

22-27 March 2021

A Week of Prayer marking one year of COVID-19

Prayers of lament, healing, protection, and hope

One year since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Christian world communions and ecumenical organizations across the world are coming together for a week of prayer from 22 to 27 March, to remember all those affected by the global health crisis and its far-reaching consequences.

These prayers offer a chance to remember the dead, to console our shared grief, to pray for healing, and to affirm our common human fragility, which the pandemic has highlighted.

It is our hope that these shared ecumenical prayers will offer a chance to remember the most vulnerable, all health care staff and front-line workers, and leaders of nations and communities as they seek to make the right decisions to further the common good.

The prayers were prepared by the World Evangelical Alliance (Monday 22/3), the Mennonite World Conference (Tuesday 23/3), World Vision (Wednesday 24/3), the World Council of Churches (Thursday 25/3), the LWF (Friday 26/3), and the Salvation Army (Saturday 27/3). The initiative for the week of prayer came from the World Council of Churches.

Monday 22 March 2021
Day One

Prayers of Lament

(We lament the more than 2 million people who have died and the deadly impact of the pandemic on the vulnerable, especially children.)

Opening Prayer

God who see all and know all,
your eyes are upon us, your children, in this our time of pain and suffering.

We affirm and recognize that you, our God, have been,
and continue to be present with us throughout this COVID 19 pandemic.

Yet over this past year, we have witnessed and experienced intense anguish:
physical and mental illness, hunger and starvation,
rising unemployment and the broadening of social inequities,
and the abuse of the most vulnerable by the powerful.

We cry out for relief and for justice and ask:
How long, O Lord? Will you forget us forever?
How long will you hide your face from us?
How long must we have sorrow in our hearts all day?

As we cry out to you for an answer,
with faith, we declare that our trust and confidence is in you.

In our lament, may we not lose hope, but even in the darkest night,
may we still be able to sing unto you a new song,
because you, God, have dealt bountifully with us.

Glory to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Scripture Reading: Psalm 6

¹ O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger, or discipline me in your wrath. ² Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror. ³ My soul also is struck with terror, while you, O Lord—how long? ⁴ Turn, O Lord, save my life; deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love. ⁵ For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can give you praise? ⁶ I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. ⁷ My eyes waste away because of grief; they grow weak because of all my foes. ⁸ Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping. ⁹ The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord accepts my prayer. ¹⁰ All my enemies shall be ashamed and struck with terror; they shall turn back, and in a moment be put to shame.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. **Amen.**

Reflection

Fatigued. That is one word that best describes where many people find themselves now as we mark one year since the declaration of the COVID 19 pandemic. We in the household of faith have not been untouched by the pandemic. Our faith in Christ has not immunized us against being infected and impacted by the Novel Coronavirus (COVID 19). Within the household of faith, we have prayed for the healing and full recovery of our sisters and brothers. Throughout our faith communities we have mourned as we had to bury our dead while not being able to fully participate in our traditional liturgical and cultural rites. We have struggled for survival as our local economies have been negatively impacted by lockdowns. Our spiritual, mental and psycho-social states have been in turmoil as our normal weekly physical gatherings for worship and fellowship have been curtailed by social distancing protocols.

The sense of being fatigued goes beyond the physical. There is also a related spiritual fatigue, even for people of faith. A good way to describe that is lament. The writer of Psalm 6 has voiced the sentiments which many faithful Christian believers have uttered over this past year:

We are languishing! We are mourning! We are shaken with terror! We are weeping! We are grieving! We are weary and worn! The ability to recognize and relate to these myriad emotions is not antithetical to our Christian faith. To express feeling abandoned by God does not mean loss of faith in the ultimate sovereignty of God. For even Jesus on the cross cried out, lamenting, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Mark 15:34). Prayers of lament are important in our faith pilgrimage because they allow us to face our grief. Lament allows others to come alongside us and either remove or lessen our fear as we face our loss and grief.

Though lamenting before God is a good and needful, it also leads along the pathway of deeper trust in God's faithfulness. Even as we call out to God in lament, drawing attention not only to our own suffering but to the suffering of others, we are reminded to not lose our faith and to trust in God's providential care. We can therefore affirm: God has heard our prayers of lament and will answer. We begin with lament. We continue in faith. We end with hope.

Prayers of Intercession

God of compassion, we call upon you to tabernacle and journey with us into the abyss of our grief as we are overcome with the torrent of emotions that shake our faith in you.

Lord, hear our cry for help and have mercy.

Gracious God, may we be reminded that our prayers of lament are never wasted, for even as we empty our tears before you, we know that you look upon us with pity.

Lord, hear our cry for help and have mercy.

Merciful God, may you hear our cries, feel our pain, consider our fear, and share our anguish over loved ones lost.

Lord, hear our cry for help and have mercy.

Immortal God, may you strengthen your people and deliver us in our fight with this invisible virus.

Lord, hear our cry for help and have mercy.

God of hope, may the embers of hope remain lit in our lives as our tears of lament pour forth, so that we do not lose trust and confidence in you.

Lord, hear our cry for help and have mercy.

We join together in praying as Jesus taught us: *Our Father...*

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace.

(Prepared by the World Evangelical Alliance)

Tuesday 23 March 2021
Day Two

Prayers for Hurting & Suffering Communities

(We remember the millions suffering from food insecurity, children and youth being trafficked and the 235 million people worldwide who are in need of living assistance.)

Opening Prayer

Eternal God, as we come before you on this day,
our souls waiting in silence,
we place our hope in You, our rock, our salvation, our refuge.

By your grace, may we not be shaken.

May we pour out our hearts in this time of prayer, trusting in Your steadfast love.

May the source of our inspiration be Christ Jesus,
who in his love of the poorest and most needy demonstrated welcome and
inclusion.

May everything we do be done as if we are doing it to Jesus,
and because we are one in His Spirit,
in whose power we pray.

Amen.

Scripture Reading: Romans 12:9–21

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰ No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Reflection

During the first weeks of the pandemic, one heard news about people anxiously accumulating groceries for themselves. This had adverse effects for others who were not able to get what they needed. However, as time went by, we heard many more stories of generosity, compassion and self-denial for others' sake. Certainly, many of us could affirm that God was at work among us, prompting and strengthening people for these acts of kindness.

These circumstances have reminded us of how God grants gifts for renewal amid difficult times. Even more, God makes things new *especially* in the context of difficult conditions. For example, we see that when there was darkness and emptiness, the Spirit of God brought light and fullness into the universe (Genesis 1:1-3, Psalm 33). When there was death and no hope, the same Spirit of God brought life and a new future (Ezekiel 37:1-14). When there is need and starvation, it is God's Spirit that sustains and renews all things (Psalm 104:27-30).

It is the same Spirit who empowers the church ever since Pentecost. Life, hope, courage, strength and a new future are possible because the Holy Spirit is moving in and through us amid this pandemic.

This Spirit is renewing humanity, wherever communion, friendship, provision and partnership are being made real in the world. This contrasts with the darkness, death, starvation, domination, exploitation and accumulation which so often marks our world.

How can we, who bear Christ's name and have God's Spirit in us, selfishly take for ourselves before caring for others? Rather, let us attend above all to those among us and throughout the world who suffer in this pandemic. In particular, let us pray and work for those whose poverty, ill health, age, and commitment to care make them especially vulnerable to the suffering in which all people have some share at this time.

Finally, let us live today looking to the renewed world that the Holy Spirit is bringing about, remembering that our Lord and Life-giver is in us, bringing new life and hope to the world. As God's people, we continue praying and living for a renewal of God's creation.

Prayer of Intercession

God of all, we pray that our local congregations may find ways to model the love of Christ in their communities which struggle with illness and death due to the pandemic. In this great work of care may we work to bridge the political, economic and racial inequalities which exist and contribute to the suffering of the pandemic.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray that the Spirit of unity and peace would bring healing and resilience. May your people continue to abide under the shadow of your strength as they take shelter in you, placing their trust in your deliverance.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Loving Lord, grant help to communities living in fear so that they will be strengthened as they face the threats of job losses, hunger, bereavement and disease. Grant them courage and hope.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Compassionate God, we bring before you today those within our global family for whom physical distancing is impossible. We pray for your gracious protection of them. Through this global crisis may we all be drawn closer to you and so closer to each other.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

As faith communities, may we find ways to show and witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ to all among us who are hurting. May we have the courage and gifts to be the Body of the Risen One in this time of our world's suffering.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We join together in praying as Jesus taught us: *Our Father.....*

Benediction

God bless you and keep you. God care for you.

God keep you safe. God fill your life with love.

May God radiate the warmth of our hearts and shine through the peace of Christ every day until His world is here. Amen

(taken from the Mennonite Hymnal (Germany / Switzerland))

(Prepared by the Mennonite World Conference)

Wednesday 24 March 2021
Day Three

Prayers for Leaders

(We remember the world's leaders especially those leading advanced-economies countries whose decision impact conditions in low-income countries.)

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Almighty and faithful God,

we come before you in obedience to your Word which implores us to pray for all people and those who serve in positions of leadership.

Give to leaders your divine wisdom.

In the exercise of their authority, might they always seek to serve with humility and to act justly.

Broaden the vision of all leaders so that they will see beyond the parochial borders.

May your love and compassion envelope their hearts,
enabling them to look after the interests of others with diligence.

May they not grow weary in doing good, in serving all with joy and a sense of purpose.

We pray for leaders who serve in every capacity and at every level:
churches, governments and civic organizations, finance, health, education.

As they lead, we pray that your Holy Spirit will grant them wisdom and courage in these times. In the name of the Jesus we pray. **Amen.**

Scripture Reading: Luke 7:1–10

¹After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ²A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. ³When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. ⁴When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy of having you do this for him, ⁵for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us." ⁶And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; ⁷therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. ⁸For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." ⁹When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I

found such faith.”¹⁰ When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Reflection

Leadership counts. And especially in times of crisis, leadership matters. The past year has exposed a variety of leadership styles from small communities and villages to political leaders with global profile. We witnessed some responses that left us astonished and speechless. At the same time without being prompted we spontaneously applauded the performance of others. Whether we gave a thumbs up or down, the response and ensuing actions of every leader had an impact in some way on the lives of others. While the visible impact made some leaders heroes, it also made some villains according to the court of public opinion.

In today's reading we encounter a man who was not only sick to the point of death but who also found himself in the unfortunate and regrettable place of being a slave. I wish not for anyone to be a slave to another human. However, in this story as we reflect on leadership, I draw our attention to the centurion who demonstrated some very noteworthy characteristics. He valued people and affirmed their humanity without regard to their '*status*'. It was this attribute that would have caused him to send messengers to Jesus to plead for healing for one over whom he exercised authority. The messengers too lauded his virtues as they sought to convince Jesus as to why his request was worthy of being answered. This leader's focus was not on himself or his own welfare. Rather his attention and energy were invested in bringing healing to one whom others might have not even thought of as being worthy.

Added to his sense of deep compassion and care, the centurion exhibited an unusual balance of deep humility and profound faith. These qualities one would not have expected in a leader whose life was not nurtured by the religious practices of Judaism. And it is precisely this surprising portrayal that results in Jesus' commendation of this leader. In this man's actions and words, we see an example of the type of leadership that is crucial to help communities, cities, countries and indeed our world to navigate us safely through this pandemic. We pray for God to give us in this compassionate season, caring, humble and faith-filled leaders.

Prayers of Intercession

For the peace of the world, that a spirit of respect and forbearance may grow among nations and peoples,

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

For the churches of Christ everywhere, that it may be filled with truth and love, and be found without fault at the day of your coming,

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

For those in positions of public trust, our global leaders, that they may serve justice and promote the dignity and freedom of all people,

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

For a blessing upon the labours of all, and for the right use of riches of creation,

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

For the poor, the persecuted, the sick, and all who suffer; for refugees, prisoners, and all who are in danger: that they may be relieved and protected,

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

(adapted, Ruth Haley Barton. Invitation to Retreat: The Gift and Necessity of Time Away with God. IVP Books. 2018. P. 141-142)

We join together in praying as Jesus taught us: *Our Father.....*

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace.

(Prepared by World Vision)

Thursday 25 March 2021
Day Four

Prayers for Healing

(We remember the front-line, health care and humanitarian workers around the world and the healing of bodies and minds and all of creation.)

Opening Prayer

Gracious God,
we echo these words of praise before you today as we declare:
Bless the Lord, my soul; bless the Lord and do not forget all of God's
benefit.

We recall with thanksgiving the many times and ways in which you have come to our
aid.

We give thanks that in our moments of sickness and weakness,
we have experienced your healing.

We give thanks for hands that have ministered your healing touch to our bodies;
for lips that have uttered comforting words bringing calm to our troubled
minds;
feet that have carried us when we were too weak to bear our own weight;
communities that have supported us, renewing our faith in you and each
other.

Through life's changing scenes and seasons, we have known you to be the God who
heals.

Help us to once again believe that in this season and at this time,
you will grant your children healing.

We pray this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. **Amen**

Scripture Reading: Luke 17:11–19

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³ they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?" ¹⁸ Was none of them found to return and

give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Reflection

It would not be altogether wrong to say that our desire to experience healing is always foremost on our minds when we are sick. If we are not careful, it can be like an all-consuming fire, depending on the nature of our illness. During such times, healing ascends the hierarchy of our human needs and we would do whatever it takes to be healed. In the reading for today we encounter ten men who possessed such a desire. Though we do not know their ages, their family of origin and their previous social status, now they are simply identified as lepers. As such they had been pushed to the margins of the society of their day. Deemed as outcasts to be socially distanced from the rest of the community, they had created their own.

In this reading we recount another instance in which the healing power of God was manifested through Jesus. Yet unlike other instances in which those seeking healing directly asked for such, this community of outcast lepers approached Jesus pleading for mercy. In essence, they were seeking compassion; a relief from the oppression and burden that was theirs because of their physical condition. Their words to Jesus pointed beyond the desire to better their physical ailment. It was also a plea for them to be recognized fully for who they – human beings created by God and reflecting that divine image. In uttering these words, they were interceding for a change to be made in them but also for a change to be around them. Mercy, should it be granted to them, would also encompass the community in which they had been marginalized.

Jesus' instructions to them, the obedience of which would guarantee their healing, reflects such a duality. In instructing them to present themselves to the priests, Jesus was seeking to do more than follow the requirements of the Mosaic law, he was also opening the doorway to bring healing within the community in which relationships had been severed because of a leprous condition. In their walk to the priests, the act of mercy, when granted, was realized in physical healing. Concurrently, the arrival of the other nine to the priests and presenting of themselves as no longer marred by leprosy can be viewed as well as a manifestation of God's mercy in bringing healing to the entire community. Those on the margins, through divine mercy, had been repositioned and a community which had before estranged others was now exercising hospitality as it affirmed the humanity of others.

During this time of COVID 19, might our prayers for healing begin with a plea for mercy. And mercy when granted results in healing and transformation of individuals and communities. The fullness of mercy and healing though is translated to wholeness and wellness when we remember to utter not only pleas for mercy and healing but voice as well our praise and thanks to God. In these times, may our faith lead us to approach Jesus, pleading for mercy coupled with the expectancy of healing for bodies, minds and souls.

Prayers of Intercession

We pray for all healthcare workers, nurses, doctors, allied health professionals, hospital and community-based health workers, care providers in care homes, and others. We also pray for families caring for the sick, at home and in communities.

Hear from heaven and heal your people.

We pray for all the sanitation workers and those who work in the community, in villages, towns and cities and in both the public and private sector to keep the environment clean and healthy.

Hear from heaven and heal your people.

We pray for all service providers, such as police, drivers and public transportation workers, shop attendants, hairdressers, all who interact with the public, to serve and ensure the smooth functioning of society.

Hear from heaven and heal your people.

We pray for teachers and care providers for children who ensure the formation, training and provision of a safe environment for children and young adults.

Hear from heaven and heal your people.

We pray for all children, youth, and adults who have struggled through this period, facing physical, spiritual, and mental crises. Uphold them and help our communities to accompany them.

Hear from heaven and heal your people.

We pray for the provision of safety supplies that help us to protect ourselves from the pandemic. We pray that we can ensure that all have equitable access to the protection that is needed for the healing of our communities.

Hear from heaven and heal your people.

We pray for the healing and renewal of creation despite this global pandemic.

Hear from heaven and heal your people.

We join together in praying as Jesus taught us: *Our Father.....*

Benediction

May the freedom that is granted through Christ,
be lived in the power of the Holy Spirit,
as we affirm what God, the Creator, declared over all that was created... it is good. **Amen.**

(Prepared by the World Council of Churches)

Friday, 26 March 2021
Day Five

Prayers for Protection

(With over 209 million people being vaccinated, we pray for an equitable distribution of vaccines, especially in low income countries so that people everywhere will be protected.)

Opening Prayer

God, our parent,
you are gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love.

You are good to all and your compassion is over all that you have made.

Gather us together, as one family.

Envelope us in your immeasurable goodness and generosity that, we too,
may recognize that bond that unites us and the dignity and worth of every
human being,
never favouring one person or group over another,
but together seeking justice, equity, protection, health for every human
being.

We ask this all in the name of your child, Jesus,
who in the manger and on the cross showed complete solidarity,
and now through the Holy Spirit continually opens ways of justice. **Amen.**

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 58:6–12

⁶ Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? ⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, ¹⁰ if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. ¹¹ The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. ¹² Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

Word of God! Word of Life!

Thanks be to God!

Reflection

Protection. Masks, distancing, hand washing, sheltering. These protective behaviors have become common during this year of COVID. But it took an extraordinary collaboration of organizations and governments to expedite research and develop safe vaccines. Vaccines save millions of lives each year, through a simple method. They train the body's immune system to recognize harmful viruses or bacteria by injecting a harmless piece of that virus or other protein into the body. Your body's natural germ fighting cells learn to recognize the harmless piece of virus and prepare antibodies in case the virus ever returns. Vaccines help your body remember.

Since the earliest Chinese and Indian methods of inoculation, the methods of vaccination have become normal. But a closer look reveals a strange logic. The cause becomes the cure.

Numbers 21:4-9 recounts a story when the Israelites were in the midst of the Exodus. Suffering from thirst and hunger in the wilderness, a new threat emerged. They encountered poisonous snakes with deadly venom. What to do? The Lord told Moses to fix a serpent to a pole. When someone is bitten by a serpent, they should look to the serpent on the staff, and they will be healed. The cause becomes the cure. Today a snake on a pole is a symbol for the medical profession. This *caduceus* is a symbol of healing.

The Gospel of John does not miss the parallel between the *caduceus* and Jesus being lifted up on a tree. The cross is the sign of cosmic healing for all who look upon Christ and remember. But a closer look reveals that Jesus's message of healing also operated by a strange logic.

Religious and social laws of the day demanded that the sick or "impure" be kept at a distance. In an honour/shame system, a touch of impurity would contaminate the pure. But Jesus proclaimed a message of mercy, where a touch of grace heals and restores all that is wounded. The gospel upended the exclusionary logic of purity laws that lead to despair with the foolishly hopeful logic of love that holds in order to heal.

For a year we have embraced the strange logic, that the cause of our grief, physical distancing is part of the cure that can protect one another. As the prophet Isaiah recalls, our self-limitation is a holy fast that can lighten the burden of suffering with the knowledge that our restraint protects our neighbour. This strange logic even brings hope in the form of a vaccine where a bit of the cause becomes the cure. Now we seek the wisdom to distribute these vaccines to the most vulnerable, ensure just and equitable access, and sensitize people to the importance of remembering safe preventative practices until we see this journey through.

As we find our way through this wilderness to the day when we can safely gather again, may we look to the one fixed to the cross, and remember the holy and healing logic of life that comes through self-giving.

Prayers of Intercession

Remembering your love that encompasses all and your call to solidarity, we come before you O God with our prayer:

O God, our mother, gather all peoples under your wings, no one is excluded, awaken in us that love which gives itself in care and commitment for the safety and protection of all. Turn, O God,

and deliver us!

O God, our creator, as hands are outstretched and arms are waiting for the vaccine, push us to find ways of equitable distribution that all available resources be allocated without discrimination and without unequal treatment based on race, ethnicity, colour, gender, sexual orientation, age, religious affiliation, nationality, social status or ability to pay. Turn, O God,

and deliver us!

O God, our guardian, every human being carries your image. You desire that all may have life and have it abundantly. Break down barriers of wealth and illusions of superiority that all may enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health as a basic human right. Turn, O God,

and deliver us!

O God, our refuge, sustain all medical workers, nurses, doctors, attendants, all hospital and clinic workers. Strengthen them in their expertise so that the number of deaths be minimized, lives preserved, protect them as they take great risk themselves. Turn, O God,

and deliver us!

O God, our hope, inspire scientists and lab workers in their continual search to improve the vaccine. Motivate pharmaceutical companies to seek rapid and just distribution without thinking first about profit. Turn, O God,

and deliver us!

O God, our ark, gather and protect the most vulnerable, those at the greatest risk of becoming ill, shield them and all of us from the raging waters of the pandemic. Bring a swift end to the virus and the suffering it causes. Turn, O God,

and deliver us!

O God, our truth, embolden religious leaders to confront unsubstantiated rumours and conspiracy theories that undermine public trust in science and in health authorities. Encourage them to speak up for the marginalized so that public policy decisions benefit all equally. Turn, O God,

and deliver us!

O God, our ruler, sway the governments of this world to speak truth, to provide correct and honest information and equitable policies of protection and care that the pandemic may be controlled and ended. Turn, O God,

and deliver us!

O God, our sustainer, support and preserve all workers and businesses that long-term hardship to the economy be avoided and that a peaceful and prosperous environment be created in which all are satisfied. Turn, O God,

and deliver us!

O God, hold in your tender embrace all who will die this day. Into your hands, O God,

We entrust all our prayers. Amen.

Gathered into one family by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us:

Our Father, in heaven...

Benediction

May the goodness and favour of the Lord our God,
Eternal Majesty, Incarnate Word, Abiding Spirit
Embrace all creation
May the unconditional love of the Triune God
Envelop all in justice and peace.
O prosper the work of our hands that your shalom reigns. **Amen.**

(Prepared by the Lutheran World Federation)

Saturday 27 March 2021
Day Six

Prayers of Hope

(We celebrate the signs of hope as people are being helped in particular children and the vulnerable.)

Opening Prayer

God of hope,
our hearts overflow with gratitude for your abiding presence during these exceedingly difficult and troubled times.

May the flames of hope remain aglow among individuals, families, communities and nations during the pandemic.

May our trust in you be affirmed especially as we continue to navigate each day the challenges that have confronted us.

Let all that we are wait quietly before you, O God, knowing that our hope is in you.

By your Spirit, may we be grounded in the hope that is proclaimed in your Word: you are our rock and salvation, our fortress where we will not be shaken.

We pray in the One who, by his resurrection, has given us the hope of life eternal, Jesus the Christ, **Amen**.

Scripture Readings

2 Thessalonians 2:13–17

¹³ But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ For this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.

¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

Romans 15:13

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Reflection

'Hope springs eternal in the human breast' was written in 1732 by the poet Alexander Pope. It captures the profound instinct that dark and difficult times will pass. To hope is to anticipate, even expect that better days will come. More recently others have shared their wisdom on this theme. Take for example, what Hellen Keller has said, 'Hope sees the invisible, feels the intangible, and achieves the impossible.' Zig Ziglar said, 'If there is hope in the future, there is literally power in the present.' The words of Nelson Mandela too are timely when he remarked, 'May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.' Hope is a bridge which helps us to journey from the difficulties and depravities of the present to a future which looks not only different, but better.

Consequently, when hope is lessened or even destroyed, our spirits are crushed. Little wonder that hope is one of the central tenets of the Christian faith! For followers of Jesus Christ, "hope" is more than being optimistic or having a positive outlook on life. It is that and more, for our hope is anchored in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Our faith therefore leads us to affirm that what we hold to as hope enables us to see beyond the current calamities, even beyond the 'sting' of death and to still maintain we are a 'hope-filled' Christian people.

Christian hope though in these times also embraces other signs of hope which helps us to keep hope alive during this pandemic. The flames of hope are ignited when we see scientists throughout the world working together to create vaccines. Our hope in humanity is affirmed as we witness nations sharing knowledge and information to mitigate the pandemic, agreeing to quarantine and isolation to protect each other. Though there have been innumerable challenges and difficulties that have emerged since the start of the pandemic, there have also been many signs of hope that remind us that things will get better.

During this week of prayer, in all the varied expressions of lament, concern, intercession and gratitude there has been a thread of hope, a confidence that God is with us. Our God who suffers with his people will continue to bring hope and healing. Paul's prayer is our prayer, that God, the source of hope will fill us with joy, peace and hope because we trust him. A hope that is rooted in God, not in outward circumstances. Hope that is expressed in what we do and say. God's people serving him, bringing hope where there is poverty and suffering. This is our active participation in God's mission, the *Missio Dei*.

Prayers of Intercession

God of hope, we pray to you bring peace and hope to the hearts of all people, especially in communities where hope has been lost and where poverty has taken away all hope for the future.

God of hope, keep us hopeful.

Gracious God, we pray for all the organisations and denominations who have participated in this call to prayer, all who are working in partnership to provide healthcare and education and infrastructure that will enable and equip communities to recover from the effects of the pandemic and build a better future.

God of hope, keep us hopeful.

Loving God, we give thanks for the hope that you have given us, may the Holy Spirit continue to fill us with all hope enabling us to continue to trust you as we minister and serve in your name.

God of hope, keep us hopeful.

Benediction

The Lord bless us and keep us;
the Lord make his face shine on us and be gracious to us;
the Lord turn his face toward us and give us peace.

(Prepared by the Salvation Army)