forge my weapons,
gird me with God's weapons;
with the weapons of love, of peace, of patience, of freedom,
of firmness, of humility.
Or better still,
mould me so that I may be a weapon in your hands.



Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger

Burkina Faso

The Africa which the world needs is a continent able to stand up, to walk on its own feet rather than on crutches or on its head, in vacuous mimicry or escapism. It is an Africa conscious of its own past and able to keep on reinvesting this past into its present and future.

Joseph Ki-Zerbo



Statistics

Population: 13.5 million

Government: Parliamentary republic

Language: French; also Mossi, Bobo, Senuto, Fulani, Gurunsi, Lobi and over 40 others

Literacy: 19% (men 29%, women 9%)

Religion: Muslim 49%, Ethnic 34%, Christian 17%

WCC member churches: Association of Evangelical Reformed Churches of Burkina Faso

History

Burkina Faso is in west Africa to the north of Ghana. The Bobo, Lobi and Gurunsi peoples were the original inhabitants. In the fourteenth century the Mossi and Gurma people immigrated to the region. The Mossi Empire governed the land until the close of the nineteenth century, when it became a French protectorate. In 1919 Upper Volta (as it was called by the French) became a separate colony, gaining independence in 1960. France retains a neocolonial interest in its government and economy, maintaining a military and civilian presence.

Repeated military coups throughout the 1970s and 1980s resulted in military governments and dictatorships. These were followed in the 1990s by multiparty civilian elections. Burkina Faso's high population density and limited natural resources mean poor economic prospects for the majority of citizens. Recent unrest in northern Ghana and the Ivory Coast has deprived several hundred thousand seasonal Burkanibe workers from finding employment in neighbouring countries.

Burkina Faso is situated in the heart of the Sahel, the borderland of the Sahara Desert. Subsistence farming and nomadic herding are a way of life, with over 90 per cent of the population engaged at least part of the time in agriculture. Drought is common and medical facilities are limited. In 1996 a meningitis epidemic led to the deaths of several thousand people. HIV/AIDS is growing at an alarming rate, and 6 per cent of the population is infected.

Islam was introduced to the area during the eighteenth century. During French rule, proponents of Islam underwent persecution, imprisonment and even execution. Since independence, Islam has grown and now claims about half the population. Christianity was introduced in the early 1900s, with the establishment of a Roman Catholic mission. Today, over half of all Christians are Roman Catholic. A Pentecostal influence was primarily brought to the region by the Assemblies of God in 1919, which remains the largest denomination apart from Catholicism.

About a third of the population continues to adhere to ethnic and animistic beliefs.

Chad

(*Republic of Chad*)



Statistics

Population: 9.5 million

Government: Republic

Literacy: 48% (men 62%, women 34%)

Language: Arabic, French and over 100 indigenous languages

Religion: Muslim 59%, Christian 23% (mostly Protestant), Ethnic 17%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

A landlocked country in north central Africa, Chad is bounded by Libya to the north, Sudan to the east, the Central African Republic to the south, Cameroon and Nigeria to the southwest and Niger to the west. It is home to some 200 ethnic groups of Arab and Arabized people in the north and the Pagan or Kirdi in the south. More than three-quarters of the population live in rural areas.

Chad gained independence from France in 1960, but was forced to endure three decades of ethnic warfare as well as invasions from Libya before a semblance of peace was restored in 1990. The government eventually suppressed or

otherwise came to terms with most political-military groups, settled a territorial dispute with Libya on terms favourable to Chad, drafted a democratic constitution and held multiparty presidential elections in 1996 and 1997. Unfortunately, in 1998, a new rebellion broke out in northern Chad, which sporadically flares up despite two peace agreements signed in 2002 and 2003 between the government and the rebels. Despite talk of democratic reforms, power remains in the hands of a northern oligarchy.

Much of Chad's land is subject to drought and a lack of potable water. Locust plagues and dust storms are not uncommon, and desertification and pollution are growing environmental concerns. Nearly 3 per cent of the population is infected with HIV/AIDS, and a lack of infrastructure and the remoteness of many areas make it difficult to obtain health care. Refugees have crossed into Chad from the Darfur region of Sudan, with instances of border violence.

Most of the people in the north and east are Muslim, while those in the south are mainly Christian and indigenous (primarily animists). The 1970s were turbulent times for Christians, with the expulsion of missionaries, but subsequent government changes led to the reopening of churches and invitations to return. Recent developments include the establishment of Bible schools in local languages, theological schools, training of church leaders, medical evangelization programmes, health centres, the training of teachers in churches, and the translation of the Bible into various dialects.

Mali

(Republic of Mali)

Statistics

Population: 12 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: French, Bambara (80%) and others

Religion: Muslim 82%, Ethnic 16%, Christian 2%

Literacy: 31% (men 29%, women 23%)

WCC member churches: None



History

Mali is in northwestern Africa, bounded by Algeria to the north, Niger to the east, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and Guinea to the south, and Senegal and Mauritania to the west. Since 300, caravan routes have passed through Mali. The Malinke Empire ruled regions of Mali from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries and the Songhai Empire reigned over the Timbuktu-Gao region in the fifteenth century. Morocco conquered Timbuktu in 1591 and ruled it for two centuries. Subjugated by France at the end of the nineteenth century, the land became a colony in 1904 and was called French Sudan.

Senegal and the Sudanese Republic became independent of France as the Mali Federation in 1960. When Senegal withdrew within a few months, what remained of the Sudanese Republic was renamed Mali. Constant rule by dictatorship ended only in 1991 with a transitional government and in 1992 Mali's first presidential election was held. After his reelection in 1997, President Alpha Konare continued to push through economic and political reforms and to fight endemic corruption. In keeping with Mali's two-term constitutional presidency, he stepped down in 2002 and was democratically succeeded by Amadou Toure.

Desert covers 60 per cent of Mali. Drought, declining soil fertility, deforestation and deserti-

fiction plague this nation. The majority of the population lives in the more fertile southern region of the country, engaging in herding and subsistence farming. Less than half of the population has access to adequate water supplies, and only a third have access to medical facilities. HIV/AIDS is a growing concern, with 2 per cent of the population already infected.

Islam was first introduced to Mali in the eleventh century. The White Fathers and White Sisters of the Catholic Church were the first to bring Christianity to Mali in 1895. Protestantism arrived through the work of the Gospel Missionary Union in 1919. Probably the most influential Protestant group has been the Evangelical Christian Church of Mali, with its mission among the Dogon people.

Mauritania

(Islamic Republic of Mauritania)



Statistics

Population: 3 million

Government: Single-party republic

Language: Wolof (official), Arabic, French, Pulaar, Soninke

Literacy: 41% (men 49%, women 26%)

Religion: Muslim 99%, Christian and other 1%

WCC member churches: None

History

Mauritania is in northwest Africa on the Atlantic coast. Morocco lies to the north, Algeria and Mali to the east and Senegal to the south. It is a sparsely populated country compared to its neighbours. Black Africans and Berbers were the area's first inhabitants. The Portuguese explored Mauritania in the fifteenth century, and by the nineteenth century the French had gained control. In 1904 the area was organized into a territory and made part of French West Africa.

Mauritania obtained independence in 1960. It annexed the southern third of the former Spanish Sahara in 1976 (now Western Sahara), but relinquished it after three years of raids and border warfare with the Polisario guerrilla front, who sought independence. Opposition parties were legalized and a new constitution formalized in 1991. Two subsequent multiparty presidential elections have been judged as badly flawed and Mauritania remains a one-party state. Ethnic tensions continue between its minority black African population and the dominant Maur (Arab Berber) populace. Slavery is still practised in the country.

Only a small portion of the south of the country supports rain-fed vegetation. Since independence, there has been a shift from a nomadic to an urban society (more than half the population is now urban), largely due to droughts in the 1970s and 1980s.

Islam reached the nomadic Berbers of this region in the tenth century and is today the official religion of the country. Christianity (mostly Roman Catholic) is practised mainly by foreigners living in the country. Protestant attempts at evangelization have been unsuccessful.

Niger

(Republic of the Niger)

Statistics

Population: 11.3 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: French; also Hausa, Djerma, Fula, Tamashek and others

Literacy: 13% (men 20%, women 6%)
Religion: Muslim 91%, Ethnic 8%, Christian and other 1%
WCC member churches: None



French territory in 1900. Its poor soil and lack of rain made Niger one of the least developed French colonies. In 1993, some thirty years after independence from France, Niger held its first elections. A 1995 peace accord ended a five-year Tuareg insurgency in the north. Coups in 1996 and 1999 were followed by the creation of a National Reconciliation Council that effected a transition to civilian rule in 1999.

Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world, with minimal government services and insufficient money to develop its resources. The largely agrarian and subsistence-based economy is frequently disrupted by droughts. The current average life expectancy is 42 years. There is tension between the two main ethnic groups – the Hausa and the Djerma-Songhair – who are sedentary, and the rest of the population, who are nomadic or semi-nomadic.

H i s t o r y

Niger is a landlocked, semi-desert country, bordered by Chad to the east, Nigeria to the south, Benin and Burkina Faso to the southwest, Mali to the west, and Algeria and Libya to the north. For several centuries it was on one of the main caravan routes across the Sahara. British, German and French explorers arrived in the late nineteenth century, and the country became a

Niger is predominantly Sunni Muslim, while most of the rest of the population are animists who follow traditional African religions. The country is officially a secular state with freedom of religion. The Christian church is small and not highly visible – mostly Roman Catholics from other countries. Christian missions operate a hospital, a leprosy centre, and agricultural development projects, and serve university students.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o The freedom for Christians to worship in Mauritania even though it is an Islamic country.
- o Christians who retain their faith and continue to serve Christ even though they are tiny minorities in some of these countries.
- o Those who depend on semi-nomadic and nomadic ways of life and who continue to survive and retain their ethnic heritage.
- o Those who plant trees to counter the spread of the desert.

Pray for:

- o Political and economic stability in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, an end to human rights abuses and slavery in Mauritania, and an end to civil war in Chad.

- o Those who suffer from lack of water and food, particularly in desert regions.
- o Refugees and those whose lives have been formed in the midst of violence and conflict.
- o An increase in the availability of education and medical care.
- o The elimination of the consistent use of military force to resolve disputes.
- o Peace and reconciliation between tribes and ethnic groups.
- o Reconciliation in families, in marriages.
- o An end to the various abuses against children and women.
- o The just use of the discovery/exploitation of oil in Mauritania and Chad so that it shall no longer profit only the few and thus lead to social disturbances.

PRAYERS

(1)

MORNING PRAYER

God, accept the morning greeting;
 earth, accept the morning greeting;
 ancestors, trees, stones, everything, accept the morning greeting;
 you who have placed the stone, accept the morning greeting;
 you who have balanced the steps, accept the morning greeting;
 you who slept on beds, accept the morning greeting;
 women who bore long-necked calabashes, accept the morning greeting;
 our old men have poured out a libation: take and drink.
 If you have drunk, give me a long old age;
 make me a gift of children;
 let me reach next year.

(2)

Come, Lord, and cover me with the night.
 Spread your grace over us as you assured us you would do.
 Your promises are more than all the stars in the sky;
 your mercy is deeper than the night.
 Lord, it will be cold.
 The night comes with its breath of death.
 Night comes, the end comes,
 but Jesus comes also.
 Lord, we wait for him day and night.

(3)

PRAYER FOR MAURITANIA

Your land, O Lord, is divided

and suffers from fighting between your children.

Injustices of all kinds, hatred and bitterness

are part of the daily life of the people.

Families seek reconciliation.

Tribes and ethnic groups need reconciliation and peace.

The country needs to be restored and reconciled with itself

in order to deal with its past.

The downtrodden still struggle to live a decent life.

The powerful continue to exploit the powerless and the voiceless.

Send your Holy Spirit to reveal your presence and might to all.

May your name be feared and judgment brought upon those

who continue to oppress the little ones.

Enter into hearts and lives and change them to become havens of love.

(4)

God, our Father, we bless you

for the gift of life that you grant us,

that strength of faith,

so fragile and so powerful,

which is nourished by the assurance of your love.

We pray to you, Lord,

for the sustenance of life for the people of these five countries,

Mali, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mauritania.

Stir up the strength and courage of all those who are engaged

in lifting these countries out of poverty.

We pray for all the small farmers and workers of the Sahel.

Come to their aid so that they find their place

within a more equitable world.

Lord, Jesus, our God and our brother,

by your death and resurrection,

you have revealed the power of love

to all those who know to open their eyes.

We pray to you for Niger.

Guide the political leaders with your wisdom,

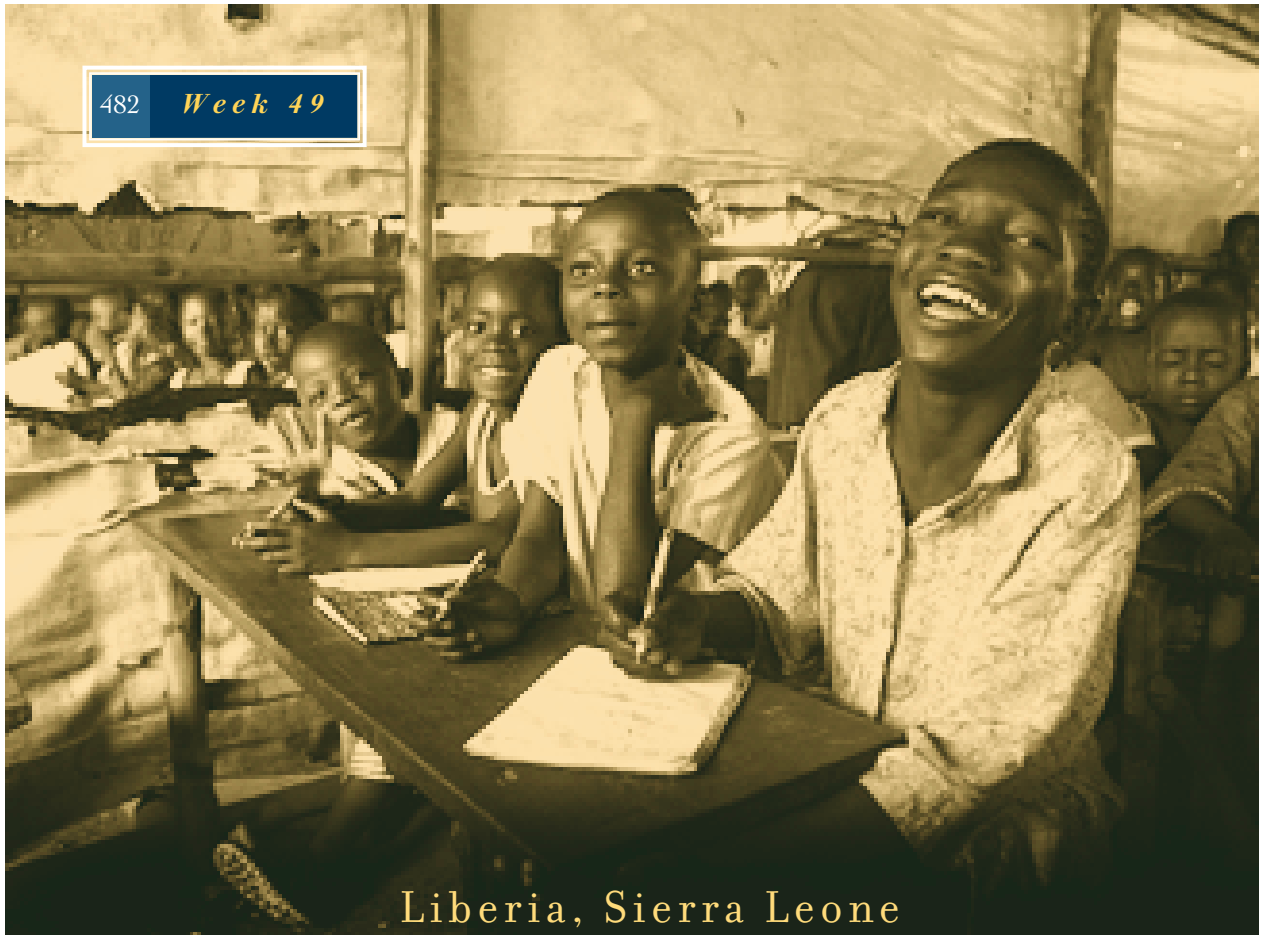
so that they pursue the beginning recovery with discernment,
taking account of the complexities of the contemporary world.

We give you thanks, Lord, for the discovery of oil in Chad.
We pray that the government of Chad shall respect the laws
which had foreseen how to divide the revenues from this resource
so that education, health and access to water
can bring all the people to a life of dignity
by satisfying their basic needs.

We pray for Burkina Faso, O God.
We entrust to you the political leaders
so that they work to put an end to the political troubles
and contribute to the resolution of the conflict
in its neighbour, Côte d'Ivoire.
May this country and with it, all the region,
rediscover quickly that peace and stability
necessary for their development.

May your Spirit breathe, O Lord,
on all those who work for the future of Mauritania.
As it undergoes difficulties,
may it find your way forward towards a better life
for all its inhabitants.

Holy Spirit, inspire the leaders of Mali,
so that they find the way to save
the historical and cultural heritage discovered at Timbuktu.
May all Africans become aware of their worth,
culturally, economically, spiritually,
in the face of all the humiliations and catastrophes
which they have endured
and which continue to plague them.
Lord, hear our prayer.



Liberia, Sierra Leone

The problem in my country is war and malnutrition. My parents and my brothers were killed in the war. I joined the forces when I was twelve because I was told I would have food and should take revenge on the death of my parents. Please don't be afraid of me. I am not a soldier any more. I am just a child. And what I want to say is that people fight because they think they can take revenge. But there is no revenge. You kill and you kill, but it will never stop. There is no such thing as revenge.

Ishmael Beah

God's Word is carried out on earth for the benefit of human beings by ministering and guardian angels. We cannot protect Liberia with our blood, only the blood of Christ can keep us safe.

Victoria

Liberia

(Republic of Liberia)

Statistics

Population: 3.4 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: English; also many indigenous local languages

Literacy: 39% (men 52%, women 22%)

Religion: Ethnic 43%, Christian 39%, Muslim 16%, Other 2%

WCC member churches: *Presbyterian Church of Liberia, Lutheran Church in Liberia*



History

Liberia is on the western coast of Africa, with Sierra Leone and Guinea to the north and Côte d'Ivoire to the east. The indigenous peoples of the area (the Mandingo, Krahn, Gola and others) make up 95 per cent of the population.

Liberia was founded in the early nineteenth century by the American Colonization Society for liberated slaves repatriated from the Southern US, who never made up more than 2 per cent of the population and were called Americo Liberians. Liberia gained independence soon after the former slaves arrived, although its boundaries were not fully established until 1911. During the 1930s it was discovered that slavery continued in Liberia, leading to a new Americo Liberian government that abolished it but continued to withhold rights from indigenous peoples.

In 1980 the government was overthrown in a bloody coup led by Sergeant Samuel Doe, who publicly executed many of the leaders of the earlier regime, engaged in blatant corruption and destroyed the economy of the country. In 1989 a group of dissidents, known as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, began an uprising that led to Doe's death and a civil war that lasted until 1997, despite attempts by West African nations, led by Nigeria, to impose a ceasefire.

These decades of fighting destroyed most infrastructure and disrupted all normal activity. Unsettled domestic security has delayed the process of rebuilding. President Charles Taylor won the presidential elections in 1997 after an eight-year civil war, but was never able fully to eliminate rebel groups that sought to oust him. Rebel attacks on the capital, Monrovia, plus two years of UN-imposed sanctions for Liberia's meddling in the Sierra Leonian civil war finally resulted in Taylor's forced abdication from power in 2003 and his exile. National elections in 2005 brought to power Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the first woman president in Africa. In 2006, former president Charles Taylor surrendered himself and was transported to The Hague to face charges of human rights abuses. The UN Mission in Liberia continues to lend stability to national life.

The country is rich in natural resources, but has had limited economic development because of the civil war. Government authority is weak and the resulting anarchy has led to abuse by soldiers in all factions, including extortion, torture and other violations of human rights. Children have been conscripted into government and rebel armies by force; women are subjected to all kinds of abuses, including rape. Liberia is thought to have at least 15 per cent HIV and AIDS incidence, with little knowledge of prevention and care. Over a million people have been displaced or have left the country to seek refuge. Communal forests are cut indiscriminately and rich biodiversity is being lost.

Although Liberia was originally founded as a Christian state, Christians remain a minority, with a significant portion of the population engaged in ethnic and animistic religions. Even so, the Christian church in Liberia has made a significant contribution to national life. In response to the social upheavals following the 1980 coup, the churches and Islam in an inter-faith coalition were active in championing people's rights and forthright in speaking out on matters of social justice. United Methodists and Baptists are the largest Protestant denomina-

tions. During the 1990s a Pentecostal/charismatic renewal spread rapidly across many of the older churches in Liberia.

Sierra Leone

(Republic of Sierra Leone)



Statistics

Population: 5.8 million

Government: Constitutional democracy

Language: English; Krio, Mende, Temne and 20 others

Literacy: 31% (men 54%, women 18%)

Religion: Muslim 60%, Ethnic 28%, Christian 10%, Other 2%

WCC member churches: Methodist Church
Sierra Leone

History

Sierra Leone is on the Atlantic coast, with Guinea to the north and west, and Liberia to the south. Freetown, the capital, was originally founded as a settlement for ex-slaves and became a British colony in 1808. It was used as a reception centre for the large numbers of Africans freed from ships that continued to trade illicitly after the slave trade was abolished. Many of the descendants of these slaves, Creoles, eventually

rose to positions of relative wealth and influence. Independence was gained in 1961.

The 1991-2002 civil war between the government and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and the displacement of more than 2 million people (well over a third of the population), many of whom are refugees in neighbouring countries. With the support of a British-led UN peace-keeping force and contributions from the international community, demobilization and disarmament of the RUF and combatants of other rebel forces has been completed. National elections were held in 2002 and the elected government is slowly establishing its authority. However, the gradual withdrawal of the UN peace-keepers in 2004 and the extremely tenuous security of neighbouring Liberia present a serious challenge to future stability.

The majority of people in Sierra Leone depend on subsistence farming. Malnutrition and poverty are widespread and health care is seriously insufficient. There is a prevalence of serious diseases due to poor sanitation. HIV/AIDS is estimated to infect at least 10 per cent of the population. Abuse of human rights (including looting, robbery, amputations and mutilation, extortion and extrajudicial killings) has been rampant. Freedom of the press and freedom of speech have been curtailed. There is also systemic discrimination against women and people of non-African origin, and tribal loyalties remain important factors in government. Children are often conscripted to serve rebel factions. Over the past decade, forest lands and more than 85 per cent of wildlife habitats have been lost to agriculture.

More than half the population is Muslim, and a large minority still adhere to traditional ethnic and animistic beliefs. Christianity came to Sierra Leone principally with released slaves. The Council of Churches in Sierra Leone is an active ecumenical group that was originally established in 1924.

INTERCESSIONS***Give thanks for:***

- o Christian churches and people who, despite hardships and temptations, retain faith and hope and love, and work for the betterment of all peoples in their nations.
- o Those who work for reconciliation and healing, so that people can live with one another again.
- o Churches that try to rebuild their communities.
- o The council of churches in Sierra Leone and Liberia and their work towards a renewed Christian witness.
- o Those who saved others at great risk to their own lives.

Pray for:

- o The establishment of a society where children can live and grow with love and peace instead of hatred and violence.
- o The fullness of human life for all men, women and children of all tribes and ethnicities in Liberia and Sierra Leone.
- o Refugees and those internally displaced by civil war.
- o Women who have been raped and who have otherwise suffered the ravages of civil war.
- o Healing for those broken in body, mind and spirit by the brutality of war.
- o Orphans, displaced children, malnourished children, and children who live in fear.
- o For the renewal of the forests, wildlife habitats and rich biodiversity of Sierra Leone and Liberia.
- o For functioning economies which have been totally wrecked by the years of violence.

PRAYERS

(1)

Most heavenly Father of the human race, behold me, unworthy though I am; see that I am about to have a baby. I pray that you assist me to bear the pain of childbirth courageously, and give me physical and moral strength. Avert from me any unseen or unnatural circumstance and grant me the privilege of bearing a normal, healthy baby. Hear my humble prayer, dear Lord, offered to you with confidence and love in this hour of my expectation. Help me to be a good mother in word and example. Grant that after my delivery my little baby may learn at an early age of your greatness. May the joy and peace of a safe delivery fill my heart, and may your blessed name be praised now and for evermore.

(2)

My Lord and my Maker,
 I have bruised and ruined my country,
 have mercy on me.
 Pardon and forgive me, my people,
 for the sake of real peace, forgive me
 and accept me, brothers and sisters.

(3)

PRAYER FOR THE RESTORATION OF THE NATION

Almighty Father, creator of the universe,
 we adore and worship you
 because you are above all creatures and divine beings.
 After a decade-long civil conflict in Liberia,
 it finds itself plunged into
 degradation, frustration,
 dejection, rejection,
 poverty and economic ruin.

Father, in the name of Jesus, we call on you now,
 pleading to you,
 who maps the destiny of peoples and nations,
 to visit Liberia.

In your mercy Lord, which endures forever,
 we pray for the restoration of Liberia,
 for that nation to be what it ought to be
 according to your perfect will.

Father,
 Liberia is presently experiencing economic recession
 and spiritual decadence.
 Have mercy upon that nation and its people,
 so that they turn and be reconciled to you,
 because you said in your word:
 "If my people who are called by my name shall humble themselves,
 pray and turn from their wicked ways and seek my face,
 then will I hear from heaven and heal their land."

O Lord, please heal that nation and restore its people
 that you may take glory in Liberia.
 In Jesus' mighty name.

(4)

A LITANY OF RENEWAL

Son of the Living God:
 our God of power and might,
 of love, grace and mercy;
 by whose spoken word
 the world came into being
 and without whose guidance
 we are lost;
 we stand in awe of you
 and in adoration lift our voices to you:

Come, Lord Jesus.

**Come and make Sierra Leone
 a better place for the people there
 and for their children.**

We thank you for the people of Sierra Leone.
 You have given them a wonderful country
 with lovely landscapes, a coast with beautiful beaches,
 enough rain and sunshine, green vegetation,
 fertile land and mineral resources,
 enough to make each family happy.
 We pray with them,
 "Somehow Lord,
 greed, selfishness and corruption
 overtake us and destroy us;
 we confess our manifold sins."

We lift up our voices to you:

Come, Lord Jesus.

**Come and make Sierra Leone
 a better place for the people there
 and for their children.**

After a decade of maiming, killing and destruction
 with deadly weapons of war,
 a once beautiful country is scarred, disfigured and devastated.
 A part of Africa is still groping in darkness.
 Teach them to let go of the old
 and let you into their lives and daily work.

So that your coming may find them rejoicing, we pray:

“Holy Spirit, Wind of Change,
Refining Fire and River of Life,

renew every sphere of our lives as we lift up our voices to you”:

Come, Lord Jesus.

**Come and make Sierra Leone
a better place for the people there
and for their children.**

(5)

LITANY OF PEACE

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

when forces of evil strike

as they did during the war just ended in Sierra Leone,

or when anything traumatic happens,

such that sorrows attend our way and peace eludes us,

may we in our moments of lamentation, hear you say to us:

“Be still and know that I am God.”

All: *(softly sing)* **Be still and know that I am God. (3 times)**

The ten dark and sombre years of war are over

and the work of national healing of the wounds of war has been ongoing
for years now.

But somehow, Lord, there are still thousands of our brothers and sisters out there,

especially widows and widowers, orphans and amputees,

still hurting from the pains and traumas, from the bitter realities of the war.

We pray that in their quiet moments in communion with you,

they will hear you speak the words of comfort and assurance to them:

“I am the Lord that giveth peace.”

All: *(softly sing)* **I am the Lord that giveth peace. (3 times)**

Merciful and loving Father, we lift up in humble prayer to you

troubled spots from around the world –

remembering especially the war-wearied people of

Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel, Palestine

and Sudan, with a special focus on the people of Darfur.

We pray for your spirit of peace to move mightily

and for real and lasting peace to return to the peoples of these troubled regions,

so that many lives are spared and saved.

Then will they hear you say to them:

“I am the Lord that giveth life.”

All: *(softly sing)* **I am the Lord that giveth life. (3 times)**

Lord Jesus, only begotten Son of the Father,
 we remember with grateful hearts the life-saving roles played
 by ECOWAS,* the UN and friendly countries
 in ending the bloodbath in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire.
 May the troops of ECOWAS and the African Union,
 and the men and women in blue berets keeping peace in our continent,
 never grow tired,
 but in sweet fellowship with you always hear you say to them:
 "I am the Lord that giveth strength."

All: *(softly sing)* **I am the Lord that giveth strength.** (3 times)

Spirit of the living God, we bring our prayers for civil society groups –
 especially religious groups in our country,
 whose resilience and courage contributed in no small way
 to ending the terror in Sierra Leone.

May they never grow cold in the ongoing search for sustainable peace
 in the postwar situation.

When the task is daunting and their good intentions misconstrued,
 may they hear you say to them: "Be still and know that I am God."

All: *(softly sing)* **Be still and know that I am God.** (3 times)

Lord Jesus, you came so that we might have life and have it more abundantly.
 We need your countless mercies for peace.

Without food on the table and money to send the kids to school
 or pay the medical bills,
 peace flies through the window.

HIV, AIDS and all manner of illness and unemployment
 can destroy our peace as well.

When justice is perverted and corruption enriches a few
 at the expense of the masses,

peace slips through the fingers of those who govern.

We pray therefore, dear Lord, that you endow all
 in positions of trust, power and authority

with wisdom that comes from you,

to the end that the manner

in which they govern family, community, institution and state
 will make us experience your peace and grace.

Then the whole nation will hear you say to them: "I am the Lord that giveth
 peace."

All: *(softly sing)* **I am the Lord that giveth peace.** (3 times)

* Economic Community of West African States

(led by a child)

Jesus, friend and brother,
for all sorts and conditions of children around the world,
I bring our prayers.
You took children in your loving arms, blessed them and healed them.

Today, we ask you to stretch your saving hands
to bless and heal children in refugee camps,
children living in the streets,
children who hunger and starve,
children sick and helpless,
children orphaned by HIV and AIDS,
by wars, fatal accidents
and by natural disasters like hurricanes.

Bless and protect children and their families
around the world from harm and danger.

We make our prayers in your name:

So Lord, have mercy.

All *(softly sing)* **Lord have mercy.** *(3 times in English)*

Kuru nukasu. *(3 times in Themne)*

Yata chinjiima. *(3 times in Kono)*

Ndemoi manumuma. *(3 times in Mende)*

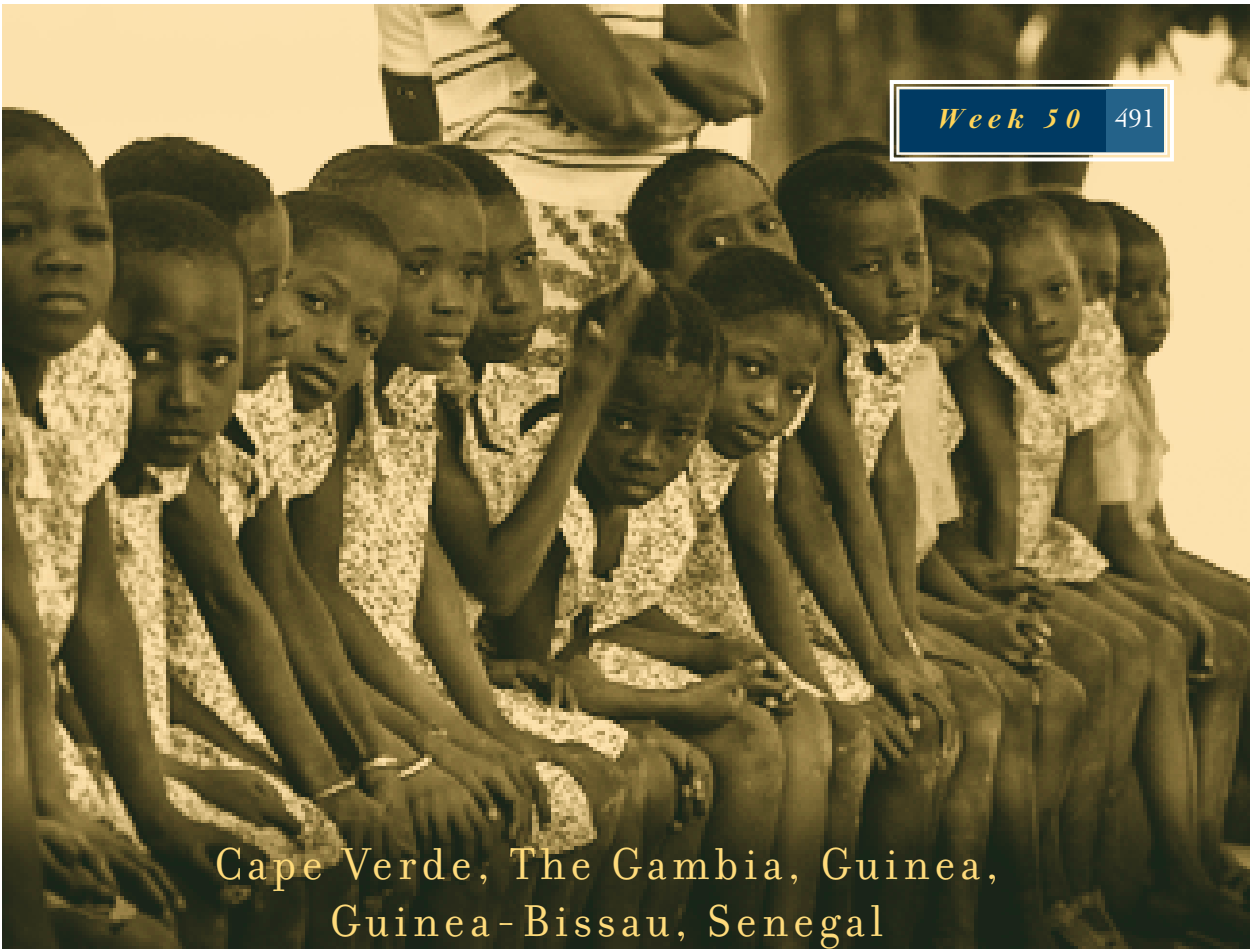
Kyrie eleison. *(3 times in Greek)*

(6)

God, what kind of world is this
that the adult people are going to leave for us children?
There is fighting everywhere
and they tell us we live in a time of peace.
You are the only one who can help us.
Lord, give us a new world in which we can be happy,
in which we can have friends
and work together for a good future.
A world in which there will not be any cruel people
who seek to destroy us and our world in so many ways.

(7)

O Christ Jesus,
we know that you are alive and present in all of us.
You strengthen us by your own journey to Calvary.
We shall not give up!



Cape Verde, The Gambia, Guinea,
Guinea-Bissau, Senegal

A child's cry
 Mother, where are you?
 Father, I do not see you.
 I am so afraid of the dark,
 even though the dogs do not bark.
 What am I to do now,
 there is no one left in the town?

You told me to run and hide,
 I took your word, trusting like a child.
 For a long while I heard loud noises,
 then, all of a sudden, complete silence.
 I crept out of my hiding place,
 and looked around me – what a mess!

I cannot understand why
 hands, legs, bodies just lie
 about scattered, everywhere.
 I ran to our house, it was nowhere to be seen.
 Mother, can you hear me?
 I am so hungry.
 Help me up, father, I am weak and thirsty.

*Gambia Unit, World Federation
 of Methodist and United Church Women*

Cape Verde

(Republic of Cape Verde)



Statistics

Population: 430,000

Government: Multiparty state

Language: Portuguese; also Crioulo and others

Literacy: 71% (men 81%, women 63%)

Religion: *Christian 95% (mostly Roman Catholic), Muslim 3%, Other 2%*
WCC member churches: *None*

H i s t o r y

Cape Verde consists of 15 volcanic islands off the coast of western Africa in the North Atlantic. Mauritania and Senegal are the nearest neighbours, to the east. The islands were uninhabited until the Portuguese discovered them in the fifteenth century. They subsequently became a staging place for the export of African slaves and later an important coaling and resupply stop for whaling and trans-Atlantic shipping.

Following independence in 1975, and a tentative interest in unification with Guinea-Bissau, a one-party state was established and maintained until 1990, when multiparty elections were held. Cape Verde continues to be one of Africa's most stable democracies.

Repeated droughts in the second half of the twentieth century caused significant hardship and considerable emigration. As a result, Cape Verde's expatriate population is greater than its domestic one and most Cape Verdeans have both African and European antecedents. Droughts and limited fresh water resources are still serious problems, and the country relies heavily on foreign aid.

Most of the population is Roman Catholic (the first Roman Catholic clergy arrived in 1462). Protestants, consisting principally of Nazarenes and Seventh-day Adventists, make up less than 5 per cent of the population. The Christian community was an important voice in creating democratic reforms during the 1980s and 1990s.

The Gambia

(Republic of the Gambia)

S t a t i s t i c s

Population: *1.5 million*

Government: *Parliamentary republic*

Language: *English*

Literacy: *38% (men 52%, women 24%)*

Religion: *Muslim 87%, Ethnic 8%, Christian*



4% (mostly Roman Catholic), Baha'i 1%
WCC member churches: *None*

H i s t o r y

The Gambia extends from the Atlantic Ocean along both sides of the Gambia River. Except for its coastline, it is entirely surrounded by Senegal. There are a number of different ethnic groups living along the river, including the Mandinga, the Fulani and the Wolof, who were the first to settle in the region. The Portuguese arrived in the late sixteenth century, followed by the French and British. The Gambia River region was claimed as a British protectorate in 1894.

The Gambia gained its independence in 1965 and for a brief period formed the Federation of Senegambia with Senegal. In 1991 the two nations signed a friendship and cooperation treaty. A military coup in 1994 overthrew the president and banned political activity, but in 1996 a new constitution was approved and presidential elections, followed by parliamentary balloting in 1997, restored nominal control to civilian rule.

The Gambia River, lined with mangrove swamps, is one of Africa's best navigable waterways to the Atlantic Ocean. Cultivation of peanuts in the sandy soil and fishing in the river are primary economic activities. Agriculture and the use of wood for fuel have resulted in the destruction of over 90 per cent of original forests, which has had a significant impact on wildlife and human populations. Other problems include overfishing, salinization and desertification.

Most of the population of the Gambia is Muslim. Roman Catholicism was first brought to the country by the Portuguese, but evangelization did not really begin until the nineteenth century.

The majority of professing Christians are Roman Catholic, but secularism and nominalism are increasingly affecting the Christian community. The Gambia Christian Council was formed in 1963 as an ecumenical association of Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist churches. There is also dialogue with the majority Muslim population.

Guinea

(Republic of Guinea)



Statistics

- Population:** 9.2 million
- Government:** Unitary multiparty republic
- Language:** French; also several tribal languages
- Literacy:** 35% (men 49%, women 21%)
- Religion:** Muslim 84%, Ethnic 11%, Christian 5% (mostly Roman Catholic)
- WCC member churches:** Evangelical Protestant Church of Guinea

History

Guinea is in west Africa, with borders on the north with Guinea-Bissau, Senegal and Mali, on the east and southeast with Côte d'Ivoire, on the south with Liberia and Sierra Leone, and on the west with the Atlantic Ocean. Major ethnic groups in Guinea include the Fulani, the Mandinga and the Susu. The Mandinga brought Islam to the region, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries controlled much of what is now Guinea. The French declared Guinea a

colony in 1891, and it became part of the French West African Federation in 1906.

Independent from France in 1958, Guinea did not hold elections until 1993, when General Laurent Conte (head of the military government) was elected civilian head of state. He was reelected twice, but serious unrest that spilled over from Liberia and Sierra Leone during past decades has threatened stability and created numerous humanitarian crises.

Christians are a small minority in Guinea. Most of the population is Muslim. Roman Catholic missionaries arrived in the late nineteenth century and set up schools and missions. Following independence, Christian religious schools were nationalized and missionaries were expelled. Under the most recent constitution, freedom of religion is allowed, but often the Christian minority faces discrimination and intolerance by the majority Muslim population.

Guinea - Bissau

(Republic of Guinea-Bissau)



Statistics

- Population:** 1.4 million
- Government:** Multiparty republic
- Language:** Portuguese; also several tribal languages
- Literacy:** 54% (men 68%, women 42%)
- Religion:** Ethnic 45%, Muslim 40%, Christian 13% (mostly Roman Catholic), Other 2%
- WCC member churches:** None

History

Guinea-Bissau is in west Africa on the Atlantic coast, and also includes approximately 60 islands. Senegal lies to the north and Guinea to the east and south. Major ethnic groups include the Balante, Fulani, Mandingo, Mandyako and Pepel, who came to the region by the twelfth century. When Portuguese slave traders arrived in the late fifteenth century, Guinea-Bissau became a centre of the slave trade. Portugal claimed the region as a colony in 1879 and as a province in 1952. Guinea-Bissau achieved independence in 1974 after several years of war.

Since independence, Guinea-Bissau has experienced considerable turmoil and upheaval. The founding government consisted of a single-party system and a command economy. In 1980 a coup installed Joao Veira as president, and a path to a market economy and multiparty elections was implemented. A number of coup attempts in the 1980s and 1990s failed to unseat him and in 1994 he was elected in the country's first fully free elections. However, a further coup attempt and a civil war finally ousted Veira in 1999. In February 2000 an interim government turned over power when opposition leader Kumba Yala won two consecutive and apparently transparent elections. He in turn was removed in a bloodless coup in December 2003 and Henrique Rosa was sworn in as president. In 2005 former President Veira was re-elected, and he has pledged to pursue economic development and national reconciliation. Guinea-Bissau's faltering attempts at democracy will be complicated by the legacy of its civil wars and its crippled economy. The military still retains a strong presence and there is potential for more violence.

The population is engaged in subsistence agriculture or fishing. Problems include deforestation and soil erosion, overgrazing and overfishing, and a lack of safe drinking water and sanitation. These contribute to a low life expectancy and high infant mortality. The civil war led to the deaths of many thousands of people and tens of thousands were displaced.

Almost half the population follow traditional beliefs. Another large group is Muslim. Although missionaries arrived with the Portuguese, Christianity was not really established until the twentieth century. During the civil war, Christian leaders were active in promoting peace and providing for those who were displaced.

Senegal (Republic of Senegal)



Statistics

- Population:** 10.8 million
- Government:** Multiparty republic
- Language:** French; also numerous tribal languages
- Literacy:** 33% (men 43%, women 23%)
- Religion:** Muslim 88%, Ethnic 6%, Christian 5% (mostly Roman Catholic), Other 1%
- WCC member churches:** None

History

Senegal is in west Africa on the Atlantic Ocean. It entirely surrounds the Gambia. Mauritania lies to the north, Mali to the east, and Guinea and Guinea-Bissau to the south. It has a diversity of ethnic groups, including the Wolof, Wolf and Serer, who arrived in the area in the sixth century. They established an empire during the ninth century that lasted 500 years. The first European contact was with the Portuguese, who reached the Senegal River in 1444. The Dutch displaced them

in the early seventeenth century and later the French displaced the Dutch.

One of the most sophisticated and democratic countries in Africa, Senegal achieved its independence from France in 1960. It formed a socialist system of government under the leadership of the famed poet-politician, Leopold Sedar Senghor. Its nominal attempts to confederate with The Gambia in 1982 did not work out and Senegal continued on its own, developing a culture of stability and contributing widely to UN peace-keeping operations.

A new constitution in 1974 provided for democratic elections, and in 1981 Senghor stepped down voluntarily. He was succeeded by Abdou Douif, who remained in power until 2000, when he too was replaced in peaceful elections. During the 1980s and 1990s the government was weakened by student demonstrations, an ailing econ-

omy, and a violent bid for independence by the Cassamance region, which is that part of Senegal to the south of The Gambia.

Senegal has a transitional topography and climate. Increasing population has led to deforestation and overgrazing of some areas, and recent long-term droughts have caused desertification.

Islam came to Senegal in the eleventh century, and today the majority of the population is Muslim. The remaining people are split between those who follow traditional beliefs and Christians, mostly Roman Catholic. There were a number of different Roman Catholic missions in Senegal, beginning with the Portuguese in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the Holy Ghost Fathers in the late nineteenth century. In spite of their minority status, Christians have made a strong contribution to the country, particularly through schools and medical facilities.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Community and religious organizations that work together to improve food security in rural households, to educate and end illiteracy, to support refugees from neighbouring countries, and to provide care for people living with HIV and AIDS.
- o Christians in these predominantly Muslim countries who continue to witness to their faith and live their lives in accordance with the gospel.
- o Rural populations, subsistence farmers and livestock herders, who endure the season of want that precedes the harvest every year.
- o Stilt dancers in Guinea.

Pray for:

- o Those who flee to urban areas and face problems such as chronic unemployment, alcoholism and drug addiction.
- o Leaders, to govern wisely on behalf of all their people, and to address underlying problems of ethnic strife and the unequal distribution of wealth through non-violent means.
- o Rebuilding and healing in Guinea-Bissau as it recovers from civil war.
- o Those from Cape Verde who are unable to make a living in their home country and must live and work abroad.

- o All who suffer the effects of water shortages and long-term drought.
- o An end to discrimination on the basis of religion or ethnicity.
- o Refugees who seek shelter and safety in The Gambia and for those who work to meet their needs.
- o The environment, particularly areas that are subject to overgrazing, over fishing, desertification and soil erosion.
- o Peace, understanding and tolerance between the different religions of these countries, and respect and the freedom to express one's faith.

PRAYERS

(1)

May your word, O God, reach all nations
and may you be recognized as the only one true God.

(2)

Lord, hear my prayer of peace and forgiveness!

Lord God, forgive the white slave-traders of Europe and over the seas!
They hunted our children like wild elephants. They caught them, tied
them up, whipped them and soiled their hands with their blood.

Bless my people, Lord, those who seek their own faces under the threat
of being recognized. May they continue to seek you in spite of the cold
and famine that eats at their very bones, at their very insides. The
woman who laments her absent husband, the fiancée her lost love, the
mother her dead son, bless those who have lost loved ones, may we all
unite under your love.

With your help, may all the people of Europe, Asia, Africa, and all who
have sweated blood and suffering look beyond and see the haloed heads
of my people. Extend a warm handshake to them so that we may all
interlace our fingers to belt the earth in fraternal love.

(3)

Lord, grant our leaders the qualities of leadership they need
to stride securely through our times,
and on the hard-fought path of life
give them a generous portion of the grace they need
to lead us with a sincere heart and with wisdom.

May the difficult sacrifices
we joyfully make for the development of our country
reach up to you as a living plea
to lavish kindness, faithfulness and power
and keep watch over our land.

Lord, let us believe in your power
to bring all people together
and let no one deprive us of this song of unity.

Let us form the great image of the human person and community
among us which fulfils your will.

We pray for peace and unity in our homeland,
that we may be able to live as one family
working for the betterment of our nation and her people.

We pray for all those who have to witness to their faith
in situations where they are ridiculed, threatened and persecuted:
that they may find in you, Lord, the courage they need.



Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo

Benin

(Republic of Benin)

And it is true we are wounded
 at the lowest point of hope,
 but hope in us has never beaten its wing;
 it rises on our human horizons
 like a fresh unfolding bud.
 There lives in us unconquerable hope,
 snapping at the heels of freedom.
 In due course it hunts down the dawn
 with huge supplies of stones
 against the wall that will crack in the end,
 for we will not leave the smallest scrap
 to the demons of despair.

Paulin Joachim



Statistics

Population: 7.25 million

Government: Parliamentary democracy

Language: French; also Bariba, Dendi, Voltanic, Yoruba and others

Literacy: 37% (men 48%, women 25%)

Religion: Ethnic 50%, Christian 30% (mostly Roman Catholic), Muslim 20%

WCC member churches: Protestant Methodist Church of Benin

History

Benin is in West Africa on the Gulf of Guinea, bounded by Nigeria to the east, Togo to the west, and Burkina Faso and Niger on the north. The land is hot and humid, with coastland, swamps, forest and highlands.

The Benin of today was the site of Dahomey, a prominent West African kingdom that arose in the fifteenth century, and which was once one of the major suppliers of slaves to European traders. In 1872 Dahomey became part of French West Africa. The Republic of Benin achieved independence in 1960. A succession of military governments ended in 1972 with the accession to power of Mathieu Kerekou and the establishment of a government based on Marxist principles, which was widely respected in some international circles. A move to representative government began in 1989. Two years later, free elections were held and Kerekou was defeated and stepped down, marking a peaceful transition from one-party rule to multiparty elections. Kerekou returned in another free election in 1996 and again in 2001.

Benin's economy is overwhelmingly agricultural, with most people engaged in subsistence farming or fishing. Except for a brief oil boom during the 1980s, the annual cost of imports usually far exceeds earnings from exports. Lack of potable water is a serious concern.

Under Marxist rule religion was discouraged, but under the 1990 constitution equal rights are granted to all religions. The majority of Christians are Roman Catholics. The Protestant Methodist Church of Benin is the largest Protestant church and plays an active role in the socio-economic life of the country. It is involved in dialogue with Muslims, as is the Roman Catholic Church. There are also significant Pentecostal/charismatic churches.

Côte d'Ivoire

(Republic of Côte d'Ivoire)



Statistics

Population: 17.4 million

Government: Parliamentary democracy

Language: French; also Dialect, Baoulé, Bété, Senoufou, Malinke, Agni and over 50 others

Literacy: 40% (men 49%, women 30%)

Religion: Ethnic 38%, Christian 32%, Muslim 30%

WCC member churches: Church of Christ-Harrist Mission, United Methodist Church of Côte d'Ivoire

History

Côte d'Ivoire (also known as the Ivory Coast) is located on the Gulf of Guinea. Ghana lies to the east, Liberia and Guinea to the west, and Mali and Burkina Faso to the north.

Côte d'Ivoire was originally made up of numerous isolated settlements and today it includes more than sixty distinct tribes. The area attracted both French and Portuguese traders in search of ivory and slaves during the fifteenth century. French traders set up establishments early in the nineteenth century, and in 1842 the French obtained territorial concessions from local tribes, gradually extending their influence along the coast and inland. The area was organized as a

territory in 1893, became an autonomous republic in the French Union after the Second World War, and achieved independence in 1960.

In December 1999 a military coup overthrew the elected government. Rigged elections in 2000 led to riots and violence and an attempted coup in 2002. Rebel forces claimed the northern half of the country, but in 2003 were given some ministerial posts in a government of national unity. Ethnically charged issues such as land reform sparked more civil war and the government has been unable to assert control over the northern part of the country, despite the presence of French troops. Thousands of French citizens who lived for many years in the affluent suburbs of Abidjan fled the country, leaving it short of technical and professional personnel.

The country's economy had been one of the most developed in sub-Saharan Africa. It was the world's largest exporter of cocoa and one of the largest exporters of coffee. In spite of steady industrialization since the 1960s, and the production of petroleum gas since the 1980s, the country remains predominantly agricultural. The wealth is distributed unevenly: 25 per cent of the population earns two-thirds of the total income, while the bottom 60 per cent earns less than a fifth. In addition to recent warfare, major concerns include coping with a high birthrate, providing housing, education and safe drinking water (particularly in rural areas), and dealing with health issues, most notably the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which is estimated to infect 11 per cent of the population. Further worries revolve around the uncertain political future of the country, growing tribalism, rising unemployment and unfulfilled expectations among educated young people.

Over a third of the population still adhere to traditional African religions, with the remainder split between Muslims and Christians. The first Roman Catholic mission arrived in 1687, and over the years the church has made a deep impact through education. During the many years of stability under the country's first president, Felix

Houphouët Boigny, the Catholic church played a key role in politics. In return the eccentric president moved the capital city inland from Abidjan to his home village of Yamassoukro. There he built a church slightly larger than St Peter's Basilica in Rome, and Pope John Paul II consecrated it.

In 1913–15 the preaching of Prophet William Wade Harris of Liberia led to a remarkable mass movement of coastal people to Christianity and the establishment of the Harrist Church. In general, Christianity is practised by the middle class and in urban centres in the south. Most Protestant bodies belong to the Evangelical Federation of Côte d'Ivoire.

Togo

(Togolese Republic)



Statistics

Population: 5.5 million

Government: Republic under transition

Language: French; also Ewe, Mina, Kabye, Cotocoli and many other dialects

Literacy: 51% (men 67%, women 37%)

Religion: Christian 43% (mostly Roman Catholic), Ethnic 38%, Muslim 19%

WCC member churches: Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Togo, Methodist Church of Togo

History

Togo comprises a narrow strip of the West African coast, with Ghana to the west, Burkina Faso to the north and Benin to the east.

European colonization began in the eighteenth century. Togo was first a German colony, but was subsequently divided between the British and French, who called the area Togoland. It became an independent country under its present name in 1960. In 1967 General Gnassingbe Eyadema became its military ruler and president, a position he held until his death in late 2004. He was the longest ruling head of state in Africa at the time. His death caused a constitutional crisis when the army installed his son Faure to complete Eyadema's term as president. Togo is regularly criticized by human rights organizations and the country is in constant political unrest. Most bilateral and multilateral aid is frozen.

Agriculture and fishing are Togo's chief economic activities. Large-scale mining of phosphate deposits in the southeast began in 1963 and

has become Togo's most important industry. Togo is subject to droughts, and slash and burn agricultural practices have led to increasing deforestation. AIDS currently infects about 8 per cent of the population.

While Christians may now be the largest religious group in Togo, many people still adhere to tribal religions, and there is a large minority Muslim population. Roman Catholics from the African Missions Society first arrived in Togo in 1593, and today more than half of Christians are Roman Catholics. The first Protestants to enter the country were trained in Christian schools in Ghana, then known as the Gold Coast. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church, and the Assemblies of God are major denominations. Almost half of the school-age population is educated in Christian schools. A number of Protestant churches have participated in a Christian council since 1983, and Roman Catholics and Protestants cooperate in the South Togo cultural and religious research group.

INTERCESSIONS

Give thanks for:

- o Pastors, priests and evangelists and other church workers for their mission endeavours.
- o Those who search for ways to provide clean water.
- o The education ministry of Christian churches.
- o Coffee and cacao, palm groves and coconut, yams and peanuts.
- o The indigenous woven cloth and work in bronze.

Pray for:

- o Peace, unity, and political and economic stability throughout the region.
- o Unemployed young people.
- o The many people in these countries who live in desperate poverty, and efforts to create better living conditions.
- o Health care workers who provide medical help and education to those living with HIV and AIDS.
- o Children who are trafficked for cheap labour or otherwise exploited.

PRAYERS

(1)

The time of harvest is over;
 You have given us good crops;
 We are going into the bush.
 Now I call on you, God,
 so that no evil falls on us
 and our feet do not step on anything bad,
 and we meet nothing but good things
 and nothing bad touches us.
 You guaranteed these things
 and have kept your promise.
 May the animals in the bush come to meet us;
 let them come within our circle.
 Let our arrows not miss them;
 let our arrows kill them.
 Let the arrows not kill any of us.
 You who have given such a good harvest
 continue to walk before us
 as you have been doing for our grandparents.

(2)

Voice 1: O God, most mighty among the heavens, forgive our sins. **Amen.**
 Voice 2: For private and secret sins, O God, forgive us. **Amen.**
 V1: For not walking uprightly, O God, forgive us. **Amen.**
 V2: Forgive our young people. **Amen.**
 V1: Forgive our adults. **Amen.**
 V2: Forgive our men. **Amen.**
 V1: Forgive our women. **Amen.**
 V2: Visit not the sins of our fathers on us. **Amen.**
 V1: If you should visit their iniquities on us who worship you,
 we shall be hurt. **Amen.**
 V2: Therefore blot out all their sins this day, O Lord. **Amen.**
 V1: Forgive us individually. **Amen.**
 V2: Forgive us corporately. **Amen.**
 V1: Grant forgiveness to all who worship you and do your will on earth.
Amen.

(3)

Lord our God,
 we pray for the holy church.
 That it be deeply rooted
 in faith and in your love.

(4)

Let us pray for those who foster violence,
 those who do not forgive others.
 May the Lord change their hearts,
 that they seek peace and love their brothers and sisters.

(5)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Almighty God,
 You are the Creator and we are your creations.
 You are all-powerful and we are weak.
 You give sustenance to the earth and all its inhabitants.
 Without you, we could do nothing.
 You are holy and we are sinners.
 Lord, you are all-seeing and all-knowing
 and you know us better than we know ourselves.
 You know better than we, how we will react.

We are gathered here today in this place, in your presence,
 to humbly ask your forgiveness
 and to confess before you our sins.
 We admit our wrongful acts, thoughts and desires.
 Pardon our sins in the name of your Son,
 our Saviour Jesus Christ.

O God, have mercy on us.

Lord, you are a compassionate God.
 You have loved us before the creation of the world.
 Even before we saw the light of day,
 you loved us and sent your Son to deliver us from sin
 and the hands of our enemy, the devil.

Forgive us our sins and deliver us from your anger
 in the name of your Son Jesus Christ.

O God, hear our prayer.

Jesus Christ, you are the Saviour of the universe.
 We thank you for the love you have given us.
 By this love, you came into our world
 to die on the cross for us.
 Then you were resurrected and ascended to heaven.
 It is you who sent the Holy Spirit
 to those who believe in you
 and who plead to your Father
 that we might have eternal life.
Jesus Christ our Lord, bless us all.

(6)

Our Father in heaven,
 you are the God of gods, the King of kings.
 We ask you to bless our governments,
 our leaders, our elders
 and all those who are in powerful positions.
 Give them a heart which abides by your will
 so they no longer favour injustice,
 but act for the well-being of all,
 in all things.
 Give us all humble hearts
 so that we have good things,
 right actions,
 and your blessing forever for our country.

Bless the activities of the farmer, the fisherman,
 the businesswoman, the artist, and all other workers.
 After the dry season, send us the blessed rain
 and favour us with a plentiful harvest
 so that we may glorify you.

Have pity on the poor, the soldiers, the sick.
 Help those who are alone
 and console those who are devastated.
 Support pregnant women and mothers.
 Help the widows and widowers.
 Be father and mother to all orphans.
 God, bless your word for Christians,
 and for non-believers,

so that they may be assured
and lean on you
to obtain forgiveness for their sins
and become your children.

O Lord, have pity on us.
You are the God of mercy.
You are the strength, the glory, the honour and the holiness,
forever and ever.

(7)

Lord Jesus, how can I welcome you,
the Saviour of the world,
friend of my soul,
both guest and host?

O, Jesus, enlighten me
so that I may know and accomplish your will.
Lord, you came into the world to lift my sins
so that they would no longer cause me sorrow.

Yes, Lord, you came to save us sinners,
and make us children of God,
inheritors of your kingdom.

(8)

CALL TO WORSHIP

He comes.

He comes down from heaven to live in our midst,
to live as one of us,
to be our heavenly host.

Let us pray before him with a path covered with palm leaves, avo* and flowers.

He comes with the utmost humility
to rid the earth of its sins.

It was his life that was given to deliver us from our sins.

Yes, he comes and wishes to live in our hearts

so that we may inherit his Kingdom.

Let us welcome our king and be delivered from our sins.

Let us know how we may be worthy of his Kingdom.

* Avo is the traditional cloth that women wear in Togo.

(9)

We pray to you, Lord, for your church,
which today wants to make its voice burst free
so that it is heard in your name.

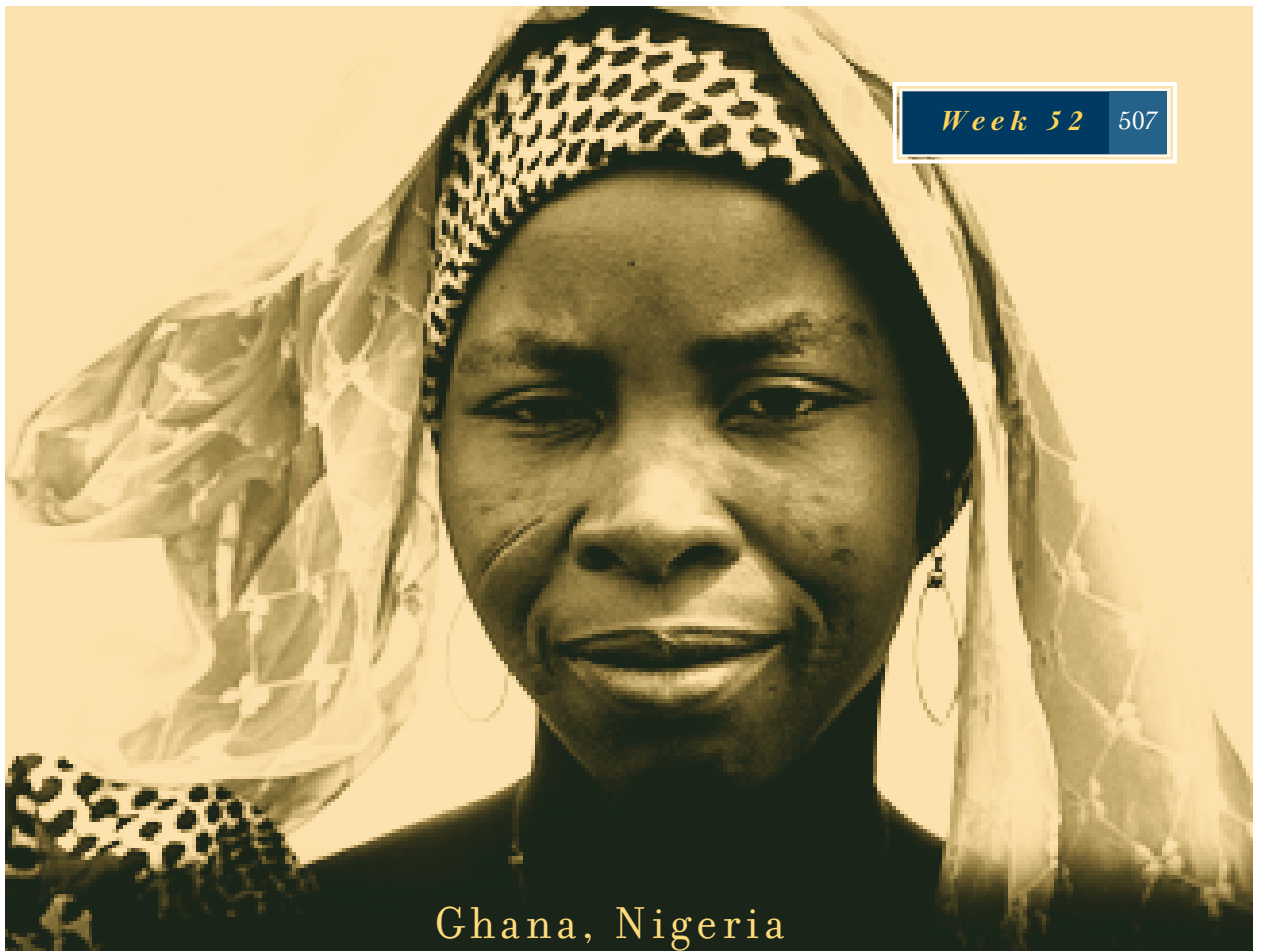
Give back its place as repairer and sentinel.
May it become dynamic once again,
the salt will give taste to life,
a life of happiness.

May the church be a light overcoming the darkness
which has overtaken Togo.

Guide us as we attempt to build an identity as a unified nation
which can finally emerge as a new Togo,
a secure democracy with a society peaceful and reconciled,
a Togo exemplary in respecting human rights,
a Togo with a flourishing economy
of which the fruits are shared among all.

Create a new people seeing the day,
walking on their way,
a people of hope stepping towards their happiness.

God, Almighty, you can do all,
because yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory.
Send down the power of your Holy Spirit,
hear our prayer,
in the love of your Son Jesus Christ, transform Togo.



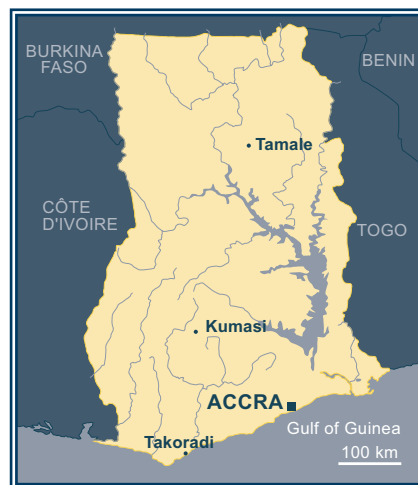
Ghana, Nigeria

Drawing on Jesus, Paul, and my own experience from childhood, the last supper has become for me the image of the church. It is true that the Western world has left us a picture of a table with twelve men crowding on one side, in various postures to the left and to the right of Jesus. Well, nobody sits like that to eat together in Africa! So the picture I have in mind is that of eating in Ethiopia, on a round Ethiopian reed-table. That is the church. As a child I saw people eat together from one bowl. They sit around it. The church is a round table, around which are seated the people of God, who are continually nourished, as the body of Christ, from resources that God provides. The most enduring biblical portrait of church for me is that of the round table.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye

Ghana

(Republic of Ghana)



You, our ancestors, have asserted your continued presence to make us work, so you too can feel at home in global Christianity. No longer shall we join in demonizing you in translations and in theologizing. We realize today that cultur-

al and religious pluralism is a global reality. We affirm therefore that taking this factor seriously demands that we take African religion seriously. Those of us who are Christians shall learn to be both authentically African and authentically Christian. The challenge is to strive to contribute to world Christianity and a Christian ecumenism... Who knows but that others may find our [faith] speaking to them or at least we shall enhance and enrich the diversity and the variety of ways of living out the faith. We would be contributing to shaping the history of Christianity and demonstrate the universal import of the coming of Jesus the Christ. Western Christianity has in the main been a de-Africanizing power, but that does not need to continue. You our ancestors expect us to do better than that. So with you among the great cloud of witnesses I call upon my sisters and brothers of African descent to conversion and commitment. We cannot afford to do less.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye

S t a t i s t i c s

Population: 20.7 million

Government: Multiparty republic

Language: English; also Ashanti, Fante, Ewe, Brong, Gurenne and over 60 others

Literacy: 64% (men 74%, women 53%)

Religion: Christian 55%, Ethnic 24%, Muslim 20%, Other 1%

WCC member churches: Church of the Province of West Africa, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana, Methodist Church Ghana, Presbyterian Church of Ghana

H i s t o r y

Ghana is on the Atlantic Ocean, with Togo to the east, Côte d'Ivoire to the west and Burkina Faso to the north. The area has been inhabited since at least 4,000 BC. Waves of migration from the north and the east have resulted in great ethnic variety, with over 70 different ethnic groups.

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the northern regions of present-day Ghana were controlled by several tribal kingdoms. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive in the fifteenth

century and set up trade in slaves. Afterwards the Dutch arrived, and then the British took over Ashantiland after a year-long battle in 1873.

In 1957 Ghana became the first sub-Saharan country in colonial Africa to attain independence, under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah. A series of coups resulted in the suspension of the constitution in 1981 and the banning of political parties. Ghana was ruled by the armed forces led by Gerry Rawlings until 1992, when elections were held which were won fairly by Rawlings. In 1996 he was constitutionally prevented from seeking a third term. He was succeeded peacefully by John Kufuor.

During the colonial period Ghana saw the introduction of cocoa, which became the backbone of its economy. In addition to political tensions, Ghana faces HIV and AIDS, which infects nearly 15 per cent of the population. The northern parts of the country are particularly prone to drought. Environmental problems include deforestation, overgrazing and inadequate water supplies.

The first Christian preachers were chaplains in the fort settlements on the Slave Coast in the 1830s and 1840s. Many of these early missionaries died from disease, but several missions began more sustained work, particularly in education, agriculture and medicine. As church members moved about the country as traders and government officials, Christianity spread outside the fort areas. During the 1990s there was a revival of Christian churches of all types, especially Pentecostal and Evangelical churches. The Christian Council of Ghana is an ecumenical group established in 1929.

Nigeria

(Federal Republic of Nigeria)

S t a t i s t i c s

Population: 137.2 million

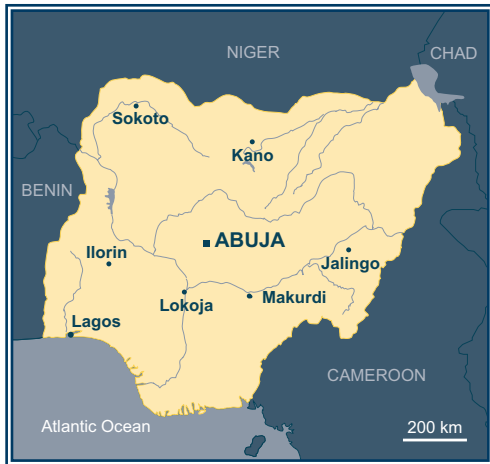
Government: Republic

Language: English; also Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Toroobe Fulani, Yerwa Kanuri and over 300 others

Literacy: 57% (men 67%, women 47%)

Religion: Christian 46%, Muslim 44%,
Ethnic 10%

WCC member churches: *The African Church, Church of the Brethren in Nigeria, Church of the Lord (Aladura) Worldwide, Church of Nigeria (Anglican), Methodist Church Nigeria, Nigerian Baptist Convention, Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria*



History

Nigeria is located in West Africa on the Atlantic Ocean. To the west lie Benin and Burkina Faso, to the north is Niger, Chad is to the northeast, and Cameroon borders the east. Europeans came to the coastal areas in the sixteenth century because of the slave trade. Nigeria was created by an amalgamation of several British colonies in 1914.

The period of turbulence that followed independence resulted in several violent coups along ethnic lines, so that by 1967 when the eastern, oil-rich region of Biafra declared its independence, Nigeria was badly polarized. The three-year Biafra war, in which more than a million people died, was one of Africa's worst, with starvation used as a weapon of war. International churches developed an ecumenical humanitarian aid plan that maintained a two-year airlift across Nigerian and British blockades to feed and save the lives of several million people.

During the 1990s Nigeria had an extremely poor human rights record: hundreds of journalists, government opponents and pro-democracy supporters were unjustly detained, tortured, tried and often executed. In 1995 the Nigerian government hanged the novelist and playwright Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other members of the Ogoni tribe, who had publicized the ethnic genocide and environmental degradation of multinational oil companies.

A new constitution was adopted in 1999, and a relatively peaceful transition to civilian government was achieved. It faces a daunting task in rebuilding a petroleum-based economy whose resources have been squandered through massive corruption and mismanagement, as well as institutionalizing democracy after years of military rule. In addition, there are longstanding and extreme ethnic and religious tensions. In 2003, despite some irregularities, Nigeria marked the first civilian transfer of power in its history.

Even with its rich oil resources, there is great inequality in the distribution of wealth, and Nigeria remains one of the poorest countries in the world. Many areas struggle with problems of urbanization, such as overcrowding, crime, corruption, unemployment and housing shortages. In some rural areas, overuse of land has led to desertification. Disease and malnutrition are common, and HIV/AIDS infects approximately 7 per cent of the population.

The first Christian missionaries came in response to requests from returning freed slaves who were themselves Christians. Methodists, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Baptists arrived first, followed by Roman Catholics and Lutherans. Some of the earliest missionaries were African. Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria are extremely sensitive. Several of the northern states declared themselves to be under Shari'a Muslim law. The Christian church continues to expand and proliferate with many new denominations, most of which are linked together.

INTERCESSIONS***Give thanks for:***

- o Christians and Muslims who take risks to work for dialogue and reconciliation between the two faith communities.
- o The councils of churches in these countries and their common witness.
- o Missionaries who brought the gospel, and growing independent churches which have found their own ways of being Christian.
- o Talking drums and rattles.
- o Ama Atta Aidoo, Wole Soyinka, Ken Saro-Wiwa and others who tell good stories from an African context.
- o Fufu, yams, cassava and peanuts.

Pray for:

- o The curtailment of deforestation.
- o A more just distribution of wealth and power.
- o Just and peaceful relations between members of different ethnic groups and between Muslims and Christians.
- o An end to human rights abuses against minority groups.
- o Those who suffer from malnutrition and diseases such as malaria, whooping cough and HIV and AIDS.
- o Better stewardship of the environment and natural resources.

PRAYERS

(1)

Lord, my soul is filled with trust – but my head with doubts.

Lord, help my unbelief.

Lord, plant this faith, which exists somewhere within me,
trusting and hoping, into my head.

Lord, let my eyes see not facts alone, but through them you, Lord.

Figures are so convincing –

help me to hear your voice with even more power.

Lord, for your Son's sake let my faith be also in my head.

(2)

The sun has disappeared.
 I have switched off the light,
 and my wife and children are asleep.
 The animals in the forest are full of fear,
 and so are the people on their mats.
 They prefer the day with your sun to the night.
 But I still know that your moon is there,
 and your eyes and also your hands.
 Thus I am not afraid.
 This day again you led us wonderfully.
 We went to our mats satisfied and full.
 Renew us during our sleep,
 that in the morning
 we may come afresh to our daily jobs.
 Be with our brothers [and sisters] far away in Asia
 who may be getting up now.

(3)

We invoke you, Spirit of Unity,
 Transform our divisions and reshape our vision.
 All of creation, all living beings, cry in the midst of injustice and brokenness.
 Spirit of Unity, reconcile your people.
 We invoke you, Spirit of Unity,
 Heal the wounds of our history,
 Remove from us all that sustains our present divisions.
 Unstop our ears to hear your call for unity.

(4)

Almighty and everlasting God,
 God of the universe,
 I praise your name and adore you for the opportunity granted me
 to call on you and worship you this morning.
 Lord, I thank you for your protection and care
 for my parents, my family, my friends,
 and all who care for me.
 Lord, I am before your mercy seat
 asking for mercy for all the sins I have committed
 against you and against my neighbours.
 Forgive me, Lord, and let my cry come unto you.

I am at the beginning of another day asking for your protection, guidance, mercy, health and good relationship with my neighbours; for peace in all homes, work places, schools, colleges, towns, cities, and the world at large.

Lord, look to lands, which are full of wars and disunity, misunderstanding and oppression, poverty and homelessness, orphans and refugees, widows and widowers, and the aged.

My God, counsel and teach these people to be like your Son, Jesus Christ, in word and deed; comfort them and grant them eternal peace.

Remember, O God, other world powers who are full of might, progress, hard work, dedication and power in your name.

Grant them happiness and peace, and remove from their sight any forms of strife, greed, corruption, evil thought, hatred and pride that may render them unacceptable to you.

Teach them to know your mysterious ways and worship you.

My God, be our guide in the days to come and help us to know your ways so that in the end we shall enjoy a world of peace, comfort and grace, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

(5)

We offer you, O Ruler of men and women and of heavenly beings, the gold of our costly service. Take the labour of our hands, the skill of our minds, the power of our organization. Purge us of pride, and stir us from sloth, that we, being refined by your grace, may become better servants of your kingdom, now and hereafter. **Amen.**

We offer to you, our Lord and our God, the incense of our worship and our prayer. By the gift of your Holy Spirit, you have hung forth a star in the lowly heaven of every Christian soul; grant us eager feet to follow wherever it leads, until our searching souls are blessed with the vision of yourself, who are our heaven and our home, forever. **Amen.**

We offer to you, O Man of sorrows, the myrrh of your church's sufferings. When we have nothing else to give, this offering remains. Where you are on the cross, there also may your servants be. May your perfect sacrifice avail to make our light affliction redemptive in the world, that sharing the fellowship of your sufferings we may rejoice in the power of your resurrection, now and forever. **Amen.**

(6)

Lord, I sing your praise the whole day through, until the night.
 Dad's nets are filled; I have helped him.
 We have drawn them in, stamping the rhythm with our feet,
 the muscles tense.
 We have sung your praise.

On the beach there were our mummies,
 who bought the blessing out of the nets,
 out of the nets and into their basins.
 They rushed to the market, returned and bought again.
 Lord, what a blessing is the sea,
 with fish in plenty.
 Lord, that is the story of your grace:
 nets tear, and we succumb because we cannot hold them.
 Lord, with your praise we drop off to sleep.
 Carry us through the night.
 Make us fresh for the morning.
 Hallelujah for the day!
 and blessing for the night!

(7)

We are going to praise the name of Jesus Christ.
 We shall announce his many titles:
 they are true and they suit him well,
 so it is fitting that we do this.

All-powerful Jesus
 who engages in marvellous deeds,
 he is the one called Hero – Okatakyi!
 Of all earthly dominions he is the master;
 the Python not overcome with mere sticks,
 the Big Boat which cannot be sunk.

Jesus, Saviour of the poor,
 who brightens up our faces!
 Damfo-Adu: the clever one,
 we rely on you as the tongue relies on the mouth.

The great Rock we hide behind:
 the great Forest Canopy that gives cool shade:

the Big Tree which lifts its vines
to peep at the heavens,
the magnificent Tree whose dripping leaves
encourage the luxuriant growth below.
There is a wild noise
like that of rushing streams.
Yet it is not the sound of streams we hear;
it is the thunder and lightning serenading Jesus!

The wind clutches a golden banner,
its left arm laden with beads and bracelets of gold,
as it dances before Jesus' face.

Jesus Christ: you are the Fountain of life,
the glistening Water-lily of the great swamps!

Sources and Acknowledgements

515

We wish to thank all those who have granted permission for the use of their prayers in this book. It could not have been published without the contributions of many lay persons, pastors and members of the WCC central committee who wrote prayers particularly for this volume.

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W Some copyright holders have kindly given permission for their material to be reproduced by a church congregation or church-related bodies for use in orders of worship services (not for sale), provided that full copyright acknowledgement is included. However, the copyright holders retain all rights and permission must be obtained for all other uses. This is indicated by a **W** after the number of the prayer. If this mark is missing, explicit permission for such use has not been given. Permission should then be sought from the copyright holder for reprinting in an order of worship.

ABBREVIATIONS OF SOURCES

- | | | | |
|-------------|---|-------------|--|
| <i>AP</i> | <i>AfricaPraying: A Handbook on HIV/AIDS Sensitive Sermon Guidelines and Liturgy</i> , ed. Musa W. Dube, WCC, 2003 | <i>HFD</i> | <i>Hallelujah for the Day</i> , ed. Anthony Gittins, Ligouri/Triumph, Ligouri MO, USA, 2002 |
| <i>APB</i> | <i>An African Prayer Book</i> , selected and with introduction by Desmond Tutu, © 1995 Desmond Tutu, Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc. | <i>LUPL</i> | <i>Let us Pray to the Lord</i> , ed. George Lemopolos, WCC, 1996 |
| <i>BAE</i> | <i>The Bible through Asian Eyes</i> , eds Masao Takenaka and Ron O'Grady, © Asian Christian Art Association, Perum Duta Wacana No. 2 Jatimulyo, Yogyakarta 55242, Indonesia, Pace Publishing, Auckland, Aoteroa/New Zealand, 1991 | <i>PEW</i> | <i>Prayers Encircling the World: An International Anthology</i> , SPCK, London, UK, American ed. John Knox, Louisville KY, USA, 1998 |
| <i>FAGP</i> | <i>For All God's People</i> , comp. WCC, 1978 | <i>PP</i> | <i>A Procession of Prayers: Meditations and Prayers from around the World</i> , comp. John Carden, WCC, and Cassell, London, UK, 1998 |
| <i>GMC</i> | <i>Gifts of Many Cultures: Worship Resources for the Global Community</i> , Maren C. Tirabassi and Kathy Wonson Eddy, United Church Press, Cleveland OH, USA, 1995 | <i>RL</i> | Red de liturgia del CLAI, Latin American Council of Churches, Liturgical Network, www.selah.com.ar/red |
| | | <i>SCO</i> | <i>Seeing Christ in Others</i> , comp. Geoffrey Duncan, United Church Publishing House, Etobicoke, Ont., Canada, 1998 |

- SNV** *Sing Out New Visions: Prayers, Poems and Reflections by Women*, NCCCUSA, Friendship Press, New York, USA
- SO** *Sinfonia oecumenica, Worship with the Churches in the World*, German Evangelical Mission Agency, Hamburg, Germany, and Basel Mission, Basel, Switzerland; comp. Beatrice Aebi, Fritz Baltruweit, Christione Dithmar, Dirk Friederich, Markus Lesinski, Armin Mettler and Dietrich Werner, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Gütersloh, Germany, © Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Gütersloh, in der Verlagsgruppe Random House GmbH, München, Gütersloh, 1998
- TPP** *Timeless Prayers for Peace: Voices together from around the World*, comp. Geoffrey Duncan, Canterbury Press, UK, 2002
- WAGP** *With All God's People*, comp. John Carden, WCC, 1989
- WAP** *Women at Prayer*, Rachel Stowe, copyright © 1994, used by permission of The Zondervan Corp., Grand Rapids MI, USA
- WCC** World Council of Churches
- WIC** *Wisdom Is Calling*, comp. Geoffrey Duncan, Canterbury Press, UK, and United Church Publishing House, Etobicoke, Ont., Canada 1999
- WOP** *The World at One in Prayer*, ed. Daniel J. Fleming, Harper, New York, 1942
- WPCU** *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, WCC, Geneva, and Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican City

WEEK 1

- Quote Naim Ateek, Sabeel, Jerusalem.
www.indcatholicnews.com/letters%20page.html
- 1,2 **W** © Middle East Council of Churches, PO Box 5376, Beirut, Lebanon
- 3 **W** Based on a prayer by a Palestinian Christian. © Christian Aid. Used with permission. *TPP* p.17
- 4 © 1999 Garth Hewitt, St Catherine's Church, Bethlehem, February 1998. *A Candle of Hope* by Garth Hewitt, 1999, pp.156-57
- 5 © Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), PO Box 14076, Muristan Road, Jerusalem 91140
- 6 Morning prayer, Syrian liturgy. *LUPL* p.3
- 7 St Isaac the Syrian, 7th century, *Mystical Treatises*. *LUPL* p.21
- 8 St Auxentios, 3rd century Syria, excerpt from a prayer. *LUPL* p.2
- 9 Coptic liturgy, Egypt. *LUPL* p.90
- 10 **W** Kathisma Hymn for the Nativity, *The Nativity of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ*,

Pascha: Three Day Feast. Dept of Religious Education, Orthodox Church in America, Syosset NY, USA, p.82

- 11 A Coptic Christian, Egypt. *Immanuel*, comp. Hans Rudi Weber, WCC
- 12, 13 **W** © The Rt Rev. Riah Abu El-Assal, The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East. *TPP* p.130

WEEK 2

- Quote Ibn Arabi, 1165-1241
- 1 Ancient hymn of the Chaldean liturgy. *WAGP* p.22
- 2, 6, 7 English transl. M.J. Birnie © 1997 Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East
- 3 "Prayers used in the 7th circuit of the K'abah in Mecca", transl. Kenneth Cragg in *The Muslim World Quarterly*, vol. 45.3, July 1955, pp.269-80. © Duncan Black MacDonald Centre, Hartford Seminary, CT, USA
- 4 and 5 **W** Bahá'ulláh, founder of Bahá'í

WEEK 3

Quote FAGP, WCC, p.11

- 1 From the "Great Blessing of Water". *LUPL* pp.78-79
- 2 From the "Great Blessing of Water". *LUPL* pp.76-77
- 3 Matins hymn, Holy Epiphany. *LUPL* p.17
- 4 St Symeon of Thessaloniki, 15th century, Greece. *LUPL* p.11
- 5 Vesper hymn, Sunday of the blind man. *LUPL* p.17
- 6 Adapted vesper hymn, Sunday of the Samaritan woman. *LUPL* p.20
- 7 St Gregory Nazianzus, 4th century, Turkey. *LUPL* p.12
- 8 St Basil the Great, 4th century, Turkey. *LUPL* p.40
- 9 St Basil the Great, 4th century, Turkey. *LUPL* p.58
- 10 St Nicodemos of Mount Athos, 18th century, Greece. *LUPL* p.40
- 11 Prayer from the liturgy of St John Chrysostom. *LUPL* p.52
- 12 "Suppliant Prayers Offered the Author of all Creation for the Protection of the Environment". © Narthex Press, PO Box 280758, Northridge CA, 91328-0758, USA
- 13 From the 'Via Crucis', © His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, Istanbul, Turkey

WEEK 4

Quote Tertullian, 3rd century CE. English Rev. S. Thelwall

- 1 Adapted from St Augustine of Hippo, Soliloquia 1.2-5. www.biblestudy.churches.net//CCEL/FATHER/S2/NPNF107/NPNF1153.HTM
- 2, 5 © 2005 Hocine Kacaimer, Algeria. English transl. Terry MacArthur © 2005 WCC
- 3 St Augustine of Hippo. www.rochdaleonline.co.uk/Faith/Christian/Prayer/Themes/bereavement.asp

4 **W** *Sulle Tracce de Padre de Foucault* 1973, I piccoli Fratelli de Spello (eds) © Cittadella Editrice, Via Ancajani 3, 06081 Assisi (PG), Italy

6 **W** © 2005 Abdenour Ait Abdelmalek, Montpellier, France. English transl. Terry MacArthur © 2005 WCC

7 **W** St Augustine of Hippo. www.stlvocations.org/prayers/intercession/Augustine_hippo

WEEK 5

Quote Dag Hammarskjöld, first secretary general of the UN, *Markings*, Knopf, New York NY, USA, p.124

- 1 Bishop Nathan Söderblom, Sweden. www.appleseeds.org/March_2000.htm
- 2 **W** *Prières pour le monde 2002* © Fédération protestante de France, Paris, France. English transl. Terry MacArthur © 2005 WCC
- 3 **W** © 2005 Bernhardur Gudmundsson, Selfoss, Iceland
- 4 © Gerd Grønvald Saue, Norway. *WPCU* 1997 p.26
- 5 **W** © 1997 Per Harling, Uppsala, Sweden. *WPCU* 1997 p.27
- 6 © Gerd Grønvald Saue, Norway. *SNV* p.51
- 7 **W** © 2005 Irja Askola, Helsinki, Finland

WEEK 6

Quote *Our congregations miss...* by George MacLeod, from *Praying for the Dawn* published by Wild Goose Publications www.ionabooks.com

- 1 © Bernard Thorogood. *PEW*#158
- 2 Robert Burns, Scotland. Excerpted from "Holy Willie's Prayer"
- 3 **W** Noel Davies, Wales
- 4 Denzil Ieuan John, Wales
- 5 **W** *Travelling the Road of Faith: Worship Resources from the Corrymeela Community*, © Corrymeela Community, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
- 6 **W** *Risk magazine*, vol. II, no. 2-3, 1975, WCC

- 7 **W** © David Fox, Penarth, UK. *TPP* p.3
- 8 **W** © John Johansen-Berg, Worcester, UK. *TPP* p.20
- 9 **W** © Rev. Frances Ballantyre, Brentwood, Essex, UK. *TPP* p.81
- 10 Raymond Chapman, *Following the Gospel Through the Year*, © 2001 Canterbury Press, Norwich, UK, p.120
- 11, 12 **W** © Pamela Klimcke, Dublin, Ireland. *TPP* pp.207,210
- 13 **W** © Duncan Tuck, Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire, UK. *SCO* p.232
- 14 © Carys Humphreys. *SCO* p.232
- 15 *Common Order* © Church of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland. Supplication from *All Desires Known*, Janet Morley, p.42. © SPCK London, UK. UK rights © Christian Aid, London, UK
- 16-18 *Common Order* © Church of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland
- 19 **W** © Waldo Williams. By permission of Gwasg Comer, Llandysul, Ceredigion, Wales, SA44 4JL. www.gomer.co.uk English transl. © Noel Davies
- 20 Irish blessing. *SCO* pp.42-43

WEEK 7Quote **W**

Willem Visser 't Hooft, "The Mandate of the Ecumenical Movement", address to the fourth WCC assembly at Uppsala, 1968. *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, eds Michael Kinnamon and Brian Cope, WCC, 1997, p.44

- 1 Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536), "Prayer at Daybreak"
- 2 W.R. van der Zee, *Zondagswoorden, Teksten en gebeden voor alle zeven dagen*, © 1995 Boekencentrum Uitgevers (Zoetermeer), The Netherlands, p.39. English transl. Andreas Wöhle
- 3 Henk Jongerius / Nico Vlaming. *Dienstboek – een proeve, Schrift, Maaltijd, Gebed*, © 1998 Boekencentrum Uitgevers (Zoetermeer), The Netherlands, p.64. English transl. Andreas Wöhle

- 4 Henk Jongerius / Nico Vlaming. *Dienstboek – een proeve, Schrift, Maaltijd, Gebed*, © 1998 Boekencentrum Uitgevers (Zoetermeer), The Netherlands, p.92. English transl. Andreas Wöhle
- 5 Lyrics by Huub Oosterhuis, *Dienstboek – een proeve, Schrift, Maaltijd, Gebed*. © 1998, Boekencentrum Uitgevers (Zoetermeer), The Netherlands, p.1115
- 6 Huub Oosterhuis. *Hoe ver is de nacht*, © 1974 Ambo (Baarn), The Netherlands, p.62
- 7 Anke Kooke. *SNV* p.48

WEEK 8

- Quote Sebastião da Gama, Serra-Mãe. *WPCU* 1996 p.24
- 1 **W** Waldensian liturgy. *Rete di Liturgia*, March 2000, No. 5 © Worship Committee of the Baptist, Methodist and Waldensian Churches in Italy
- 2 Local preparatory group, Spain. *WPCU* 1990 p.22
- 3 **W** Portugal. *WPCU* 1997 p.23
- 4 **W** Waldensian liturgy. *Rete di Liturgia*, March 2000, No. 4 © Worship Committee of the Baptist, Methodist and Waldensian Churches in Italy
- 5 Sebastião da Gama, Serra-Mãe. *WPCU* 1996 p.21
- 6 **W** Waldensian liturgy. *Rete di Liturgia*, March 2000 © Worship Committee of the Baptist, Methodist and Waldensian Churches in Italy
- 7 **W** © Luca M. Negro, Italy. *Our Responsibility to Future Generations*, European Christian Environmental Network
- 8 **W** Theological Working Group, Federation of Protestant Youth in Italy, Agape, Italy. *Rete di Liturgia* 1996 No. 2, © Rete di Liturgia
- 9 **W** Waldensian liturgy. *Rete di Liturgia*, March 2000, © Worship Committee of the Baptist, Methodist and Waldensian Churches in Italy
- 10 **W** Carlo Lupo, Italy. *Rete di Liturgia*, November 1998, No. 41 © Rete di Liturgia
- 11 **W** © Luca M. Negro, Italy. *Rete di Liturgia*, March 2000, No. 7

- 12 **W** Massimo Aprile, Italy. *Rete di Liturgia*, 1996, No. 2 © Rete di Liturgia

WEEK 9Quote **W**

Madeleine Barot, France. *Madeleine Barot*, André Jacques. English transl. Pat and Bill Nottingham. © WCC

- 1 Brother Roger Schutz of Taizé and Mother Teresa of Calcutta, "A Prayer for Reconciliation"
- 2 Source unknown
- 3-5 **W** Fritz Baltruweit, Klaus Burkhardt, Klaus Mehnert, Christine Lindhorst, Klaus Hampe, English Elizabeth Burtzloff, *SO* pp.328-32, 338,342
- 6 © Eglise luthérienne de France, Paris, France. English transl. Terry MacArthur © WCC. *Prière pour la liturgie des dimanches*, Eglise luthérienne de France, p.36
- 7 Adapted from a meditation in the resource book of the Ecumenical Pilgrimage to the Holy Robe in Trier 1996. English, Bissy Raj. *SO* pp.360-62
- 8-13 © Ateliers et Presses de Taizé 71250, Taizé-Communauté, France
- 14, 15, 17 Jugendaus Düsseldorf. English transl. Barbara Thompson. *SO* pp.704,706-708,714
- 16 **W** Dr Sybille Fritsch-Oppemann. English transl. Barbara Thompson. *SO* p.714

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- 12-13 From a worship bulletin, *The Feast of the Faith Community, A Fijian Experience*, Friday 4 July 1997
- 14-15 **W** Worship and Bible studies, Friday 3 October 1997, Pacific Conference of Churches, Suva, Fiji
- 3 **W** 1995 conference, Cieszyn, Poland. © International Ecumenical Fellowship, Brussels, Belgium
- 4, 10-12 **W** © Milan Opocensky, Czech Republic
- 5-7 **W** © 2005 Rev. Daniela Horinkova, Abteilung der Inneren Mission des Generalbischofsamtes der Evangelischen Kirche A. B. in der Slowakei, Bratislava, Slovak Republic
- 8 **W** World Day of Prayer Committee of Poland, 2005, excerpted from the Prayer of Thanksgiving, *Let Our Light Shine*. © 2005 World Day of Prayer International Committee
- 9 **W** World Day of Prayer Committee of Poland, 2005, excerpted from the Prayer of Confession, *Let Our Light Shine*. © 2005 World Day of Prayer International Committee

WEEK 35

Quote © Asko Künnap Estonia. English © Eric Dickens

- 1 © Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church, Riga, Latvia
- 2 © Ieva Klavina, Latvia. *SNV* p.51
- 3 *Latvian Lutheran Hymnal* © Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church. English transl. © Una Stroda
- 4 From "Vision", *Psalms of a Prisoner* © Antanas Miskinis, Lithuania
- 5 Prayer of Lithuanian prisoners. *Prayers Written by Lithuanian Prisoners in Northern Siberia*, ed. K.A. Krimikas SJ, Paulist Press/Newman Press, Mahway NJ, USA. *PP* p.235
- 6 © Rev. Olav Parnamets, United Methodist Church, Estonia

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Quote **W**

- © Milan Opocensky, Czech Republic. Former general secretary of the Conference of European Churches
- 1 Czech Republic. *An Iona Prayer Book*, comp. Peter Millar, Canterbury Press, Norwich, UK, 1998, pp.88-89
- 2 **W** World Day of Prayer Committee of Czechoslovakia. *A Better Tomorrow, Justice for All* © 1990 World Day of Prayer International Committee

WEEK 37

Quote Cardinal Franjo Kuharic, Croatia. *Catholic World Report*, article by Josip Stilinovic, www.catholic.net/rcc/Periodicals/Igpress/CWR/CWR0397/croatia.html

- 1 Croatia. *Bridge of Stars*, ed. Marcus Braybrooke, Thorsons, London, UK, 2001, p.199
- 2 Prayer of a Bosnian villager. *PP* p.123
- 3 Mother Teresa, Macedonia. www.americancatholic.org/Features/Teresa/Prayer.asp
- 4 Mother Teresa, Macedonia. *TPP* p.227
- 5-7 Orthodox. *Words and Songs of Reconciliation and Praise, Second European Ecumenical Assembly*. Graz, Austria, pp.67, 75, 73-74
- 8 Frano Prcela OP, Croatia. European Ecumenical Assembly, Graz 1997
- 9 Mother Teresa, Macedonia. *The HarperCollins Book of Prayer*, ed. Robert Van de Weyer, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco CA, USA, 1993, p.351

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Quote **W**

Dr Ion Bria, Romanian Orthodox Church. *The Liturgy after the Liturgy*, WCC, 1996

- 1 St Symeon the New Theologian, Romania
- 2 **W** Gerhard Koslowsky. English transl. Fredrich R. Trost, reprinted with permission of Kirk House Publishers, Minneapolis MN, USA
- 3 **W** © Medgyessy László, Karoli Gaspar Reformed University, Budapest, Hungary
- 4 St Symeon the New Theologian, Romania
- 5 **W** Dr Ion Bria, Romanian Orthodox Church. *WAGP* p.161
- 6 Dr Kalman Csiha, Romania. *GMC* p.47
- 7 **W** St Stephen is the patron saint of Hungary. Adaptation Terry MacArthur
- 8-9 *The Lenten Triodion*, transl. Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, © Faber and Faber, London and Boston, pp.117,120-21
- 10-13 **W** Endre Sándor, Hungary. *In Happiness and in Sadness: Prayers by Endre Sándor* © 2001 John Calvin Publishing House of the Reformed Church in Hungary, Budapest, Hungary
- 14-16 **W** © Rev. Laszlo Gonda, lecturer, Debrecen University of Reformed Theology, Department of Mission and Ecumenical Studies, Hungary

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- Quote Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Russia. *Life Prayers from Around the World*, eds Elizabeth Roberts and Elian Anidor, HarperSan Francisco, San Francisco CA, USA, 1996
- 1 John Sergieff, Russia. *The HarperCollins Book of Prayer*, comp. Van de Weyer, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco CA, USA, 1993, p.318
- 2 Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Russia. Claude Durand Publ., Paris, France
- 3 A child from Chernobyl, Ukraine. *SCO* p.153
- 4 Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow, Russia. www.stvladimirs.ca/library/morning-prayer-philaret-moscow.html
- 5-7 Orthodox tradition. www.stvladimirs.ca/library
- 8 Tikhon de Zadonsk, Russia. *Prières pour le monde 2004*, Fédération protestante de France, Paris, France. perso.wanadoo.fr/fpf/prieres/sem2004/s39.html

WEEK 40

- Quote Tyrannius Rufinu, Georgia, 5th century. www.angelfire.com/ga/Georgian/beso.html
- 1 Armenian liturgy
- 2 St John Mantakuni, Armenia
- 3 St Gregory the Illuminator, Armenia
- 4 Armenian Orthodox Liturgy. *TPP* p.294
- 5 Armenian prayer book. *LUPL* p.59
- 6 *The Sunrise Office of the Armenian Church*, English transl. Archbishop Tiran Nersoya, New York, Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, 1969. *LUPL* p.2
- 7 Armenian prayer book. *LUPL* p.37
- 8-11 **W** © 2001 The Armenian Prayer Book of St Gregory of Narek, English transl. Thomas J. Samuelian, www.stgregoryofnarek.am
- 12 St Nersess Shnorhali (The Gracious) (1100-1173), Armenia. English transl. © Holistic online. www.1stholistic.com/SpL-prayers/A2004/prayer_lenten-prayers-nurses.htm

WEEK 41

- Quote Commandhan Sadhar Khan Majaheed, Afghanistan
- 1 Mongolia. *WAGP* p.65
- 2 **W** Rûmi - Mahathnawi V 3843, Afghanistan. *Prières pour le monde 2004*, Fédération protestante de France, Paris, France

WEEK 42

- Quote **W** © Kazi Nazrul Islam, Bangladesh. English transl. © Prof. Kabir Chowdhury. www.nazrul.org
- 1 Bangladesh. *PP* p.179
- 2 Birkha Khadka, Nepal. *GMC* p.7
- 3 **W** Nepali Christian woman, October 2004
- 4-5 **W** © 2005 Bartholomew Shaha, Bangladesh, secretary general, World Alliance of YMCAs, Geneva, Switzerland
- 6 **W** Bangladesh. *Dear Life*, J. Morley, J. Ward and H. Wild, eds © Christian Aid 1998. Used with permission

WEEK 43Quote **W**

S. Wesley Ariarajah, Sri Lanka. *Not without my Neighbour: Issues in Interfaith Relations*, WCC, 1999, p.50

Quote India

M.M. Thomas, India. *The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism*, chapter 10, jointly published by Christava Sahhya Samhhi (OSS), Tiruvalla, Kerala, and The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPCK), Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi - 110 006, 1996

- 1 **W** Adapted from "The Fellowship Prayer." © Church of North India Women's Fellowships for Christian Service, 16, Pandit Pant Marg, New Delhi 110 001, India
- 2 Rabindranath Tagore, India. *The Heart of God: Prayers of Rabindranath Tagor*, Tuttle, North Clarendon VT, USA
- 3 Alice Saldanh, India. *SCO* p.175
- 4 India. *WOP* p.82
- 5 Pakistan. *WAGP* p.327
- 6 **W** Attributed to D.T. Niles, Sri Lanka. *BAE* p.144
- 7 **W** Sri Lanka. *CCA Youth, Your Will Be Done*, Christian Conference of Asia, Hong Kong, 1986
- 8 **W** United Theological College, Bangalore, India. © UTC Publications, Bangalore, India. *GMC* p.164
- 9 India. *SNV* p.32
- 10 *The Realization of the Cross*, M.M. Thomas, India © Church of South India
- 11 **W** © Aruna Gnanadason, India, coordinator for Justice, Peace and Creation at the WCC

WEEK 44

Quote Ranto Ranaivoson, Madagascar. *SCO* p.294

- 1-3 **W** © 2005 Péri Rasolondraibe, Antananarivo, Madagascar
- 4 Ranto Ranaivoson, Madagascar. *SCO* p.56
- 5 Mauritius. *PP* p.129
- 6 Presbyterian community in Mauritius. *WAGP* p.242

7 **W** Madagascar.
www.cms-uk.org/prayer-month.htm

- 8 Simone Rakotomavo, Madagascar. *SCO* pp.191-92
- 9 **W** World Day of Prayer Committee of Madagascar, 1998, *Who Is My Neighbour?* © 1998 World Day of Prayer International Committee

WEEK 45

Quote Christophe Munzihirwa, Archbishop of Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo. Assassinated on 29 October 1996. *An Iona Prayer Book*, comp. Peter Millar, Canterbury Press, Norwich, UK, 1998, pp.85-86

- 1 **W** "Prayers for those affected by the Goma (DRC) volcano", Nigel Varndell. © Christian Aid, UK. Used with permission.
www.christian-aid.org.uk/worship/archive/0202goma.htm
- 2 **W** "God, the Word", Pigmy tribe, Democratic Republic of Congo. *The Prayers of African Religion*. John Mbiti. © 1975 SPCK, London, UK, p.144
- 3 Anglican diocese of Buye, Burundi
- 4 Prayer of a displaced woman, Rwanda. *Women at Prayer*, Rachel Stowe. Copyright © 1994. Used by permission of The Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids MI, USA
- 5 The Association of Widows of the Genocide of April 1994, Rwanda. *PP* pp.39-40
- 6 **W** "For those who are Orphans", © Xavierian Missionary Society, Wayne NJ, USA, www.xaviermissionaries.org/M_Life/WorldPlaces/Africa/Bur_Poem.htm
- 7 *New Roman Missal*, Democratic Republic of Congo. *WPCU* 1993 p.24
- 8-9 Group from Zaire who prepared for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 1993. *WPCU* 1993 p.21

WEEK 46

Quote 1 Albert Schweitzer, medical missionary to Gabon. "Albert Schweitzer Speaks Out", *World Book Yearbook*, May 1964. © Association internationale de l'œuvre du Docteur Albert Schweitzer de Lambaréné (AISL)

- Quote 2 Albert Schweitzer.
www.schweitzer.org/english/aseind.htm
- 1-7 © Louise Bakala Koumouno, People's Republic of Congo
- 8 **W** "Thanksgiving", *I Sing Your Praise All the Day Long: Young Africans at Prayer*, ed. Fritz Pawelzik, © Friendship Press, New York NY, USA, 1967, p.40
- 9 Prayer of an African Christian. *PEW* p.126
- 10 "A Prayer for Animals", Albert Schweitzer. *Animals, Nature, and Albert Schweitzer*, ed. Ann Cottrell Free, The Albert Schweitzer Fellowship, 1982, sources section, chapter 1, footnote 2

WEEK 47

- Quote **W**
Aaron Tolen, a former president of the World Council of Churches from Cameroon. This was said during a worship service on the site where the first slaves arrived in Brazil. The worship was part of the world conference on mission and evangelism, Salvador, Brazil. *Called to One Hope*, WCC, 1998, p.174
- 1, 4 **W** © Rev. Dr Kayoka-Luendu M., Cameroon. English transl. Dr Colette Bouka Coula, adapted Terry MacArthur
- 2 *I Sing Your Praise All the Day Long: Young Africans at Prayer*, ed. Fritz Pawelzik, © Friendship Press, New York NY, USA, 1967, p.13
- 3 *PP* p.210
- 5 **W** "Prayer for the Sick", © Rev. Dr Kayoka-Luendu M., Cameroon. English transl. Dr Colette Bouka Coula, adapted Terry MacArthur
- 6 Central African Republic. *Le tronc beni de la prière*, ed. Mamia Woungly-Massaga, unpublished manuscript. *PP* p.47
- 7 **W** "Prayer of Intercession", © Rev. Dr Kayoka-Luendu M., Cameroon. English transl. Dr Colette Bouka Coula, adapted Terry MacArthur
- 8 Mamia Woungly-Massaga, Cameroon. *WPCU* 1993 p.24

WEEK 48

- Quote © Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Burkina Faso. 1997 recipient of the Right Livelihood Award.
www.rightlivelihood.se/recipients.html

- 1 "Accept the Morning Greeting", Dogon Peoples, Mali. *HFD* p.11
- 2 *FAGP* p.33
- 3 **W** © Dr Colette Bouka Coula, Cameroon. Church worker in Mauritania
- 4 **W** *Prières pour le monde 2004* © Fédération protestante de France, Paris, France. English transl. Terry MacArthur, © 2005 WCC

WEEK 49

- Quote 1 Ishmael Beah, age 15, as told to Laura Simms, Sierra Leone. *Earth Prayers/Honoring the Earth/Prayers for a Thousand Years*, eds Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon, Harper San Francisco, a division of HarperCollins, New York NY, USA, 1991, p.176

Quote 2 **W**

- Victoria of the Pan African Christian Women's Alliance in Liberia. WCC Feature: "Signs of peace and symbols of hope in Liberia", 28 August 2000
- 1 Sister E. Ghonda, Sierra Leone. *Women at Prayer* by Rachel Stowe. © 1994. Used by permission of The Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids MI, USA
- 2 Sinneh B. Conteh, Sierra Leone. *Friends Again* ©2001 Council of Churches in Sierra Leone and Churches Together in England. *TPP* p.234
- 3 "Prayer for the Restoration of the Nation" © 2005 Rita R. Wheazor, national executive director, Wawile, an organization for survivors of sexual violence, Liberia
- 4 **W** "A Litany of Renewal" © Sahr Kemoore Salia, general secretary, Council of Churches in Sierra Leone, Freetown, Sierra Leone
- 5 **W** "A Litany of Peace" © Sahr Kemoore Salia, general secretary, Council of Churches in Sierra Leone, Freetown, Sierra Leone
- 6 **W** "A Child's Prayer", Liberia. *Another Day*, comp. John Carden, SPCK, Triangle © SPCK, London. UK
- 7 Sierra Leone. *PP* p.252

WEEK 50

- Quote **W**
© Matilda A. C. Johnson, Kanifang East, The Gambia. *The Repeal and Other Poems*, Juka

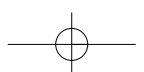
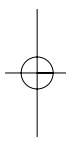
- Fatou Jabang, Matilda A. C. Johnson and Ann Therese Ndong-Jatta, Julladu Publishers, The Gambia, 2005
- 1 Guinea. *WAGP* p.176
- 2 Excerpted from "Prayer for Peace and Brotherhood", Sedar Senghor, president of Senegal, 1960-81. *HYD* p.103
- 3 Prayers written by Christians for the Gambia. Submitted by Michael J. Cleary, CSSp, Bishop of Banjul
- 4 **W** © Mabel Morny, E.P.Church Headquarters, PO Box HP 18 HO, V/Region, Ghana. *GMC* p.25
- 5 Ghana. *GMC* p.146
- 6 "A Fisherman's Song of Praise", Ghana. *APB* pp.22-23
- 7 **W** Afua Kuma, Ghana. *Jesus of the Deep Forest, Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma* © Asempa Publishers, Box 919, Accra, Ghana

WEEK 51

- Quote © Paulin Joachim, Benin.
web.uflib.ufl.edu/cm/africana/joachim.htm
- 1 "For Safety from Evil", Somba and Dahomey Peoples, Benin. *Textes sacrés d'Afrique noire* © 1965 UNESCO, Paris, France. Reproduced by permission of UNESCO
- 2 **W** A prayer of confession recorded in an African independent church. *WAGP* p.186
- 3 **W** Benin
- 4 Côte d'Ivoire. *GMC* p.35
- 5-8 © 2005 Josephine Sanvee, Togo
- 9 Pastor Franck Mawuli Adubra, Togo. *Prières pour le monde 2004* © Fédération protestante de France, Paris, France. English transl. Terry MacArthur, © 2005 WCC

WEEK 52

- Quote **W**
© Mercy Oduyoye, Ghana. *Ecumenical Review*, January 2001, WCC
- Quote Ghana **W**
© Mercy Oduyoye, Ghana. *From Cover to Core: A Letter to My Ancestors*, Mercy Oduyoye
- 1 "Doubt", *I Sing Your Praise All the Day Long: Young Africans at Prayer*, ed. Fritz Pawelzik, © Friendship Press, New York NY, USA. 1967, p.62
- 2 "The Sun Has Disappeared", Ghana. *APB* pp.122-23
- 3 **W** © Mercy Oduyoye, Ghana. *We Would Be One*, Institute of Women in Religion and Culture, Accra, Ghana



Subject Index

533

A

abundance 112, 198
 abundant life 445
 abuse 196, 206, 213, 216, 350
 acceptance 16, 388
 action 449
 addiction 357
 adoration 28, 45, 270, 377, 464, 513
 Advent 78, 137, 167, 197, 286, 347,
 362, 382, 464, 487, 505
 affection 243
 affirmation of faith
 87, 88, 89, 97, 109, 157, 254,
 267, 268, 286, 287, 313
 affliction 419
 Africa 474
 alcohol 215
 alive 79
 Allah 434
 altar 244
 ancestors 86, 479, 507
 anchor 312
 anger 332, 376
 animal 465, 470
 Anna 455
 annunciation 419
 Ash Wednesday 78
 assurance 335, 396, 463

astronaut 385
 atom 288
 authoritarianism 266
 awareness 217
 Aymara 259

B

bacteria 258
 baking 324
 bamboo 147
 baptism 198
 baptism of our Lord 34
 barn 326
 barrier 332, 347, 462
 bauxite 310
 beach 310
 beauty 107
 belief 396
 benediction 227
 Bethlehem 1, 10
 Bible 29, 134
 birds 147, 167
 birthday 205
 blacksmith 473
 blanket 228
 blessing 13, 56, 68, 70, 72, 99, 110,
 198, 216, 265, 289, 337, 347

blind 36
 blossom 170
 body 197, 206, 246
 boss 386
 bounty 243
 bread 10, 121, 133, 246, 324, 326,
 328, 334, 336
 breath 182
 brokenness 65, 77, 321
 Buddha 434
 buffalo 170
 building 214
 bush 470, 502
 busyness 298
 butterfly 247

C

call to worship 85, 86, 87, 334, 336, 505
 canoe 347, 349
 captain 420
 captives 168
 care 121
 carpenter 59
 cassava 464
 cattle 181
 challenge 199, 423
 change 436
 chaos 90
 Chernobyl 397
 chief 349
 child 397
 childbirth 181, 191, 485
 childhood 233
 children 9, 117, 142, 188, 196, 216,
 240, 488, 490, 491

cholera 244
 cholesterol 258
 Christ
 adoration of 382
 image of 167, 387
 names of 168, 355, 382, 407, 435, 513
 nature of 86
 passion of 276
 presence of 97, 109, 112, 226, 231, 337,
 357, 377, 447
 second coming of 479
 Christianity 282
 Christmas 1, 10, 14, 206
 church 9, 64, 88, 136, 208, 355, 438,
 455, 503, 506, 507
 city 133
 cleansing 229, 244
 climate change 339
 clothing 228
 coconut 346, 347
 comfort 166, 189
 commandments 28, 38, 176, 376, 406
 commitment 79, 110, 127, 142, 190, 226,
 256, 276, 286, 289, 298, 355,
 448, 469, 507
 communion 13, 24, 57, 88, 107, 246, 257,
 322, 327, 349, 399
 community 146, 243, 302, 378, 426, 427
 compassion 109, 145, 296, 316, 364, 366,
 409, 434, 437, 465
 confession 27, 71, 86, 94, 155, 212, 227,
 229, 256, 276, 298, 332, 335,
 350, 366, 384, 388, 409, 411,
 486, 487, 502, 503
 confidence 48
 confirmation 198
 conflict 169, 200, 480
 consecration 111
 consolation 266

S u b j e c t I n d e x

535

contradiction 217
 conversion 369, 507
 convict 333
 corporation 117
 corruption 127, 128, 152, 265, 266, 472
 courage 121, 170, 189, 226, 280, 335,
 363, 397, 423, 469, 497
 creation 34, 38, 86, 112, 143, 144, 174,
 188, 200, 228, 243, 268, 288,
 314, 321, 333, 337, 338, 346,
 347, 364, 367, 437, 447, 470
 creed 257, 277
 crib 14
 crisis 280
 crops 13
 cross 98
 crowd 226
 crucifixion 11, 39
 cruelty 98, 465
 culture 299, 329
 cyclone 447

D

dam 128
 dance 142, 435
 danger 204, 420
 dawn 498
 death 89, 205, 312
 decree 176
 dedication 397
 delight 79
 deliverance 471
 depression 355
 depth 110
 desert 101

despair 189
 destruction 311, 490
 devastation 157
 development 497
 dialogue 325, 463
 diamond 471
 differently-abled 196, 446
 dignity 192, 297, 310, 427
 disaster 454
 discipleship 40, 48, 49, 58, 279, 348, 387,
 505, 512
 discrimination 127, 213, 215
 disease 214
 disgrace 170
 dismissal 127, 405
 disorder 90
 diversity 277, 347
 division 169
 doctor 112
 domestic servant 299
 door 80, 88, 325, 438
 doubt 396, 507
 downtrodden 145
 dream 142, 199, 208, 333
 drought 174, 211
 drowning 108
 drugs 311

E

earth 72, 86, 321, 337
 Easter 157, 158
 economy 166
 ecumenism 146, 369
 education 128, 267, 299

elections 198, 444
 emptying 376
 encouragement 135
 endurance 358, 433
 enemy 65, 383, 398
 enlightenment 135, 400
 environment 38, 112, 128, 143, 348
 envy 364
 Epiphany 34, 35, 313
 equality 297
 eternal life 137, 336
 ethnic conflict 434
 eucharistic prayer 24, 327
 evangelism 118, 120, 238, 465, 496
 evening 406
 evil 183, 471
 exploitation 258, 448, 480
 eyes 36, 70, 72, 78, 98, 99, 119,
 142, 166, 183, 228, 229

F

face 277
 faith 170, 197, 227, 268, 355, 364,
 437, 503, 507
 faithfulness 382, 464
 false doctrine 464
 family 138, 142, 357, 366
 farmer 152, 167, 169
 farming 297
 fatherhood 213
 fatigue 357
 fear 108, 166, 190, 362, 365, 368,
 511
 feet 119
 field 245, 297

fighting 434, 490
 fire 198, 376, 411
 fishing 513
 flame 376
 flight into Egypt 14
 flower 158, 167, 170, 247, 458
 flying 397
 food 14, 196, 346, 398
 foolishness 69
 footwashing 246
 force 112
 forest 128, 177, 338, 470
 forgiveness 15, 51, 65, 71, 118, 123, 170,
 216, 239, 276, 332, 350, 365,
 376, 382, 385, 386, 389, 398,
 463, 470, 496, 504, 505, 511
 fountain 513
 fragrance 376
 frailty 470
 freedom 77, 97, 167, 302, 434, 448
 frontier 462
 fruit 181
 fruitfulness 199
 future 269, 474

G

galaxy 288
 garden 244, 247
 generosity 315, 409
 gentleness 112
 gifts of the spirit 289
 giving 218, 243
 globalization 258, 311
 glory 64

- God
- attributes of 37, 45, 71, 87, 174
 - existence of 396
 - image of 142, 231, 297, 299
 - names of 68, 135, 247
 - nearness of 196
 - oneness of 28
 - presence of 64, 79, 87, 136, 279
 - promises of 434
 - relation with 396
- Good Friday 11, 39
- goodness 377, 396, 437
- Gospel 38, 118, 188, 280, 445
- government 117
- grace 28, 50, 64, 228, 328, 399, 409, 437, 470
- grain 196
- gratitude 137
- greed 36, 86, 112, 143, 426
- green 338
- grudge 332
- guidance 37, 56, 77, 121, 176, 207, 218, 314, 347, 349, 382, 386, 424, 511
- H**
- hand 119, 229, 255
- happiness 470
- hardship 110, 211
- harmony 169, 316, 332
- harvest 169, 181, 188, 198, 324, 326, 464, 502, 504
- hatred 11, 112, 480
- healing 112, 123, 142, 143, 155, 169, 181, 192, 205, 258, 268, 296, 332, 350, 388, 407, 408, 424, 426, 443, 463, 471, 486, 488, 511
- healing (*cont.*) 426, 443, 463, 471, 486, 488, 511
- health 244
- heart 238, 465
- heart attack 258
- heat 174
- heaven 160
- help 145
- heritage 480
- hero 435, 513
- Hindu 152, 427
- HIV and AIDS 205, 208, 212, 213, 215, 216
- holiness 327
- Holy Family 14
- Holy Spirit 24, 182, 200, 314, 337, 355, 443
- home 375
- homeless 80, 142
- honesty 199
- hope 1, 13, 15, 99, 110, 157, 166, 168, 239, 254, 279, 287, 298, 311, 382, 385, 423, 436, 498, 506
- hospital 375
- household 299
- human rights 127
- human trafficking 152
- humanity 59, 138, 312
- humility 120, 246, 433
- hunger 142, 196, 377, 496
- hunting 228, 502
- I**
- icon 378
- identification with people 168

identity 227
illumination 405
incarnation 1, 14, 59, 88, 246, 254, 257,
287, 313, 449
inclusiveness 465
indigenous people 291, 297, 321, 329
inequality 259
infinity 108
injustice 166, 423
insanity 108
insect 158, 327
inspiration 367
intercessions 12, 13, 36, 64, 97, 117, 255,
269, 311, 355, 363, 435
inter-religious understanding
152
invocation 86, 257
irrigation 134
island 339

J

jail 1
jasmine 433
journey 96
joy 181, 316, 397, 426
justice 10, 88, 112, 121, 127, 144, 145,
152, 154, 167, 170, 197, 199,
216, 228, 256, 257, 266, 267,
277, 281, 286, 287, 295, 297,
301, 362, 397, 427, 447, 511

K

Kingdom of God 239, 286, 362
knowledge 135

Koran 16
Korean unification 169

L

lamb 170
lament 154, 156, 205, 299, 433
landmines 127
Latin America 110
laughter 79, 397
laying on of hands 471
leader 199, 362, 368, 472, 497, 504
leaf 391
leaven 93
Lent 1 78, 96
libation 479
liberation 166, 168, 216
liberation theology 271
lies 362
life 120, 239, 267, 323, 349, 357,
397, 458
light 38, 58, 72, 77, 120, 167, 196,
296, 376, 382, 386, 406, 506
lilly 166
lion 170
lips 183
loneliness 136
longevity 27
Lord's Prayer 118, 152, 295
loss 135, 166, 196
lotus 433
love 9, 16, 129, 134, 183, 191, 227,
255, 267, 282, 368, 377, 382,
391, 419, 427, 437, 463
love of God 503
loyalty 137

M

- mall (shopping) 153
 malnutrition 482
 market 166
 Mars 351
 Mary 436
 master 213
 meal 398
 meekness 77, 265
 meeting 462
 men 215
 mercy 28, 88, 214, 252, 408, 409,
 419
 Minjung 168
 mirror 97
 miserliness 197
 mission 56, 444
 missionaries 50
 mistake 385
 money 127
 moon 181
 morning 12, 37, 58, 78, 167, 198, 289,
 299, 337, 405, 406, 479, 511
 mountain 170, 226
 mouth 119, 229
 mujahadeen 412
 Muslim 152
 mystery 391

N

- nail 98
 nationalism 376
 nature 128

- necessities 480
 needy 73, 145, 435
 neighbour 448
 neocolonialism 171
 neutrality 231
 New Year 13, 14
 night 363, 479, 511, 513
 nonviolence 325
 nourishment 77
 nuclear energy 348
 nuclear weapons 166
 nurse 36
 nurture 137

O

- obedience 56, 118, 119, 397, 399, 411
 ocean 470
 offering 289, 297
 opening of worship 424, 457
 openness 80, 88, 146, 238, 349, 377,
 447, 465
 opportunity 117
 oppression 127, 167, 232, 239, 480
 order 90
 orphan 188, 218, 247, 456, 491, 504
 outcast 201, 227, 332
 outer space 385
 overalls 287

P

- paddle 346
 pain 114, 290, 316, 350, 471

palm 346, 505
 paradise 158
 parent 137
 past 474
 pasture 181
 path 120
 peace 15, 67, 99, 117, 118, 123, 138,
 155, 156, 166, 170, 177, 181,
 188, 190, 196, 198, 200, 226,
 227, 228, 231, 239, 266, 269,
 276, 277, 279, 281, 299, 310,
 312, 316, 325, 337, 346, 347,
 368, 377, 383, 385, 406, 412,
 433, 455, 472, 488, 490, 503,
 511
 peace-makers 10
 pearl 310
 peasants 278
 Pentecost 198, 200
 persecution 425
 persistence 490
 pilgrimage 94, 96
 planting 297
 pluralism 177
 poetry 171, 267, 407
 politician 199, 480
 poor 93, 127, 168, 247, 269, 271,
 433, 504
 poverty 9, 80, 117, 206, 265, 311, 433,
 480, 511
 praise 24, 48, 200, 464
 prayer 27, 38, 117, 168, 355, 366,
 389, 396, 424
 pregnancy 181
 prejudice 155, 432
 previenent grace 327
 prison 79, 385
 privacy 248
 proclamation 238

promise 244
 prophet 144, 444
 protection 56, 198, 227, 270, 383, 405,
 419, 454
 protest 244
 providence 205, 464
 purification 386, 405

Q

quest 50

R

racism 220, 231, 252
 rain 36, 72, 174, 355, 464, 504
 rainbow 463
 rape 297
 reading 134
 reading the Bible 28, 29
 recognition 297
 reconciliation 11, 57, 65, 93, 156, 181, 229,
 231, 255, 291, 346, 347, 350,
 365, 388, 398, 455, 462, 463,
 480, 486, 488, 511
 recreation 386
 reed-table 507
 refuge 13, 214
 refugee 14, 135, 184, 190, 201, 207,
 218, 313, 455
 rejection 56
 renewal 134, 355, 487
 repentance 466
 respect 56, 65
 rest 279, 386

Subject Index

541

- | | | | |
|-----------------|---|-------------------|---|
| restlessness | 133 | sea | 332, 346, 347, 348, 382, 513 |
| restoration | 389, 486 | search | 99, 351 |
| resurrection | 167, 168, 182, 244, 289, 435 | seasons | 181 |
| revelation | 69 | secret | 405 |
| reverence | 458 | security | 349, 426 |
| revitalization | 112 | seed | 71, 298, 324, 326 |
| revolt | 99 | self-confidence | 365 |
| revolution | 232 | selfishness | 145, 448 |
| rhinoceros | 470 | sending | 216 |
| rice | 160 | senses | 119, 400 |
| rice paddies | 154, 158, 433 | sentinel | 506 |
| rich | 127 | servant | 448 |
| righteousness | 37, 167, 169, 183, 310, 311,
364 | service | 119, 170, 207, 246, 289, 432,
469, 512 |
| river | 134, 147, 181, 290, 464 | sexuality | 215 |
| rock | 214, 513 | sharing | 196, 295, 296 |
| roof | 376 | shelter | 112, 174, 349, 438 |
| roots | 146 | shepherd | 182, 296 |
| round table | 507 | shore | 349 |
| rudder | 347 | sickness | 471, 504 |
|
S | | sigh | 290 |
| sacrifice | 145 | sight | 86 |
| sadness | 233 | silence | 89, 147, 216, 350 |
| safety | 146, 174, 176, 181, 190, 228,
502, 511 | sincerity | 364 |
| saints | 64 | singing | 142, 267, 397, 470 |
| salt | 71, 506 | slavery | 299, 321, 466, 496 |
| salvation | 137, 248, 269, 408 | smile | 158 |
| Samaritan woman | 36 | society | 295, 436 |
| sap | 338 | software | 166 |
| Saviour | 503 | soldier | 504 |
| scientist | 348 | solidarity | 266, 281 |
| scorpion | 297 | song | 142, 321 |
| scriptures | 427 | sorrow | 266 |
| | | sowing | 86 |
| | | Spirit | 86, 110, 349, 357 |
| | | spirits | 188 |
| | | spiritual revival | 443 |

spirituality 192
 split-personality 212
 squatter 142
 St Nino 401
 stars 228, 288, 512
 stereotypes 432
 stomach 119
 stone 214, 412, 498
 storm 146, 252, 382, 420, 426, 443,
 447
 story 166
 stove 311
 stream 412
 street 240
 street children 201
 strength 363, 367, 433, 469, 490
 struggle 108, 158
 students 120, 218
 suffering 79, 98, 239, 244, 254, 496
 sun 71, 77, 174
 surrender 377, 433
 survival 278
 sweat 158
 swimming 347, 397
 syncretism 427

T

table 107, 349
 table grace 346, 398
 teacher 218, 365
 teaching 29
 team 58
 tear 114, 214, 357
 temptation 190, 204, 358, 470

tenderness 99
 tent 146
 terrorism 252
 thanksgiving 24, 134, 188, 314, 323, 335,
 365, 397, 426, 464, 511, 513
 thatch 351
 theft 278
 theology 387
 thirst 135, 326
 time 385
 tiredness 363
 tolerance 447
 tongue 183
 torture 79, 98, 127
 touch 86, 243, 426, 463
 tourist 313
 tradition 347
 transformation 377
 travel 313
 traveller 71
 treasure 335
 tree 174, 177, 412, 479
 trial 357
 Trinity 70, 86, 367, 377
 trouble 120, 405
 truck 287
 trust 463
 truth 90, 94, 119, 219, 472

U

understanding 200
 unemployment 153
 ungratefulness 86
 unhappiness 363

Subject Index

543

unity 9, 10, 15, 30, 47, 50, 57, 64,
65, 73, 123, 133, 136, 138,
146, 154, 181, 207, 287, 299,
333, 347, 355, 362, 368, 369,
383, 405, 456, 457, 496, 497,
511

untouchables 201

V

victim 377

violence 1, 152, 206, 240, 253, 256,
265, 318, 350, 377, 437, 449,
503

virtue 127

vision 216, 266, 286, 325

vocation 58, 85, 227, 238, 245, 334

voice 68, 142

vulnerability 68

W

wall 1, 11, 15, 65, 227, 312, 498

war 1, 143, 196, 233, 375, 376,
425, 482, 487, 488, 491, 511

warehouse 166

waste 315, 346

water 34, 36, 101, 128, 157, 229,
244, 334, 335

wave 147

weakness 69, 409, 449

wealth 214, 358, 426

weapon 473

weaving 67

weeds 298

welcome 80, 85, 88, 337, 438

well 101

widow 455

wilderness 168

wind 13, 513

wine 13

winning 166

winter 58, 433

wisdom 29, 112, 121, 135, 137, 328,
437

witchdoctor 471

witness 121, 376, 382, 383, 387, 401,
445

women 110, 117, 121, 191, 206, 259,
267, 268, 297, 299, 301, 324,
365, 432

Word 9, 86, 88, 246, 313, 357, 367,
383, 389, 454, 471, 482

words 351

work 64, 112, 167, 265, 279, 289,
363, 386, 504

worker 287

world 99

World Trade Organization
128

worry 40

worship 245

worth 432

wound 93, 332

Y

youth 128, 208, 215, 455

Genesis 1:28	385	Isaiah 55:1-3	326
Genesis 2:15	385	Isaiah 61:1-4	66, 504
Genesis 12:1-9	94, 95, 96	Daniel 3:19-30	190
Deuteronomy 26:1-11	94, 96	Zephaniah 3:14-15	504, 505
I Kings 19:11-12	89	Matthew 2:11	512
Nehemiah 1-4	214	Matthew 2:13-15	14
Psalms 1:1-6	77	Matthew 3:13-17	34
Psalms 23:1-6	118, 296	Matthew 4:1-2	78
Psalms 42:1	86	Matthew 4:1-11	190
Psalms 51:1-19	386	Matthew 4:12-23	58
Psalms 88:10	258	Matthew 4:18-22	49
Psalms 90:12	464	Matthew 5:1-11	265
Psalms 104:24	200	Matthew 5:3	69
Psalms 118:14-29	166	Matthew 5:5	77
Psalms 133:1-3	220	Matthew 5:44	457
Psalms 137:1-9	244	Matthew 8:1-4	399
Psalms 137:4	212	Matthew 8:20	142
Psalms 139:1-24	231, 409	Matthew 8:23-27	252
Song of Songs 7:1-13	215	Matthew 9:20-22	268, 399
Isaiah 6:2, 8	245	Matthew 11:25-30	279, 399
Isaiah 25:6-9	170	Matthew 13:24-35	298
Isaiah 35:1-10	67	Matthew 13: 44-46	68, 310
Isaiah 54:2	146	Matthew 14:13-21	246
		Matthew 14:22-33	334, 335
		Matthew 16:13-20	387
		Matthew 17:1-8	97

B i b l i c a l I n d e x

545

Matthew 18:1-5	216	Luke 4:21-30	56
Matthew 18:20	472	Luke 6:20-21	69, 77
Matthew 18:21-35	389	Luke 6:27-28	457
Matthew 18:22	386	Luke 7:11-17	239
Matthew 20:29-34	443, 446	Luke 7:36-8:3	243, 246
Matthew 22: 34 -40	120, 445	Luke 8:22-25	252
Matthew 25:1-13	464	Luke 8:43-48	268, 399
Matthew 25:36	385	Luke 9:10-17	246
Matthew 27:46	89	Luke 9:18-20	387
Matthew 28:16-20	120, 238, 348, 367	Luke 9:28-36	86, 97
		Luke 9:46-48	216
Mark 1:9-11	34	Luke 10:1-12	279
Mark 1:12-13	78, 190	Luke 10:25-28	120, 445
Mark 1:12-15	101	Luke 10:32	144
Mark 1:16-20	47, 49	Luke 10:38-42	298
Mark 2:35	67	Luke 11:1	117
Mark 4:35-41	252	Luke 11:3	121
Mark 5:24-34	268, 399	Luke 12:13-21	323, 326
Mark 6:1-6	278, 279	Luke 12:32-40	334, 335
Mark 6:30-44	246	Luke 13:31-35	112
Mark 7:6	364	Luke 14:7-14	364
Mark 8:27-35	387	Luke 15:1-10	135, 182
Mark 9:2-8	97	Luke 15:1-32	388
Mark 9:29	168	Luke 15:11-24	89, 384
Mark 9:33-37	216	Luke 17:11-19	426
Mark 10:17-31	426	Luke 18:9-14	212
Mark 10:46-52	443, 446	Luke 18:35-43	443, 446
Mark 12:28-34	120, 445	Luke 20:27-40	463
Mark 13:35	464	Luke 24:13-34	157
Mark 15:34	89	Luke 24:35-48	182
Luke 1:35	419	John 1:29-34	34
Luke 3:7-18	505	John 1:35-42	37, 48, 49
Luke 3:21-22	34	John 1:36-51	109
Luke 4:1-13	78, 96, 190	John 4:1-15, 36	101
Luke 4:16-21	66	John 4:42	109

John 6:1-15	107, 246, 315	II Timothy 4: 6-8; 16-18	444
John 6:24-35	107, 322, 324, 334	Hebrews 5:1-10	443
John 6:35-41	51, 336	Hebrews 12:1-3	347
John 6:60-69	357	Hebrews 13:5-6	364
John 6:68	109, 137	James 1:22-25	364
John 9:1-41	36, 399	I Peter 3:15	183
John 10:27-30	182	I John 4:11-16	212
John 11:32-37	120	Revelations 1:4-8	167
John 14:6	357	Revelations 3:20	88
John 14:15-21	183	Revelations 21:10-14	198
John 14:23-29	198	Revelations 22:1-5	244
John 15:1-8	199		
John 15:13	226		
John 18:38	219		
John 20:19-23	200, 357		
John 20:19-31	167		
Acts 2:1-21	200		
Acts 5:27-32	166		
Romans 7:15-20	386		
Romans 8:26-27	472		
Romans 8:28-30	310		
Romans 12:9-21	365		
I Corinthians 1:18-25	69		
I Corinthians 3:16-17	206		
Galatians 5:22	473		
Ephesians 2: 13-18	65, 299		
Philippians 2:5-11	86		
I Thessalonians 1: 5-10	445		

Calendar 2007-2014

547

In order that all may use the same material each week, we offer here a calendar for 2007-2014.

It will be noted that the prayer cycle starts each week on a Sunday, and that Week 1 always includes 1 January. Because the calendar year does not divide into 52 weeks exactly, there is at intervals an extra week. In the span covered by this calendar this occurs once; at the turn of 2011-2012. It is suggested that Jerusalem be prayed for during this week, as well as at other appropriate times and seasons.

548 *C a l e n d a r 2 0 0 7 - 2 0 1 4*

	2007	2008	2009	2010
Week 1	31 Dec. (06)	30 Dec. (07)	28 Dec. (08)	27 Dec. (09)
Week 2	7 Jan.	6 Jan.	4 Jan.	3 Jan.
Week 3	14 Jan.	13 Jan.	11 Jan.	10 Jan.
Week 4	21 Jan.	20 Jan.	18 Jan.	17 Jan.
Week 5	28 Jan.	27 Jan.	25 Jan.	24 Jan.
Week 6	4 Feb.	3 Feb.	1 Feb.	31 Jan.
Week 7	11 Feb.	10 Feb.	8 Feb.	7 Feb.
Week 8	18 Feb.	17 Feb.	15 Feb.	14 Feb.
Week 9	25 Feb.	24 Feb.	22 Feb.	21 Feb.
Week 10	4 March	2 March	1 March	28 Feb.
Week 11	11 March	9 March	8 March	7 March
Week 12	18 March	16 March	15 March	14 March
Week 13	25 March	23 March	22 March	21 March
Week 14	1 April	30 March	29 March	28 March
Week 15	8 April	6 April	5 April	4 April
Week 16	15 April	13 April	12 April	11 April
Week 17	22 April	20 April	19 April	18 April
Week 18	29 April	27 April	26 April	25 April
Week 19	6 May	4 May	3 May	2 May
Week 20	13 May	11 May	10 May	9 May
Week 21	20 May	18 May	17 May	16 May
Week 22	27 May	25 May	24 May	23 May
Week 23	3 June	1 June	31 May	30 May
Week 24	10 June	8 June	7 June	6 June
Week 25	17 June	15 June	14 June	13 June
Week 26	24 June	22 June	21 June	20 June

C a l e n d a r 2 0 0 7 - 2 0 1 4

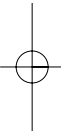
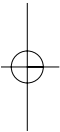
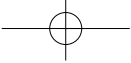
	2007	2008	2009	2010
Week 27	1 July	29 June	28 June	27 June
Week 28	8 July	6 July	5 July	4 July
Week 29	15 July	13 July	12 July	11 July
Week 30	22 July	20 July	19 July	18 July
Week 31	29 July	27 July	26 July	25 July
Week 32	5 Aug.	3 Aug.	2 Aug.	1 Aug.
Week 33	12 Aug.	10 Aug.	9 Aug.	8 Aug.
Week 34	19 Aug.	17 Aug.	16 Aug.	15 Aug.
Week 35	26 Aug.	24 Aug.	23 Aug.	22 Aug.
Week 36	2 Sept.	31 Aug.	30 Aug.	29 Aug.
Week 37	9 Sept.	7 Sept.	6 Sept.	5 Sept.
Week 38	16 Sept.	14 Sept.	13 Sept.	12 Sept.
Week 39	23 Sept.	21 Sept.	20 Sept.	19 Sept.
Week 40	30 Sept.	28 Sept.	27 Sept.	26 Sept.
Week 41	7 Oct.	5 Oct.	4 Oct.	3 Oct.
Week 42	14 Oct.	12 Oct.	11 Oct.	10 Oct.
Week 43	21 Oct.	19 Oct.	18 Oct.	17 Oct.
Week 44	28 Oct.	26 Oct.	25 Oct.	24 Oct.
Week 45	4 Nov.	2 Nov.	1 Nov.	31 Oct.
Week 46	11 Nov.	9 Nov.	8 Nov.	7 Nov.
Week 47	18 Nov.	16 Nov.	15 Nov.	14 Nov.
Week 48	25 Nov.	23 Nov.	22 Nov.	21 Nov.
Week 49	2 Dec.	30 Nov.	29 Nov.	28 Nov.
Week 50	9 Dec.	7 Dec.	6 Dec.	5 Dec.
Week 51	16 Dec.	14 Dec.	13 Dec.	12 Dec.
Week 52	23 Dec.	21 Dec.	20 Dec.	19 Dec.

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Week 1	26 Dec. (10)	1 Jan.	30 Dec. (12)	29 Dec. (13)
Week 2	2 Jan.	8 Jan.	6 Jan.	5 Jan.
Week 3	9 Jan.	15 Jan.	13 Jan.	12 Jan.
Week 4	16 Jan.	22 Jan.	20 Jan.	19 Jan.
Week 5	23 Jan.	29 Jan.	27 Jan.	26 Jan.
Week 6	30 Jan.	5 Feb.	3 Feb.	2 Feb.
Week 7	6 Feb.	12 Feb.	10 Feb.	9 Feb.
Week 8	13 Feb.	19 Feb.	17 Feb.	16 Feb.
Week 9	20 Feb.	26 Feb.	24 Feb.	23 Feb.
Week 10	27 Feb.	4 March	3 March	2 March
Week 11	6 March	11 March	10 March	9 March
Week 12	13 March	18 March	17 March	16 March
Week 13	20 March	25 March	24 March	23 March
Week 14	27 March	1 April	31 March	30 March
Week 15	3 April	8 April	7 April	6 April
Week 16	10 April	15 April	14 April	13 April
Week 17	17 April	22 April	21 April	20 April
Week 18	24 April	29 April	28 April	27 April
Week 19	1 May	6 May	5 May	4 May
Week 20	8 May	13 May	12 May	11 May
Week 21	15 May	20 May	19 May	18 May
Week 22	22 May	27 May	26 May	25 May
Week 23	29 May	3 June	2 June	1 June
Week 24	5 June	10 June	9 June	8 June
Week 25	12 June	17 June	16 June	15 June
Week 26	19 June	24 June	23 June	22 June

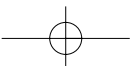
Calendar 2007 - 2014

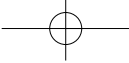
551

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Week 27	26 June	1 July	30 June	29 June
Week 28	3 July	8 July	7 July	6 July
Week 29	10 July	15 July	14 July	13 July
Week 30	17 July	22 July	21 July	20 July
Week 31	24 July	29 July	28 July	27 July
Week 32	31 July	5 Aug.	4 Aug.	3 Aug.
Week 33	7 Aug.	12 Aug.	11 Aug.	10 Aug.
Week 34	14 Aug.	19 Aug.	18 Aug.	17 Aug.
Week 35	21 Aug.	26 Aug.	25 Aug.	24 Aug.
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Week 44	23 Oct.	28 Oct.	27 Oct.	26 Oct.
Week 45	30 Oct.	4 Nov.	3 Nov.	2 Nov.
Week 46	6 Nov.	11 Nov.	10 Nov.	9 Nov.
Week 47	13 Nov.	18 Nov.	17 Nov.	16 Nov.
Week 48	20 Nov.	25 Nov.	24 Nov.	23 Nov.
Week 49	27 Nov.	2 Dec.	1 Dec.	30 Nov.
Week 50	4 Dec.	9 Dec.	8 Dec.	7 Dec.
Week 51	11 Dec.	16 Dec.	15 Dec.	14 Dec.
Week 52	18 Dec.	23 Dec.	22 Dec.	21 Dec.



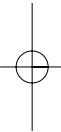
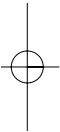
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