

FEAST OF THE COVENANT 2025

COVENANT REVIEW AND DISCERNMENT

Our Covenant

In Christ God has made a covenant with us, a covenant which we have joyfully received and entered into by faith and baptism. He has become our God and we have become His people. As members of Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon, He has called us to express in a special way this covenant established by His Son, Jesus, through His sacrifice on the cross. We do so by making a covenant with one another as a response to the call He has given us. He has joined us together in the bond of steadfast love and faithfulness, and has given us a particular call and mission.

As we enter into this relationship with one another and accept this call and mission He has given to us as a people, we do so as faithful members of our Church and we support one another in this commitment. Although this covenant is intended to be a stable commitment, we understand that it does not necessarily mean for everyone a lifelong commitment to being part of our community. We can foresee that changing circumstances in a person's life may make active involvement in Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon no longer possible, although such change would be undertaken only with serious prayer and counsel.

It is with deep joy and gratitude, realizing the overwhelming goodness of God in giving us this opportunity that we enter into the life of this people that God has called together. We accept the particular covenant relationship that God has established among us as a community, and we express this acceptance publicly as individuals and as a people.

In order to respond to what God is doing among us, in order to be that people He is calling us to be, we desire to give our whole lives to Him, to follow His Son, Jesus, and to live more and more in the Holy Spirit. We desire to love and serve Him in lives of daily prayer and service; to praise and worship Him always; to ever seek His face; to know and serve the truth of His word in the joy, peace, and love of the Holy Spirit; to believe what He speaks to us and to be obedient to the truth of His word and the guidance of His Spirit; to offer hospitality to those whom He sends us; to widen our hearts to receive those He adds to our number; and to carry out the mission that He is entrusting to us. Above all, we desire to be a people who always grow, by His great mercy, in the fervor of that "first love" He has given us, He who is our all. We desire to consecrate our lives to Him not simply as individuals but as members of a people, members of Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon Community.

We recognize that by virtue of our membership in Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon Community, we are also members of The Sword of the Spirit (and Christ the King Association). This makes us part of an international community of communities. We commit ourselves to love and support our brothers and sisters in the community of communities throughout the world, and to serve with them in a common mission.

We know that in order for us to be truly a community, a people of one mind and heart in our response to the Lord, we must serve and care for our brothers and sisters in Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon Community, and we must understand and accept those things which make our life as one body possible. We know that we must meet together when the community meets. We must respect and support the pattern and order of our life together.

We must support the life of the community with our material and financial resources. All this is simply to take responsibility for those the Lord has given us; to be a new family, members of the same body, brothers and sisters working together in the mission He is entrusting to us as a people.

We desire to put our lives into His hands completely, and follow Him as a people wherever He may lead.

As a sign of your intention to become part of this people and to enter into the particular covenant relationship shared by its members, the following response should be made.

I _____, want to give my life fully to God, and to live as member of Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon.

COVENANT REVIEW AND DISCERNMENT

Week Three

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

January 18-25, 2025

Introduction Video

(If you're watching from a PowerPoint file, please wait a bit for the video to load. You can also watch via the links provided in the text/ Viber message.)

Introduction Video Transcript (Noel E.)

The third week of January is the international observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This commemoration provides us a special opportunity to grow in ecumenical spirit as members of the one Body of Christ. We have a common heritage as Christians and during this week, most churches all over the world have set aside this time to gather and pray for a more visible expression of the love and unity that Jesus asked the Father in his High Priestly Prayer.

The Sword of the Spirit Community of Communities has provided for us the Daily Prayers for Christian Unity which we will use starting today till January 25th. It is our hope that the Lord will grant us a new Spirit of unity, love, peace and solidarity with one another, that the world may believe.

During this week as well, let us find time to reflect on the Covenant Review and Discernment Guide - Week Three. May we be encouraged by this enriching aspect of our Covenant!

Our Covenant Paragraph 2

The Ecumenical Dimension of Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon

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In Other Words

One unique aspect of our Covenant is God's gift of international and ecumenical relationships in the Sword of the Spirit to which we belong. The Sword of the Spirit currently has ninety (90) member-communities and more than 100 movements, with about 14,000 adult members in the communities and an equal number in the movements worldwide. The Sword of the Spirit is called a "community of communities".

Some of our communities are ecumenical in composition. Some communities are Protestant, while others belong to the Orthodox Tradition. Some communities are Catholic. The Catholic communities have formed themselves into the Christ the King Association.

The Sword of the Spirit communities share a common vision and mission, way of life, and spiritual culture. While each member- community is self-governing, it shares resources with other SOS communities around the world, especially in working together in the mission of Christ. By the power of God's Spirit, we are able to transcend our cultural, racial and denominational differences.

In God's Words

Discerning prayer leads us to a deeper recognition of the harmony of God's words and deeds. And God's Word provides us with the needed understanding about certain life issues that others might be uncomfortable to face. God wants us to widen our perspective and reach.

1. Read and reflect on these words from the Scriptures.

John 10:14-16 I have other sheep

John 17:20 -24 That they may be one

Acts of the Apostles 10:34-36 God has no partiality

Ephesians 4:1-5 Unity of the spirit

2. Ask the Lord for the grace to truly grow in loving and appreciating our brothers and sisters from various Christian traditions in the Sword of the Spirit and in our country.

In My Own Words

1. What do I truly feel about Ligaya's Covenant having an ecumenical dimension? What are the good fruits of having an ecumenical spirit?
2. How am I growing in ecumenical spirit as a member of a Catholic Covenant Community?
3. What concrete step can I make in this area?



Do you believe this?

She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." (John 11:27)

The Sword of the Spirit
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
January 18-25, 2025

Introduction

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an important opportunity for us in the Sword of the Spirit to pray for unity with Christians from around the world and from various church traditions. We work with materials provided by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches in conjunction with the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity of the Catholic Church. The brothers and sisters of the monastic community of Bose in northern Italy were tasked with composing the 2025 materials. This year, our theme is “Do you believe this?” (John 11:26), from Jesus’ conversation with Martha, the sister of Lazarus.

We are remembering also the 1,700th anniversary of the 1st Ecumenical Council (in 325) of Nicaea (modern-day Iznik, Türkiye). This Council was called to address the controversy about the nature of the Son of God, particularly His divinity. This argument was causing division among and within Christian communities.

In our Sword of the Spirit document called Community Life and Order, we state that a member must be orthodox in beliefs, which means accepting the truths stated in the Apostles and Nicene Creeds. Thus, we regard the creeds as an expression of our unity in the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The reflections after the daily scripture will be by “patristic fathers,” whose writings influenced the beliefs and doctrines of the members attending the council. The selections come from Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Armenian authors. This will be an opportunity for us to encounter some writers we may not have encountered before. We hope this journey together through the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity will increase our hope for greater unity among us and among the Christian people

NOTE: On five of the days, we have included special intercessions for our Sword of the Spirit Regions, as well as a prayer for unity in the Lord’s Day prayers.

From the International President

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Each week, across the entire Sword of the Spirit, we celebrate the Lord's Day. During the prayer after the meal, we pray: "Have mercy, Lord our God, upon your people who belong to your Son, the dwelling place of your Spirit. Grant that the Christian people throughout the world may attain the unity for which Jesus prayed on the eve of His sacrifice, and that we in the Sword of the Spirit may be a sign of that unity and a means of its growth."

The foundational call of the Sword of the Spirit is to be ecumenical and, more importantly, to be a catalyst for ecumenism and a means for it to flourish across our communities.

Cognizant of the reality that, after over 50 years of existence, SOS membership still remains overwhelmingly Catholic, and that a vast majority of our communities are still single-confession Catholic communities, the Lord has led us to include ecumenism as an important strategic priority of the Sword of the Spirit in the coming many years. It is a reminder from the Lord of this most important element of our life as a community of communities.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity should have great meaning for us in the Sword of the Spirit as we celebrate it each year. We encourage all our communities, especially our Catholic communities, to use this week as a starting point for doing something more meaningful in this area throughout the year.

The prayers from this year have been adapted from the materials made available by the World Council of Churches and the Vatican and developed for use in the SOS by a small team of brothers and sisters from across our communities. The main theme for this year is, "Do You Believe this?" Taken from the Gospel of John, it is Jesus' question to Martha after he declares himself to be the resurrection and the life. It is also his question to each of us as we follow him as disciples on mission.

May our observance of this week of prayer lead us to that unity for which Jesus prayed.

Manny de Los Santos

International President of the Sword of the Spirit

Day 1: Saturday, January 18, 2025

The Fatherhood of God Who Rules the Universe

Scripture Reading I Corinthians 8:5-6

For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Patristic Reading from the Greek Tradition

Behold the mysteries of love, and then you will contemplate the bosom of the Father, which the only-begotten Son of God has revealed. God himself is love, and through love he is contemplated by us. And while in his ineffable reality he is Father, in his compassion he has become for us mother. Clement of Alexandria [c. 150-215], *Which Rich Man Will Be Saved?* 37:1-2

Prayer of Response

We bless you, O Lord, Father of lights; from you descend every good thing and every perfect gift. You have made the world and all that it contains, you are the Lord of heaven and earth. You created all the peoples that dwell on the earth. For them you established the order of time and the boundaries of their space. Merciful Father, in Jesus, your Son, you proclaimed the good news of the kingdom. God of all consolation, call us to follow you. Make firm for us the work of our hands.

Intercession

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your unity, the unity of the Trinity. We pray that all Christians might seek the oneness of heart and mind, that is your desire for all your people. We ask that you might guide us as we seek to live out your unity, one with another, and as we pray for that unity this week. 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.

Witness: Alex Kilpatrick



I went to Mass regularly growing up, but my Catholic faith did not extend beyond Sunday morning. During the first few weeks of freshman year, I found myself more and more unsure why I was going to church. Eventually, a couple students invited me along to a University Christian Outreach (UCO) prayer meeting. Over the course of that semester, these new friends - one Presbyterian and the other Baptist - invested in me, witnessed to me, and included me in their lives. Through their friendship, love, and common mission in UCO, I began to see the joy of knowing Christ personally and sharing Him with others. For the first time, I made the decision to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Being helped by my Protestant brother and sister to come

into a personal relationship with Christ was only the beginning of many blessings in ecumenical community. I realized how much I took for granted in my Catholic faith. The regular experience of sharing life, prayer, and mission with Christians from other traditions helped me see that I needed to grow in understanding what I believed as a Catholic and why. My faith has been greatly strengthened through my experience in ecumenical community.

My Protestant and Orthodox friends tend to emphasize different practices of piety, different perspectives on celebrating Christian feasts, and ask good, honest questions about what I believe (sometimes exposing my lack of knowledge). They have taught me to love scripture and understand the biblical foundation for what my Church teaches. I experience my relationships with other Christians giving me a new heart for living the Christian life. I have a much deeper love for evangelism, for reading and studying scripture, for spontaneous charismatic prayer, and for discipleship. I've been challenged to grow in the Lord.

Day 2: Sunday, January 19, 2025

Creation as God's Work

Scripture Reading: Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

Patristic Reading from the Greek Tradition

God cannot be seen by human eyes but is seen and perceived through his providence and works. Just as one who sees a fully equipped ship entering port assumes that it has a pilot to guide it, so we must perceive that God is the pilot of the entire universe, even though he is not visible to the eyes of the flesh because he is incomprehensible. *Theophilus of Antioch [2nd century], Ad Autolycus, 1:5*

Prayer of Response

We praise you and give you thanks, God of steadfast love, for the great signs of your favor and your mercy for the whole creation. You have made all things. You declared them to be good, for your Spirit dwells in them all and they belong to you, O Lord. We confess, O Lord, your glory in the immense starry spaces of the universe and in the smallest seed of life. We give thanks for the works of your hands and the creation of all people. Blessed are you for the air that gives us life. Blessed are you for the earth that nourishes us. Blessed are you for the water that quenches our thirst. Blessed are you for the fire that warms us. Giving voice to the whole creation and gathering every grief and joy, we glorify you and give you thanks. Lord God, you made all things, and will soon transfigure them, clothing them with your glory.

Intercession, Europe

Lord in heaven, we pray that in Europe you would deepen our heart's desire to be united with our brothers and sisters across the churches. We ask that you give us the grace to embrace those who are different from us, and to welcome one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Add to our communities from across our different churches we cry out to you, O Lord!

Witness: Sue Heuver



Life in ecumenical community and in the North American Region has brought me wonderful friendships with brothers and sisters from many Christian traditions. Each one has enriched my own walk with God. When I prayed with Debbie, an Orthodox Christian, I was moved by her reverence and the way she began her prayer with repentance by proclaiming Psalm 51. Donna and Jeanne, two Catholic women, spurred me on as they each spent years caring selflessly for family members through debilitating illnesses. Deena, a Reformed Christian, inspired me to root myself in God's word by studying Scripture and to prioritize my marriage and family while serving in my community and parish. Mike, a Baptist, bonded with my husband over farming, heavy machinery, and serving the poor. Our children served with Mike on mission trips and came home grateful and energized by helping people in need.

Jennifer, a Lutheran sister in my own community, has become a trusted, beloved friend. We began by taking walks, pushing strollers and trading prayer intentions. We grew to rely on each other in our service and our call as wives and mothers. Amid our differing beliefs and practices, we have celebrated together her child's adoption, first communions, weddings, and confirmations. We have shared life's joys and sorrows. It is "for such a time as this" that God brought us to ecumenical community—and it has been very good! One day, Jesus' prayer, "that they may all be one," will finally be answered. We will join with believers from every nation, race, tribe, and tongue to praise our God, who saved us by his death and resurrection. On that day, we will share fully in the gifts that our brothers and sisters bring to the body of Christ. Through my ecumenical friendships, I have tasted and seen!

Day 3: Monday, January 20, 2025

The Incarnation of the Son

Scripture Reading: John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

Patristic Reading from the Armenian Tradition

He took upon himself all human passions, excluding sin. That is: he hungered who gives food to all the living. He thirsted who gives the water of life to his believers. He felt weariness who is the rest of the weary. He slept who always kept Israel vigilant. He wept who wiped away every tear from all eyes ... He took on our passible body, so that he who is impassible might suffer with the passible body and

he who is immortal might die with the mortal body, to free us who are guilty. *Gregory of Skevra [12th/13th centuries], On True Faith and Pure Conduct in the Virtues, 15-17*

Prayer of Response

You have shared our life in all things; you died as we all die. Son of David, desired by the righteous and the prophets, you have proclaimed the good news to the poor; you have proclaimed the time of favor. You came to break the chains of bondage; you went about doing good; you have opened the way to the presence of God for all. You came into the world in weakness and poverty; you have confounded the proud with your humility; you have drawn the weary and overburdened to you. You are the Lamb of God and our Shepherd, the Servant of God and our Lord: you were made sin for us, our Redeemer.

Intercession, Middle East

Lord of All, in the Middle East we pray that despite of, and in the middle of, the current troubles and trials you might lead us to learn to love one another more and see you in one another. Deepen our desire to explore the richness and beauty of the different parts of the church and to find ways to join together as we seek your unity, to serve our churches. Amen.

Witness: Alain Dibo



My name is Alain Dibo. I'm married with two boys, and I am part of the People of God (POG) Community in Lebanon. I was born into an Orthodox family, but since there was no Orthodox church nearby, I grew up attending a Catholic church and school. By my teenage years, I began attending only on special occasions—a pattern that continued throughout my adult life, especially during my 16 years living and 7 working abroad. Everything changed at the age of 37 when, while living in Amsterdam and visiting Lebanon, I encountered the People of God Community. Through their outreach meetings, I felt a profound transformation as the Holy Spirit touched my life. Over time, I sensed God calling me back to Lebanon and commit to a life of discipleship in my home country. My spiritual life flourished within the Catholic church—the tradition I had always known. Then, during my third year of formation at POG, my Catholic brothers in the community encouraged me to rediscover my Orthodox roots. Initially, I hesitated but decided to honor this invitation, even though I was unfamiliar with the Orthodox Liturgy.

For the first three months, attending the Orthodox church felt foreign. I would attend the Orthodox service in the morning and the Catholic church at night. During Lent, I used to drive a long distance to join Orthodox brothers in another parish who explained the liturgy, helping me slowly uncover the beauty of the Orthodox service. Six months later, our family began to find joy in our Orthodox roots. We formed strong connections with our priest and parish community. This journey also revealed the painful reality of division between the Orthodox and Catholic churches. In the summers, when we would go up to the mountains for summer break, we were far from the nearest Orthodox church. I found it difficult to be away from our parish, particularly from the Eucharist. I called our priest and asked if I could receive the Eucharist at the Catholic church. He acknowledged the wound of division between our churches—a wound that can only be healed at a higher level— and encouraged me to embrace this pain by refraining from receiving the Eucharist; to pray for this unity, recognizing our shared suffering and longing for reconciliation.

Today, I am deeply grateful for the POG brothers' encouragement and for the ecumenical life we live in this community. Experiencing the richness of both Orthodox and Catholic traditions has been a profound blessing, enhancing my appreciation for the unity we all share in Christ. I pray fervently for

the unity of His Church, so we may share and cherish the wealth of our diverse faith traditions together.

Day 4: Tuesday, January 21, 2025

Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus

Scripture Reading: Psalms 16:5-11

The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; thou holdest my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also, my heart instructs me. I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore, my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure. For thou dost not give me up to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the Pit. Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.

Patristic Reading from the Latin Tradition

God the Father was very merciful: he sent his creative Word who, in coming to deliver us, came to the very place and spot in which we had lost life, and broke the bonds of our fetters. His light appeared and made the darkness of the prison disappear and hallowed our birth and destroyed death, loosing those same fetters in which we were enchained. *Irenaeus of Lyon [c. 135-198], Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching, 38*

Prayer of Response

Blessed are you, O Christ, Firstborn of all creation: you are crowned with glory and honor. At your Name every knee will bend in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue will confess that you are the Lord. Let us rejoice and sing praises to you, O Christ, beloved Son of the Father: you are the Risen One, you call us to live in you. We adore you, we glorify you, for you are King of kings and Lord of lords: you have opened to us the kingdom of heaven. We give you thanks at all times and we bless your Name. You are with us always, to the end of the age.

Intercession

All gracious God, we thank you for the many ways you have led your church to be more united, particularly over these last fifty or more years. We thank also you for those men and women who have stepped out to lead us towards greater unity. We pray now that you raise a new generation of leaders, inspired and gifted to carry on your work of ecumenism around the world. Amen.

Witness: Emilio Rivera



My name is Emilio Rivera. I am an Evangelical Christian, and I have been a member of a Pentecostal church since my childhood. Some time ago, God did something very important and new in my life, when he called me to be part of Arbol de Vida, an ecumenical community in Costa Rica.

My nuclear family is Evangelical, although the rest of my relatives are Catholic. Because of negative experiences with some of them and how they expressed their Catholicism I came to regard it erroneously. Both family tensions arising from denominational issues, and mutual ignorance, strengthened this perception. When I compared my

Christian life and my ecclesial commitment with the lives my relatives led, I always thought that they came up short, while I lived my Christianity in the right way.

But my life took a turn when I became acquainted with “Cristianos en Marcha,” an ecumenical outreach of the community. There, I got to know young Catholic students who had, by far, a deeper relationship and experience of God than I was used to see in my immediate context. Also, it was encouraging to see Evangelicals and Catholics sharing the same space of prayer and worship in fraternal love.

Soon after, I felt that the Lord was calling me to belong to the community and embrace its way of life. I serve a lot in my church and there “I had everything I needed,” so it was difficult to divide my time in both places. But, one day when I attended Mass with my Catholic friends in the outreach, God used the priest's message to confirm my call and helped me make the decision.

Living in an ecumenical community is a true blessing and one of my best decisions. Here, I can appreciate the way Catholics express their faith and draw closer to God. As an evangelical who lives and prays for unity, that is something I treasure in my heart.

Day 5: Wednesday, January 22, 2025

The Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life and Joy

Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 36:24-28

For I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. You shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Patristic Reading from the Syriac Tradition

It is not correct to say that the Spirit departs when we sin to return when we are converted ... What good is it for me if he dwells in me after I have become righteous? If at the time of the fall he does not dwell in me, does not give me a hand, and does not raise me up, how will I feel his help? What physician, when he sees a sick person who falls sick, leaves and abandons him, to come to him when he becomes healthy? Is it not more useful that the physician be with the sick person at the time of his illness? *Philoxenus of Mabbug [c. 440-523], On the Inhabitation of the Holy Spirit*

Prayer of Response

You are the Spirit breathed upon the face of Adam, making human flesh a living being. You are the Spirit given by the Risen One; our sins have been forgiven. You are the Spirit sent at Pentecost; you opened the way for the Gospel to reach all people. You are the Spirit that awakens our prayer; we are held in God's love. You are the Spirit of God poured out upon the dead: the graves will be opened, and the dead will rise.

Intercession, North America

Heavenly Father, renew our faith in you and bind us together through your love. We hold before you this day the members, communities, and outreaches of the North American Region of the Sword of the Spirit. Bless the ecumenical communities, the single-tradition communities, the various college outreaches and community building efforts of all. Bless the efforts at uniting the North American Region's young adult outreaches, especially through the work of Kairos. May all the members of the Region embrace gladly our unique call and gift of ecumenism. We hold this day and this week before you through Jesus Christ, your only begotten Son, in the communion of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Witness: Stacey Barajas



My name is Stacey Barajas. I grew up in the Work of Christ Community, which is made up of Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic Christians. My husband Francisco is from Mexico, and we have 3 bilingual sons.

I teach Spanish classes and a Mexican culture class at Michigan State University, where my community has an active University Christian Outreach (UCO) chapter. As you can imagine, I find myself constantly translating and moving back and forth between two different languages and two different cultures. It often reminds me

of what we can experience as members of an ecumenical community.

I grew up in a community neighborhood. Among the families there was a great mix of Protestants and Catholics. We kids often asked questions and made comments about the differences in our church traditions and practices.

Before I was old enough to understand any of the important differences that exist among Christians, or to grieve the brokenness that exists in the body of Christ, I experienced love and unity in the power of the Holy Spirit. Later, as a teen and young adult, I received a lot of helpful teaching about ecumenism. One fun experience of this was in my UCO women's household in college. We had Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox women living together, so we made and used three different Advent wreaths!

Today, I feel equipped to flow culturally & linguistically between different environments, some that include just people from my Catholic tradition and others which do not. I had a Russian Orthodox student in my Mexican Cultures class who made fascinating comparisons between Mexican Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy. Because of my community experiences, I was able to understand and affirm his contributions to our class discussions.

I greatly treasure the international, intercultural, and ecumenical life we have in the Sword of the Spirit. My life is richer for it, personally and professionally.

Day 6: Thursday, January 23, 2025

The Church, a Community of Believers

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:1-6

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Patristic Reading from the Latin Tradition

The church is one, spread abroad far and wide into a multitude by an increase of fruitfulness. As there are many rays of the sun but one light, and many branches of a tree but one strength based in its tenacious root ... in the same manner the church, shone over with the light of the Lord, sheds forth her rays over the whole world, yet it is one light which is everywhere diffused, nor is the unity of the body fractured. Her fruitful abundance spreads her branches over the whole world. *Cyprian of Carthage [c. 210-258], On the Unity of the Church, 5*

Prayer of Response

At the empty tomb, you entrusted the news of your resurrection to the women; deliver all messengers of the Gospel from fear. On the road to Emmaus, you explained the law and the prophets to the disciples; open our minds to understand the Scriptures. In the upper room, you gave your friends the gift of your peace; help us to keep this peace by our mutual love. On the lakeshore, you appointed Peter as shepherd of your flock; uphold with your Spirit the leaders of our communities. On the mountain, you gathered the dispersed disciples before you returned to the Father; give unity in faith and charity to those who believe in you.

Intercession, Latin America

God of all, give us the grace in Latin America to open our doors wide to those who would welcome the opportunity to be part of an ecumenical community of communities, the Sword of the Spirit. Give us the grace to open our hearts to receive those you bring to us that we might fulfill your call that we might be one. Help us Lord to have wisdom to work with our churches so that our call and efforts to be ecumenical might be well received and supported by our bishops and church leaders. Amen

Witness: Esteban López



My name is Esteban López. I am a member of the “Arbol de Vida” community and attend an evangelical Pentecostal church in Costa Rica. The love of my parents, and their search for God in various places, paved the way for my Christian life and for the ecumenism that I would later find in the community.

My father, as a young man, had sought God with the Jehovah's Witnesses. When he was fifteen, my paternal grandfather died, and some Catholic religious counseled him in the faith. My mother hailed from the Costa Rican South Pacific and was raised a Catholic by her fisherfolk family. Years later, after an Evangelical renewal meeting, my parents got married and decided to become members of an Evangelical church. Since then, we have all lived there our commitment to Christ.

At one point, I resented my church, blaming the entire system for manipulating my faith. But in the midst of that struggle, God redirected my heart to the depth of who he is. I was invited to a men's night of the community's Christian outreach, where, in the presence of Catholics supposedly alien to Pentecostalism, I experienced an unexpected familiarity and the power of the Spirit. How was it

possible that being in an environment totally different from mine, I could perceive the Holy Spirit manifesting himself in me and in them? Something good was happening and it came from God. This charismatic and ecumenical experience led me to desire again to receive all that God offered me, including unity with Christians from other churches in a covenant community.

This is how my ecumenical journey began and has been until today. Amid the differences, Christ remains the source of unity, and his Spirit moves us to walk humbly towards God as brothers and sisters. We do not limit him with our divisions, and he continues to invite us to the banquet of unity in Christ.

Day 7: Friday, January 24, 2025

Baptism into the Death and Resurrection of the Lord

Scripture Reading: Matt 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

Patristic Reading from the Greek Tradition

Such is the power of faith in Christ, such the excess of his grace: As the element of fire, when it meets with ore from the mine, straightway of earth makes it gold, even so and much more baptism makes those who are washed to be of gold instead of clay. The Spirit at that time falling like fire into our souls, burning up the "image of the earthly," and producing "the image of the heavenly," fresh coined, bright and glittering, as from the furnace-mold. *John Chrysostom [c. 350-407], Homily on the Gospel of John, X:2*

Prayer of Response

For having called us to faith in baptism, for the communion we share in the New Covenant, for your presence in the holy Church—we give you thanks and praise. For the witness of persecuted Christians, for the suffering of their martyrdom, for their participation in Christ's passion—we give you thanks and praise. For all servants of communion, for those who pray and work for the reconciliation of churches, for those who offer their lives for unity—we give you thanks and praise.

Intercession, Asia

Lord and King of Kings, help us, we cry, to meet Protestants and Orthodox who have an ecumenical heart and desire for community. Give us the grace to welcome them, and to see that we need them as they need us to fulfil your call for us to be an ecumenical community of communities here in Asia. Amen.

Witness: Pili Galvan



My name is Pili Galvan, and I grew up in the Incense of God Community in Xalapa, Mexico. My husband Ghassan Abouchaar grew up in the People of God Community in Lebanon. We now live in the Work of Christ Community in Lansing, Michigan, with our two children, Lucia and Nicolas.

Many thought at first that our relationship was a bit crazy. A Lebanese Melkite Catholic and a Mexican Roman Catholic? We learned that the Sword of the Spirit was our common culture; one we both understood.

During our courtship, I learned about our differences as Catholics from Melkite and Roman traditions. For example, in the Melkite Church, children receive communion as soon as they are baptized, and there can be married priests. We found we needed to learn more about our own church's traditions as we learned to embrace each other's.

I attended many Melkite weddings in Lebanon over the years, and I always found the ceremonies to be quite beautiful. There is a lot of symbolism, and the couple is active during the ceremony, even though they do not make any vows. The weddings feel very solemn. Nevertheless, as the prayers were always in Arabic, I was never able to understand them!

It wasn't until I attended the wedding of a dear Orthodox community friend in Michigan, that it all clicked for me. Orthodox share many common things with Melkite Catholics, especially when it comes to the ceremonies and liturgy. The wedding was like a Melkite wedding, having many of the same symbols, prayers and chants. How blessed was I that they were in English, and I could understand the depth of the prayers offered for the newlyweds. Again, I was struck by the huge blessing of the intercultural and ecumenical richness that we have in the Sword of the Spirit. I have lived with brothers and sisters of other cultures and other churches; we have the Sword of the Spirit as our common culture, and the Lord who unites us.

Day 8: Saturday, January 25, 2025

Waiting for the Kingdom and the Life to Come

Scripture Reading: Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."

Patristic Reading from the Syriac Tradition

Whoever lives in love in this creation breathes the life coming from God. While yet in this world, he breathes the air of rebirth. In this air the righteous will delight at resurrection. Love is the kingdom whereof our Lord mystically promised the disciples that they would eat in his kingdom: "You shall eat and drink at the table of my kingdom." What should they eat, if not love? Love is sufficient to nourish

a man instead of food and drink. This is the wine that gladdens the heart of man. Blessed is he who drinks of this wine! *Isaac of Nineveh [7th century], First Collection, 43*

Prayer of Response

O Christ the Lord, who for our sakes became poor and who promise that the poor will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, you fill us with your riches. O Lord Jesus, meek and humble of heart, who reveal a new world to those who trust in you, you give us your fullness. O Christ the Lord, who knelt and prayed with your face to the ground, you who in sadness traced a way of consolation, you are the joy that nothing and no one can take away from us. O Lord Jesus, who cast down rulers and powers and who clothe peacemakers with a glorious robe, you transform us into your image.

Intercession

Loving God, we delight in being your creations, and in the knowledge that you love all whom you have made. We pray that our unity, the unity for which we have been praying this week, the unity that is expressed in selfless love one for another, might be a strong witness of your love for all humankind. We pray that this witness might lead many to come to know you as their loving creator Father and gracious Lord. Maranatha – come Lord Jesus! 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.

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.

John 11:17-27

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

The Sword of the Spirit Communities of Disciples on Mission

Additional Resource:

Talk on Ecumenical Courtesy (video available in this URL: <https://youtu.be/MEbbj9c-BKY>)