

Resources for

THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

And throughout the year 2011

The ecumenical situation in the local group's country or region.

Ecumenical Life in Jerusalem

Partly taken from the Pastoral Message of Patriarch Michel Sabbah – March 2008

Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples. He foresaw the difficulty of the mission he was entrusting to them. That is why he prayed: "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." (Jn 17:11) A prayer that always accompanies the Church in Jerusalem and that remains a commandment given to the Churches, to the bishops and to the faithful, "so that they may be one as we are one". A prayer that expresses his will. To be one as he and the Father are one, is an imperative and theological obligation.

In Jerusalem, There are 13 different and separate traditional local Churches that come together in as a beautiful mosaic. There are frequent, almost monthly meetings with the Patriarchs and the Bishops of the various Churches of Jerusalem, Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants, and through these more fraternity and mutual help developed between communities. The year 2000, witnessed a moment of unity by launching the beginning of the 3rd millennium together on Nativity Square; this was accompanied by an ecumenical pastoral letter signed by the 13 heads of the Churches of Jerusalem. Among the many documents signed by the Heads of Churches and in addition to the common messages sent to our faithful and to the world at Easter and Christmas, the two documents on the status of Jerusalem should also be mentioned; the first was in November 1993 and the second in September 2006.

At the level of the Christian Churches, in 1990 the Catholic Churches in the region became members of the Council of Churches in the Middle East, which never ceases to create a place of fraternity, of encounter and of collaboration among all the heads of Churches in the Middle East and through them, among the 15 million Arab Christians in the region.

Together with the World Council of Churches, the whole Church of Jerusalem with its 13 communities developed a particular link and a fruitful collaboration in the area of justice and

peace in the Holy Land and in the region. It first succeeded in setting up the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program, with volunteers coming from all the Churches of the world to collaborate with the Israelis and the Palestinians in the conflict, and to accompany the Palestinians in places of confrontation and where their freedom was limited. Secondly, it helped to create a permanent Inter-Church Centre in Jerusalem for the development of ecumenical relations between the Christian communities.

On community level the Palestinian Christians living in Jerusalem and the rest of the Holy Land enjoy greater ecumenical life together where differences and denominational diversities are fading away and more cooperation and integration are experienced. In forums and coalitions, in institutions and movements the Christians of this land join activities and live together in brotherly atmosphere. They join each other liturgies and celebrate together. They help one another and share the same difficulties with their Palestinian Moslems in the West Bank, and Gaza.

On a wider level the Local traditional Churches informally get together with other churches present in the area within the Ecumenical Circle of Friends that meets monthly to share news and information aiming at a wider inclusive fraternity. The same group helps prepare Week of Prayers for Christian Unity in the Holy Land each year.

What is significant too is that the Church in Jerusalem continues to live in a political climate that is in many ways similar to the life of the early Christian community. While under occupation the People long for justice, peace, and security.

In the midst of all of this, the Christians of Jerusalem and throughout the Holy Land address their brothers and sisters around the world through this week of prayer for Christian unity to pray with them and for them as they struggle to see the end of the Israeli occupation of their country and the presence of peace and prosperity for all the people of the land. The church lifts up its voice in prayer to God in anticipation and hope for itself and the world so that we all may be one in our faith, in our witness, and in our love.

Statistics: Currently, the Holy Land Christians in this area count 200,000 throughout Israel, the West Bank and Gaza: 150,000 in Israel, and 50,000 in Palestinian territories including 10,000 in East Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, the central issue and Holy City for the three religions, almost all Palestinian Christians were forced to leave their homes in West Jerusalem after 1948 war. At the end of the war 34 percent of the land that belongs to Christians was seized by Israel.