

Universal Day of Prayer for Students 2009

First celebrated in 1898, this year the UDPS is observed on or around February 15th. In line with WSCF's theme for 2009 the UDPS theme is 'Identity, Diversity and Dialogue'. WSCF's Middle East Regional Office prepared the 2009 UDPS.

Context and theme: Identity- Diversity – Dialogue

Identity is classified as an individual's personal identity, social identity or ethnic identity

Personal identity is the way in which a person defines themselves in terms of their individuality and difference to others. This might include factors such as age, gender, nationality, culture, religious affiliation, disability, sexuality, interests, talents, personality traits, and family and friendship networks. The way in which a person sees themselves in relation to those around them, and what makes them unique, are all aspects of personal identity.

Part of our personal identity is given to us at birth, such as gender, nationality and genetic history. Other aspects of our personal identity are formed during our early years of development and continue to develop during our life as we grow, mature, make choices and forge relationships.

Social identity is how we function within many different social situations and relate to a range of people. Social groups may involve family, ethnic communities, cultural connections, nationality, friends and work. They are an important and valued part of our daily life. How we see ourselves in relation to our social groupings defines our social identity.

Children who have been separated from their family or country of origin may become confused about their personal and social identities. They may have experienced a number of moves, been cared for by different people in different places, lost important contacts and relationships from their past, been separated from family, friends and their ethnic and cultural networks.

Feeling or being made to feel different is a major issue for children who have been adopted, particularly for children from diverse cultural backgrounds or with a disability. For the adopted child, the stigma of not living with their birth family, living as a cultural or ethnic minority and becoming accustomed to what it means to be adopted are lifelong adjustments.

Ethnic identity refers to a person's sense of belonging to an ethnic group. Ethnic identity is drawn from the realization that a person's thoughts, perceptions, feelings and behaviors are consistent with those of other members of the ethnic group. Ethnic identity recognizes that a person belongs to a particular group that shares not only ethnicity but common cultural practices.

“ One of the most characteristic...ways of evading the identity problem is conformism, running with the herd, the refusal of solitude, flight from loneliness. This exists even in monasteries and can create a serious problem if, for renunciation and inner solitude, it tries to substitute a false atmosphere of collective euphoria and corrupt our cenobitic (monastic) life with a vapid 'togetherness'. Togetherness is not 'community'. To love our brother we must first respect him in his own authentic personal reality, and we cannot do this if we have not attained a basic self-respect and mature identity ourselves. Are our efforts to be more 'communal' and to be more of a 'family' really genuine or are they only new ways to be intolerant of the solitude and integrity of the individual person? Are we simply trying to submerge and absorb him, and keep him from finding an identity that might express itself in dissent and in a desire for greater solitude? Are we simply trying to guard against his entering a 'desert' of questioning and paradox that will disturb our own complacencies?

Thomas Merton OCSO

The concept of **Diversity** encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognising our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity,

gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.

"Others are the bridge to our own development. They make up what is wanting in us. They demand new insights in us, new awareness, new skills of patience and acceptance. They require us to overcome our revulsions, to risk wild trust, to take down the barriers in our lives. They teach us to let differences in so that we do not all die of the breathless white space with which we surround ourselves. They enable us to take on the heart of God for them.

Most of all, other people teach us that no one has the right to take up all the space in life. There are other ideas, other ways of doing things, other needs and desires than ours in life. It is a painful moment, this time of testing the truth of what we say we believe."

Joan Chittister OSB

Dialogue is listening and talking, hearing and being heard, it is respecting and engaging with the identity, ideas and perspectives of the other while sharing our own identity, ideas and perspectives.

"...a new kind of mind begins to come into being which is based on the development of a common meaning...people are no longer primarily in opposition, nor can they be said to be interacting, rather they are participating in this pool of common meaning, which is capable of constant development and change."

David Bohm

The Bible tells us much about the different parts of our theme:

Identity:

Isaiah 43: 1-3a, 5-7 I have called you by name
Matthew 3: 7-9 You brood of vipers
Romans 4: 16-19 Faith of Abraham
Galatians 3: 6-9 Descendants of Abraham
Heb 11:17-31 Faith of Abraham, Moses, Rahab
Revelation 2:17 A new name

Diversity:

Ezek 37:21-22 Unity of God's people
Genesis 11: 1-9 Tower of Babel
1 Cor 12: 4-11 Varieties of gifts but the same Spirit
1 Cor 12: 12-26 Just as the body is one and has many parts
Eph 2: 11-22 Christ has broken down the dividing wall
John 10:16 I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold
Acts 2: 1-13 Pentecost
Galatians 3:28 In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek

Dialogue:

Psalm 133: 1 How very good when kindred live together in unity
Micah 4: 3-5 They shall beat their swords into ploughshares
Genesis 18:1-15 Sarah and Abraham and the three men
Mark 12:13-44 Jesus in dialogue with Pharisees
Acts 17 Paul in dialogue with Jews and Greeks

Preparing for celebration of the UDPS

To prepare for this liturgy please:

1. Read the liturgy through and adapt it for use in your situation. The structure is a suggestion; different parts are optional and can be modified according to your local situation.

2. Organise the venue; in your university or college, in a church supportive of your SCM, or in the place where you usually gather with your group.

3. Brainstorm symbolic acts to illustrate the theme to be carried out during the worship.

Two examples:

A) On diversity: Each person chooses one piece from an assortment of paper of different colours (and textures). The pieces of paper will have been pre-cut into one regular interlocking shape (hexagonal, triangular, or square - not circular). Everyone is invited to think about a core aspect of their identity and to write key words or pictures on their shaped piece of paper. During this time, the leader invites people to think about what they especially and uniquely bring to the body of Christ. People then move forward and place their pieces of paper onto a large board or sheet of paper at the front. The collective pieces make a new interlocking pattern of colours, textures and words/images comprising the diverse identities of this particular gathering.

B) On identity: using the text Revelations 2: 17, 'Let anyone who has an ear to hear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers I will give a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it'.

As part of the reflection everyone is given a small white stone to hold. In silence they look at it and think about their own identity. The leader invites people to consider silently: What is your identity? What makes you unique? What are your gifts? What is known only to you and God?

The leader invites people to turn to their neighbour and discuss: How do you relate with identities other than your own? How can we embrace each other's identities in respect and love? How can your identity be a source of dialogue instead of conflict?

At the offering everyone brings forward their stone and places it so that each stone touches others on either side.

4. Find someone or some people (student, senior friend or clergy) to prepare a sermon/reflection. It would be appropriate for the sermon/ reflection to be about the scripture readings chosen or generally on the theme. Inviting local students to share their own experiences and to participate in the liturgy is recommended.

5. Find people to lead the music

6. In consultation with those who will lead the music select the songs and music for the liturgy.

7. Organise baskets for offerings.

8. Find people to lead the liturgy; try to have several people (women and men, students and senior friends) taking the leader's part

9. Announce that there will be a collection for WSCF's Ecumenical Assistance Programme. After the service send an electronic transfer or cheque to WSCF in Geneva.

10. Invite students and senior friends to share this liturgy

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'Identity – Diversity -Dialogue'

Welcome and sharing peace

Leader: O Master, Lord God, Almighty, the Father of our Lord, our God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, we thank you in every condition, for any condition and in whatever condition. For that you have covered us, preserved us, accepted us, had compassion on us, sustained us, and brought us to this hour. **All: Amen**

Leader: Jesus said: " Holy Father keep through your name those whom you have given me that they may be one as we are one. (John 17:11).

We gather as a part of the human community, of the body of Christ.

Let us greet one another in peace and love.

(Participants greet one another with words/signs of peace)

Song to gather the community

Leader: We gather as a community joined by our faith, let us join in the prayer Jesus taught us, each in her or his own language

Lord's prayer

Confession

Leader: O God as we gather, in front of us are the three themes: Identity, Diversity and Dialogue. We thank you for the rich and diverse identities you have given to humankind. We thank you for the possibilities for dialogue in our world.

We confess to you that we often don't understand the blessings of identity, diversity or dialogue. Enlighten our minds and hearts as together we seek respect for all people, loving communication and true community.

All: Kyrie eleison

(or Lord have mercy)

Leader: We rejoice that you planted your Gospel of peace, reconciliation and justice in the world as a tree ever flourishing, evergreen for the benefit of all humankind.

We confess that as we seek to live in peace with you and all your people sometimes we feel inadequate and discouraged. We confess that we have difficulty following the way of the saints and all those who well understood your Gospel.

All: Kyrie eleison

Leader: We thank you that you have made every person in your own image. We confess that we forget to treat all people with dignity.

Help us and humankind in all its diversity to live in peace. Help us to defend the human rights of all people and not to turn our backs on our sisters and brothers who are suffering.

All: Kyrie eleison

Leader: We thank you for our faith, for our different confessions, for the Holy Scriptures and for the words of your prophets and saints.

We confess that religion has been misused to suppress diversity, that it has been used to stifle rather than enable dialogue.

Help us to recognise and resist all religious aggression and oppression. Help us to overcome all violence and discrimination, especially in our communities and in our Christian tradition.

Empower us to live your Gospel of reconciliation and peace.

All: Kyrie eleison

Absolution

Leader: God invites us to put away all negativity and bring to light every positive thing from our diversities.

God invites us to use our identities to pursue dialogue and to live the Gospel.

May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All: Amen

Leader: Blessed be the Lord

All: Who has heard the voice of our prayer

Leader: Therefore shall our hearts dance for joy

All: And in song will we praise our God. (Ps 28.7,9)

Song of praise

A reading from the Old Testament

Song

A reading from the New Testament

Reflections/ Sermon

Silence

Affirmation of Faith

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed

All: I believe in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, of one essence with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became human; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father.

And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; His kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke through the prophets.

I believe in one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church; I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins; I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Intercessions

(If possible images appropriate to the prayers should be projected or displayed and those present should be invited to keep their eyes open and use these images as part of their prayers.)

Leader: O God, be with the Palestinian people who are suffering in Gaza today and help them to have peace and justice soon.

All: To you we cry, O Lord, hear and have mercy

Leader: O God be with all who make decisions to find peace through negotiations and dialogue and who

reject war and violence.

All: To you we cry, O Lord, hear and have mercy

Leader: O God be with every displaced person and refugee, that they may return safe and sound to their original home. We pray for the release of all captives.

All: To you we cry, O Lord, hear and have mercy

Leader: O God guide Arabs and Israelis to find ways of peaceful dialogue and to reject violence and the desire to destroy.

All: To you we cry, O Lord, hear and have mercy

Leader: O God teach people of every religion to find peace, openness and generosity in the message of their ancestors.

All: To you we cry, O Lord, hear and have mercy

Leader: O God let every Christian discover their true identity which is of the kingdom of heaven. Grant that the gifts you have given to each person may blossom. Strengthen dialogue and unity between all Christians.

All: To you we cry, O Lord, hear and have mercy

Leader: O God we pray for all peoples, that your light may shine upon them, that the spirit of justice and mutual forbearance may be established among them, the spirit of love and peace.

All: To you we cry, O Lord, hear and have mercy.

Silence

Prayer for WSCF

Leader: God, we pray for the World Student Christian Federation, a community of students on a journey. Help us to walk with people who are suffering and oppressed.

All: Make your way plain before us (Ps. 5.8)

Leader: Strengthen the work of the Student Christian Movement in schools, colleges and universities, so we may powerfully proclaim your Gospel to the students of the world

All: Make your way plain before us

Leader: Bless all those who plan SCM events, who organise students and senior friends, who write magazines, prayers and websites, who participate in liturgies, meetings and protests, who fundraise to enable our journey together, those who pray for WSCF, and all those who keep the Federation's vision alive

All: Make your way plain before us

Leader: Be with all those who work and travel for WSCF, especially the staff, the officers and the Executive Committee

All: Make your way plain before us

Leader: We thank you for our WSCF friends and comrades who have now completed this earthly journey, especially those who have been killed because they sought to walk with you. We give you thanks for their vision and courage

All: Make your way plain before us

Leader: Guide WSCF by your Holy Spirit so that our journey together may be one of joy, compassion, solidarity and courage, in Jesus' name

All: Amen.

Song (during which offerings for the Ecumenical Assistance Programme are collected)

Sending out

Leader: God help us to find and cherish our true identity as individuals and as a community. We pray that we may be a true community of God with an identity of unity, understanding and love.

All: Amen

Leader: God help us to understand the rich diversity of humanity not as a matter of separation and division but as a positive reality. Help us to give each other space, and help us to work together as we celebrate our diversity.

All: Amen.

Leader: God teach us to listen to each other. Open our hearts so that we may feel the breath and play of your Spirit. Unclench our hands so that we may reach out to one another, and touch and be healed. Open our lips that we may drink in the delight and wonder of life. Unclog our ears to hear your agony in our humanity. Open our eyes, that we may see Christ in friend and stranger. Breathe your Spirit into us, and touch our lives with the life of Christ.

All: Amen.

Leader: O Lord Jesus, stretch forth your wounded hands in blessing over your people, to heal and restore, and to draw them to yourself and to one another in love.

And may the blessing of God the Creator, the Son and the Holy Spirit be amongst us now and always.

All: Amen

Sources: Ecumenical Prayer Cycle, Bread of Tomorrow, UDPS 2007, Celebrating Common Worship.