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6.6-Magnitude Earthquake Rocks Central Italy

The Wired Word for the Week of November 6, 2016

In the News

The good news is that, as of last report, no one was killed by a massive 6.6-magnitude earthquake that shook central Italy violently last Sunday and was even felt in places distant from the epicenter, including in Rome.

The earthquake comes after tremors in the same area the preceding week and follows a devastating 6.2-magnitude quake in August, which killed nearly 300 people and flattened entire villages. Because of the August quake and the more recent jolts, much of the area had been evacuated, which is likely the reason no lives were lost in Sunday's seismic upheaval.

The bad news is that more than 15,000 people are displaced and living in temporary shelters or even in their vehicles, more villages have been leveled and many buildings of historic significance, including monasteries and churches, have crumbled.

Among the many buildings toppled are the basilica of San Benedetto (St. Benedict) and the monastery of the same name, both in the community of Norcia. That town, which is less than four miles south of the center of Sunday's shock, is where six people were pulled -- alive -- from the rubble afterward.

Some 30 percent of the buildings in Norcia were already damaged in the August quake. Last Sunday's jolt not only toppled many more structures, but also undid what restoration efforts were under way. The monastery had become unusable in August, but the monks had returned and were working out of a tent. Now there is almost no one left in town to whom to minister.

The Norcia basilica was built over the reputed birthplace of St. Benedict, who in the sixth century A.D. wrote the Rule of St. Benedict, which set the code of practice for monastic communities in the West. While there is hope that the homes and historic structures will be restored, it is uncertain that they all will.

Pietro Luigi Altavilla, deputy mayor of Norcia said Sunday's quake was "like an explosion that never ended. ... I do not know when it will be possible to put it back together." Officials in surrounding communities gave similar reports.

Italian premier Matteo Renzi has pledged to rebuild the devastated communities.

"We will have to start from scratch," said Michele Franchi, the deputy mayor of Arquata del Tronto, one of the towns ravaged by the quake.

The destruction of the monastery at Norcia especially saddened TWW editorial team member Mary Sells, who had visited Italy recently. "I was nearby a month ago in Cascia," Sells said, "and did not have time to go to Norcia and thought, 'Oh, I'll go next time I am able to visit Italy.'"

Aftershocks continue to shake the area.

More on this story can be found at these links:

['Everything Collapsed': Another Quake Rattles Central Italy. USA Today](#)
[Italy Earthquake: More Than 15,000 People in Shelters. CNN](#) (includes video of damage)
[Italy's Earthquake Affects Us All -- Theirs Is a Cultural Richness Like No Other. The Guardian](#)
['We've Returned to the Stone Age': Quake Levels Italian Town. Associated Press](#)



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The Big Questions

1. To what degree is your sense of security and comfort tied to a physical location -- including your residence? How has having to move, perhaps because of a job change, affected your sense of well-being?
2. When, if ever, have you had to start over, more or less from scratch? How did that affect you emotionally, psychologically and spiritually?
3. Assuming you were a church attendee in a former location, how did relocating affect your practice of faith in the new community. Did you start attending a church there right away? Why or why not? If you didn't, did you feel disconnected from God in any way?
4. To what degree has your church building or a church camp or a retreat center or some other specific location become the repository for your sense of God's presence? If, for example, your church were to be lost in a fire, what bearing would that have on your commitment to worship God?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

2 Samuel 5:7, 9

Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion, which is now the city of David. ... David occupied the stronghold, and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inward. (For context, read 5:1-10.)

Saul had been king over all Israel. After he died in battle, the people of Judah, the southern region of Israel, installed David as their king. David set up his capital in the city of Hebron. The rest of the nation was governed by a son of Saul named Ishbaal, who ruled from Gibeah, where his father's throne had been. Later, however, Ishbaal was assassinated, and at that point, some elders from the area Ishbaal had ruled asked David to be Israel's king as well. David agreed, and became the ruler of all of Israel.

One of David's first acts as king of the united Hebrew tribes was to capture the city of Jerusalem, setting it up as the new capital of Israel. Although Jerusalem was situated within the area controlled by the Hebrew tribes, it was occupied by a people called Jebusites. But after David and his men captured it, the place became known thereafter as "the city of David."

From both a symbolical and political standpoint, David setting up his throne in Jerusalem was a brilliant move. For one thing, Jerusalem was between Hebron, his earlier royal seat, and Gibeah, from which Ishbaal had ruled, so it was a way of not favoring either of the previous Hebrew kingdoms. For another thing, although Jerusalem sat within the territory of Judah, it was neutral ground because it had been occupied by a non-Hebrew population and so was not part of either kingdom.

From this point onward, Jerusalem became the center of Israel's identity as a people and the focal point of their understanding that God was in their midst. So strong was their connection with Jerusalem that years later, when the Babylonians overran the city, burned it and marched the citizens off into exile, there was great mourning *over the city* among the people of Israel.

Questions: When, if ever, have you mourned over a place? Why?

Jeremiah 29:4-7

Thus says the LORD ... to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (For context, read 29:1-9.)



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This text contains the continuation of the story begun in the commentary for 2 Samuel 5:7, 9 above. After the people of Jerusalem were exiled to Babylon and were grieving over their separation from Jerusalem, the prophet Jeremiah sent them a letter, the essence of which is the verses above. He told them that God wanted them to make homes in the new location and seek the welfare of that place.

The people had been thinking that God was localized in Israel, with his throne (at least symbolically speaking) in Jerusalem. And now they were discovering that God was not localized and could be found even in Babylon!

Years later, when the exiles were finally able to return to Jerusalem, the people set about rebuilding the city, seeing it as central to who they were as a people. And when the prophets spoke of God's kingdom fully coming at the end of things, they described that ideal kingdom as a restored or new Jerusalem.

Questions: Or if your job forced you to relocate to a distant community, might you feel less connected to God because of your "exile" from this place? How do you translate a localized experience of God into one that is not tied to place? What helps you trust a Presence rather than a place?

Revelation 21:22-25

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day -- and there will be no night there. (For context, read 21:9-27.)

These verses and the context reading relate a vision of God's kingdom fully come, describing it as a new Jerusalem, a place to which all the faithful people of the earth stream. As the person having the vision looks around the city, he makes this observation: "I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (the Lamb is a reference to Jesus).

It is significant that in the kingdom of God, there is no temple, no "place," needed to symbolize God, because the presence of God so fills the realm that a temple would be superfluous.

Questions: How close does the New Jerusalem as described here come to your idea of an ideal location? Why? What "place" does God occupy in your life?

Acts 16:14

A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. (For context, read 16:11-15.)

Though God's kingdom has not fully come yet, the way we live as kingdom people today is by inviting God to live within us. That's why for years, the church has talked about God opening our "hearts" to the gospel, just as he did with Lydia in the verse above. We understand that *the inner place* is the one that matters most in the life of faith. Our gathering for worship reinforces and feeds that relationship, but until we let Christ move inside us, we have no spiritual home.

But notice that the verse above also speaks of Lydia in the context of where she lived: the city of Thyatira. The location where we most need to worship God is within us, not tied to any physical place. But the location where we most need to live out the results of that worship is in our churches, our homes, our workplaces and our communities in solid acts of faithfulness to God.

Questions: How did the Lord open your heart to the gospel? What people did God use as part of the process? What role, if any, did place play?



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For Further Discussion

1. Respond to this: In his book *Staying Put: Making a Home in a Restless World*, Scott Russell Sanders tells that whenever his father would come to a new place, he would bend down, scoop up a pinch of dirt, sniff it, stir it around in his palm, squeeze it, and finally rake it across his tongue. When asked why he did this, he explained, "Just trying to figure out where I am."

2. Comment on this: Though we talk of having Christ within us, we still need physical geography in which to live out our Christianity. Yes, we are members of the worldwide church and yes, we are citizens of the universe, but it's hard to translate that into anything concrete and to interact with the whole of anything. We need a localized place on which to focus our interaction. The troubled poet John Berryman once wrote a poem in which he tried to say places were unimportant. It read:

Exile is in our time like blood. Depend on
interior journeys taken anywhere.
I'd rather live in Venice or Kyoto
except for the languages, but
O really I don't care where I live or have lived.
Wherever I am, young Sir, my wits about me,
memory blazing, I'll cope & make do.

That view is all fine and dandy, but it wasn't enough to keep Berryman, not long after writing those lines, from leaping to his death from a Minneapolis bridge into the Mississippi River. The truth is, if we try to live entirely cut off from place, then not only we suffer, but so do the places where we might have contributed our energy and efforts.

3. Compare Mary Sells' decision to put off visiting Norcia (described in "In the News" above) with James 4:13-15.

4. Talk together about how a sense of place complicates church mergers, when two congregations of the same denomination in the same area decide to unite. One of the problems that often arises is the question of which congregation will give up its building. People get very attached to their buildings. Sometimes, when the decision is made to abandon building A and move its congregation A into building B along with congregation B, some members of congregation A say "No way!" and use that uniting as a reason to either find a new church or stop attending worship anywhere. Some of the more successful church unions have happened where both A and B leave their buildings and together build a new church building C. But should that be?

5. After the August quake, some monks in Norcia had worked to re-establish their work and had reopened their brewery. Sunday's quake ended all of that, at least for the time being. Have you put your heart and soul into some work, only to see it closed, sold, destroyed or repurposed? How did that affect you?

Responding to the News

Contemplate and apply to yourself this (from the Acts 16 commentary above): "The location where we most need to worship God is within us, not tied to any physical place. But the location where we most need to live out the results of that worship is in our churches, our homes, our workplaces and our communities in solid acts of faithfulness to God."

Prayer

O Lord, we pray for those suffering and displaced because of the recent earthquake in Italy. Help them to know the security of your dwelling within them, and the comfort of others who bring aid. In Jesus' name. Amen.



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Other News This Week

Pope Visits Sweden to Commemorate the 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation

In the News

On Monday, the 499th anniversary of German monk Martin Luther's posting of 95 theses on the door of the Catholic cathedral in Wittenberg, Pope Francis co-hosted an ecumenical prayer service in Sweden with leaders of the Lutheran Church. The service launches a year of celebration leading up to the quincentenary of the Protestant Reformation.

The visit by Pope Francis was particularly remarkable, since Luther's resistance to papal authority, the sale of indulgences to purchase pardon for sins, and protest against excesses and abuses within the church led to his excommunication as a heretic, the church split known as the Protestant Reformation, and decades of brutal religious wars in Europe.

While Swedish society is primarily secular, the state church is Lutheran. Since the 1500s, Catholics in Sweden suffered persecution, discrimination and even death.

In the past, Pope Francis has painted Luther as "an intelligent man" who rightly called for reform of a corrupt, worldly church that "was not a role model [but stained by] ... greed and lust for power."

At the celebration this week, the pope stated that "the Reformation helped give greater centrality to sacred Scripture in the church's life."

"We must look with love and honesty at our past, recognizing error and seeking forgiveness," he said, calling on Catholics and Lutherans to "mend" history.

While Catholic-Lutheran relations have been particularly marked by periods of tension and hostility in the past, Christians of all persuasions face the challenge of how to relate to those with whom they disagree.

One of the principal issues dividing Lutherans and Roman Catholics was resolved in 1999, when the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Catholic Church's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) co-signed a [Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification](#), which states in part:

In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.

Relations between Roman Catholics and Lutherans took further large strides this year with the adoption of "Declaration on the Way" by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), which outlines 32 "Statements of Agreement" between Lutherans and Catholics regarding church, ministry and the Eucharist.

Auxiliary Bishop Denis J. Madden of Baltimore, the Catholic co-chairman of the joint task force of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the ELCA that developed the declaration, said he hoped the bishops would endorse it as well.

"Though we have not yet arrived, we have claimed that we are, in fact, on the way to unity," ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton said after the assembly voted overwhelmingly to approve the document. "After 500 years of division and 50 years of dialogue, ... this 'Declaration on the Way' helps us to realize more fully our unity in Christ with our Catholic partners, but it also serves to embolden our commitment to unity with all Christians."



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Lutherans and Roman Catholics are still divided on other issues, such as the nature of the Universal Church, the authority of the pope, the role of women in church leadership, and the nature of the Eucharist (Communion).

Rev. Martin Junge, general secretary of the LWF, told reporters that "people feel lack of unity the heaviest around the [Lord's] table." For centuries, Christians have been barred from partaking of the Eucharist in Catholic churches (though TWW team member Heidi Mann says she's received it, simply by going forward; in her experience, priests don't stop and ask what a visitor's denomination is). But by official position, it is Catholic barring of Lutherans; Lutherans (in the LWF anyway -- not Missouri Synod and a few other conservative branches of Lutheranism) practice "open Communion."

In a joint statement issued in Lund, Sweden, this week, the Roman Catholic Church and the LWF acknowledged that this has been a source of pain especially for family members "who share their whole lives, but cannot share God's redeeming presence at the Eucharistic table. We long for this wound in the body of Christ to be healed" by bringing members of both churches together at the Lord's table, "no longer strangers."

Pope Francis said that while theological differences still exist, the two churches can join forces to serve the poor and refugees, and to fight persecution of Christians. A hallmark of this pope's legacy is his effort to build bridges to other parts of the Christian family, such as the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as to people of other faiths, such as Islam and Judaism.

Rev. Jens-Martin Kruse of the Lutheran Church in Rome described the pope's approach as "walking ecumenism." In the act of "walking together," Kruse said, "we find that we have ... more in communion than we thought before."

Teresa Jodar, a resident of Stockholm who attended the celebration earlier this week, agreed. "I am a Catholic," she said. "The Reformation ... was a sad separation. But we are celebrating taking a step closer. It is wonderful that we can work together instead of thinking about all of the differences that separate us."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[The Pope Commemorates The Reformation That Split Western Christianity. NPR](#)
[Reformation Day: Pope Francis Marks Luther Anniversary in Sweden. BBC News](#)
[Pope Francis, in Sweden, Urges Catholic-Lutheran Reconciliation. The New York Times](#)
[ECLA Approves Lutheran-Catholic Ecumenical Document. ECLA](#)
[Catholic-Lutheran Document Sums Up Agreements, Maps Steps to Full Unity. Catholic News Service](#)
[Declaration on the Way. ELCA](#)

The Big Questions

1. What has been your experience (if any) interacting with Christians from other denominations? What benefits or negative consequences could occur for people who seek interdenominational or interfaith relationships?
2. How have relations between the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches changed in your lifetime? Do you see the overtures for better relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church (and other Protestant groups) as a positive or a negative development? How did you arrive at your viewpoint?
3. What factors would you say most influence your own attitudes about ecumenical dialogue and relations? Rank in order of significance: a) Personal experience (positive or negative) with people in a different branch of the family tree of Christ. b) Views of church leaders. c) Local church or denominational culture. d) Personal and/or corporate Bible study. e) Other (specify).
4. How open are you to ecumenical dialogue, joint worship and/or cooperative service and mission projects? To what extent are you open to interfaith dialogue, and if not, why not? Worship experiences? Cooperation in service projects? Under what conditions do you think such ventures would be possible and potentially positive? When might they be impossible or potentially negative, and why might that be the case?
5. Can the church be true to its identity and faith and work with people or groups that don't share the same identity or faith? If not, why not? If so, how do we balance a commitment to biblical truth (as we understand it) with a call to unity in the church?



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Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Psalm 133:1

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! (For context, read 133:1-3.)

This psalm exalts the virtue and pleasure that belong to people who are joined together by God's grace. In the context verses, this common life is compared to two liquids: oil and dew.

When Aaron was consecrated as a priest (Leviticus 8:12) he was anointed with a fragrant oil made of four spices, myrrh, cinnamon, cane and cassia, mixed with olive oil (Exodus 30:23-25, 30). The image is of very different substances, which, when combined, produced a rich, distinctive perfume unique to the priestly class. When God brings people together in unity from radically different backgrounds, anyone in the vicinity will notice that these people are different.

The unity of the people of God is like the fleeting morning dew, which may seem inconsequential, but which is essential to bring life to an arid land. While unity is a blessing to the people of God themselves, it is capable of blessing everyone who comes in contact with them as well.

Questions: Is it possible to be united as a church while members have significant disagreements? In church relations, how much agreement must be present between the parties for unity to exist? Are there any relationship qualities short of unity that are still godly ways to work with others for the kingdom of God?

How have you experienced the goodness and pleasure of living together in unity among God's people, in spite of differences? When have you seen a united church bring blessing and life to people beyond the walls of the church itself?

John 17:20-23

[Jesus prayed,] "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (For context, read 17:11, 20-26)

We often experience conflict and division in the family of God, and unity seems elusive. Perhaps that is why, in the hours before he went to the cross, Jesus made it a top priority to pray for his followers to be one.

Questions: How does the unity of Jesus' followers reflect his glory and the glory of God the Father? What creates that oneness binding his followers together? What does disunity in the church communicate to the world? What can we do to foster unity in the church, when we have real, substantive differences and disagreements?

Acts 2:1, 4, 6, 11-12

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ... All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. ... And ... each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ... "speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" (For context, read 2:1-12.)

After Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples stayed together in Jerusalem, waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus had promised to give them. They spent much time in prayer, and so they were still together on the day of Pentecost when they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak about God's mighty acts of deliverance.

Questions: What is the significance of the fact that they spoke in many languages, rather than just in one? If they had all spoken in their own native tongue of Aramean, what do you think would have happened to their faith community? What does this event on the Day of Pentecost tell us about how God can use our differences to bless the entire church?



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1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 20-21

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free -- and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ... As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." (For context, read 12:4-7, 12-13, 20-27.)

While this passage deals specifically with the matter of spiritual gifts as God distributes them to individuals within the church for the common good, the principles of body life can also apply to how the church grows and manifests itself in various times and places. So it might be said that the church universal is undivided, and yet is expressed in various ways by different groups of people who are all members of the body of Christ.

Questions: Why are there so many different churches and denominations? What is good about the variety? What problems sometimes occur because of our differences?

Look at your body. Is there any organ or limb that you would part with easily? Look at the body of Christ. What do other churches or denominations add to the body that you value? What does your church or denomination add to the body that others need?

Ephesians 4:2-6

... bearing with one another in love, making every effort 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 of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (For context, read 4:1-16.)

Paul writes to his beloved congregation in Ephesus that they are called to a life of humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance and love, in order to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This kind of life doesn't just happen; it takes deliberation, intentionality and every effort we can muster.

We can only live this way by helping one another. Later in the chapter, Paul says God gave people various gifts "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ." (4:12-13). Believers are to exercise their gifts in such a way that others are built up, until we all grow up into the character of Christ.

On the seal of the United States of America are the words in Latin, *E pluribus unum*, which means "Out of many, one." Originally, the meaning was that out of many colonies or states came one nation. Later, the phrase was broadened to suggest what is regrettably too often an ideal rather than a reality: that out of many races, religions, ethnicities and languages came one people united by a common identity and vision.

Paul lists seven factors that unify those who follow Jesus: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of all. Jesus said (in a different context) that no one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).

Questions: Recall a time when it was very difficult to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. What hindered unity in that instance? What do you think would happen if the people of God tried to organize around multiple bodies, spirits, hopes, lords, beliefs, baptisms or gods? How does God make "out of many, one"?

For Further Discussion

The 2012 document of the International Lutheran -- Roman Catholic Commission on Unity titled "From Conflict to Communion" states:

1) Catholics and Lutherans should always begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division in order to strengthen what is held in common even though the differences are more easily seen and experienced.

2) Lutherans and Catholics must let themselves continuously be transformed by the encounter with each other and by mutual witness of faith."



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How might these principles apply to relationships your church or denomination has with others who do not belong to your particular "tribe" of faith?

Responding to the News

1. Consider visiting a service at another church, not of your present denomination, with the goal to better understand what is common and what is different. If you have already done this, consider visiting a house of worship outside the Christian faith with the same goal.
2. Brainstorm ways you and your church and denomination can collaborate with people from other churches and denominations in prayer, study and service. For example, you might covenant with a parish of a different denomination to pray for each other at each Sunday liturgy. You might gather with people of other denominations to study the Bible; to engage in a shared service project; or to learn about one another's important documents, key theological concepts; or important events in their history.
3. Listen to or sing one of the following songs about the unity of the church as a prayer or statement of faith:

The Church's One Foundation ([words and notation](#)) or [video with lyrics, Top choristers from Chennai, India, at Egmore Wesley Church, Chennai, India](#)

[Undivided \(performed by First Call\) video with lyrics](#)

Prayer

O God, in the relationship of the persons of the Trinity we glimpse the kind of oneness to which you call us as believers. Teach us to treat one another with the same kind of love and respect that flow among Father, Son and Holy Spirit. May the unity you create among us reveal your oneness to people of every tongue and nation, to the glory of your name. Amen.

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