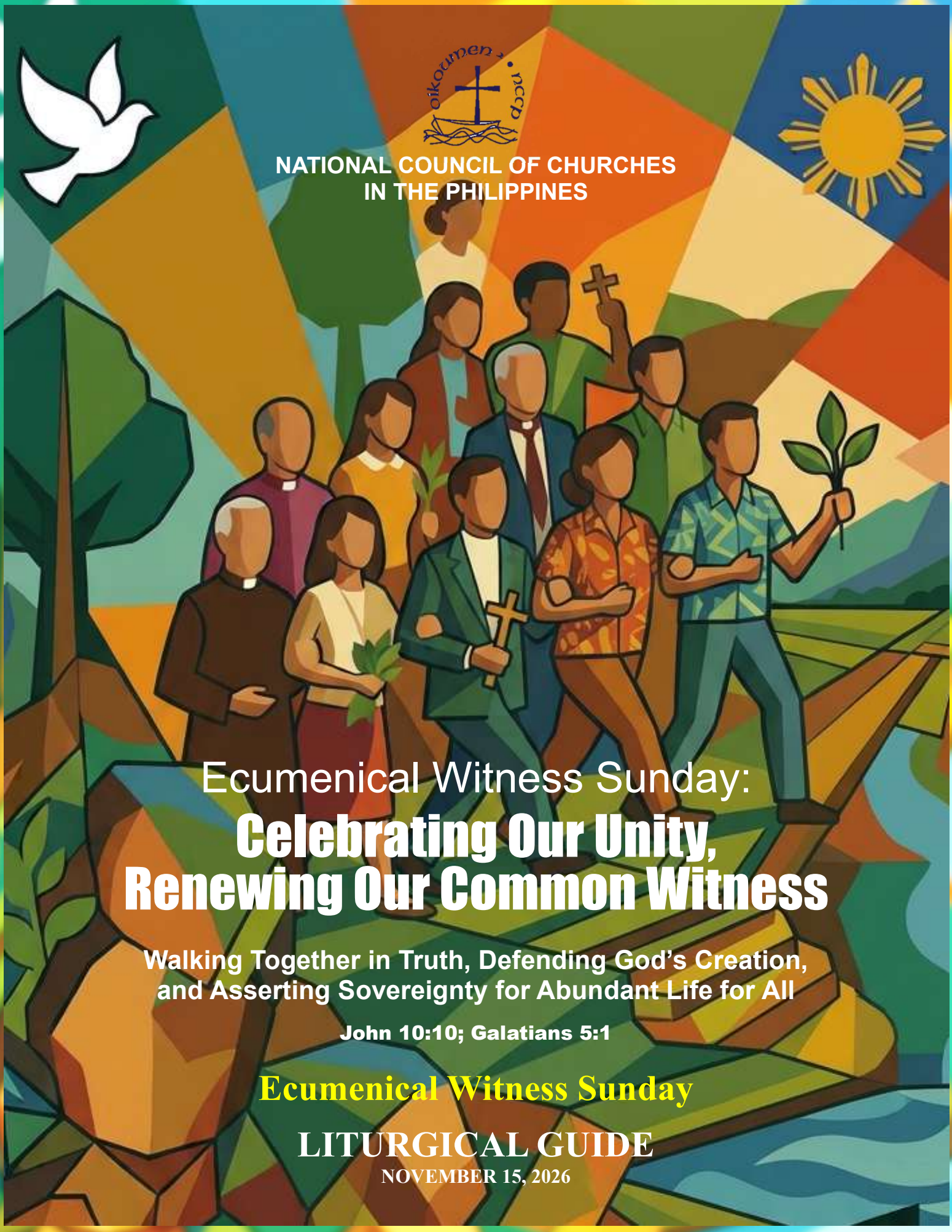


NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
IN THE PHILIPPINES

Ecumenical Witness Sunday:

Celebrating Our Unity, Renewing Our Common Witness

Walking Together in Truth, Defending God's Creation, and Asserting Sovereignty for Abundant Life for All

John 10:10; Galatians 5:1

Ecumenical Witness Sunday

LITURGICAL GUIDE

NOVEMBER 15, 2026

FOREWORD*

"Ecumenical Witness Sunday: Celebrating Our Unity, Renewing Our Common Witness"

The National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) Executive Committee is once again called to reflect on the significance of Ecumenical Witness Sunday—a celebration of our shared faith, our ecumenical journey, and our continuing commitment to bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the life of the Church and in the life of our nation.

Established through the designation of the third Sunday of November as NCCP Sunday, this annual observance was mandated by the NCCP General Convention to promote and popularize the Council and the ecumenical movement at the grassroots level, and to mobilize the spiritual, human, material, and financial resources needed to sustain the Council's life, ministries, and prophetic witness. More than an institutional celebration, it is an occasion to reaffirm why the churches have chosen to journey together despite their differences in traditions, practices, and expressions of faith.

At the heart of Ecumenical Witness Sunday is the conviction that Christian unity is not merely an aspiration for harmonious relationships among churches. It is a calling to participate together in God's mission in the world. As the NCCP's vision declares, we seek "Life in All Its Fullness"—a vision rooted in the promise of Jesus Christ (John 10:10) and expressed through the pursuit of a just, egalitarian, self-reliant, and sustainable society. Our unity, therefore, must find expression in our common witness and action in solidarity with the people, particularly those whose dignity, rights, livelihood, and very lives are threatened by poverty, violence, injustice, and the destruction of God's creation.

MINNIE ANNE MATA-CALUB
General Secretary
National Council of Churches in the Philippines

*(*from the report of the General Secretary to the NCCP Executive Committee on its November 2026 meeting)*

INTRODUCTION

The Ecumenical Witness Sunday (formerly NCCP Sunday) is an annual celebration of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines by its Member Churches during the 3rd Sunday of November. This is not only to celebrate their being members of the NCCP, but more importantly to affirm their commitment to achieve NCCP's vision of "Life In All Its Fullness" (John 10:10). Thus the celebration of Ecumenical Witness Sunday serves as a reminder and a motivation for churches to continue translating the Christian faith into grassroots action and to be of one mind and spirit in doing so.

This year's theme "Celebrating Our Unity, Renewing Our Common Witness" has been expanded in order to focus on how our unity and common witness are translated into action in the midst of our current situation as a nation. To remain authentic to what is currently transpiring in the country, the expanded theme blends traditional ecumenical values with the acute societal challenges facing Filipinos. Thus, considering the prophetic voice, incarnational theology, and historic identity of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, this year's Ecumenical Witness Sunday expanded theme thus states: **"Walking Together in Truth, Defending God's Creation, and Asserting Sovereignty for Abundant Life for All."** *(Inspired by John 10:10 and Galatians 5:1)*

This theme reflects how our faith responds to the call of the times which includes defending the defenders of human rights with churches and church people facing continuous political vulnerabilities in their ministry of protecting the rights of people, rallying against corporate aggression and initiatives such as Pax Silica which threatens ancestral lands and the lives of Indigenous Ayta and farming communities, advocating for genuine self-determination amid increasing geopolitical tensions and foreign military footprints in the country, and the churches collective response in standing firmly with the people in the issue of accountability amidst corruption in the government.

It is our hope and prayer that even through the celebration of Ecumenical Witness Sunday, our churches would be able to live out a liturgical life that responds to our Lord's prayer in John 17:21, *"...that all of them may be one... so that the world may believe...."*

REV. CALLUM R. TABADA
Program Director
Christian Unity and Ecumenical Relations (CUER)

BIBLICO-THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Theme:

"Walking Together in Truth, Defending God's Creation, and Asserting Sovereignty for Abundant Life for All."

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." - John 10:10
"For freedom Christ has set us free." - Galatians 5:1

Introduction: The Meaning of Abundance

In John 10:10, Jesus presents a sharp, uncompromising contrast between two forces: the thief who comes "only to steal and kill and destroy," and Christ himself, who comes so that we "may have life, and have it abundantly."

For the ecumenical movement in the Philippines, abundant life is not a passive, abstract, or purely otherworldly reality. It is material, communal, and structural. It is an incarnational reality where the belly is filled, the land is tilled by those who own it, the environment flourishes, and human dignity is fiercely protected.

As we celebrate Ecumenical Witness Sunday, we must ask ourselves: What are the forces stealing, killing, and destroying the life God intended for the Filipino people today?

The Thief in Our Midst: Systems of Death and Destruction

To preach the Gospel truthfully in the Philippine context, we must name the "thieves" of our time.

The Thief of Truth *(Red-Tagging and Persecution):* Church workers, human rights defenders, and ecumenical leaders are continuously targeted, vilified, and red-tagged. When the state forces silence upon those who speak for the marginalized, it seeks to steal the prophetic voice of the Church.

The Destruction of Creation *(Corporate Aggression):* From aggressive mining to foreign-led industrial incursions like "Pax Silica," the plunder of ancestral domains displaces Indigenous peoples and small farmers. When we destroy the earth, we destroy the very life-support system God provided for God's children.

The Erosion of Sovereignty: True abundance cannot exist under the shadow of foreign military dominance or economic dependency. True freedom requires self-determination.

Christ's Counter-Cultural Response: Asserting Freedom

In Galatians 5:1, the Apostle Paul commands the church: "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

Paul was speaking to a community tempted to retreat into safer, legalistic bonds rather than brave the radical freedom of Christ. Similarly, the NCCP's identity has always been defined by refusing to submit to the "yokes of slavery"—be it tyranny, foreign dictates, or economic oppression.

Asserting sovereignty is a spiritual act. It is the recognition that the Filipino people answer to a sovereign God, not to foreign empires or corporate interests that treat our islands as a geopolitical chessboard or a resource playground.

Walking Together: The Ecumenical Imperative

The theme calls us to walk together. The Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, implies a public gathering—a collective body called out to act. Ecumenism is not merely a polite theological dialogue among different denominations; it is a shared, dangerous, and beautiful journey toward justice.

When the NCCP walks with the farmers of Cagayan Valley, the Ayta communities defending their mountains, and the urban poor demanding fair wages, the Church is living out its ecumenical witness. We break down the walls of our denominational sanctuaries to build a larger sanctuary of solidarity out in the world.

Pastoral and Practical Challenges for the Congregation

From Spectators to Witnesses: Challenge the congregation to move away from comfortable neutrality. In the face of systemic injustice, neutrality sides with the thief.

Defending the Church's Witness: Remind the body that supporting red-tagged church workers and human rights defenders is not a partisan political stance—it is a biblical mandate to defend the "least of these.

Eco-Solidarity: Call for concrete actions in the local church to support environmental defense, climate justice campaigns, and the protection of ancestral lands.

Our Witness Today

The thief comes with weapons, lies, and mandates of fear. But Christ comes with the promise of life. As the ecumenical church, our witness this November is to stand firmly in the breach. By defending the land, protecting the truth, and asserting our collective right to self-determination, we pave the way for the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise: an abundant, liberated life for every single Filipino.

Sermon Guide:
"A Prophetic Witness for Abundant Life"

Sermon Outline

1. **The Divine Blueprint:** God's promise of Shalom and abundant life (John 10:10).
2. **The Present Thieves:** Identifying the systems that steal, kill, and destroy our people and lands today.
3. **The Call to Ecumenical Action:** Walking together in truth, defending creation, and asserting the sovereignty given to us by God (Galatians 5:1).

Ecumenical Witness Sunday Liturgy

November 2026

The Gathering of God's People

PRELUDE

CHORAL INTROIT

***CALL TO WORSHIP**

Leader: Grace and peace be with you from God our Creator, Christ our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit who sustains our collective witness. Today, as the ecumenical body, we gather to assert life amidst the shadows of death.

People: ***We come to worship the God of life, who calls us out of isolation into a shared journey of truth.***

Leader: Look around our beautiful archipelago—from the mountains of the Cordilleras to the seas of Mindanao. God looked at creation and called it good.

People: ***Yet the land groans, the waters weep, and corporate greed plunders the inheritances of our Indigenous communities.***

Leader: Listen to the voices crying out from the fields of Cagayan Valley, the streets of our cities, and the sanctuaries of our churches. God's servants are speaking truth to power.

People: ***Yet the forces of deceit respond with red-tagging, violence, and threats against those who defend the poor.***

Leader: Stand tall and look toward the horizon. Christ has set us free for freedom's sake!

People: ***We refuse the yoke of foreign dominance and local tyranny! We gather to walk together in truth, to defend creation, and to assert our sovereignty for an abundant life for all! Let us worship God!***

***HYMN** *("Purihin ang Panginoon" or "All Creatures of Our God and King")*

The Act of Confession and Reconciliation

CALL TO CONFESSION

Leader: Christ came that we might have life in all its fullness. Yet, we acknowledge the times we have allowed the "thieves" of our time to steal, kill, and destroy without our protest. Let us silently and collectively confess our shortcomings.

(A brief moment of silence)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

People: Sovereign God, Creator of the land and seas, we confess that we have often chosen comfort over courage. We have stayed inside our neat denominational walls while our neighbors suffered. We have looked away when ancestral lands were plundered in the name of false progress. We have kept silent when our brothers and sisters in ministry were falsely accused and red-tagged. Forgive us for our complicity. Forgive us for our fear. Renew our hearts and ignite our spirits to be true witnesses of Your justice. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Minister: Hear the good news: God does not leave us in our fear. Christ breaks the yokes of our slavery and calls us into the light of truth. In Christ, you are forgiven, you are redeemed, and you are empowered to stand firm.
People: Thanks be to God!

The Proclamation of the Word

***SCRIPTURE READINGS** John 10:10 and Galatians 5:1

SERMON / HOMILY

Response to the Word

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH – The Nicene Creed** *ALL*

We believe in one God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,
begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human.
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered and was buried.
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life.
He proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.
He spoke through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,
and to life in the world to come. Amen.

OFFERTORY / PRESENTATION OF GIFTS

(We encourage the churches to set aside a special Ecumenical Witness Sunday Offering for the work of the wider Ecumenical ministry through the NCCP. Collections can be coursed through the Member Church's central office.)

***DOXOLOGY** *Praise God the Source of Life and birth!*
Praise God the Word who came to earth!
Praise God the Spirit, holy flame!
All honor, glory to God's name. Amen!

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE *(Intercessory Prayers)*

Leader: As an ecumenical community, we lift our prayers for our church, our nation, and our world. After each petition, let us respond with: "Lord, hear our prayer for life."

Leader A: *(For the Church and Ecumenical Workers)* We pray for the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, its member churches, and all ecumenical workers. Protect those who are red-tagged, vilified, or legally harassed for standing with the marginalized and defending Human Rights defenders. Grant them courage, physical safety, and the unwavering solidarity of the whole body of Christ. Lord, in your mercy...

People: ***Lord, hear our prayer for life.***

Leader B: *(For Creation and Indigenous Communities)* We pray for our common home. We pray for the Ayta, the Lumad, the Mangyan, and all Indigenous peoples fighting against aggressive corporate mining, land-grabbing, and initiatives that destroy ancestral domains. Help us to be fierce defenders of the land, realizing that the destruction of creation is the destruction of our people. Lord, in your mercy...

People: ***Lord, hear our prayer for life.***

Leader C: *(For National Sovereignty and Peace)* We pray for the Philippines. Deliver our nation from being a playground for geopolitical superpowers. We pray against foreign military exploitation and economic agreements that bypass the needs of the Filipino poor. Empower our leaders to assert genuine sovereignty, and guide us toward a peace that is built on the foundations of justice, not fear. Lord, in your mercy...

People: ***Lord, hear our prayer for life.***

Leader: Gathering all our prayers, we pray as Christ taught us:

****People:*** ***(The Lord's Prayer / Ama Namin)***

The Sending Forth and Benediction

***HYMN OF COMMITMENT** *("Pananagutan" or "We Shall Overcome")*

***CLOSING PRAYER**

Minister: God of the journey, we leave this house of worship to enter the sanctuary of the world.

People: ***May our hands defend Your creation. May our voices speak Your truth. May our feet walk alongside the poor. Keep us united as one ecumenical body, seeking nothing less than the abundant life You promised to all. Amen.***

***BENEDICTION**

Minister: Go forth into the world!

May the Creator bless the land beneath your feet;
May Christ the Redeemer guide your path as you walk in truth;
And may the Holy Spirit give you the courage to stand firm in freedom and assert the sovereignty of God's love.
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

People: ***Amen!***

***RESPONSE**

POSTLUDE

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches
Episcopal Church in the Philippines
Iglesia Evangelica Metodista En Las Islas Filipinas
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