

Benedict and Kobia pray together in Rome for Christian unity: At Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

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In an ecumenical first, a general secretary of the World Council of Churches took part with the pope in a Rome service to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, an observance that began 100 years ago in the U.S.

WCC general secretary Samuel Kobia, a Methodist minister from Kenya, prayed with Pope Benedict XVI January 25 in the ancient basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, where according to tradition the bones of the apostle Paul were buried following his execution by rulers of ancient Rome.

Saying that “the world needs a church that is one and united in its witness,” Kobia referred to unrest in his home country that has led to more than 850 deaths. “The common witness of the churches for reconciliation and healing of the nation is crucial for peace in Kenya,” Kobia said.

The service, which gathered about 30 leaders of WCC churches, came at the end of the January 18-25 observances described by the *National Catholic Reporter's* John Allen as a “week-long ecumenical festival.”

Allen noted also the presentation of the Paul Wattson Christian Unity Award to the WCC's Commission on Faith and Order and the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, which have jointly prepared the Week of Prayer for 40 years. Wattson helped initiate what was once called the Octave of Prayer for Church Unity, first held in 1908 in Graymoor, New York, by the Society of the Atonement.

The official Vatican newspaper, *l'Osservatore Romano* carried an interview with Kobia in which he said he hoped that by the middle of the 21st century Christians will be able to share Holy Communion together at every church.

Benedict made no mention of the interview. Neither the Catholic Church nor Eastern Orthodox churches allow other Christians to participate in their Eucharist. But at the final service he thanked Kobia and other ecumenical representatives. -*Ecumenical News International*