

World Day of Prayer Service: Sunday March 3, 2024

Lead by: Gundy Upans

Acknowledging this territory

For thousands of years First Nations and Metis people have walked this land. Their relationship with the land is at the centre of their lives and spirituality. Today as we gather to worship, we acknowledge that we gather on the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendel people, the Anishnabek people, the Algonquin people and the Odawa people. We acknowledge also the presence, gifts and contributions of the Metis people in this are. This territory is Williams Treaty territory and as we gather we recognize

Lighting of the Christ Candle We light this candle as a symbol of the light of Christ, which shines in each one of us, no matter where we are in the world.

Welcome and Introduction to World Day of Prayer

This is my 6th time leading the World Day of Prayer service and I thank Rev. Meg and all of you for that trust.

It all starts on the international dateline in Samoa. Early in the morning Christian women begin praying for the world. Then as the earth rotates, a great wave of prayer begins to build. It sweeps across the Pacific, touching Fiji and New Zealand. It rolls on through Asia – Japan, the Philippines, Korea. The countries of Africa are next and then the Middle East. This growing wave reaches Europe as the day dawns there. Across the Atlantic it moves onwards – the Caribbean, the Americas and to the Pacific again, until the sun finally sets over America Samoa where the final service takes place and the worldwide circle of prayer is complete.

The World Day of Prayer is an international ecumenical Christian laywomen's initiative. It is run under the motto "Informed Prayer and Prayerful Action".

Imagine over 1.5 million Christians speaking 90 different languages, including Braille in 150 countries coming together in spirit; uniting to pray for relevant issues affecting women and children. The movement aims to bring together women of various races, cultures and traditions in a yearly common Day of Prayer, as well as to foster closer fellowship, empathy, understanding, caring and action throughout the year.

The Women's World Day of Prayer started in the USA in 1887, as two Methodist women called for a week of prayer and self-denial for foreign missions. The Day of Prayer initiated by these two women expanded to Canada in 1920, then to the British Isles in the 1930s. The movement's focus on ecumenism and reconciliation led to its growth after World War II. Since 1927 the first Friday in March is known as Women's World Day of Prayer. Catholic women were allowed to join the movement in 1967.

Through the World Day of Prayer, women are encouraged to become aware of other countries and cultures and no longer live in isolation. They are also encouraged to take up the burdens of other people, to sympathize with the problems of other countries and cultures and pray with and for them. They are further encouraged to become aware of their talents and use them in the service of society. The World Day of Prayer aims to demonstrate that prayer and action are inseparable and that both have immeasurable influence in the world.

The symbol for World Day of Prayer was developed by the women of Ireland and adopted as the international logo in 1982. Its design is made up of arrows converging from the four points of the compass, persons kneeling in prayer, the Celtic cross, and the circle, representing the world and our unity through all our diversity.

Every year the worship service focuses on a different country and a specific theme and that country prepares the order of worship. Canada was represented in 1978 with the theme "Community Spirit in Modern Living" which I think suited our little communities of Hillside, Dwight and Dorset well. Canada's first World Day of Prayer was January 9, 1920 in Lindsay, Ontario just over 100 years ago and 125km away and then again in 1931. Last year we visited Taiwan and this year Palestine – interesting because both of these countries have current severe political challenges. Next year it will be the Cook Islands near New Zealand.

Opening Hymn: VU#679 Let There Be Light (youtube)

Call to Worship:

Leader: We gather in the Name of the Triune God: Creator, Son and Holy Spirit.

All: Let us pray and praise God, transcending differences in views and theological interpretations. Triune God, walk with us as we journey through the land where you lived and taught. Open our eyes to see the personal suffering of the inhabitants of this land. Grant us the strength and courage to act and pray with all who suffer around the world.

Leader: Let us remember these essential qualities of people of faith: humility, gentleness, patience and love

All: We confess our weakness and failure to accept others without judging them. With humility and patience, we bear challenges in our families, society, community and churches. With gentleness and love, we overcome everything. We remain strong in our faith, knowing that we belong to God. Amen.

Words from the WDP Palestine Comm. Oct 12/23 published 5 days after the Hamas attack

In these trying times, let us remember that the human experience transcends borders and political differences. We must stand together as one global community, advocating for the welfare and dignity of every individual, irrespective of their nationality, religion or origin. Together, we can work towards a brighter and more harmonious future for all in this troubled region.

As we observe the World Day of Prayer, our thoughts and prayers continue to go out to those suffering in Israel and Palestine, and we hold steadfast to the hope that one day, the people of this land will enjoy peace and prosperity."

Introduction to Palestine

Chosen by WDP in 2017 who also picked the theme. They were hosts in 1994.

Historic Palestine includes Bethlehem (where Jesus was born), Nazareth (where Jesus spent his childhood), the River Jordan (where Jesus was baptized), and Jerusalem (where Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead). The Mediterranean Sea lies to the west of historic Palestine, where Paul and the apostles traveled on missionary journeys to spread the good news of Jesus.

The Gaza Strip is located on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, bordering Egypt and Israel. Gaza has been under siege and total isolation by the State of Israel since 2006. Gaza is the third most densely populated area in the world with 47% of the population being children.

The West Bank, located on the west bank of the Jordan River, remains divided into 3 areas under the 1993-1995 Oslo Accords which were intended to last only five years. Much of it is under exclusive Israeli military and civilian control and there is continued concern about the presence and ongoing growth of illegal Israeli settlements.

Palestine is not a country. It is a State or geographical area that has had many names in the past 3,000 years depending on the tribes that settled there. These included the Assyrians, Romans and Ottoman Empire until WW I when it was divided between France and England.

In 1917, there was a public declaration by Britain that a national home for the Jews should be established in Palestine while respecting the rights of non-Jewish communities in Palestine. Support for the creation of a homeland for the Jews in Palestine increased after the end of World War II, largely because of the Holocaust.

The 1948 Arab–Israeli War began following the end of the British Mandate for Palestine at midnight on May 14, 1948. The Israeli Declaration of Independence had been issued earlier that day, and a military coalition of Arab states entered the territory of British Palestine in the morning of May 15. During the war, at least 750,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from their home, a time referred to as Nakba or the “catastrophe”. Until 1967, Jordan controlled the West Bank including East Jerusalem while Gaza was controlled by Egypt.

Tensions between Israel and its Palestinian neighbors escalated, and in June 1967, Israel launched a pre-emptive attack. The impact of this Six-Day War was dramatic, and the effects are still felt today. Palestinians call this war the Naksa, or the “setback.” The 4 maps on the slide show the loss of Palestinian land from 1946-2000.

In 1988, Palestine proclaimed its independence only on the land Israel had occupied since 1967. For the sake of peace, Palestinians agreed to live on only 22% of their original land. As of July 31, 2019, 138 of the 193 United Nations member states have recognized Palestine as a state, and the Palestinian flag now flies outside of the United Nations.

It is estimated that there are over 5 million Palestinians living today in Palestine and Israel. 2% of these Palestinians are Christian and 75% of those are Greek Orthodox. The total number of Palestinians around the world amounts to over 12 million in countries as far as the United States, Canada, Brazil, Chile and Honduras.

A series of coordinated attacks, conducted by the Palestinian Islamist militant group, Hamas, from the Gaza Strip onto bordering areas in Israel, commenced on Saturday October 7, 2023 killing 1,200 and taking over 240 hostages. Israel’s Security Cabinet voted to undertake a series of actions to bring about the “destruction of the military and governmental capabilities of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad”. We know this continues today with hopes of a second temporary ceasefire and release of more of the remaining 100 – 130 hostages. There is a catastrophic shortage of water, food and medical aid. Most of the important aquifers are controlled by Israel. We know that much international aid is available but very few aid convoys have been allowed into Gaza. To date about 30,000 Palestinians have died, with

over 12,000 of them children. More than 17,000 children have no family. About 85% of the population is displaced so there is no point in me using the material I was provided with talking about Palestine's educational and hospital systems, agriculture or industry and the land of "milk and honey".

It is so hard to find middle ground. We condemn Hamas, we support Israel. But our hearts also ache for the suffering of innocent Palestinians, most of whom are women and children. Both Israel and Palestinians deserve a place to feel safe and to call home.

Palestinian Hymn: Yarabba Ssalami "O God of Peace, rain down your peace on our world" (youtube)

Leader: At a crucial moment of his life, Jesus gave the disciples this commandment: Love one another. Bear with one another in love.

In today's service, we will hear three stories from Palestinian Christian women. Each story is a powerful witness to Jesus' call to bear with one another in love.

Let us listen, now, to a story of Resilience from Eleonor (we warmly welcome Susan Cassie from the Lake of Bays Mission Church)

My skin is wrinkled like the trunk of an olive tree. Like the tree, I have witnessed many wars and violence. I am a Palestinian Christian – a member of the Greek Orthodox Church in the Holy Land.

I come from a deeply rooted old Jerusalem family. In the early 19th century, my great grandfather established St. George's Orthodox Church, which enabled Christians living outside the city walls to have a place to worship.

That church remained in existence until the catastrophe, or Nakba, of 1948, when 750,000 Palestinians were forced to flee, disperse and become refugees. My family was included. Due to heavy shelling and bombardment, my parents ran for their lives. They took shelter at my mother's cousin's home, hoping to return soon to their original home and St. George's Church. That never happened. Today, my parents' home and St. George's Church have become the Confederation House, an Israeli cultural center.

Prior to fleeing, my parents' Jewish neighbours offered to store the treasures of the church, including icons and precious communion cups. They promised to safeguard my parents' property and belongings until the family's return.

As my brothers and I were growing up, my parents remembered their neighbours graciously as they waited for the big day of return. They imagined themselves collecting these sacred items and thanking their neighbors for keeping their promise. Sadly, my parents have passed away without realizing this dream. And yet, I vividly remember that, despite their pain and suffering over all they had lost, my parents were always thankful and spoke kindly about these Jewish neighbours. My parents taught me how to bear with others in love, always remembering to be grateful for those who do good.

As I have gone through life as a Palestinian Christian living in Jerusalem, I have chosen to be fully engaged with all members of the community at local and global levels. I learned from my parents' example how important it is to stay together with others, even when life is harsh and difficult.

My commitment to my community started when I was in 6th grade. My Arabic teacher engaged me in running errands for her humanitarian work. She was gentle and loving, which helped me grow to value and love working to make life better for others.

Later in life, I designed and implemented humanitarian aid and development programs, as well as social and community projects. These programs and projects served all people, regardless of religion, ethnicity, gender, status or need. I was privileged to help hundreds of women in Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank to sustain their families as breadwinners. Many of these projects have grown and spread to other areas, positively impacting many lives.

Life has not always been easy. I have experienced setbacks, obstacles, and even threats. However, I firmly believe that our community can be strong together if there is genuine love, understanding, gentleness, humility and patience.

Since my childhood, I have known that life is fragile, and peace is not a guarantee. I could have left the country of my roots, but I made the choice to stay and live out Jesus' commandment to love others as God has loved me.

Scripture Readings: John 15:12,13,17, Ephesians 4:1-3 (Jane Vanderkraan)

Meditation: "Walking in Unity"

(With excerpts from Jeremy Myers website RedeemingGod.Com)

Everyone wants unity, but nobody really knows how to achieve it. Most people today seem to think that unity requires conformity. We think that unity is achieved when everyone thinks the same way, talks the same way, dresses the same way, and has the same opinions. When differences occur, division results, and unity dies. And some people seek to achieve unity by silencing and cancelling those who have different opinions.

You see, when we are in conflict with someone, we think it is the responsibility of the other person to change their ways, so we can get along with them. We point at their faults and what they said, or what they did, and say that if there was going to be peace, they have to change. Paul challenges all of this in the Ephesians reading where he shows us how we can have unity with others even when there is disagreement.

The key to unity when differences exist was, not surprisingly, first taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. In Mathew 7:3-5, Jesus says that when you see a fault in your brother – Jesus calls it a speck in your brother's eye – first take the plank out of your own eye. Then you will be able to see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Paul tells us to be humble and gentle. Before Christianity, humility was not considered to be a virtue at all. The ancient world looked upon humility as a thing to be despised. The Greek language did have an adjective for humble, but it was described as being looked upon as a cowering, groveling and inferior human being.

And that's even somewhat true today, isn't it? It is not always a compliment to be called humble in today's back-stabbing, self-advancing, look-out-for-number-one corporate economy. But one of the supreme rules In Christianity is humbleness.

The word gentle is a fascinating word in Greek. It comes from the praotes, which means gentle or meek. In English, when we think of someone as gentle or meek, we think of them as weak. But praotes does not imply weakness. It implies great strength being withheld.

To bear with another means to “put up with another’s short comings.” That kind of has negative connotations, but Paul meant it in a positive way because we are to bear with another in love.

Peace with others begins with peace in God. If you are not at peace with God, there is no way you can be at peace with others. It is only when the peace of God rules in our hearts that we can build unity with one another.

If you have ever been in a conflict with someone, you know how hard it is to maintain an attitude of humility, gentleness, love, unity and peace. But, if you find these difficult when you are embroiled in conflict, don’t forget what you have in Christ.

God never asks us to do something without first telling us what He has done for you or what he has given to you. Paul has just asked us to do something very difficult. He has said that when you find yourself in a conflict, check your own attitude first. And if this seems hard to do, remember what you have. You have the power of God to do what you otherwise could not do. On your own, you might not be able to love that person and to be at peace with them. But with the power of the Holy Spirit within you, you can do what would be impossible otherwise.

Remember, Paul was writing to a very diverse church in Ephesus. It was made up of Jewish and Gentile believers in the first century AD who could not get along no matter how hard they tried. Paul called them to be at peace with each other and he told them how to. He tells them it begins with their own attitudes.

We can apply this same principle to all of our present-day relationships. Do you have any damaged relationships at home with your spouse or kids? Do you have any conflicts at work? How are you getting along with your neighbours? If so, step number 1 is to focus on your own attitude. If we are going to walk toward unity, it doesn’t begin with fixing everyone else. No, it begins in our own hearts with changing our attitudes. Hopefully, this will bring unity in our lives, in our communities, and in this world. May it be so.

A Story of Truth Telling from Lina (Lisa Nichol)

On May 11, 2022, I lost my Aunt Shireen, a famous journalist who was killed in Jenin. For me, Aunt Shireen was like the branch of an olive tree, resisting the strong winds that threatened to erase the truth of Palestinian experience.

When Aunt Shireen died, Palestine lost an icon, a legend, and a famous journalist. And yet, Shireen is all of the above and more. She was also my aunt, my godmother at baptism, and my best friend. Shireen has been my role model for as long as I can remember. She was also a role model to many young Palestinian women. Growing up, I aspired to be as successful, professional, and empathetic as she. I will cherish all the moments I spent with her talking about art, politics, and life, watching shows, going on vacations, and spending time with the family.

For 25 years, Aunt Shireen dedicated her life to telling the stories of Palestinian experience, and to being the voice of truth. She entered every house in Palestine and the Arab world through the TV screen. The day of her funeral was proof that she had also entered the hearts of Palestinians. The outpouring of solidarity we witnessed at her funeral will forever be ingrained in my memory and the collective

memory of Palestine. We are forever grateful to the strong and courageous Palestinians who resisted the threats from Israeli forces and carried Shireen's casket on their shoulders.

Many people did not know that my aunt was a Palestinian Christian. Shireen's faith led her to bear with all in love, despite differences in faith traditions. She stood with all who were being harmed. She struggled for both Muslims and Christians to have access to the holy sites in Jerusalem. Her truth telling was even a way of bearing with the occupiers in love. Speaking the truth is a form of loving resistance, because it calls the oppressor back to their humanity.

Although Shireen, a branch of the olive tree, was cut down too soon, her legacy lives on. Her memory now nourishes the earth, from which we will gain strength to continue telling the truth and demanding justice.

Hymn: The Lord's Prayer sung in Aramaic (youtube)

A Story of Flourishing from Nora (Catherine Hawkins)

I am Nora from Jerusalem. I was born in Palestine and grew up in Jerusalem Jordan. Since 1967, I have lived under occupation in Jerusalem.

My parents and other family members survived the Armenian genocide so they know what suffering is, and what humans can do to each other. It is not the will of God to see people killed. My grandfather wanted us to look at what suffering does and how we can do things for a better world. For us, he hoped "that they will learn to scorn injustice and face hardship, never get discouraged, and become leaders in control of their lives and models of behavior to others."

My father's family had been pharmacists in Nicomedia - modern Turkey - and lost two pharmacies to the Turks. In Jerusalem, they started a pharmacy with the Harami family on Mamilla Road, which they lost, with other possessions in 1948. They were refugees in Lebanon and Syria until the Lutheran World Federation brought back professionals to Jerusalem at the beginning of the 1950s to build up the new reality. My father served at the Augusta Victoria Hospital as a pharmacist and established, with Dr. Mohammad Naquib Husseini, the x-ray department.

How we can do things to create a better world is very much a part of World Day of Prayer. My introduction to World Day of Prayer was through my mother who was one of the Armenian readers in Jerusalem. I also became a reader. By 1994, which was the year Palestine was invited to write the service "Go, see and act", I was nominated by the Armenian Patriarch to represent my church.

In 2017, Palestine, again, was invited to write the service. When the World Day of Prayer International Committee choose the theme, because we did not suggest it, they had in mind the situation of the Middle East. We saw it as a message to us personally ... how do we bear with one in another in love and unity. An alternative motive was to see if we could bring about understanding in this troubled area.

The whole world is troubled, and so the voices of women speaking up loudly, not only about their suffering but also their hope is really what makes this movement a unique movement.

I work for justice. This is the only way to live ... respecting others but speaking my mind. When we moved to Jerusalem, we did not want to be secluded. I learned Armenian at home, grew up in the Orthodox faith of the Armenian Apostolic Church, but studied at a Catholic school run by the Sisters of

Our Lady of Sion and then attended Protestant universities. My husband was Greek Orthodox, and I have worked with both the Armenian and Greek Orthodox churches.

One of my current prayer requests for Palestine is the end of the occupation ... but it will not bring peace. It is important to take people out of their boxes ... for everyone to see people as equals, living in dignity and equality ... having real freedom as human beings. Reeducation is needed. Let us work together to make sure that global justice is done.

Offering – please support the WDP with the yellow envelopes as well as our churches while listening to Jim Reeves sing “Peace in the Valley” (youtube)

All: God, our cross is heavy, but together we are able to bear it. May this offering be a sign of our commitment to lead a life worthy of your calling. May it be a powerful instrument towards abundant life for all living things. Amen.

Prayers of the People (Jane Vanderkraan)

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, we now pray for women everywhere, for the world, and for those in need.

After each petition, you will hear me pray “Lead us into a life worthy of our calling.” You are invited to respond, “Hear our prayer.”

Let us pray. God of Righteousness, bless us and make us witnesses of peace and justice. Open our eyes so that we can see things as you do. Protect us from all forms of violence, hurt and revenge. We pray especially for women who are denied education and other basic rights. We pray for women who are abused and suffer violence. We pray that our churches, as well as our governments, will create safe places for women. Help us to raise our voices and use our gifts and talents to help others. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling. All: Hear our prayer

Refugee God, who as a child had to flee a massacre in Bethlehem, you know the plight of refugees and the displaced. Remain with us and help us in these dark and difficult times. Guide and protect refugees and displaced people. Bring them to places of safety. Open the hearts of those receiving refugees and guide the actions of political leaders so that all needs will be met. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling. All: Hear our prayer

God our Rock, you have taught us to build our lives on you. We pray for those who are homeless. We pray especially with Palestinian families whose homes have been demolished or are under threat of demolition by Israeli authorities. Bring these families justice and end this cruel practice. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling. All: Hear our prayer

God of Peace, we pray for a just solution to the ongoing conflict. We also pray for the city of Jerusalem, sacred to three religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. We pray for equality, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, and freedom of expression. Teach us as Christians to follow the way of Jesus, sharing love with all the inhabitants of the land. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling. All: Hear our prayer

Healer and Sustaining Spirit, we pray for all those who are sick, who are dying, and who are grieving. When we are lost and weary, strengthen us. Revive our dry branches, so that they yield good fruits

again. Give us new life and the hope of resurrection. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling. All: Hear our prayer

God of Mercy, we have carelessly destroyed your beautiful creation. We have harmed the environment, the flora and fauna, and the creatures of the air, land and water. Our destruction of the earth has caused the climate crisis. Help us to appreciate and love your creation. Help us to repair what we have destroyed. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling. All: Hear our prayer

God of Unity, your child, Jesus, prayed that your disciples and followers would be one, as you are one. Teach us, your servants, to treat others justly, fairly and with love, even though we may speak, live, and pray differently. Bless the global church and bless the faithful women everywhere who share your Good News with others. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling. All: Hear our prayer

How can we thank you, Loving God? We know that all our blessings come from you. Do not k

We offer these prayers, and the prayers of our hearts known only to you, trusting that you hear and answer them. In the name of God, Creator, Son, and Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Sharing the Peace of Christ – exchange of branches

All: In the midst of injustices, wars and suffering, God calls us to bear together in love. When we stay together through difficulty, we can live in the peace that God promises us. And so, we share the peace of Christ as we exchange branches saying “Salaam al Massih” (suh-lom al massah) “The Peace of Christ”

Leader: Please join me in speaking aloud the commitment of our hearts.

All: May we commit to working for peace as we stand with all women, particularly those experiencing oppression, violence or discrimination. May we be faithful advocates for decision makers on all levels of society. May we bear with one another in love until God’s justice and peace reign throughout the world.

Closing Hymn: VU #684 “Make Me a Channel of Your Peace” (youtube)

Benediction

We pray for women, who even now are losing children and other family members. We pray that their strength be a beacon of resilience, as they endure all challenges and pain with grace. Grant them courage to navigate adversity. And may their aspirations for peace and prosperity shine brightly in the midst of these difficulties.

In this time of war, we pray for the healing of hearts and the restoration of peace. May compassion prevail over hatred, and may the suffering of all those affected by war be alleviated. Grant them strength, solace, and hope for a brighter and harmonious future.

We pray for all families who have lost members, for the kidnapped, for the missing, and all who are still under the rubble. May the spirit of God grant them all patience and strength as they wait to be reunited. Lord Jesus, we pray for the end of all wars, especially in the land you called home. You are our Saviour, the one who taught us the real meaning of peace. Guide us and give us power to practice peace in our daily lives. Go in peace. Amen.