



Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs

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Ecumenical Prayer Service for Religious Year of Consecrated Life Resources

**January 24, 2015
Feast of St. Francis de Sales**

Dear Friends:

Pope Francis has invited us as religious to share our charisms and our ministries with the Catholic Community and other friends during this year of focus on religious life. Part of the primary mission for some communities is church unity. Other communities like my own have-- by our witness to the Gospel in our ministry and by our hospitality to all-- welcomed the fellow Christians in our midst. During my two decades of work for Christian unity, I have heard many of our Christian colleagues say how much they appreciate the understanding and support religious communities have shown for them in their Christian faith and in their spiritual growth. Several years ago I went with some Catholic friends to the Trappist monastery in Berryville, Virginia for a short weekend retreat in silence. Six months later I attended a lecture at Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary. On the way out I met a Lutheran pastor whom I thought I had met before. In a way, we had met. We discovered that we both had been on silent retreat that weekend—and we had seen each other at meals but never spoke. We both really appreciated the time to get away and to pray in the silence.

It would be appropriate if we religious, during this year of sharing our vocation, might invite our Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox friends to come to pray with us. Our communities often have Christian friends associated with our ministries or in groups related to our communities. And who today among us does not have a niece or nephew or other family member whose spouse is from another Christian community? Frequently these people who know and respect us would like an opportunity to pray with us and ‘learn a little bit more about us.’

What follows is a concise guide to constructing an ecumenical prayer service. The basic elements reflect those of the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* [for more on the Week of Prayer, see the website of the Atonement Friars at http://www.atonementfriars.org/our_missions_and_ministries/the_week_of_prayer_for_christian_unity.html]. I offer suggestions for hymns, readings, prayers and the like. Most of these are readily available in publications you have in your communities.

The celebration can occur at almost any time. The *Week of Prayer* [January 18-25] and the feast of Pentecost are considered most appropriate.

I would mention two important elements of preparation. It is good if you can have two or three Christian friends work with you on putting the prayer service together. These friends sometimes have insights and sensitivities that add to the service. They also could participate as readers, song

leaders and so forth at the Service.

A second element should always be something from your community—for example, an appropriate reading from one of ‘your saints’ or the writings/poetry of a member of your local community. Likewise, if you have a simple reception or social after the prayer service, the community might share a little about itself and its ministry. Often, since I am both an ecumenist and a religious, I am asked to fill in information on a religious community a Protestant friend has encountered. People like to know more about us.

Today we see Pope Francis calling us to walk with our fellow Christians and share our life of faith with them and listen intently as they share their faith with us. There is much to share and much to learn. The prayer service could lead to regular prayer together. **A simple prayer service can have a profound impact on our Christian Friends and on us.**

Christ’s Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John W. Crossin OSFS". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and personal.

John W. Crossin, OSFS
Executive Director

Structure of Prayer Service

The service could follow the structure below that is common to many prayer services. Since this is a Prayer Service and not Vespers, there is flexibility.

- I. Prelude
Preparation—including Hymn
- II. Opening
Confession of Sins
- III. Scripture Readings
- IV. Homily
- V. A Spiritual Reading from Saints’/Founders’/Community members’ writings
- VI. Apostles Creed
Intercessions
Offertory
Lord’s Prayer
- VII. Blessing
Sign of Peace
Departure/Social

Resources for Prayer: Some Brief Indications

I. Prelude Preparation—including Hymn

There are many suitable hymns depending on the readings/theme you have chosen. It is good to consult your music director/community liturgist. Hymns sometimes used, found a variety of hymnbooks, include:

- A. **The King of Love My Shepherd Is** [Henry W. Baker, 1821-1877; music: Irish Melody; tune, Saint Columba]
- B. **In Christ there is no East or West** [John Oxenham, 1908]
- C. **Father, We Thank You**
- D. **Christ is Made the Sure Foundation** [John Mason Neale, 1851; music: Henry Purcell]
- E. **O God, Our Help in Ages Past** [Isaac Watts, 1674-1748, alt.]

II. Opening Confession of Sins

The Roman Missal has varied penitential rites that might be useful. Likewise *The Roman Missal Various Needs #17 For the Unity of Christians* has numerous prayers that could be used for the prayer service. The Service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity also has prayers that can be used.

III. Readings

The classic text is John 17:17-21.

The readings used for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2014 were:

Isaiah 57:14-19; Psalm 36: 5-10; 1 Corinthians 1:1-17 and Mark 9: 33-41

Those for 2015 are Isaiah 55:1-5; Psalm 19: 1-14; John 4: 1-42,

Others often used would include Micah 6: 6-8[walk humbly with God]; Luke 24: 13-35[the road to Emmaus]; Galatians 3: 13-35; Ephesians 2: 11-22 [you are no longer strangers]; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Psalm 86: 11-16; Psalm 103: 1-5, 20-22 [Bless the Lord]

IV. **Homily**—the homily should be based on the Scripture readings and have a theme appropriate to Christian unity.

V. **Apostles Creed**—this is being said more frequently these days but most do not know it. The text can be found in the Roman Missal and should be printed in the Worship Guide.

Intercessions—these might reflect local needs and be drawn from various resources already available. Again, one of the appendices of the Roman Missal does have general suggestions for the Universal Prayer. If necessary this would be a place to start.

Offering for the Poor—this might be appropriate given the ministry of the religious community and what is happening in the surrounding region.

Lord's Prayer

VI. **Blessing**

Sign of Peace

VII. **Departure/Social to follow**

Closing Hymn

I should mention that the noted Canadian Ecumenist Father Bernard de Margerie of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan has just come out with an excellent resource book entitled *In God's Reconciling Grace: Prayers and reflection texts for Christian reconciliation and unity*. His chapter 5 has some further detailed instructions and suggestions for prayer services. The book also has resources suitable for personal prayer and ecumenical sharing groups. Fr. De Margerie can be reached at 901-2503 Louise Street, Saskatoon, SK,, S7J 3Z6 (Canada). His email address: jumeau@shaw.ca