



John 15 – The Vine and the Branches

The Sword of the Spirit
**Week of Prayer for
Christian Unity**

January 18-25, 2021



Contents

Introduction	2
John 15: 16a “You did not choose me I chose you.”	3
John 15: 4 - “Abide in me as I abide in you”	5
John 15: 12 “Love one another as I have loved you”	7
John 15: 15 “I do not call you servants any longer ... but I have called you friends”	9
John 15: 1-3 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.	11
John 15: 16b “Go and bear fruit, fruit that will last”	13
John 15: 5 “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”	15
John 15: 11 “So that my joy may be in you, and your joy complete”	17
Prayer for the Lord’s Day	19

Introduction

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is actually an eight-day observance or “octave” of prayer. It has been this way since the beginnings of this international movement in 1908.

This is now the Sword of the Spirit’s 11th year of participating internationally in this worldwide observance. This year we are using the Bible passages proposed by the World Council of Churches from John 15, the vine and the branches.

After each passage there is a reflection from either Brother Joseph Donovan of the Brotherhood of Hope, based in Boston, or from Andy Pettman of the Servants of the Word based in London. They are an ecumenical team, since one is Catholic, the other Protestant, and their working together on this is a strong sign of the unity that we believe we in the Sword of the Spirit are supposed to live out.



Following the reflection is a simple prayer, and then testimony from Sword of the Spirit members from all over the world, about why our ecumenical call is so important to them.

We do hope these reflections, testimonies and prayers, help you as you join in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity this year.

DAY 1 - January 18th

John 15: 16a “You did not choose me I chose you.”

The idea of ‘chosen-ness’ to many people can smack of elitism. God's choices, however, are not based on the superior qualities of any person or group. He chooses people to *be* something and to *do* something. He chose Israel to be a light to the nations and fulfill his plan to reveal himself to the world. Similarly, Jesus chose his apostles to be his messengers and to announce his salvation to the world. In each case people were chosen to be an example and to carry out a mission.

So also for us in the Sword of the Spirit. God chose us both to *be* something and to *do* something. We are called to be a family of grace in the midst of a fractured world, and to strive to live in unity with all who bear the name Christian. Rather than seeing this as merely a job, I find it more helpful to think of it as a privilege of growing in friendship with other Christians. Some time ago I was having breakfast at a diner with some brothers when I saw a group of African-American men begin to gather around a table in the centre of the restaurant. At one point they stood up and began to pray. I realized at that point I was witnessing Christians giving public expression to their faith. When I finished my breakfast I went over to them and said, "I don't know who you guys are but how do I sign up?" They laughed and right away they welcomed me to sit down and join them for coffee. They were men from a local Baptist Church and their warmth and hospitality was amazing. We almost immediately established a strong bond of brotherhood and mutual respect. We have since gone on to work together to assist one another in outreach to men and to continue to show true Christian unity.



These men lived in the confidence of their “chosenness” in Christ and were free to engage with other Christians no matter the denomination.

In John 17 Jesus prays that the unity he experiences with the Father is the unity his apostles show. This is the type of unity for which Jesus prayed and it is the unity for which we yearn during this week of prayer.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father may we be examples to the world of people who live our vocation as disciples, so that in the witness of our charity and unity the world may come to know and believe that you sent your Son Jesus to redeem us and give us new life.

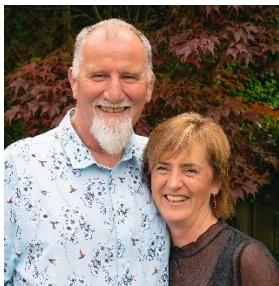
Testimony: Florence Irvine (Catholic) – Northern Ireland

The most important aspect for me of living as a member of an ecumenical community in the Sword of the Spirit, is the daily praying and sharing of my faith and life with brothers and sisters from different Christian denominations, now for almost 40 years.

I grew up in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in the 1960s/70s, and lived through “The Troubles” (30 years of violence and civil unrest, mainly due to the bigotry between Protestants and Catholics/Unionists and Nationalists.... More than 3,500 were killed in the conflict). Of course, there is a long and complicated back story to all of this, but as someone who lived in a predominantly Catholic area of Belfast, and had been taught by Dominican nuns from 5-18 years of age, my contact with Protestants had been very minimal. However, during my teens the Lord began stirring a restlessness in me as I reflected on His desire for unity among His people and church, but I had no opportunity to explore this.

My first connection, and subsequent commitment to community, was via a Catholic charismatic prayer meeting I attended in my late teens, a group of just 15-20 adults. It felt as if I was just settled, when the Lord quickly intervened, and through prophetic direction, spoke to us clearly about joining with a larger Protestant group from across the city! Not just to meet up occasionally, and see how we got on, but to integrate fully and form one community. I can't describe how crazy that seemed at the time, and not without personal risk, along with major concern from family and friends. But we were excited too; it felt radical, and we somehow knew it was of God. Still, it certainly wasn't easy. We had to recognize our theological differences, and overcome our own prejudices and misconceptions, but through the Lord's grace we have lived in the ecumenical Charis community ever since.

Living in an ecumenical community has been vital for me personally since my husband (in photo below) and children are Anglican. It has been a source of joy and strength for us to encourage each other to be the best Catholic/Protestant we can be, while being doubly blessed as we experience the unique riches from each denomination. I love living this life of mission with other Christians who have ecumenism in their DNA, and who are willing to follow Him and reflect His heart for unity.



Florence is part of the Charis community in Belfast Northern Ireland, and is in an ecumenical marriage.

DAY 2 - January 19th

John 15: 4 - “Abide in me as I abide in you”

It is an undisputed botanical fact that a branch cut off from the stem or vine of a plant dies. It cannot bear fruit. This is the point which Jesus makes in John 15 when he states, “I am the vine...apart from me you can do nothing.” Therefore, he calls his disciples to abide in him: “abide in me as I abide in you”. He is not inviting us to merely hang out with him but to depend on him for our very lives. To abide or dwell in him is not a passive but a dynamic state. Like a branch drinking in the DNA of the vine, we, by abiding in Christ, drink fully of his spiritual DNA. The result is an abundant, fruitful life and a challenge to live in a new way. As the apostle John would insist, “Whoever says he abides in Christ ought to walk in the same way he walked.” 1Jn 2:6.

Last year was the 200th anniversary of the hymn, “Abide with Me” by the Irish Anglican pastor Henry Francis Lyte. In it he pleads with Christ to remain with him in every situation which life throws at him and not just visit occasionally:

“Not a brief glance I beg, a passing word, But as Thou dwellest with Thy disciples, Lord,
Familiar, condescending, patient, free. Come not to sojourn, but abide with me.”

He was inspired to write these verses after spending time at the bedside of a dying friend who kept repeating, as if in prayer, “abide with me.” Taking the phrase from Luke 24:29 where the Emmaus disciples urge Jesus to “stay with us, for the evening is far spent”, Lyte then personalized the phrase and extended it to be a response to every human situation. “The darkness deepens, Lord with us abide.” In both the hymn and gospel, we acknowledge Jesus who is present and who desires to remain with us in even our darkest moments. And so, like Henry Lyte, we who yearn to abide in Christ can pray this confidently because Jesus promised that if we abide in him he will abide in us and we will bear much fruit.

During this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity we are reminded of how Christians around the world are threatened by numerous external dangers and persecutions but also from the threat of internal discord within our various denominational confessions as well as in some communities. Any of these situations can damage our connection with the vine who is Christ. When we experience danger or persecution or the threat of disunity, let us make our own the last verse of this beautiful hymn:

“I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless. Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.

Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee; In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.”

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, we trust in your promise to always be with us even to the end of the age. May we always find our dwelling place in you, abide with you in prayer, and know the abundant life of peace and unity which comes from your abiding presence.

Testimony: James Munk (Orthodox) - USA

There's a secret library at the top of the stairs at 31 Lynton Road. During my GAP year, I had the privilege of living in this house, the London home of the Servants of the Word. I suppose the room is not really all that secret, it's just tucked out of the way. For attention, it compares unfavourably with the inviting lounge across the hall and the water closet, next door. For the first few months of my stay, I didn't give it much thought. It was, and presumably still is, a pretty simple library: about eight mismatched bookshelves, lining every inch of the small room.

But as the year went on, I found myself spending more and more time perusing the shelves. What they offered, in spine after spine of worn-out paperbacks, was a modest but striking survey - theology, philosophy, history, and biography - from the Christian People across time, and across Christian traditions. In many ways, it was an odd collection, but the common thread was Jesus Christ as Lord. And as a member of the house, the Library was mine.

I've lived all my life in ecumenical Christian communities, growing up in the Sword of the Spirit. When I think of the people, events, and ideas that have formed me, what ties them together is a firm and total dedication to Christ - they are a denominationally eclectic group, otherwise. Looking back, I would be reluctant to delete the things from my past that fall outside my church tradition. And this is not because I find my church deficient; but because I find my Lord lavish, and near to all who call on him.

Has such an upbringing watered down my faith? I don't think so. Rather, it's formed in me an impulse that assumes the riches of Christianity are available to me. I live in a large library.



James is a married man living as part of the Work of Christ community in Lansing, Michigan

DAY 3 - January 20th

John 15: 12 “Love one another as I have loved you”

One day at Rutgers University in New Jersey, Brian, a chaplain to the Chi Alpha student outreach of the Assemblies of God Church asked me, “Can you give a talk to our students on the baptism in the Holy Spirit?” Was I ever surprised! Why was he asking me, a Catholic chaplain, to speak to his group about this when Baptism in the Holy Spirit was the Pentecostal ‘stock in trade’ so to speak?

His trust in me was based on a relationship of brotherly support we had built up over months and years of sharing with one another the joys and burdens of our respective campus missions and at the monthly meetings we had with a larger group of Orthodox and Protestant campus ministers at Rutgers.

Jesus commands us not only to ‘love one another’ but also models how to do it. ‘Love one another AS I have loved you.’ He said this at the Last Supper but would demonstrate the very next day what the “as” implies when he offered himself on the cross as the supreme act of love. But more than simply showing us, he gives us the power to do the same. What is required, to love as Jesus loves, is simply everything.

It is the same love my father showed in his care for my mother who suffered with Parkinson’s disease for 33 years. One day I asked my dad who was at that point providing almost 24/7 care, if he wanted to get away for a bit, take a break. “Joe,” he said “this is why I got married.” He took his vows seriously and rather than parcel out his love he gave everything away to be true, in love, to the promise he made to my mother on their wedding day. In his specific life setting he found a way to imitate the Lord and his way of loving.

Just as my dad’s love expanded to meet the increasing needs of my mother the same became true of the chaplains at Rutgers. Brian and I, along with the other chaplains, have learned how to go deeper in our relationships at each of our monthly meetings. The fruit, as we have learned how to love and serve one another and be loved and served in return, is a deep and fruitful unity.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus you gave us an example of how you intend us to love. You gave us the power to love through your Holy Spirit poured into our hearts. May we be obedient to your word and example and hold nothing back from loving as you loved and so build up your Kingdom in this world.

Testimony: John Hughes (Protestant) - USA

When I was eight years old we lived in a rural French village. The public school we went to still had (Catholic) religion class, and I distinctly remember in the first class it was announced that a few of us (myself included) would be going to the computer room during the time. In some cases it was because the parents didn’t want their kids in class. In my case, it was because I was ‘un protestant’. I didn’t know what that word meant, and didn’t speak French yet anyway, but I was horrified to be singled out and treated differently - I came home that day upset, and told my mom “They found out I’m a protester!”

For those of us who make up the minority denomination in our ecumenical environments, there can be a temptation to feel like the ‘other’ in some way. For me, while it hasn’t usually come to something like the story above, there is a more subtle way I experience this. I am often hyper-aware of how others are making ecumenical arrangements for us (even if they are actually being done willingly), and can feel like we’re a nuisance, an inconvenience; that things would just be easier for the majority if we weren’t here. I need to resist this - ecumenism is so important to me because in our environments (when they’re working well) our different

traditions aren't just tolerated and accommodated, but valued and cherished. My brothers and sisters from other traditions are just that: brothers and sisters. On that basis, and on the basis of our covenantal call, our life in community isn't complete without each other.

It's my joy to say that this really is my lived experience - of course there are mis-steps and unfortunate thoughtless moments, but the predominant experience is that this brotherhood is the primary foundation of our life together. And any adaptations or arrangements being made in support of this way of life are being done gladly, out of a deep, Spirit-inspired brotherly love. This allows me to engage this life - with all of its messiness - in freedom and without reservation.

I'm so grateful for this precious and unique gift. May the Lord sustain our conviction for this way of life, and bless us as we live together for him.



John is a family man, and part of the Word of Life community in Michigan

DAY 4 – January 21st

John 15: 15 “I do not call you servants any longer ... but I have called you friends”

To be called a friend of God is to be like Abraham (2 Chronicles 20:7) or Moses (Exodus 33:11) who were called friends of God. The main image of our relationship with God in the Old Testament was as servants and subjects of God, but now Christ calls us to be his friends. A servant does not know fully his master's intentions and purposes; he knows rather enough to obey. But a friend is taken into the inner planning. That Jesus calls the disciples, and us, friends is not to diminish our discipleship because in verse 14 Jesus says “You are my friends if you do my commands”, but it opens up a whole new way of relating to Him.

When I came to university in London I was very engaged in a Protestant group called the Christian Union. Unfortunately, a number of the Christians there at that time were not favorable to Catholics, and I could have been influenced by their thinking. But at the same time I was being introduced to the power of the Holy Spirit through a Life in the Spirit seminar run by UCO, and the men in UCO I found myself most impacted by were nearly all Catholics! What made the biggest difference for me was that these men showed a personal interest in me in a way that I had never before experienced from other men – they chose to make me their friend. In their church they had different ways of expressing their Christian faith than I had grown up with, but their hearts were as mine, for the Lord, and that's what mattered.



University of London Student Central

If we are to reach our call to live out ecumenical unity in the Sword of the Spirit, we need to start by making friends with those who are from different churches from us, and are different from us. Satan desires to separate us and make us enemies of one another; but Christ calls us to be friends.

PRAYER: Lord, I pray that each of us might be able to be friends with those who are different from us. Where we find that we are different and at times we don't understand one another's ways of doing things, Lord give us grace to love one another, choosing to be friends as you have chosen us as your friends.

Testimony: Efrain Calderon (Catholic) – Costa Rica

I am a Catholic Christian who belongs to Árbol de Vida, an ecumenical community in San José, Costa Rica. Since its beginning as a small group of Evangelical and Catholic university students, Árbol de Vida has for 43 years maintained both its interchurch membership, as well as its commitment to ecumenism in the Sword of the Spirit.

Why is ecumenical community so important to me? First of all, being in a covenant relationship with Christians from a church other than my own allows me to share in a relationship of mutual love and service with them, getting to know them closely, and learning to appreciate their own vision as Christians from another church. This is how we respond readily from the heart as we seek for the unity the Lord wants for all the Christian people (see John 17:22-23).

Ecumenical community gives witness to the churches that, with God's grace, it is both possible, and a great joy for Christians to overcome obstacles of division and respond to the Lord's prayer "that all may be one". It is a reminder to the Christian people that this has been God's purpose in Christ all along, and a summons for us to engage in it by seeking what unites us and not what divides us. This ecumenical attitude can grow and deepen in communities whose members belong to only one church body. Whether we are ecumenical in membership or not, the Spirit empowers us all to pray and strive towards the goal of unity in love that is part and parcel of our spirituality in the Sword of the Spirit.

As for me, being in Árbol de Vida gives me the opportunity to show gratitude often, in very personal and practical ways, for the role that not only Catholics but also many Evangelicals played in my conversion and my growth as a Christian disciple. Today, when, as a Catholic, I relate to and learn from my Evangelical brothers and sisters, I can rightfully proclaim with the psalmist "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down upon the beard, upon the beard of Aaron running down on the collar of his robes!" (Psalm 133:1-2).



Efrain is from Costa Rica, and he and his family are part of Árbol de Vida community in San Jose.

DAY 5 – January 22nd

John 15: 1-3 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

2 Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you.”

In today's passage Jesus presents an extended metaphor, the “Vine and the Branches” in which he is the vine, which produces fruit through the branches, the disciples, and the gardener is the Father. Just as the gardener prunes the branches, removing dead ones, and cutting back the fruitful ones, he gives room for the fruitful ones to be more fruitful; so our Father in heaven disciplines us that we may be more fruitful.

Part of the fruit of the Sword of the Spirit is unity in community lived out well, but for that fruit to ripen the branch needs to be pruned. I live in London, and am part of the Antioch community. We have members who are Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant. At times, each of us makes mistakes and annoys other ones of us, and so we might hear: “That was too Protestant a way of dealing with that”; or “Those prayers were done in too Catholic a way”; or “The richness of my faith is not fully expressed here”. The reality is that for all of us being part of ecumenical community means working hard for the common ground, what we all believe, and not letting our differences, real and important though they may be, separate us. And when we annoy one another accidentally, we forgive one another, and move on.

Forgiveness is at the heart of community, and it is particularly at the heart of ecumenical community. If we are going to build unity, in a one denomination community, or an ecumenical community, we have to be vigilant not to let there be a chance for grievances, or little offences, that can turn to bitterness, grow in us. They are, in the words of one Christian author, like little foxes that run around nipping at us, and if we let them, they will eat up the unity God would have for us.

PRAYER: Father in heaven, Lord God, we thank you that you prune us, that you discipline us, that we might better fulfil your purposes. We pray Lord, that we would be forgiving and generous in the way we relate to one another, and forgive all offences we commit against one another, particularly where those destroy the unity you have called us to.

Testimony: Karen Jordan (Catholic) – India and Scotland

Jesus calls us to love God and our neighbor. In my Christian journey I have always found it easy to love those who are like me, whether it be it in personality or things we have in common. I find it more challenging to love those who are different from me. Ecumenism in community presents an opportunity to meet people I would not have met otherwise. It has given me the opportunity to grow in love and understanding of other Christians. It has taught me mercy, love and forgiveness in new ways, and led me back to the Lord, and to lean on His understanding. The reward has been lifelong close relationships across the world and a new, deeper knowledge of the Lord through it. Another unexpected aspect of ecumenism which I have experienced is the strength in our unity particularly in evangelism. The love, understanding and trust shared between brothers and sisters of different denominations draws people in and allows them to feel accepted and allows for steps in their faith.

I come from a Catholic family and, as a student, lacked understanding and occasionally was even wrong about other Christians. Living in a Koinonia (UCO) student household in London with other Christian women was a major turning point in my ecumenical journey. We had our fair share of arguments, but there was lots of discussion and prayer. It set the foundation for

very strong relationships, focussing on the ties that bind us, rather than those that divide us. One of the things I learned then and still use today is “*dialogue and communication done in love*”. I’ve learned to avoid assumptions but rather communicate even when it’s the hard things. My experience is that there seems to be tremendous grace and love for all those conversations possibly because being united together we are more powerful in Gods kingdom.



Karen Jordan grew up in one of our communities in Mumbai, India, but then came to study and work in London where she met her husband Tommy. They now live with their children as part of the Community of the Risen Christ in Glasgow, Scotland.

Testimony: Michi Schoeberl (Catholic) - Germany

In his classic book “Orthodoxy”, G.K. Chesterton draws up the delightful sketch of an English yachtsman who, after a miscalculation, makes landfall on the English coast, believing it to be some uncharted island in the Southern sea. Filled with all the enthusiasm of an age of exploration, he strives to examine the wild inhabitants and their barbaric architecture – only to discover that he has in fact arrived at home.

Ecumenical life certainly has elements of embarking on an adventure into uncharted territory. Some might say it is dangerous or even suggest that one might be lost. And yet experiences abound in which our life mirrors Chesterton’s explorer – of finding home in supposedly foreign waters.

For one, the confrontation with other viewpoints forces us to engage our own convictions at a level not otherwise required. As John Stuart Mill noted, “He who knows only his side of the case knows little of that.” I have often found our teaching institutes benefit from the precision with which Christian truths are stated because of the awareness of ecumenical differences, and this has helped me in my understanding of my own tradition.

But no doubt the primary way we find home away from home is when we “examine the inhabitants” of other traditions. My own experience of other Christians has been of men and women who “have seen the Lord”. And just as shared experience with our family members builds a common identity, so it does with members of other traditions, who we cannot but recognize as brothers and sisters. Despite the mystery of our differences, they are our true family and those with whom we will spend eternity.

Ecumenical life may be hard work at times, but it is also a foretaste of heaven – and you cannot get any closer to home than that.



Michi is a single man who is part of the Bread of Life community based around Munich, Germany.

DAY 6 – January 23rd

John 15: 16b “Go and bear fruit, fruit that will last”

Jesus the vine, calls us, the branches, to bear fruit, fruit that will last. If we are connected to Him, and stay connected, then we will receive God’s life-giving sap, the Holy Spirit, and we will bear fruit. There are many different aspects of that fruit. However, at its most simple it is loving God, and loving other people, and in doing those two, bringing others to know Christ.

Sometimes, living in community, we can forget how counter cultural it is to love people who are different from us. In London, where I live, there are many, many, churches, and if you don’t like one church...well, you move on and find another. Sadly, it is also the case that when people have a significant disagreement with someone else in their own church they sometimes leave, and find another church. In community we have chosen to work out our differences, because we are committed to one another, and in working things out, we love one another, and witness to the love of God for us, and His love for those around us.

In John chapter 13 Jesus makes this point exactly. He says “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35). One of the most common excuses I have heard people use for not believing is because “you Catholics and Protestants and Orthodox, you are all disagreeing and fighting...so why should I believe”. We may be different, and we may have things that we don’t fully understand in each other, but in community we can really love one another. That speaks volumes.

When I first got involved in the Sword of the Spirit in the 1980s I was particularly impressed by two communities, one in Belfast, Northern Ireland, which was Protestant and Catholic, and one in Johannesburg, South Africa, which was not only Protestant and Catholic, but also made up of people from different racial backgrounds. In the 1980s both Belfast and Johannesburg were places of serious conflict, and to cross the boundaries as these communities did, was at times dangerous, and often not understood by other people. But to me, a young student in London, their willingness to love across the boundaries spoke powerfully, and was one of the key reasons I joined the Sword of the Spirit.

PRAYER: Lord, we pray that we might have unity that others might believe. Lord we pray for the unity of your people, despite all our differences and divisions, particularly the divisions between our churches. Give us greater love for one another that we might be united, and witness to the love you have for us and all people.

Testimony: Christiane Lewerentz (Protestant) & Monse Arellano (Catholic) – from Germany and Ecuador, but now in Northern Ireland

Over this past year, we have discovered great joy in living and serving together as Bethany sisters from two different Christian traditions and cultures, but who share the call to live single for the Lord and the call to Christian unity.

Growing up a charismatic Christian from a Lutheran missionary background, I, Christiane, always experienced the Christian life expressed in committed community and radical discipleship. The most important reason for my choice to join the Sword of the Spirit, even though it is predominantly Catholic, was, and is still, its call to Christian unity. Most of my friends in school were atheists, and whilst they were intrigued to hear about God’s love, they were also quick to point out how the lack of love and unity between Christians made the Gospel story a lot less credible. My heart’s desire has been to be part of a more credible witness, through living ecumenical community, showing that God’s love in Christ is real and dependable.

I, Monse, grew up in a Catholic Sword of the Spirit community in Ecuador. I always knew that part of our calling in the Sword of the Spirit was to be a witness to Christian unity, but only now living in Belfast, do I feel I'm practically living out that call. The most important discovery for me has been that we are sisters and brothers in the same family, and we are finding ways to practically make that real, day to day, in the way we relate to one another, and how we show interest in one another's traditions.

We, Chris and Monse, have experienced how discovering one another's spirituality has strengthened us in our own. We experience love in the sometimes painful sacrifices we make for each other, and encouragement in exploring our churches' work towards unity. In sharing about our traditions, we enrich and complement each other in our walk with Christ, because of the different ways we grew up to relate to God, to our churches and to scripture. We experience greater spiritual authority when we stand united in prayer. The pain of not being in full communion, of not always being understood, and of past hurts has drawn us into a greater zeal to love one another. Sharing life has meant re-discovering our call in the SoS to be a visible and credible witness together of the kingdom of God.



Christiane and Monse are both single women who are part of the Bethany Association of women living single for the Lord. They are living together in Belfast, Northern Ireland

DAY 7 – January 24th

John 15: 5 “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

The metaphor of the vine and the branches says to us that we have to stay connected (“abide”) to the Lord if we are to bear fruit. Why would we not stay connected? The reality is that Satan is constantly trying to distract us, pulling us away from that connectedness to Christ that will allow us to bear fruit. If God has made the Sword of the Spirit to be ecumenical, and in that, called to bear fruit, then Satan is going to do everything he can to make that hard.

As I have travelled around the world and visited many of our communities, I have heard people say, how hard trying to be ecumenical can be. Of course many of our communities are constituted as one denomination communities, and in that context being ecumenical means something different from what it means for other communities. But since Christ puts such a high focus on the unity of Christians, we should not relax our resolve to do our part, persevering in building relationships with those who are in Christ, but different from us, and, where we can, welcoming them into our midst.

When I was a student I joined a summer household linked to the Antioch community in London. There were, I think, ten of us, and we were Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. One evening, we were just playing around, singing some of the songs we had been learning. We started to sing a song which uses the words of Psalm 133. It goes “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head of Aaron, it is like...” and the Psalmist then gives a series of images that tell of the beauty of being united. We sang the song through once - it is very short - and then repeated it, and as we did something happened that I have never seen happen again: we went into spontaneous four-part harmony! It was totally beautiful, and totally of the Holy Spirit, for none of us could have sung like that naturally. That day the Lord convinced me of his desire that we might be united across our churches, and of how good it is in his eyes.

PRAYER: Lord, be gracious to us in the Sword of the Spirit as we seek to live out this special gift you have given us to be ecumenical. Allow us to persevere in it when we find it hard, and when we do not know how to move forward. Lord we pray that all of us would know the part that we should play in the building of your kingdom through unity.

Testimony: Andrew Lee (Catholic) - Singapore

Before I encountered the community in Ann Arbor, Michigan while I was studying, I was really only living a nominal Catholic life, and going to Mass on Sunday was my only Christian activity. The experience with the community completely changed my life, and gave me a renewed faith, and desire to share it with others.

There were a few of us students from Singapore who had the same experience of “conversion” in Ann Arbor, so when we went home we set up the Servants of the Lord community to provide a “Lively Christian Environment” for people who were seeking a committed relational way to live out their Christian Faith.

I also believe that God has given our community a special mission in Singapore.

From the very beginning, we have brothers and sisters from various Christian traditions gathering to worship together. This is not common in Singapore, as deep divisions exist between Christian denominations.

I felt that this lack of unity severely limited our ability as Christians to share the gospel with our non-Christian friends. They did not understand why there were so many different denominations, when all of us professed that we were followers of Jesus Christ. They were surprised to find, that even as we shared Christ's message of love with them, we had many areas of disagreement.

In light of this, I believe God has given the Servants of the Lord a special mission to promote Christian unity in Singapore, since our members are from several different Christian denominations, who worship God, and strive to love and support one another as one extended family of God's beloved children. This is as we continue to remain faithful to the teaching and practice of our own churches, and are active members of them. We believe this grassroots unity of love lived in a deliberate, committed relationship with one another, despite our various churches' doctrinal differences, is part of the answer to Christ's prayer that all may be 'One', as He had prayed on the eve of His sacrifice as set out in John 17. Christian unity is not only possible but is already a concrete reality in our community in Singapore.



Andrew Lee is a family man, and part of the Servants of the Lord community in Singapore

DAY 8 – January 25th

John 15: 11 “So that my joy may be in you, and your joy complete”

Jesus never does things in half-measures. When it comes to joy he wants our joy to be complete. Nothing missing. Our verse reads, “that your joy may be complete”. Sometimes it’s translated “that your joy may be full.” This reminds me of the image of the man in the sixth chapter of St Luke who, for his generosity, is given a “good measure” from God, “pressed down, shaken together and flowing over.” This joy is testified to by the Holy Spirit, of whose presence joy is the unmistakable sign. It is the joy of Christ himself that is poured into us by that same Spirit. For the person who has encountered the Lord, the joy of Jesus is visible and palpable. Many times we’ve heard about a visitor to one of our community prayer meetings being overwhelmed by the joy they witnessed.

This is the joy I experienced in an early encounter with the Charismatic Renewal. In 1978 I was attending my first Charismatic conference in Atlantic City, New Jersey. When I entered the convention center I heard, then felt, then saw more than 25,000 people in exuberant joy. I, too, was stunned. In time I came to experience this same joy as a regular component of the prayer meetings of the People of Hope and of my brothers in the Brotherhood of Hope. What became clear to me is that this joy is a fruit of unity which the Holy Spirit. We had a common desire to know, love and serve the Lord and he validated that desire with his gift of supernatural joy. What I witnessed was a community of people committed to following the Lord Jesus and to find ways to live his command to love one another. It is a pattern I have seen repeated in many of the communities I have visited over the years.

When I first met the men who were forming the Brotherhood of Hope I was really impressed with both how normal they were - basic, well-grounded men who loved God - and were filled with a compelling and authentic joy.

We are called to live this joy confidently, freely and generously! When we do, we enable others to encounter the Author of joy so that their ‘joy may be complete.’

PRAYER: Lord Jesus you promised to make our joy complete. Please send your Holy Spirit on us this week so that through the outpouring of that same Spirit your joy may be fulfilled in us and our unity deepened. Through us may others come to know your love and perfect joy.

Testimony: Salim Baz (Orthodox) – Lebanon

Whenever I am asked why I chose to make a commitment to the Sword of the Spirit, I say that one of the main reasons, if not the main reason, is its ecumenical dimension. Being in community with Christians from other churches has been extremely valuable to me in my growth as a disciple, not only in general, but also as a member of the Orthodox Church. There are two main reasons for this. First, as a committed member of the ecumenical People of God community in Beirut, it was imperative that I got to know the Orthodox Church in a deeper way, its history, catechism and theology. Second, on a more practical level, I was spurred to take on a more active role in the life of my parish, than had been the case before.

Being part of an ecumenical community, does not, unfortunately, erase the differences between my Church denomination and others. Quite the opposite: I found that, once I started living with Christians from other denominations in a tightly knit community, I became more aware of these differences. One particular (and perhaps trivial) difference is that the Orthodox uses a different liturgical calendar from the one used by Catholics and Protestants. This means that we often don’t get to celebrate the main feasts, particularly Easter and Pentecost,

together. This has been a very painful experience for me. Having said this, being part of an ecumenical community has significantly broadened my horizons, and expanded my heart and my capacity to love and serve with brothers and sisters from different traditions, despite the differences that separate our denominations. I find that to love each other, and to do mission together, despite our differences, is very humbling, and a great testimony to others of the wonderful love of Christ. It is my firm belief that nothing but Christ's love can join us, and keep us, together as a community. This "unity-despite-the-fault-lines" aspect of ecumenical community is very important to me.



Salim is a married man, and part of the People of God community based in Beirut, Lebanon.

Prayer for the Lord's Day

This prayer may be used after the Blessing of the Wine, similar to the seasonal variations in the Lord's Day Opening Ceremony.

Leader: Let us thank Him this day especially for the unity we enjoy in the Body of Christ and for our call to ecumenical life in the Sword of the Spirit. May we all become perfectly one, so that the world may know and believe. Lord our God, You are bringing us into the fullness of unity through the work of Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Group: Now we live with Him through the Holy Spirit, and we look for the day when we will dwell with Him in Your everlasting kingdom.



The Sword of the Spirit
Communities of Disciples on Mission

