

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR PEACE 21 SEPTEMBER 2007

In 1981 the United Nations established an International Day of Peace with the aim of encouraging the whole world to observe a day marked by peace and non-violence. Since then a growing number of people representing a wide variety of religious traditions have committed to the task of giving the day spiritual meaning, with places of worship and spiritual practice used by those who seek for peace in the world.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has invited its member churches to join in this observance, proposing that 21 September or its nearest Sunday should be a time to pray for peace. Prayer is at the heart of the 'Decade to Overcome Violence' a major WCC programme that began in 2001, and in this particular year the focus is on Europe and the theme 'Make me an instrument of your peace'. Thus, it is appropriate that our churches give special attention to marking this day. It is an opportunity for church communities in all places to pray and act together to nurture lasting peace in the hearts of people, their families, communities and societies.

The following prayers and worship material have been drawn from many sources, including resources prepared by the WCC. There are general prayers, followed by a collection of reflections and readings, and then a focus around four particular forms of violence. The material is to help you bring your concerns and can be used in any way you wish.

PRAYERS FOR PEACE

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
O, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal
life.

Amen

attributed to St. Francis of Assisi

God of compassion and mercy,
We bring to you our divided society and our
broken world,
Seeking your healing and transforming grace;
It is easy for us to point the finger at others,
Yet we know that we all need your forgiveness;
So we lift into your presence today,
not only the victims of our conflicts,
But also those we have called enemies.
Break down the walls of hatred, distrust and
bitterness
And open a way for us to reach one another
in truth and love.
Enable us to build a society where all can belong;
To share our gifts in mutual respect
And to seek for the new future which you
offer us. Through Jesus Christ.

*Travelling the Road of Faith: Worship resources from
the Corrymeela Community, Belfast, Northern Ireland*

Could it be that we are teetering on the brink
Of an outbreak of peace?
Could it be that by embracing one another
Deep peace could be known,
Here and now?
Where we work against the tyranny of war
and delight in our humanity.
Where suspicion and terror are replaced
with trust and hope.
Let us take the risk –
To make peace with one another
Live in peace with one another
And be at peace with ourselves.

Anthea Cox

Grant us peace that will
BREAK our silence in the midst of violence
then prophetic voices shall resonate

Grant us peace that will
PULL US DOWN from the steeple of our pride
then we'll learn to wash each other's feet

Grant us peace that will
EMPTY us of hate and intolerance
then we'll turn guns into guitars and sing

Grant us peace that will
SHUT our mouths up when we speak too
much
then we'll learn to listen and understand
what others are saying

Grant us peace that will
DISTURB us in our apathy
then we'll dance together under the sun

Grant us peace that will
BURN our lethargic hearts
then we'll endure burning and let love and
justice glow

Philippines

O Lord, my God, grant us your peace;
already, indeed, you have made us rich in
all things!
Give us that peace of being at rest, that
Sabbath peace, the peace which knows no
end.

St Augustine

Our vulnerable God,
we see your face in a helpless child,
born of refugee parents,
without safety or security or protection.
Forgive our confidence in weapons of
mass destruction.
Forgive our reliance on the politics of fear.
Forgive our dependence on the use and
abuse of power.
Teach us new patterns of living
that seek to resolve conflict without
resort to violence,
that tear down walls of suspicion rather
than erect barriers of hate,
that honour our common humanity
made in your image.
So may our nation learn the ways that
make for peace.

Graham Sparkes

WE BELIEVE:

That the Gospel commands us to seek
peace founded on justice and that costly
reconciliation is at the heart of the Gospel.
That work for justice, peace and an equitable
society is a matter of extreme urgency.
That God has given us partnership as
stewards of creation and that we have a
responsibility to live in a right relationship
with the whole of God's creation.
That, handled with integrity, creation can
provide for the needs of all, but not for
the greed that leads to injustice and
inequality, and endangers life on earth.
That everyone should have the quality and
dignity of a full life that requires adequate
physical, social and political opportunity,
without the oppression of poverty,
injustice and fear.
That social and political action leading to
justice for all people and encouraged by
prayer and discussion, is a vital work of
the Church at all levels.
That the use or threatened use of nuclear
and other weapons of mass destruction
is theologically and morally indefensible
and that opposition to their existence is
an imperative of the Christian faith.

Iona Community

REFLECTION

Scripture Readings:

Genesis 9: 8-17

Matthew 27: 45-56

The images in the readings are of destruction and violence, catastrophic floods and crucifixion. Both show the world overcome with darkness. Both involve acts of violence. It can be argued that God has participated in the violence of both these events, and there seems to be violence at heart of creation and our own recreation in Christ. But beyond the destruction lies the rainbow and the resurrection rainbow.

In both narratives the participation of God leads to the overcoming of violence – there is the promise of the rainbow and the refusal to answer violence with violence on the cross. Both show the ultimate desire of God to overcome violence. And in both instances there is the invitation to us to share in the work of overcoming the chaos that destroys.

We see our own feelings of helplessness when faced with the troubles of the world reflected in those who stand helpless at foot of the cross – the many women, including Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons. It is these marginalised people who keep presence – watching. So often this is where we feel that we are when faced with the violence present in our world. In our hopelessness we can only offer our presence. The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) offers this presence, watching and waiting with those who experience the terror of violence and conflict. The participation of presence when it feels as if there is no hope is healing, and can itself be an act of defiance against hopelessness.

The Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches met this year in Armenia. Visible across the border with Turkey was Mount Ararat, a potent symbol for Armenians of contested international boundaries, past violence and division. One evening during the Commission's meeting there was a thunderstorm and briefly a rainbow appeared on the mountain. A symbol of the covenant that was not restrained by human social and political divides.

By our presence in the chaos we are able to become instruments of peace. It is by standing alongside the women at the foot of the cross that we can draw upon the strengthening confidence that comes with hope, and in the midst of darkness we must remember the promise of the rainbow. A promise already made and still to come.

READINGS, POEMS AND QUOTATIONS

Scripture Readings:

Jeremiah 8:11

Isaiah 57:15-21

Micah 4:1-5

Matthew 5:3-10

Luke 6:27-35

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Hebrews 12:14

Peace is every step. The shining red sun is
my heart.

Each flower smiles with me. How green,
how fresh all that grows.

How cool the wind blows.

Peace is every step.

It turns the endless path to joy.

Thich Nhat Hanh

Be at peace with your own soul
then heaven & earth will be at peace with you.
Enter eagerly into the treasure house that is
within you,

And you will see the things that are in heaven,
for there is but one single entry to them
both.

The ladder that leads to the Kingdom
is hidden within your soul...

Dive into yourself and in your soul
and you will discover the stairs
by which to ascend.

Saint Isaac of Syria

“The ultimate weakness of violence is that
it is a descending spiral, begetting the
very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of
diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through
violence you may murder the liar, but you
cannot murder the lie, nor establish the
truth. Through violence you murder the
hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact,
violence merely increases hate...

Returning violence for violence multiplies
violence, adding deeper darkness to a
night already devoid of stars. Darkness
cannot drive out darkness; only light can
do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only
love can do that.”

Martin Luther King

“Love does not avoid conflict. It is a
distortion of love to hide true feelings, to
use manipulation and cunning instead of
directness even when this causes
conflict... This creative loving does not
have to be ceaselessly tolerant and can
involve using conflict creatively, making
demands and standing up to
unreasonableness; but its aim is to drown
self-fear and self-hatred in the overall
security of the relationship.”

Anna Briggs

For once on the face of the earth let's not
speak in any language

Let's stop for one second and not move
our arms so much.

It would be an exotic moment without rush,
without engines.

We would all be together in a sudden
strangeness.

Fisherman in the cold sea would not harm
whales

And the man gathering salt would look at
his hurt hands.

Those who prepare green wars, wars with
gas, wars with fire,

Victory with no survivors

Would put on clean clothes and walk about
with their brothers

in the shade doing nothing.

What I want should not be confused with
total inactivity,

Life is what it is about.

I want no truck with death.

If we were not so single minded about
keeping our lives moving,

And for once could do nothing,

Perhaps a huge silence might interrupt this
sadness of never

understanding ourselves

And of threatening ourselves with death.

Perhaps the earth can teach us when
everything seems dead

and later proves to be alive.

Pablo Neruda

Say No to Peace

if what they mean by 'peace'

is the quiet misery of hunger,

the frozen stillness of fear,

the silence of unbroken spirits,

the unborn hopes of the oppressed.

Tell them that Peace

is the shouting of children at play

the babble of tongues set free,

the thunder of dancing feet,

and a father's voice singing.

Brian Wren

“How does peace come about? Through a system of political treaties? Through the investment of international capital in different countries? Through the big banks, through money? Or through universal peaceful rearmament in order to guarantee peace? Through none of these, for the single reason that in all of them peace is confused with safety. There is no way to peace along the way of safety. For peace must be dared. It is the great venture. It can never be safe. Peace is the opposite to security. To demand guarantees is to mistrust, and this mistrust in turn brings forth war.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is a pattern of controlling and aggressive behaviour within the context of an intimate relationship, most often by a man towards a woman but also woman to man and in same sex relationships,. It can be physical, sexual, psychological or emotional abuse. The violence and abuse can be actual or threatened and can happen once every so often or on a regular basis.

- Domestic violence is very common with 1 in 4 women experiencing it in their lifetime and between 1 in 8 to 1 in 10 women experiencing it annually.
- Though less than half of all incidents are ever reported the Police, the Police still receive one call about domestic violence for every minute in the UK.
- A survey revealed that nearly 1 in 5 counselling sessions held in Relate Centres in England mentioned domestic violence as an issue in the marriage.

Scripture Readings:

Isaiah 43:1-7

John 14:27

Lord Jesus Christ,
You told the women of Jerusalem not to
weep for you
but to weep for themselves.
Be with women who suffer violence in their
homes,
As they weep for their sons caught up in
the violence.
Be with the women who live in domestic
violence,
Who have learnt not to weep for their own
pains,
Who have suffered so long they are numb.
Strengthen your Church in its care and
support
Of all who are in pain.
Help us to be sensitive and caring
For you are the Lord who suffers and serves.

Imagine...
Your life in pieces and your life with no
peace.
Being afraid to wake up and afraid to go to
sleep.
Facing the constant threat and the ever
present reality of abuse.
Having nowhere to go and no one to tell.
Pray for all whose home has become a prison;
Pray for all who are abused and are
trapped in self blame;
Pray for all whose lives have been left
numb by brutality.
May we discover the strength of survivors,
and together break the silence,
with voices of anger and compassion,
with hearts of tenderness and peace.

Graham Sparkes

Papua New Guinea

GUN CRIME

Gun-related crime kills, maims and intimidates, and is frequently linked to gang activity and the illegal drugs trade in the UK. Of particular concern has been the recent incidents where children have become the victims of shootings.

- Although the overall level of gun crime in the UK is very low – less than 0.5 per cent of all crime recorded by the police. But the number of overall offences involving firearms has been increasing each year since 1997/98.
- Figures show there is a rise in the number of young people carrying real or imitation firearms in an attempt to boost their image or from a mistaken idea about self-protection.
- In 2005 almost 1500 youngsters under 21 appeared in court on gun related charges.

Scripture Readings:

Psalm 70
James 3:13-18

God, you are the God of life.
Transform us in the depths of our hearts
into people, through whom your peace
is carried out into your world.
Send your Spirit into the hearts of those
who are captured in the net of violence
be it as perpetrators or as victims
and let us never give up the search
for the chance to talk to them.

Croatia

God who walked in brutal streets
and whose friends knew the despair,
of violent bereavement,
Bring to our distress your peace:
To the places where
steel is more powerful than flesh
To the places where
childhood is sacrificed to fear
To the places where
protection means intimidation
To the places where
neighbourhood does not mean community
and home does not mean safety.
Pour out the healing grace of your spirit in
our troubled places
Inspire our presence with confidence and hope
That violence and fear may be transformed
to life and peace.

Anthea Cox

INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT

Amidst the many places where there is international conflict and civil war Europe – and Britain in particular – has significant involvement and responsibility for the situation in the Middle East. The war in Iraq involves British troops, and the long running conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has a history deeply rooted in actions taken by the Government of this country.

- Between September 2000 and end of 2006 over 4000 Palestinians were killed by Israelis and over 1000 Israelis were killed by Palestinians.
- 64 per cent of Palestinians live below the poverty line. The majority of the Palestinian population now exist on less than £1.10 a day.
- Iraq Body Count says the civilian toll in that country is now more than 60,000, including more than 3,258 members of the police. But IBC warns many deaths may not have been reported.
- Most of Iraq lacks effective sanitation. Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources says only 32 per cent of the population has access to clean drinking water, and only 19 per cent has access to a good sewage system.

Scripture Readings:

Isaiah 60: 17-22

Ephesians 2: 11-22

Living Lord, ignite in us a passion for
justice and a yearning to right all wrong.
Strengthen us to work for peace in the land
we call holy;
for peace among Jew, Christian and
Muslim
for reconciliation between communities
for harmony between faiths.
Inspire us to act with the urgency of your
quickenning fire,
for blessed are the peacemakers they
shall be called children of God.

Christian Aid

Eternal God
Save us from weak resignation to violence
Teach us that restraint is the highest
expression of power
That thoughtfulness and tenderness are
marks of the strong.
Help us to love our enemies
Not by countenancing their sins,
But by remembering our own
And may we never for a moment forget
That they are fed by the same food,
Hurt by the same weapons,
Have children for whom they have the
same high hopes as we do.
Grant us the ability
To find joy and strength not in the strident
call to arms
To grasp our fellow creatures
In the striving for justice and truth.

*NCC Australia & Australia Catholic Relief.
Prepared by a Christian, a Jew and a Muslim*

Lord, we pray fervently for the people of Iraq
facing the horror of a full-scale war,
and for those people who may be called upon
to fight.
Help us to persuade world leaders to continue
negotiations.
Help all of us: individuals, nations, governments
and world leaders to remember –
the unnecessary loss of life for millions of
innocent people,
the scale of human suffering that war brings,
the right of Iraqi people to determine their
own future,
the gross violations of human rights and
crimes against humanity that are committed
in the name of war.
Nobody has total power over any country or
its people but God alone.
Let us be open to God's words in our
forthcoming decisions
and try not to be God ourselves.

Church of England

ECOLOGICAL DESTRUCTION

Global warming and the threat to our environment is a peace and justice issue. It is about our inability to live in harmony with the whole of the created order, our failure to be proper stewards of God's gift of the natural world, and our greed that means the poorest inevitably suffer most from the abuse of creation.

- Since 1850, a period in which today's richest countries have industrialised rapidly, levels of greenhouse gas carbon dioxide in our atmosphere have risen 28% and methane levels are 112% higher.
- At the current rate of carbon emissions, global average temperatures are expected to rise 2°C by 2050 causing acute water shortages for 1-3 billion people.

- Over the past 35 years, storms of the force of Hurricane Katrina have almost doubled, and the vast majority of victims of such weather-related natural disasters live in poor countries.

Scripture Readings:

Psalm 85

Romans 8:14-25

Creator, God,
breathing your own life into our being,
you gave us the gift of life:
you placed us on this earth
with its minerals and waters,
flowers and fruits,
living creatures of grace and beauty!
You gave us care of the earth.
Today you call us:
'Where are you; what have you done?'

**FORGIVE US, CEATOR GOD, AND
RECONCILE US TO YOUR CREATION.**

O God of love,
you gave us the gift of peoples –
of cultures, races and colours,
to love, to care for,
to share our lives with.
Today you ask us:
'Where is your brother, your sister?'
The refugees, the oppressed and voiceless
cry out to you.

**FORGIVE US, CEATOR GOD, AND
RECONCILE US TO YOUR CREATION.**

**TEACH US, O GOD OF LOVE,
THAT THE EARTH AND ALL ITS
FULNESS IS YOURS,
THE WORLD AND THOSE WHO DWELL
IN IT.**

**CALL US YET AGAIN TO SAFEGUARD
THE GIFT OF LIFE.**

CAFOD

Christ, we remember the sacrifice you
made for the world.
Remind us that you ask us to care for your
creation,
challenge us to see how our actions
change the world,
be with us as we act to make a
difference.

Christ, whom we remember in the bread.
Remind us of those who are hungry,
challenge us to see how our actions
change the world.

Christ, whom we remember in the wine.
Remind us of those who are thirsty,
challenge us to see how our actions can
change the world.

Christ, we remember your perfect sacrifice.
Remind us that you are with us as we seek
to live differently,
challenge us to see how our actions can
change the world,
be with us as we act to make a
difference.

Christian Aid

A PRAYER FOR PEACE BY THOMAS MERTON

Almighty and merciful God, Father of all, Creator and ruler of the universe, Lord of all history, whose designs are without blemish, whose compassion for the errors of all is inexhaustible, in your will is our peace.

Mercifully hear this prayer which rises to you from the tumult and desperation of a world in which you are forgotten, in which your name is not invoked, your laws are derided and your presence is ignored. Because we do not know you, we have no peace.

From the heart of an eternal silence, you have watched the rise of empires and have seen the smoke of their downfall. You have witnessed the impious fury of ten thousand fratricidal wars, in which great powers have torn whole continents to shreds in the name of peace and justice.

A day of ominous decision has now dawned on this free nation. Save us then from our obsessions! Open our eyes, dissipate our confusions, teach us to understand ourselves and our adversary. Let us never forget that sins against the law of love are punishable by loss of faith, and those without faith stop at no crime to achieve their ends!

Help us to be masters of the weapons that threaten to master us.
Help us to use our science for peace and plenty, not for war and destruction.
Save us from the compulsion to follow our adversaries in all that we most hate, confirming them in their hatred and suspicion of us.
Resolve our inner contradictions, which now grow beyond belief and beyond bearing.
They are at once a torment and a blessing: for if you had not left us the light of conscience, we would not have to endure them.
Teach us to wait and trust.

Grant light, grant strength and patience to all who work for peace. But grant us above all to see that our ways are not necessarily your ways, that we cannot fully penetrate the mystery of your designs and that the very storm of power now raging on this earth reveals your hidden will and your inscrutable decision.

Grant us to see your face in the lightning of this cosmic storm, O God of holiness, merciful to all.

Grant us to seek peace where it is truly found.
In your will, O God, is our peace.

Amen.

Material gathered and prepared by Anthea Cox and Graham Sparkes to mark the International Day of Prayer for Peace in Britain, 21 September 2007.

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