



*The Good Samaritan, Eugène Delacroix, 1849*

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

**January 18-25, 2024**

*You shall love the Lord your God ...  
and your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27)*

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Psalms are according to the Hebrew numbering.

## **Dear brothers and sisters:**

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an important week for us as we seek to live more fully our ecumenical call in the Sword of the Spirit. Each year the Lord uses it in powerful ways in our communities around the world, and I am confident that that will be the case this year as well.

Each year the team who puts together the Sword of the Spirit prayer booklet for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, work with the materials provided by the World Council of Churches in conjunction with the Vatican. This year those materials were put together by an ecumenical working group from Burkina Faso which was facilitated by the local Chemin Neuf Community, and they focus on the foundational theme “You shall love the Lord your God...and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27 RSV). The Sword of the Spirit team this year have added testimonies from different members of our communities around the world where we have been involved in ecumenical collaboration, adding intercessory prayers that reflect our particular Sword of the Spirit ecumenical concerns.

The testimonies not only illustrate examples of our desire to work ecumenically wherever we have opportunity, but also that we do this in a collaborative way, working with other Christians wherever we can, “spreading our tent pegs” so to speak, to embrace in love all those the Lord leads us to serve and work with.

May I encourage you to enter into the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in whatever way you can. Let us pray the closing prayer each day, as a way to lift to the Lord our desire in the SOS for Christian unity, that together we might “love God...and our neighbor as ourselves” and so see the Kingdom come.

Jean Barbara  
President, The Sword of the Spirit

## **Biblical Text for 2024**

Luke 10:25-37 (RSV)

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered right; do this, and you will live."

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

# Day 1: Thursday, January 18, 2024

## Scripture Passages

Luke 10:25 (RSV) A lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

*Help us, Lord, to have a life turned towards you.*

Romans 14:8-9 (NET) If we live, we live for the Lord; if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For this reason Christ died and returned to life, so that he may be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

Psalms 103:13-18 (NET) As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on his faithful followers. For he knows what we are made of; he realizes we are made of clay. A person's life is like grass. Like a flower in the field it flourishes, but when the hot wind blows, it disappears, and one can no longer even spot the place where it once grew. But the Lord continually shows loyal love to his faithful followers and is faithful to their descendants, to those who keep his covenant, who are careful to obey his commands.

## Reflection

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" This crucial question asked of Jesus by a lawyer challenges every believer in God. It affects the meaning of our life on earth and for eternity. Elsewhere in the Bible, Jesus gives us the ultimate definition of eternal life: "...that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Knowing God means discovering and doing his will in our lives. Every person wants a life of fullness and truth, and God desires this for us too (cf. John 10:10). Saint Irenaeus said, "The glory of God is a human being fully alive."

The existential realities of life, with divisions, selfishness, and suffering, often distance us from the quest for God. Jesus lived the mystery of intimate communion with the Father, who desires to fill all his children with the fullness of his eternal life. Jesus is "the Way" that leads us to the Father, our ultimate destiny.

Thus, our quest for eternal life brings us closer to Jesus, and in so doing brings us nearer to each other, strengthening our closeness on the path toward Christian unity. Let us be open to friendship and collaboration with Christians of all churches, praying for the day when we can all stand together at the Table of the Lord.

## **Prayer**

God of life, You have created us to have life, and life in all its fullness. May we recognize in our brothers and sisters their desire for eternal life. As we follow Jesus' way with determination, may we lead others to you. We pray in his name. Amen.

## **West London Walk of Witness**

By a member of the Antioch Community, London, England

On the last Wednesday of September, about 12 of us gathered in Saint Dunstan's Anglican Church Hall. It was our annual planning meeting for the events we would do in 2023-24 as Christians from 10 different churches and communities across Acton. We spoke about combined carol singing, the week of prayer for Christian unity, and our AGM and testimony event. But the most important event, which has been on-going for 40 years, is our Good Friday walk of witness.

Each Good Friday, we gather about half a mile from the centre of Acton singing, and handing out crosses as we wait to start. Then, led by an eight-foot cross carried by two young men, we walk up the main street (the High Street we call it) with stewards holding back the traffic (since we take up one side of the street), and as helpful handing out chocolate eggs to pacify delayed drivers and hungry kids. At the Roman Catholic Church, the mid-morning mass is finishing as the walk passes, and usually about 100 Catholics join at that point, adding to the maybe 300 already on the walk. Most of the shop owners in our area are either Muslim or Hindu, and they nearly always smile, and encourage us from their High Street shops as we flaunt our faith to the world around us.

After about 10 minutes we reach the old marketplace of Acton, in front of the historic parish church, and outside the entrance to a big supermarket that is bustling with Easter shoppers. There we gather, whatever the weather, for a common service of prayer, word, and worship. We are just a mixed bag of Christians, but there in unity in celebrating together the wonder of our Lord's sacrifice for us. The walk of witness is undoubtedly the highlight of Acton's ecumenical year.

## Day 2, Friday, January 19, 2024

### Scripture Passages

Luke 10:27 (RSV) The lawyer answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”

*Help me Lord to love you, my neighbor, and myself with all that I am.*

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 (NET) Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you except to revere him, to obey all his commandments, to love him, to serve him with all your mind and being, and to keep the Lord’s commandments and statutes that I am giving you today for your own good?

Psalms 133 (NET) Look! How good and how pleasant it is when brothers truly live in unity. It is like fine oil poured on the head, which flows down the beard—Aaron’s beard, and then flows down his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, which flows down upon the hills of Zion. Indeed, that is where the Lord has decreed a blessing will be available—eternal life.

### Reflection

The lawyer’s answer may seem simple, drawn from the well-known commandments of God. However, to love God in this way and our neighbor as ourselves can often be difficult.

God’s commandment to love him requires deep commitment and means abandoning ourselves entirely, offering our hearts and minds to serve God’s will. We can ask for the grace to follow Christ’s example, he who offered himself up completely and said, “Not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42 RSV). He also manifested his great love to all, including his enemies. We do not get to choose our neighbors. Loving them means being attentive to their needs, accepting their imperfections and encouraging their hopes and aspirations. The same attitude is needed on the path of Christian unity, with regard to one another’s different traditions.

The call to love your neighbor “as yourself” reminds us of the need to accept ourselves as we are, conscious of God’s compassionate gaze upon us, always ready to forgive. Consider that we are God’s beloved creation. Respect yourself. Seek peace with yourself. Similarly, we can each ask for the grace to love and accept our own church or community, with its failings, entrusting all things to the Father, who restores us through the Holy Spirit.

## Prayer

Lord, give us the grace to know you more deeply, in order to love you with all of our being. Grant us a pure heart, to love our neighbor as ourselves. May the gift of your Holy Spirit enable us to see your presence in our sisters and brothers, that we may love each other with the same unconditional love with which you love us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Power from on High Community, Lima, Peru



*Power from on High Community*

By Giovanni Castillo

There are not many of us in my community. There are 16 of us with an Initial Covenant Commitment and most of us have had an openness to approaching non-Catholic brothers and sisters for several reasons. One of them is that when we began our journey in the Lord within the Catholic

Charismatic Renewal there was not much Catholic charismatic material available. We were doing well doctrinally, but we wanted to be nourished by that amazing experience of the Holy Spirit. We are talking about the early 1980s. At that time we were greatly nourished, as an emerging group before belonging to the SOS, by Protestant materials. This led us to develop an affection and respect for what non-Catholic brothers and sisters could contribute to our growth, because they helped us strongly to maintain ourselves in that dimension of the Spirit.

Around 2011, I had a meeting with a Pentecostal Pastor, who proposed to have an encounter between Catholics and Evangelicals. Unfortunately, it was not until 2018 when we began to meet as a small group of Catholic and Evangelical brethren. There were two Pentecostals, one Catholic priest and three Catholic lay leaders. We would meet to pray together and share our experiences. This was so enriching that we wanted to do something even bigger. So it was that in 2019 we organized an ecumenical gathering at Pentecost attended by Catholics, Evangelicals, Lutherans, Anglicans, and a Catholic priest. We called this event "Together Again." It was a beautiful experience. During the pandemic we organized a virtual event and in 2021 we participated



in an event in Brazil. As a result of this interaction, a small group called "Pentecost Fraternity" emerged, because we understand that Pentecost is the starting point where the Church and this charismatic experience were born.

We thank the Lord for having laid in the foundations of our community such a great love for Christian unity.

## **Day 3, Saturday, January 20, 2024**

### **Scripture Passages**

Luke 10:29 (RSV) "Who is my neighbor?"

*Lord, open our hearts to those we do not see.*

Romans 13:8-10 (NET) Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not covet," (and if there is any other commandment) are summed up in this, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Psalms 119:57-63 (NET) The Lord is my source of security. I have determined to follow your instructions. I seek your favor with all my heart. Have mercy on me as you promised. I consider my actions and follow your rules. I keep your commands eagerly and without delay. The ropes of the wicked tighten around me, but I do not forget your law. In the middle of the night I arise to thank you for your just regulations. I am a friend to all your loyal followers and to those who keep your precepts.

### **Reflection**

The teacher of the law wanted to justify himself, hoping that the neighbor he is called to love is one of his own faith and people. This is a natural human instinct. When we invite people to our homes, they are quite often people who share our social status, our outlook on life and our values. There is a human instinct to prefer places of familiarity. This is also true of our ecclesial communities. But Jesus takes the lawyer, and his wider audience, deeper into their own tradition by reminding them of the obligation to welcome and to love all, regardless of religion, culture, or social status.

The Gospel teaches that loving those who are like ourselves is not extraordinary. Jesus steers us towards a radical vision of what it means

to be human. The parable illustrates in a very visible way what Christ expects from us – to open wide our hearts and walk in his way, loving others as he loves us. In fact, Jesus answers the lawyer with another question: it is not “who is my neighbor,” but, “who proved to be a neighbor to the man in need?”

Our times of insecurity and fear confront us with a reality where distrust and uncertainty come to the forefront of relationships. This is the challenge of the parable today: to whom am I a neighbor?

### **Prayer**

God of love, you who write love in our hearts, instill in us the courage to look beyond ourselves and see the neighbor in those different from ourselves, that we may truly follow Jesus Christ, our brother and our friend, who is Lord, for ever and ever. Amen.

## **Lord’s Day Prayer for the Week of Prayer**

**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.

## **Day 4, Sunday, January 21, 2024**

### **Scripture Passages**

Luke 10:31 (RSV) When he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

*May we never turn away from those in need.*

Isaiah 58:6-9a (NET) No, this is the kind of fast I want: I want you to remove the sinful chains, to tear away the ropes of the burdensome yoke, to set free the oppressed, and to break every burdensome yoke. I want you to share your food with the hungry and to provide shelter for homeless, oppressed people. When you see someone naked, clothe them! Don’t turn your back on your own flesh and blood. Then your light will shine like the sunrise; your restoration will quickly arrive; your godly behavior will go before you, and the Lord’s splendor will be your rear guard. Then you will call out, and the Lord will respond.

Psalm 34:15-22 (NET) The Lord pays attention to the godly and hears their cry for help. But the Lord opposes evildoers and wipes out all memory of them from the earth. The godly cry out and the Lord hears; he saves them from all their troubles. The Lord is near the brokenhearted; he delivers those who are discouraged. The godly face many dangers, but the Lord saves them from each one of them. He protects all his bones; not one of them is broken. Evil people self-destruct; those who hate the godly are punished. The Lord rescues his servants; all who take shelter in him escape punishment.

### **Reflection**

The priest and Levite who walk by on the other side may have had good religious reasons for not helping: they may have been ready to perform certain religious rituals and might have risked ritual defilement if the man had been dead. Yet on many occasions, Jesus is critical of religious leadership for placing the rules of religion ahead of the obligation to always do good.

The beginning of the text for the Week of Prayer tells us how the teacher of the law wanted to justify himself. The priest and the Levite in the parable would have felt justified in what they had done. As Christians, how far are we prepared to go beyond convention? Sometimes our ecclesial and culturally conditioned short-sightedness can prevent us from seeing what is being revealed by the life and witness of sisters and brothers of other Christian traditions. When we open our eyes to see how God's love is revealed by our fellow Christians, we are drawn closer to them and so are drawn into deeper union with them.

This parable of Jesus not only challenges us to do good, but also to widen our vision. We do not only learn what is good and holy from those who share our confessional or religious worldview, but often from those different from ourselves. The Good Samaritan is often the one we do not expect.

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ, as we journey with you towards unity, may our eyes not look away, but be wide open to the world. As we travel through life, may we stop and reach out, bind up the wounded and in so doing experience your presence in them: you who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

## Vasai/Mumbai Ecumenical Intercession



*Romeo Fernando*

By the SOS Ecumenical Commission

In November we spoke with Romeo Fernando, the founder of the Community of the Good Shepherd in Vasai, India. The community came out of a prayer group of 1500 people, started 35 years ago. Although the community is all Roman Catholics, right at its inception the prayer group and community were introduced to a ministry of intercession through an American Protestant couple. This led to a long-term intercessory mission, involving many different Protestant along with Roman Catholic community members and clergy. Now the intercession ministry, under the name “International Intercessors for Church and Nation” has a powerful role in praying though the year for key issues in India, with a focused time in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

In India there is a history of mistrust between Roman Catholics and Protestants, so we asked Romeo what were the key things that made this ecumenical venture successful, particularly at the beginning. Romeo’s response was emphatic: friendship, friendship, friendship! Romeo explained that he had taken time to get to know, and be known by, key Protestant leaders, because in knowing one another, and knowing one another’s testimony, we see more clearly Christ in one another.

Secondly, he added that he had chosen not to take offense easily if people, through misunderstanding, said something negative about Catholics; many of the Protestants in India don’t know much about Catholics, and particularly that Catholics also love the Bible!

So, is there fruit from this ecumenical intercession ministry? There is much! First of all, there is the fruit that comes from targeted intercessory prayer, that Romeo insists was more powerful because it was being prayed by Protestants and Catholics together in unity. Secondly, this intercession has given a door for not just community members, but also priests and others, to get to know Protestants, and become firm friends in Christ, because they realize in this that we are all one in Christ.

## Day 5, Monday, January 22, 2024

### Scripture Passages

Luke 10:34 (RSV) He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them.

*Lord, help us see the wounds and find hope.*

Joel 2:23-27 (NET) Citizens of Zion, rejoice! Be glad because of what the Lord your God has done! For he has given to you the early rains as vindication. He has sent to you the rains—both the early and the late rains as formerly. The threshing floors are full of grain; the vats overflow with fresh wine and olive oil. I will make up for the years that the (swarming) locust consumed your crops—the (hopper), the (destroyer), and the (cutter)—my great army that I sent against you. You will have plenty to eat, and your hunger will be fully satisfied; you will praise the name of the Lord your God, who has acted wondrously in your behalf. My people will never again be put to shame. You will be convinced that I am in the midst of Israel. I am the Lord your God; there is no other. My people will never again be put to shame.

Psalms 104:14-15, 27-30 (NET) He provides grass for the cattle and crops for people to cultivate, so they can produce food from the ground as well as wine that makes people glad, and olive oil to make their faces shine as well as bread that sustains them....All your creatures wait for you to provide them with food on a regular basis. You give food to them and they receive it; you open your hand and they are filled with food. When you ignore them, they panic. When you take away their life's breath, they die and return to dust. When you send your life-giving breath, they are created, and you replenish the surface of the ground.

### Reflection

The Good Samaritan did what he could out of his own resources: he poured wine and oil and bandaged the man's wounds and put him on his own animal. He went further still by promising to pay for his care. When we see the world through the Samaritan's eyes, every situation can be an opportunity to help those in need. This is where love manifests itself. The example of the Good Samaritan motivates us to ask ourselves how to respond to our neighbor. He gave wine and oil, restoring the man and giving him hope. What can we give, so that we can be a part of God's work of healing a broken world?

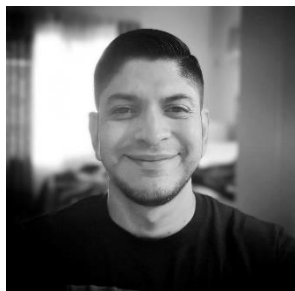
This brokenness shows itself in our world in insecurity, fear, distrust, and division. Shamefully, these divisions also exist between Christians.

Though we celebrate sacraments or other rituals of healing, reconciliation, and consolation, often using oil and wine, we persist in divisions that wound the Body of Christ. The healing of our Christian divisions promotes the healing of the nations.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, You who are the source of all love and goodness: enable us to see the needs of our neighbor. Show us what we can do to bring about healing. Change us, so that we can love all our brothers and sisters. Help us to overcome the obstacles of division, that we might build a world of peace for the common good. Thank you for renewing your Creation and leading us to a future which is full of hope: you who are Lord of all, yesterday, today, and forever. Amen.

## **Christian Unity in Honduras**



*Ramon Garcia*

By Ramon Garcia, Fortaleza de Dios

Christian unity has been a dream of God manifested very clearly in the priestly prayer of Jesus Christ. I cannot clearly remember at what moment that deep longing of God was deposited in my heart, but I can assure you that since then, it has been something for which I pray daily.

In Fortaleza de Dios, San Pedro Sula, Honduras, we have been returning to the journey towards an ecumenism of the heart. Some very pleasant memories I have are experiences in which, with the University Outreach (MCU) and some older teenagers, we went to Evangelical Churches with few young people, to perform skits, concerts and even to offer our services in prayer services. These were experiences that enriched the vision of “unity” to which Christ referred when He asked, “Father, that they may be one.” Although we were not always received in the best way, knowing that we were Catholic, it was a way of allowing our evangelical brothers and sisters to get to know us and strengthen our fraternal bonds.

We are praying strongly that opportunities like this will open up again so that we can lift a beacon of unity in a world immersed in a thick darkness of division.

## Day 6, Tuesday, January 23, 2024

### Scripture Passages

Luke 10:34 (RSV) Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

*Lord, turn our communities into 'inns,' to welcome those in need.*

Genesis 18:3-5 (NET) He said, "My lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by and leave your servant. Let a little water be brought so that you may all wash your feet and rest under the tree. And let me get a bit of food so that you may refresh yourselves since you have passed by your servant's home. After that you may be on your way." "All right," they replied, "you may do as you say."

Psalms 5:11-12 (NET) But may all who take shelter in you be happy. May they continually shout for joy. Shelter them so that those who are loyal to you may rejoice. Certainly you reward the godly, Lord. Like a shield you protect them in your good favor.

### Reflection

The man who fell into the hands of robbers was cared for by a Samaritan. The Samaritan saw beyond prejudice or bias. He saw someone in need and brought him to an inn. "The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend'" (Luke 10:35 (RSV)).

In any human society, hospitality and solidarity are essential. They require the welcoming of strangers, foreigners, migrants, and homeless people. However, when faced with insecurity, suspicion, and violence, we tend to mistrust our neighbors. Hospitality is an important witness to the Gospel, particularly in contexts of religious and cultural pluralism. Welcoming 'the other,' and being welcomed in turn, is at the heart of ecumenical dialogue. Christians are challenged to turn our communities into inns where our neighbors can find Christ. Such hospitality is a sign of the love that our communities have for one another and for all.

When we as followers of Christ move beyond our confessional traditions and choose to practice ecumenical hospitality, we move from being strangers to being neighbors.

## **Prayer**

Father of love, in Jesus, you showed us the meaning of hospitality, by caring for our fragile humanity. Help us to become a community that welcomes those who feel abandoned and lost, building a house where all are welcome. May we come closer to one another as we offer the world your unconditional love. This we pray in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Day 7, Wednesday, January 24, 2024**

### **Scripture Passages**

Luke 10:36 (RSV) Jesus said: "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor?"

*Lord, show us how to respond to our neighbor.*

Philippians 2:1-5 (NET) If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort provided by love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any affection or mercy, complete my joy and be of the same mind, by having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one purpose. Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat one another as more important than yourself. Each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but about the interests of others as well. You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had.

Psalms 10:17-18 (NET) Lord, you have heard the request of the oppressed; you make them feel secure because you listen to their prayer. You defend the fatherless and oppressed, so that mere mortals may no longer terrorize them.

### **Reflection**

At the end of the parable, Jesus asked the lawyer: who was the neighbor to the man victimized? The lawyer replied, "the one who showed him mercy." He does not say "the Samaritan" and we might imagine that the hostility between Samaritans and Jews made that answer hard to admit. We often discover neighbors in the most unexpected people, even those whose very name or origins we find difficult to utter. In today's world, where polarized politics often set those of different religious identities against one another, Jesus challenges us through this parable to see the importance of our vocation to cross borders and walls of separation.



As with the lawyer, we are challenged to reflect upon how we live our lives, not merely in terms of whether we do good or not, but whether, like the priest and the Levite, we are neglecting to act mercifully.

### **Prayer**

Holy God, your Son Jesus Christ came among us to show us the way of compassion. Help us by your Spirit to follow his example, to serve the needs of all your children, and so give united Christian witness to your ways of love and mercy. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **An Encouraging Friendship**



*Br. Parker and Michael*

Br. Parker Jordan, Brotherhood of Hope

One of the great blessings of serving in college campus ministry has been the fruitful relationships that have grown with ministers from other Christian traditions. In particular, I have been very blessed by an emerging friendship with Young Life. Young Life is a global missionary organization with a mission "To introduce adolescents to Jesus

Christ and help them grow in their faith." They are an ecumenical organization who have been growing in a desire to partner with the Catholic Church in order to reach every kid for Jesus. As a Catholic religious brother, I have found it deeply heartwarming to have been so warmly welcomed by so many Young Life staffers and volunteers.

This summer I was invited to attend the Young Life summer camp, Timberwolf Lake in Northern Michigan. My friend, Michael Havercamp, who is the Director for the Young Life Catholic Relations office, invited me and was a generous host. Every staffer and volunteer I met received me and took interest in my life, asking me questions and were authentically curious. Most people today have never met Catholic religious brothers and very few even know what questions to ask - our life kind of blows everyone's categories! One camp staffer didn't let his ignorance become an obstacle and asked me innocently, "So your name is Brother Parker. I'm just curious, is 'Brother' your first name?" We laughed and enjoyed each other's company. That week of camp was a tangible experience of God's love. I saw nearly 500 high schoolers open

up their hearts and hear the Gospel message. It renewed my hope for reaching the next generation of youth.

In response to this growing friendship, I and another Brother decided to attend the Young Life Catholic Relations conference in Notre Dame this past October. There were over 200 Catholics and Protestants praying together, building relationships, and seeking to partner together for the sake of reaching youth for Jesus. I was very inspired by what I saw and it left me excited and passionate for what can happen when we seek to be united on mission together for reaching a lost generation. Some of the people at this conference worked officially for the Catholic Church, some of them work for Young Life and both are seeking to be on mission together to reach youth for Jesus. May the Holy Spirit continue to guide and bless the efforts of Young Life and give us all a common heart and mind for reaching the next generation of youth with the love of Jesus.

## **Day 8, Thursday, January 25, 2024**

### **Scripture Passages**

Luke 10:37 (RSV) Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

*Lord, may our fellowship be a sign of your Kingdom.*

Romans 12:9-13 (NET) Love must be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil, cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another with mutual love, showing eagerness in honoring one another. Do not lag in zeal, be enthusiastic in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in suffering, persist in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, pursue hospitality.

Psalms 41:1-2 (NET) How blessed is the one who treats the poor properly. When trouble comes, may the Lord deliver him. May the Lord protect him and save his life. May he be blessed in the land. Do not turn him over to his enemies.

### **Reflection**

Through these words, "Go and do likewise," Jesus sends each of us, and each of our communities, to live out his commandment to love. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, we are sent out to be "other Christs," reaching out to suffering humanity in compassion and mercy. Like the Good Samaritan towards the injured man, we can choose not to reject those who are different, but instead cultivate a culture of proximity and goodwill.

How does Jesus' invitation to "Go and do likewise" speak to my life? What does this call of Christ imply for my relationships with members of other church traditions? How can we charitably bear witness together to God's love? As ambassadors for Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:20), we are called to be reconciled to God and to one another, for fellowship to take root and grow in our communities and in areas affected by inter-communal conflict.

As mutual trust and confidence increase, we will become more willing to reveal our wounds, including ecclesial wounds, that Christ's love may visit and heal us through each other's love and care. Striving together for Christian unity helps rebuild relationships, so that violence can give way to solidarity and peace.

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, who makes us more open to each other, resolves conflict, and strengthens our bonds of communion. May we grow in mutual affection and in the desire to announce the Gospel message more faithfully, that the world may come together in unity and welcome the Prince of Peace. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The **Sword**  
of the **Spirit** 

**Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**

January 18-25, 2024