Prayer Service

Background
Each year, the World Council of Churches—including the Roman Catholic Church—invites us to pray for the unity of Christians throughout the world. A region of the world is chosen to select the theme and to prepare resources for prayer and worship.

This year, the Christian churches of Malta invite us to reflect on the theme, “They showed us unusual kindness” (Acts 28:2). This Scripture verse is part of a larger passage that tells the story of the shipwreck of Saint Paul and his companions on the island of Malta (see Acts 27:18—28:10). The story celebrates the kindness and hospitality shown by the Maltese people to the nearly three hundred people who were onboard the ship.

This prayer service, appropriate for children and youth, may be celebrated on any day of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (January 18-25). Invite parents and leaders of churches in your community to join you in celebrating this prayer. The service may be led by a priest, deacon, or layperson.

Preparation
Read ahead of time the outline of the prayer service. Work with the young people to choose music and to designate those who will serve as musicians, readers, greeters, and so forth.

Give each young person a boat-shaped piece of paper on which are written the words, “They showed us unusual kindness.” Well in advance of the prayer service, brainstorm with the young people examples of unusual acts of kindness. Invite the young people to be attentive to the ways they experience or extend unusual kindness to others, and to write or draw one or more of those ways on their boat-shaped pieces of paper. Explain that they are to bring the boats with them to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity prayer service. (Note: If time allows, you may wish to choose an unusual act of kindness for your class or for your school to do together, such as collecting food for the parish food pantry, games and toys for a local shelter, or coats and warm clothing for an outreach to the homeless.)

INTRODUCTORY RITES

Opening Song
Choose a familiar song or hymn that reflects the theme of kindness.

Suggestions include: “All Are Welcome,” “All the Ends of the Earth,” “City of God,” “Digo Sí, Señor,” “God of Day and God of Darkness,” “Go Make a Difference,” “If You Believe and I Believe,” “Sing of the Lord’s Goodness,” “Though the Mountains May Fall,” “Voices That Challenge,” “We Will Serve the Lord,” and “With Great Love.”

You may also wish to use “Unusual Kindness,” a lively hymn that was written especially for this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. It is available for free download at christianunity.va.

Sign of the Cross

Introduction
(Presider leads, using these or similar words.)

Each year, Christian churches all over the world celebrate a very special week of prayer called the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. We join together to pray that all people who believe in Jesus will spread his Good News of love wherever they go.
This week is planned by churches in different parts of the world. This year, the Christian churches in Malta planned the week to focus on the theme of unusual kindness. Unusual kindness is part of the Scripture story chosen for this week. It is the story of the Apostle Paul and 275 others who were once shipwrecked on the island of Malta. The people of Malta welcomed and cared for the 276 shipwrecked persons, and in doing so showed them unusual kindness.

Today, let us pray for the Church of Malta, and let us pray to be people who are known for our unusual kindness too.

(Allow for a few moments of silent reflection, then offer the following prayer.)

Collect

Let us pray.

Spirit of unity,
as we gather together today,
show us the path to Christian unity.

Help us to be welcoming to all,
teach us to respect everyone we meet,
and guide us to treat all people
with unusual kindness,
as Jesus would have us do.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading

Place the Scripture story in context for the assembly by explaining that today’s Scripture reading is part of a longer passage describing the shipwreck of Saint Paul and his companions and the unusual kindness shown to them by the Maltese people. Explain that the passage being proclaimed today picks up after the ship’s crew, fearing that the ship was going to run aground on a rocky coast, decided to abandon the ship, Paul, and the other passengers. But Paul persuaded them to remain onboard, promising that God would protect all who remained on the ship.

Then have a reader proclaim Acts 27:33-44—28:1,2.

Responsorial Psalm:

Sing a setting of Psalm 107, or of any Psalm that speaks of deliverance, God’s power, or salvation.

Homily or Reflection:

Make connections between the Scripture passage, Psalm, and the theme of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Creed:

Sisters and brothers, Christian churches throughout the world are united in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Nicene Creed expresses the one faith we share in him, and in the Father and the Holy Spirit. Let us together proclaim that faith as we say:
I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
 maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins,
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Intercessions

Presider: We cannot face the storms of life alone. When Paul and his companions were
shipwrecked on the island of Malta, the people of Malta came forward to extend
kindness and hospitality. Let us pray to do the same.

Reader: For churches throughout the world. May they work together to show kindness and
care to those caught up in life’s storms of homelessness, poverty, and hunger. We
pray to the Lord . . .

ALL: LORD, HEAR OUR PRAYER.

Reader: For world leaders. May they unite in their efforts to tend to the needs of refugees,
immigrants, and the innocent victims of war. We pray to the Lord . . .

ALL: LORD, HEAR OUR PRAYER.

Reader: For the Christian churches of Malta. May they continue to be known for their spirit of
hospitality and kindness. We pray to the Lord . . .

ALL: LORD, HEAR OUR PRAYER.
Reader: For all of us gathered here today. May the Scripture story of the shipwreck of Saint Paul and his companions inspire us to look for opportunities to extend welcome and unusual kindness to others in need of our help. We pray to the Lord . . .

ALL: LORD, HEAR OUR PRAYER.

Reader: For those who have shown to us unusual kindness. May God bless them for their good works, and may unusual kindness be shown to them in return. We pray to the Lord . . .

ALL: LORD, HEAR OUR PRAYER.

Reader: For all who have asked us to pray for them, and for the prayers of our hearts today.

Allow for a moment of silent prayer.

We pray to the Lord . . .

ALL: LORD, HEAR OUR PRAYER.

Presider: Before coming here today, you were each asked to think about and to draw or write ways others have shown you unusual kindness or you have shown others unusual kindness.

In celebration of all of the acts of unusual kindness you have received and you have shown to others, I invite you to bring your boats forward and to place them (in the basket/at the foot of the cross, etc.)

(You may wish to sing one of the songs recommended for today’s Opening Song, or to play quiet instrumental music as all come forward.)

Presider: (Hold up the basket or stand near the boats as you pray the following prayer.)

God of all, every day you bless our lives through the unusual kindness of others.

Give us eyes to see those who need our unusual acts of kindness to bless them, to encourage them, and to help them in their times of need.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

LORD’S PRAYER

Presider: United in prayer with the Christian churches in Malta and with Christian churches throughout the world, we stand before God and pray together, “Our Father . . .”.

SIGN OF PEACE

Presider: The people of Malta welcomed Paul and his companions with unusual kindness. Let us turn to greet each other and to share with one another a sign of Christ’s peace.
CONCLUDING RITES

Blessing and Dismissal

Presider: May God the Father, who called us from darkness into light, help us to share that light with all.
ALL: Amen.

Presider: May God the Son, who came to save all people, help us to follow his example of welcoming and serving others.
ALL: Amen.

Presider: May God the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, help us to respond to others with unusual kindness.
ALL: Amen.

Presider (if ordained): Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your lives.
ALL: Thanks be to God.

OR

Presider (if not ordained): Let us go in peace, showing unusual kindness to others today and always.
ALL: Amen.

Closing Song: Use one of the songs suggested for the Opening Song or another song of your choosing that focuses on the theme of unusual kindness.