

PRAY AND REFLECT: THE HOLY LAND WORLD WEEK OF PRAYER FOR PEACE IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

16-22 SEPTEMBER 2024



"Whatever you did...you did for me"

INTRODUCTION

The World Council of Churches invites faith-based communities around the world to join in a Week of Prayer for Peace in Palestine and Israel from 16 to 22 September.

This year's theme is based on Matthew 25:35-40. It challenges us to ask whether we act positively or negatively – 'as if we are doing it to Jesus' – and reminds us of the urgent need to work and pray for peace. 'For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me... ..Whatever you did...you did for me.'

LIVING TOGETHER MEANS SERVING ONE ANOTHER

A reflection on the present situation in the ongoing conflict in the Holy Land needs to be founded on some fundamental principles from the Very Revd Canon Richard Sewell, Dean of St George's College, Jerusalem, August 2, 2024 (adapted)

First, Israel has a right to exist on the basis of the United Nations Resolution 181 dating from 1947.

Second, millions of Palestinians were dispossessed of their homes, their land, and their fundamental freedoms due to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948.

Standing as we do now, nine months into a terrible war in Gaza, and 58 years into Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, there is still a very long way to go before the people of Israel and Palestine will be able to live alongside one another in freedom, equality and security.

It must also be understood that the Israeli occupation of the West Bank from 1967, and the blockade of Gaza since 2007, are injustices that have compounded the previous dispossessions.

There is no going back: we have to go forward

There has been enough violence, hatred and division in Israel and Palestine to last more than a lifetime. It is made all the more painful because of the significance that Jerusalem, and all the land, holds for the people of the Abrahamic faiths. Jews, Christians, and Muslims all revere the land. They feel spiritually rooted in it because of the events of salvation history for each faith that have taken place there.

There is enough religious fervour to sustain this conflict for generations to come. People of faith need to dig deep to find the best spiritual wisdom that each faith contains, to discover how to live together in tolerance and equality.

Living together means serving one another. Ultimately, we will discover a better way when the peoples of the land can say "I belong to Jerusalem" rather than "Jerusalem belongs to me."

PAX CHRISTI PRAYER Spirit of God, we ask for: understanding that puts an end to conflict; mercy that quenches hatred; forgiveness that overcomes vengeance and the gift of courage to witness to the truth.

We pray for the commitment to act and work for peace. Amen.

BREAKING DOWN THE WALL THAT DIVIDES

'For Jesus is our peace ... and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us'. Ephesians 2:14

PRAYER

God, loving Parent of all humankind, You are our Peace.

In Jesus you embodied peace with justice

Peace, which can still prevail in the face of all the walls we build.

We pray for the people of Palestine and Israel, especially the hundreds of Palestinian families whose homes have been destroyed to build the great dividing wall.

We hear their cry, their helpless anger at the wall of concrete cutting across their daily lives, limiting their travel, study, and healthcare; limiting their access to work, worship, family connections, and even celebrations.

We pray for their children, living in a world crossed by razor wire that tears at flesh and draws blood.

We confess our complicity in maintaining barriers of ignorance, fear, privilege, prejudice, 'us' and 'them'.

But you are our peace, with power to cut this wire for good, to break down all our walls.

Help us to proclaim what is right, and together share in the work of building peace, the work of justice.

Jan Sutch Pickard, World Week of Prayer for Palestine and Israel

POEMS FROM THE CHILDREN OF GAZA

A new book, Moon Tell me Truth, is a collection of illustrated poems created last year by children from Gaza for a competition run by the Hands Up Project, a British educational charity that links children from other countries with young people in Gaza via the internet, using drama and story-telling to foster creativity, mutual understanding and friendship. Most students featured in the book are now displaced and their schools have been damaged or destroyed. Two of the young poets were killed by Israeli airstrikes in October 2023

– Obada, 14, and Fatema, 9, along with all her family.

Fatema's poem 'Eyes are for looking' has been shared all over the world.

Eyes are for looking and seeing sun

Tongues are for greeting and saying fun

Legs are for walking slowly and also run

Hands are for shaking with friends not for shooting gun

Roa'a, aged 13, writes:

My darling's face is sad. The moon's face in our homeland is sad.

Sad you are my city ... you the spring of tears and a long sad history ... you are the painting of pain and expressions of pain.

Your eyes have the green colour of olives and the blue colour of sea ... while the night falls over the face of life.

Darling: wipe out that sadness and weave the dress of impossible from the tears.

SUMUD

Sumud is an Arabic word that means 'steadfastness'. Sumud stands firm against the occupation of Palestinian lands and people. It chooses nonviolent advocacy for political change and 'resistance through existence': a determination to sustain normal daily life, such as the building and rebuilding of houses despite the risk of demolition; commuting for work or pleasure despite the aggravation of checkpoints; continuing to invest in education.



PRAYER

Steadfast God, Strong and sheltering as the oak, and, like the olive tree, life-giving, everywhere, encourage your children, with your Sumud, your constant presence, your Just Being There.

We raise to you in prayer the suffering peoples in your Holy Land.

To those who are wounded, bring healing, to those who hunger, the nourishment they need; to those bewildered, give boundaries, a sense of direction, deep meaning.

To those who trust in the power of arms, give signs of true strength; to those who reach out to the helpless, the endurance not to give up.

To the bereaved, bring consolation like healing leaves, to the broken, the possibility of wholeness, to those who despair, a glimmer of light.

Teach us to stand firm in hope and to grow together in peace.

Rooted wherever you place us, teach us the meaning of Sumud.

Amen.

Jan Sutch Pickard, Pax Christi

A PRAYER FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

God of mercy and compassion, of grace and reconciliation, pour your power upon all your children in the Middle East: Jews, Muslims and Christians, Palestinians and Israelis.

Let hatred be turned into love, fear to trust, despair to hope, oppression to freedom, occupation to liberation, that violent encounters may be replaced by loving embraces, and peace and justice may be experienced by all.

Amen.

Prayer via Terry Hephrun, President of Burnley Catenian Circle 54

Compiled by Anne O'Connor