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## **Introduction to the Worship**

*Reconciliation: The Love of Christ Compels Us (cf 2 Corinthians 5:14-20)*

### **Commemoration of the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation**

The churches in Germany decided to commemorate this anniversary as a *Christusfest* (an ecumenical celebration of Christ). The Reformation was the occasion of a renewed focus on salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We rejoice in God's salvation centered on the cross of Christ, who overcomes division and draws us together. This worship openly confesses and asks forgiveness for the sins of division which followed the Reformation. The service will celebrate Christ and his act of reconciliation, which moves the hearts of divided Christians to become ambassadors for Christ as ministers of reconciliation.

### **The Contents of the Worship Service**

The theme "Reconciliation – the Love of Christ Compels Us" celebrates the irrevocable reconciliation that we have received through faith in Jesus Christ. Christ's love becomes the driving force that moves us beyond our division toward acts of reconciliation.

Through psalms and songs, we gather in Jesus' name in praise of God's wondrous deeds. We confess our sins of division and make our plea for forgiveness. The proclamation of the Word highlights the reconciling action of Christ as "One who died for all" (v. 14). The faithful respond to this good news by accepting the call to be ministers of reconciliation.

### **Symbolic Actions in the Service**

#### **The Wall**

1989 saw the fall of the Berlin Wall, that began with the Peace Prayer Movement in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) in which people placed candles in windows and doorways and prayed for freedom. Horst Sindermann, a member of the GDR Leadership until 1989, noted "We had planned everything. We were prepared for everything, just not for candles and prayers." This is why the division of Christians and the reconciliation we seek are represented by the construction and dismantling of a wall. This can become a symbol of hope for any situation in which a division seems insurmountable.

Thus the construction of a symbolic wall at the confession of sin, the visible presence of this wall during the proclamation of the Word, and finally the dismantling of this wall to form a cross as a sign of hope, give us courage to name these terrible divisions and to overcome them with the help of God.

### **Directions/Material: Building up and tearing down the Wall**

*"Division due to our sin"*: after a brief introduction some members of the congregation will construct a wall of separation representing the sins and division that we confess. The wall remains standing during the service until the section headed *"Respond in faith – live in reconciliation."* At this point the stones will be removed from the wall and placed in the shape of a cross.

Depending on the size of the worship space, the following materials will be necessary for this symbolic action: 12 boxes of the same size (i.e. shoe boxes, transport boxes) covered in packing paper to make the "stones." On the front side of each box a key term will be noted (lack of love, hate and contempt, false accusation, discrimination, persecution, broken communion, intolerance, religious wars, division, abuse of power, isolation, and pride). As each sin is named, the stone is brought forward to build the wall. Following a moment of silence, the stone bearer makes the plea for forgiveness, to which the congregation responds "forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us."

After the proclamation of God's word which concludes with the sermon, a prayer for reconciliation follows. As the wall is dismantled and the stones are laid in the form of the cross, a song of reconciliation or a hymn of the glory of the cross is sung.

For worship services in small groups, an alternative liturgical action could be either to expand upon or to replace the wall with personal testimonies. These testimonies in the first part should name situations which have been hurtful to others. In the second part concerning the faith response, stories of reconciliation and acts of healing could be told.

### **Candles**

Following the creed, four intercessory prayers are offered. After each petition, three people light their candles from a central source of light (for example a Paschal candle) and remain standing around the cross until the section headed "Christ's commission." After the commission, the twelve pass the light throughout the congregation until each person has a lighted candle. The service concludes with a blessing and sending out.