



World Council
of Churches



Voices of Lament, Hope, and Courage

*A Week of Prayer
in the Time of the
COVID-19 Pandemic*







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Voices of Lament, Hope, and Courage
A Week of Prayer in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Contents

<i>Foreword: Working, Walking and Praying Together</i>	8
<i>Introduction</i>	12
<i>Voices of Care and Support</i>	16
Chapter 1: A World of Prayer	21
Voices from the Regions	22
Prayer from the All Africa Conference of Churches	22
Prayer from the Canadian Council of Churches	24
Prayer by the WCC President of the Caribbean/ Latin America	28
Reflection and Prayers by the Christian Conference of Asia	30
Message from the Conference of European Churches	34
Prayer from the Latin American WCC-Region	36
Confession from the Middle East Council of Churches	40
Prayer from the National Council of Churches USA	44
Prayer from the Pacific Conference of Churches	46
Voices of Faith	50
Prayer by the Archbishop of Canterbury	50
Prayer by Alumna of the Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI), Indonesia	52
Prayer by the Archbishop of Uppsala and Primate of the Church of Sweden	56
Prayer from The Church of the Lord Worldwide	60

Prayer from the Network of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for Pastoral Health Care	64
Prayer by Presiding Bishop of the Lutheran Church of Bavaria and Chairman of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany	68
Prayer by the Metropolitan of Zimbabwe and Angola (Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa)	72
Prayer by the Program Executive of the Human Rights Center, National Council of Churches in Korea	76
Prayer from Member of the Chemin Neuf Community	80
<i>A Prayer as I put on My Mask</i> by the Moderator of The United Church of Canada	84
Prayer by a Member of The United Methodist Church, Philippines	88
Prayer by the Geneva Secretary of the World Methodist Council	92
Chapter 2: Daily Services for a COVID-19 Week of Prayer	97
Day One: Prayers of Lament	98
Day Two: Prayers for Hurting & Suffering Communities	104
Day Three: Prayers for Leaders	110
Day Four: Prayers for Healing	116
Day Five: Prayers for Protection	124
Day Six: Prayers of Hope	132

Chapter 3: COVID-19 Information for Action by Communities of Faith	139
Introduction	140
Day One: Lament	142
Day Two: Hurting and Suffering Communities	146
Day Three: Leaders	154
Day Four: Healing	160
Day Five: Protection	166
Day Six: Hope	172
Chapter 4: COVID-19 Resources Produced by the WCC March 2020 – February 2021	177
Introduction	178
Webinars, webcasts, videos	182
Publications	185
WCC's COVID-19 Resources Page	185

FOREWORD

Working, Walking and Praying Together

As a year will soon have passed since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the spread of COVID-19 a pandemic, the World Council of Churches will observe a week of prayer from 22-27 March in response to requests from member churches.

During the week, we will gather to offer intercessions, especially for the most vulnerable and those on the frontline caring for them, often under harsh circumstances. We will recommit ourselves to active compassion across what separates us, in obedience to the one who had compassion for the crowds and ministered for their healing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reached all the regions of our planet. It has made manifest the danger of the ceaseless commodification of creation; it has revealed our unexpected vulnerability and interdependence. There are fear and panic, pain and suffering, doubt and misinformation about the virus, the vaccine, and our response as Christians. Yet, as a global community of faith, we affirm that, even amid our vulnerability, we trust in God as God is our hope. We are called to give account of our living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are called to show that another reality is possible, that even landscapes can change.

**Please Wash Your
Hands Here**



Therefore, we continue our pilgrimage of justice and peace. And we hope that God' Spirit will give us the strength and the wisdom to find our way together as we are walking, praying and working together for the healing of the nations. Let us pray!

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca
Acting General Secretary
World Council of Churches





Introduction

We pray for each other because Christ first – in his life, death, and resurrection – prayed for us humans and for our salvation. Our intercessions find ultimate meaning in that supreme Intercession, that brought us into communion with the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit, and therefore to hope and courage in times of lament.

In response to calls from member churches and ecumenical partners, the World Council of Churches and ecumenical partners invites you to join in a global fellowship of intercession on the first anniversary of the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic.

Join your sisters and brothers around the world in a prayer journey from lament for more than 2 million lives lost, to intercession. Pray with them: firstly, for hurting and suffering communities; then, for global leaders; for health carers on the front-line of the struggle; for a fair distribution of vaccines, especially in low-income countries; and, finally, for those – especially children and the most vulnerable – who become encouraging signs of hope for us as they get up and recover.



As we pray in Christ for each other, our communion with the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit leads us to deepen our imperfect communion as Christians. As we grow in fellowship, we become mutually vulnerable and more loyal followers of the One whose guts were moved by the suffering of the crowds.

Intercession nurtures compassion. The resources offered in this book include statistics of the pandemic around the world and on the tragic consequences of care, and particularly vaccination, being subject to systemic greed, so that we may engage in acts of compassion guided by prophetic solidarity with the stranger, the widow, and the orphan.

This book was designed for use in prayer groups, congregational services, personal prayer, and in the pastoral accompaniment of those directly affected in different ways by the pandemic. The prayers, messages, reflections, statistics and WCC resources have roots in faith challenged by mourning, fear and uncertainty in different contexts worldwide. We pray that it may bring hope and courage.

The preparation of this book was an act of fellowship crossing many confessional and cultural boundaries. It brought together regional ecumenical organizations, church leaders, councils of churches, students, and WCC partner organizations. The World Council of Churches is grateful for their inspiring participation and support.



On 26 March 2021 at 14:00 CET, a special prayer service will bring together regional ecumenical voices from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, North America and the Pacific. Please join us at oikoumene.org.

However, the material is not limited to use at this time. We invite communities of faith to continue to pray, using these resources as we continue to face the challenges of the pandemic.

Let us pray!

Rev. Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus
Interim Deputy General Secretary
World Council of Churches



Voices of Care and Support

In a time of overwhelming challenge, it would have been easy for faith communities and individuals to feel lonely and overwhelmed. But the voices of the global fellowship of believers were not silenced and provided hope and encouragement

Very early in the pandemic, on 18 March 2020, [a pastoral letter](#) by moderator of the WCC central committee Dr Agnes Abuom and the then general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit provided perspective.

“Faith communities can in times like these do a lot to promote solidarity and accountability, wisdom and care. We as churches can and should raise the voice of the communities who are made vulnerable by their marginalization, who do not have sufficient water to drink let alone for washing their hands. We have to consider the displaced communities due to war, famines, economic and ecological collapse, living in precarious conditions, many of them not even recognized by the authorities of the countries in which they find themselves. They cannot be left completely defenseless against the pandemic. We have to be in solidarity with those for whom self-isolating means a loss of livelihood and even the risk of starvation,



and with those whose precarious daily life leaves very few options for social distancing.”

A **Joint Statement** from the World Council of Churches and Regional Ecumenical Organizations soon after, affirmed the urgency of standing together to protect life amidst the COVID-19 pandemic:

“As religious leaders, we raise our collective voices to highlight the necessity for greater attention to the needs of the homeless, the incarcerated, the elderly and those already suffering from social isolation. We remember, too, those people, especially women and children, who face abuse and violence, who are not safe at home and may suffer additional abuse and violence as stress increases.”



Another **pastoral response** emphasized protection of life in the name of the God of love:

“This is a time to touch each other’s hearts, by what we say, what we share, what we do – and what we do not do – to protect the life God loves so much. In that love, we must adapt our modes of worship and fellowship to the needs of this time of the pandemic, in order to avoid the risk of becoming sources of transmission rather than means of grace.”

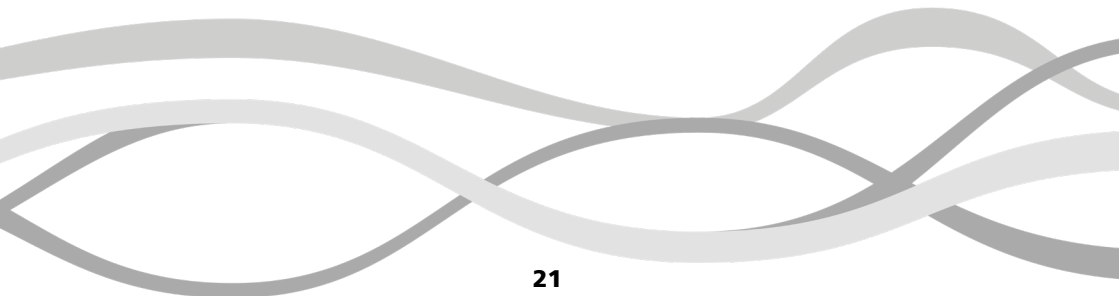
As the challenges brought by the pandemic continue, the global fellowship of people of faith will continue to encourage each other with voices of care and support.





CHAPTER 1

A World of Prayer



Prayer by the All Africa Conference of Churches

God of life, you promised your people abundant life. And this is what we seek and long for. At the same time, you tell us that in this world we will have tribulation. Still, you call us to have courage, for you have overcome the world. As the world finds itself in a time of a terrible pandemic, many families having to bury their loved ones and sustain pain and hopelessness, we ask you to grant us courage and wisdom so that we trust in your promise to overcome whatever faces us. Stand with us as we try to work in solidarity to stay safe, serve those in need of any kind of help in our interconnected and interdependent world.

Rev. Dr Fidon Mwombeki
General Secretary



Prayer from the Canadian Council of Churches

A prayer for healing, gratitude, and a just transition
“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” (Romans 8:35)

Loving God,

We earnestly pray for healing, for the continued efforts to relieve human suffering, and for perseverance throughout these challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are struck by the dedication and cooperation of virologists, biochemists, epidemiologists, and many other scientists working urgently in laboratories across Canada and around the world to develop tests, treatments, and vaccines to protect us from the ongoing ravages of COVID-19.

Now, with a shift in public attention, we pray for a just transition and recovery:

That public policy puts people’s health and well-being first, no exceptions.





That we strengthen the social safety net, especially for people in long-term care homes.

That we experience solidarity and equity across communities, generations, and borders, also in the availability of vaccines for all.

That we uphold Indigenous rights, work in partnership with Indigenous Peoples, and prioritize access to immunization programs with all vulnerable populations.

May we respond with an abundance of hope, gratitude, and solidarity, trusting in the loving and ever merciful God, the source of all hope.

Amen.

Pastor Peter Noteboom

General Secretary





Prayer from the Caribbean Conference of Churches

“The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light; on those who live in a land of deep shadow, a light has shone.” (Isaiah 9:1)

Ever-faithful and compassionate God, “Emmanuel”, we thank you for accompanying us in this time of anguish. As we come into the light of your Presence, we open ourselves to the healing power of your Spirit, laying bare our brokenness, our anxieties, and our pain. In particular, we open to you the pain of separation and loss – especially the loss of loved ones to death’s deep shadow.

Gracious God, we thank you that – despite its darkness – this moment has shed light on our common humanity. We pray that this sense of oneness of the human family may engender justice in the distribution of vaccines, and that the churches may courageously champion this cause and so give glory to your Holy Name.

Amen

Gerard A.J. Granada

General Secretary





Reflection and Prayers by the Christian Conference of Asia

It is clear that the outbreak of COVID-19 is a result of systematic practices and actions by which we exploit the planet and destroy God's creation. The crisis has revealed the fragility of human life and the ultimate vulnerability of the entire cosmos. Confronted by the spread of the novel coronavirus, all Christian churches, related organizations, and other faith communities in Asia wholeheartedly delivered prompt ecumenical responses to the pandemic by sharing emerging challenges and insights to minimize the impact of COVID-19 crisis. While strengthening our collaborations and solidarity, we are envisioning the path towards a better future where safety and well-being are ensured for all. Witnessing the hope in God amidst anguish and anxiety inspires and encourages us to believe that God's creation will be restored.

God,

In faith and hope, we come to You and confess our weakness and vulnerability.

At this time of our fragility, fear, and death, we come to You.

Make us well, and we will be well,

Be our Saviour and we will be safe,

For us, You are our hope.





We believe that You are our strength; You are our shield;
In our helplessness, we trust that You are our refuge.
In our vulnerability, You are our shelter.
In the midst of darkness, You give us light and rays of hope.
In our pain and suffering, You give us the ability to live in hope
with courage; and the wisdom to overcome all difficulties.
God of compassion, make us to be concerned for all those who
are suffering due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
God of hope, heal us, protect us, and sustain us by Your divine
grace.
Amen.

God of life,
We thank You for the gift of Your creation.
We confess our greed and ignorance that has made Your creation
vulnerable.

God of the future,
Guide us to live in Your will.



God of love,
Teach us to be compassionate,
Help us to open our eyes and stretch our hands out to comfort
 all those who are suffering.
Help us to embrace them,
Help us to accompany them with compassion and solidarity.

God of the universe,
You are mighty in power and gentle in love,
Restore us in Your Spirit,
Amen.

Dr Mathews George Chunakara
General Secretary



Message from the Conference of European Churches

We are going through strange times. So-called “social distancing” in times of a pandemic contradicts our self-image as churches: Community and presence. At the heart of our Christian community lies fellowship. Holy Communion as a physical affirmation of common identity; the sign of peace as a gesture of reconciliation and mutual love; hymn singing as an act of gathering into shared fellowship.

During such times, we must highlight prayer as a sign of hope and fellowship.

Prayer is a reminder of our vulnerability and perishability, a cue to us that as humans we are not in control, but also a sign of the Church as a worldwide fellowship of mutual encouragement, praying for the healing of our communities. Praying together becomes a powerful vaccine against the loss of hope, against the absence of communal resilience and against the lack of human sustainability.

Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen
General Secretary





Prayer by the WCC President of the Caribbean/Latin America

God of Life, God of Jesus of Nazareth,

Your son has taught me that we women are your daughters,
subjects of your love.

But in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic that plagues
humanity, I hear sad news from Colombia.

Women are victims of violence within their homes.

More than 37 women were murdered by their partners between
January and February 2021.

In the middle of the pandemic, an indigenous girl was raped and
killed by soldiers.

In Barranquilla, we women have to protest and demand that
women's quotas be met in small municipalities.

We pray, O God, for women who are victims of abuse.

For women whose rights are not recognized in companies, in the
church, in universities, in the family, in politics, in the economy,
in society in general.

We pray for the women who, in the midst of this pandemic, have
been kidnapped, abducted.

For the women who are victims of sexual violence, even from
their husbands.





We pray for the women who cry because a teacher or a fellow student has made indecent proposals to them.

We pray for the girls forced to stay away from school because they are unable to attend their classes online.

In your grace, protect them, O God, and may your church bring hope and relief in the midst of the pandemic and lift up its voice to defend them.

Amen

Rev. Gloria N. Ulloa Alvarado

Executive Secretary

Presbiterio de la costa norte (Presbyterian Church of Colombia)





Confession from the Middle East Council of Churches

Confessions to the Creator

We confess to You, O Lord, that we have persevered in our
sinfulness,

We admit to You, O creator of the universe, that we have
corrupted Your creation,

We confess to You, Lord of the universe, that we have forgotten
Your commandments,

We confess to You, Loving Father, that we have offended Your
love,

We confess to You, O Most Merciful, that we did not show mercy
to each other,

We admit to You, who are Able, that we were not able to curb
our greed,

We confess to You, Redeemer, that we did not respect Your
redemption,

We put Your gifts to ruin,

We destroyed the natural environment You endowed us with!





We destroyed the life You created!

We destroyed the creation that You redeemed!

In the midst of our tumultuous daily life, we forgot the distinction between good and evil, between truth and falsehood, and between truthfulness and blasphemy, and we hid behind masks that we borrowed from Your legacy and falsified them to meet our interests.

We forgot in our gasping behind the vain glories that Your trust in us has a right, so we created a society of consumption, prevented protecting the environment. We established injustice as a rule of life and deceitfulness as a guide to dealing with each other, and when we reached the end of times, we accused You of punishing us.

Because evil is so widespread in our togetherness, we forgot that You are the Lord of love, and thought that we are in the presence of the Lord of punishment that our minds invented! We have forgotten that we do not fear the Lord, but rather we love Him, and the good deeds that we do are not due to fear but spurred by identification with His boundless love which we seek to incarnate.



Because of the intensity of our ignorance, we thought that the pandemic that was about to destroy humanity was a punishment inflicted by You, and we forgot that we were the ones who produced it from our excessive darkness.

As we gather here to pray for the end of this pandemic, we are inspired by You and we admonish to ourselves and to each other, invoking Your boundless mercy.

From eternity to everlasting times, we will not forget that You redeemed us and sacrificed Yourself for us, so make us worthy of Your redemption and make us preserve the gifts that You have bestowed upon us.

Prof. Michel E. Abs
Secretary General



Prayer by the National Council of Churches USA

God of all people and all nations hear us as we pray. We hear the news that more than 2.6 million people have died from this terrible pandemic, more than 500,000 in our nation alone, and we confess to becoming numb to the sorrow and pain. Help us to remember that these are not mere statistics on a chart or a graph. Remind us that each one was a human being with a family and friends, each is one of your beloved children. Do not allow us to move too quickly from our grief and become reckless in our desire to return to “normal.”

Give wisdom to our political and religious leaders, give strength to our public health officials. Provide comfort and rest for our first responders, nurses, doctors, and caregivers. Give us patience and perseverance for the days and months ahead so that we could continue on the path to healing and help us to unite in the common goal of defeating this awful virus. This we pray in Christ’s holy name.

Jim Winkler

General Secretary





Prayer from the Pacific Conference of Churches

Loving and embracing God,
Through your son Jesus, you renew all things and offer abundant
life.

In these challenging times, we have been reminded that your
grace has been sufficient for us.

You challenge us to look beyond our own difficulties to those
whose needs are greater than ours, whose cries for justice are
louder than ours.

Creator God,

All of creation is groaning. There is fear, disconnect and anguish,
as profit, as greed drives us only to address the symptoms,
while the planet and all creatures that call it home are dying
from this lifestyle disease.

You remind us that a renewal is required to address the loneliness
of spirit that the world feels, the hunger of the human heart
that material gain cannot satisfy.

Amidst the pain and suffering of so many you offer hope of a
renewed world, a reweaving of the divine mat on which all
creation sits together, each a sacred strand of your design that
was very good.





Help us O Lord, journey into a profound, a deeper relationship
with both you as Creator and all your Creation.
To touch the soil and tend to the earth.
To protect the ocean and move gently upon it.
To sing a new Lord's song and work together so that
everything that has breath: the trees and the seas that make
oxygen, and the creatures that breathe it to live – everything
that has breath – praise the Lord!
In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Rev. James Bhagwan,
General Secretary





Prayer by the Archbishop of Canterbury

Almighty God,
Whose Son Jesus Christ suffered for us on the Cross
that we might have eternal life,
be present with us in our suffering as we endure the pandemic.
Be present to the sick;
be present to the dying;
be present to the bereaved.
We know that in your love all things shall be made whole.
Strengthen in us that hope
which comes only from faith in your unfailing love.
This we ask through your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ,
who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
ever one God.
Amen.

Rt Hon. Justin Welby
Church of England



Prayer by Alumna of the Asian Ecumenical Institute, Indonesia

O Almighty God,
In amazement of your power,
We are aware of our vulnerability.
We ask for your mercy, especially during this pandemic.
You see the tears that fall.
You hear the silent sighs.
You understand the anguish of our hearts.
You know all our sorrows, anxieties, and fears.
Console the broken hearts of those who grieve their loved ones.
Restore to your grace those who cry out as they cannot reach out
to their loved ones.
Uplift those who lament the loss of life and livelihood.
We believe you answer every prayer.

Omnipresent God,
We are grateful that you never let us walk alone.
However, this pandemic exposes our weaknesses and limitations.
We confess that our relationships are breaking down,
That our humanity is vanishing in the face of anxiety,
That our egotism is erasing and replacing love and concern.





We beg that you restore our world, dear Lord.
Let us recognize you as a friend in all others.
Let us be reminded of our humanity amidst suffering.
Let us be charitable and mindful, rather than greedy, in this
hardship.
Restore the physical and mental wellbeing of us all,
Enable us to fight the twin viruses of COVID-19 and hate.

O Lord God, our guard,
Grant us your wisdom and discernment,
So that we collectively act in truth and justice.
Guide our governments that they may serve in obedience and
charity.
Despite the fearful pandemic, strengthen us to pursue the truth,
Bless the work that is to be done in the best interests of society.
Give your foresight and knowledge to those who are working to
develop an antidote,
Let their motivations be to preserve life, and not their own
narrow self-interest.
Let your love unfold upon all doctors, nurses, medical personnel,
volunteers, and everyone who has dedicated their efforts in
service of others.



In your protection, let them be healthy and full of kindness,
Remind them that their service and sacrifice for humanity is not
in vain.

Encourage those infected and recovering,
those under observation, those in quarantine and isolation,
so that they pull through in this period of trials and tribulations.
Outstretch your mighty hands over entire communities,
That we all may trust in your will, in your perfect timing, in your
righteousness.

O God, the Owner of Life,
Teach us to be patient and compassionate,
And let us humble and improve ourselves,
So that even in difficult situations, we never cease to glorify your
holy name.
In your forgiveness and love we pray,
Amen.

Patricia Sapakoly
(originally written in Bahasa)



Prayer by the Archbishop of Uppsala and Primate of the Church of Sweden

God of life, God of compassion,
as the pandemic continues to shake our world, we turn to you.
We give thanks for the gifts of perseverance and creativity,
for care given and vaccines developed,
for cries heard and comfort received.

We come to you with all our worries:
for loved ones, for societies, for jobs and economies,
and for how the most vulnerable among us are being affected.
Transform unrest and fear into love and care.
Give us courage, wisdom, and energy to change what needs to
be changed.

Trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray
for the sick and those who are caring for them,
for safe and fair distribution of vaccines,
for those who mourn and those who suffer from loneliness,
for those who must take difficult decisions that affect many,
for international cooperation in the service of justice and peace,
for spiritual leadership that is faithful to your will.





In your mercy, help us to hold on to what is right, true, and beautiful.

Through Jesus Christ, whom we have come to know as our Saviour and Healer.

Amen.

Archbishop Antje Jackelén





Prayer from The Church of the Lord Worldwide

We, therefore, convey our common allegiance to Christ Jesus; to offer intercessions especially for the most vulnerable, those who have lost their loved ones to the pandemic and for those who are on the frontline caring for the sick often under harsh circumstances; and to recommit ourselves to active compassion across what separates us, in obedience to the One who had compassion for the crowds and ministered for their healing:

At a time like this, which is causing distress, grief, misery, sickness, pain, loss, calamity, and the like.

Beloved, God created us and our emotions, and it is not sinful or inappropriate to express our emotions or grief as Job did in the Bible.

Our faith in God and trust in Him should not depend on what we receive from Him, but rather because of who He is – The Alpha and Omega, the Creator of the whole universe, able to say and do, our Protector, Provider and Sustainer.





COVID-19 is not as a result of the personal sin of the afflicted. As we intercede on behalf of those afflicted, let us continue to intercede for our world that God may grant healing to all the affected persons, and that God may heal our world through Christ Jesus our Lord and Saviour, Amen.

At times like this, let us stay true to God and His Word. For no matter how bad the world becomes, no matter how the situation is, God remains God.

Beloved, at times like this, let us remember to always check on all our brothers and sisters, parents, and children, and all our loved ones. A call may save a life. May the good Lord grant us the grace to care for His creation in Jesus' name, Amen.

According to Psalm 91:7, a thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you in Jesus name, Amen.

We commit those who have lost their loved ones and are therefore grieving into the hand of God for divine comfort in Jesus name, Amen.



We also commit all those who are sick, either on hospital beds or at home into the hands of God for divine healing in Jesus name, Amen.

Heavenly Father, do Thou protect us all from deadly virus and ailments, and don't allow any evil to befall us or come near our dwelling. All these we ask in the name of our Lord and Saviour – Jesus Christ,

Amen.

His Holiness, the Most Rev. Dr. Rufus Ositelu



Prayer from the Network of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for Pastoral Health Care

Almighty Master, the help and salvation of the world; the redeemer and Savior of the sick; the physician and aid of the ailing; the healer of the sorrows of mankind's bodies and souls; who vanquished death: our God.

We now beseech You, cleanse and rid us of every malady of body and soul. Lord be not far from us. Send down upon us Your heavenly power of healing. Cast far from us every lurking illness. Grant us aid in this time of pandemic and deliver us from every evil, grief and sorrow.

End this present scourge and now grant us patience, O Lord. Uplift us and be physician to us all. Raise us from our bed of pain and from our bedding of affliction. Accept the entreaties of doctors and nurses and all whose efforts serve and minister to the sick. They offer care and comfort. In Your love of mankind, aid them. By Your power strengthen them. To those who have succumbed to this accursed, illness and are now departed from us, grant them repose in a place of refreshment. They are Your





servants and our brothers and sisters. Restore us who hope in You to Your Holy Church, healed and in health, to worship and glorify Your holy name. For it is Yours to show mercy and to save, O Christ our God, and to You we give the glory: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages of ages. Amen.





Prayer by Presiding Bishop of the Lutheran Church of Bavaria and Chairman of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany

A Window into Eternity (Rev. 21)

L: God of hope and life,
You have promised: there will be no more death and
no more mourning,
no cry of lament and no pain.
You have promised to wipe every tear from our eyes.
You have said, I make all things new.
And so we come to You and ask:

C: Yes, make all things new.

L: In this pandemic year we have experienced how the old
has crumbled away,
how our entire sense of being alive has begun to totter.
We have learned how vulnerable we are.
That we are not in control of everything.





That we cannot solve all problems with our material
and technological capabilities.

You have said: I make all things new.

And so we come to You and ask:

C: Yes, make all things new.

L: We long to be comforted,
we long for the wounds to heal,
we long for something new to open up.

You have said: I make all things new.

And so we come to You and ask:

C: Yes, make all things new.

L: We pray for those who are lonely.
We pray for those who cry, the sad, the despondent,
and the desperate.
We pray for those who have died, for those left behind,
and for those who are in mourning.

We pray for those who long for hope, truth and love
and who are searching for You with all their hearts.

You have said: I make all things new.

And so we come to You and ask:



C: Yes, make all things new.

L: These words are already coming true.

In the consolation we give to each other.

In the kind words we say to each other that strengthen us.

In the peace and tranquility of the soul we feel

when we speak to You in prayer.

During these days and weeks let us keep our eyes, ears and
hearts open

for these moments that show that:

We trust that You, God, can create something new in the
midst of the impossible.

We rely on You, God, to give us strength when we need it.

We count on You, God, in time and in eternity.

We are certain that You, God, are with us.

You have said: I make all things new.

And so we come to You and ask:

C: Yes, make all things new.

Amen

Prof. Dr. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm

Presiding Bishop of the Lutheran Church of Bavaria and

Chairman of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany



Prayer by the Metropolitan of Zimbabwe and Angola, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

Let us offer this prayer in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Lord Jesus Christ our God, You traveled through towns and villages “curing every disease and illness.” At Your command, the sick was made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus, that we may experience Your healing love.

Heal those O Lord who are sick with the virus. May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care.

Heal us from our fears, which prevents nations from working together and neighbours from helping one another.

Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to a disease that knows no borders.

Lord Jesus Christ, healer of all and physician of our souls and bodies, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow.





Be with those who have died from the virus. May they be at rest with You in Your eternal peace.

Be with the families of those who are sick or have died. As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair. May they know Your peace.

Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers, and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected, and who put themselves at risk in the process. May they know Your protection and peace.

Be with the leaders of all nations and the Members of the Church. Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the well-being of the people they are meant to serve. Give them the wisdom to invest in long-term solutions that will help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks. May they know Your peace as they work together to achieve it on earth; whether we are home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering from this illness, or only a few.

Lord Jesus Christ, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare. In place of our anxiety, give us Your peace.



All of us at WCC as we are working for the preparation of our next General Assembly, we carry on praying together day and night "The love of Christ to move all of us to Metanoia, Reconciliation and Unity" in order the whole humanity to live like the first Christian community ("all the believers were one in heart and mind, no one claim that any of his possessions was his own, but they share everything they had" Acts 4,32)

For You are the Physician of our souls and bodies, Christ our God, and to You we offer glory, thanksgiving, and worship, together with Your Eternal Father and Your All-Holy, Good, and Lifegiving Spirit, now and forever, and unto ages of ages.

Amen

(Relying on a prayer from the Orthodox Parish of St Nicholas of the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese)

His Eminence Metropolitan Seraphim Kykotis



Prayer by the Program Executive of the Human Rights Center, National Council of Churches in Korea

God, we believe that we are all God's creation.

We are all of different ages, different appearances, and different abilities.

Even though we are each different, we are all your children in your image, so we confess that we are one family.

God, you who renew us each day, connect us closer together.

Lead us on the path of love and lead us on the path of a holy life.

In this pandemic, there are strangers who have lost their families, their homes, their hometowns, and all their lives. Let us hear the desperate voices of those who seek help, and please light up our darkened eyes.





Merciful God, remember the children, women, the elderly, the disabled and minorities who suffer in the shadow of killings, terrorism, hunger, and racism. May the weak, who deserve protection, live with dignity, freedom, and safety under the wings of the Lord.

In a world where the justice of the kingdom of God disappears, and the truth is separated, we wait for the spring of history.

God who pours out the blessings of heaven to those who have clear and fine spirits, now that the whole world is suffering from COVID-19, let us be different from the past. Let us re-flower the flower of love and peace in a world where all the dignity of life coexists.

Lord, hear our prayer. Give us the wisdom to straighten out the chaotic mess of the world. Now in this moment, we pray together in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Rev. Kim Min Ji
Program Executive





Prayer from Member of the Chemin Neuf Community

Lord Jesus,

As we walk through this pandemic and are faced with many hardships,
our faith assures us that everything we need we find in you.

We know that our attitudes are determined by what we choose to look at.

Grant us therefore the grace to turn our eyes to you.

As we experience the storm caused by anxiety and fear,
whether it be fear for the future,
fear of pain and of death,
fear of loneliness,
or any other fear,

We turn our eyes to you who silenced the storm,
And we open our hearts to your gift of peace.





As we feel weighed down by discouragement, helplessness, and
despair
in our workplaces, families, and homes,
We turn our eyes to you who took Lazarus out of his tomb,
And we open our hearts to your gift of hope.

As we go through pain and suffering caused by the COVID-19
virus,
As we witness pain and suffering on the faces of our loved ones,
We turn our eyes to you who suffered every suffering in your
Passion,
And we open our hearts to your gift of compassion.

Lord Jesus,
may our eyes be fixed on you,
For you are our firm foundation in all circumstances.
Amen

Sr Sandrine Nourry





A Prayer as I Put on My Mask
by the Moderator of
The United Church of Canada

Creator, as I prepare to go into the world, help me to see the
sacrament

in the wearing of this cloth –
let it be “an outward sign of an inward grace” –
a tangible and visible way
of living love for my neighbours, as I love myself.

Christ, since my lips will be covered,
uncover my heart, that people would see my smile
in the crinkles around my eyes.

Since my voice may be muffled,
help me to speak clearly, not only with my words,
but with my actions.

Holy Spirit, as the elastic touches my ears,
remind me to listen carefully – and full of care –
to all those I meet.

May this simple piece of cloth be shield and banner,
and each breath that it holds,
be filled with your love.





In your Name and in that love, I pray.
May it be so. May it be so.

Rev. Richard Bott

Moderator





Prayer by a Member of The United Methodist Church, Philippines

We cry unto you, O Lord of heaven and earth,
seeking for your forgiveness, mercy, grace, and love.

We bow down unto you, O God of the ages,
asking for your protection and deliverance
against the deadly COVID-19 disease.

Out of the depths we cry to you, O Lord, to grant healing to those
infected and sick.

Out of the depths we cry to you, O Lord, to grant comfort to
those orphaned and mourning.

Out of the depths we cry to you, O Lord, to shatter our greed,
selfishness, and wanton craving for wealth and power.

Out of the depths we cry to you, O Lord, to strengthen all our
front-liners regardless of their profession and line of work.

Out of the depths we cry to you, O Lord, to abide with our whole
family and love ones.

May you fill our cups and tables,
not to have more than what is enough,
but to share to those who are in need.

May you touch the sick and weary
with your merciful and mighty hand.





O God, now hear our calling. Incline your ears to our distress in spite of our rebelling.

Do not regard our sinful deeds. Send us the grace our spirit needs; without it we are nothing.

We believe in your power to heal, save, and protect. The same power which made Lazarus rise up from the dead. The same power that can make the broken to be whole again.

Our soul is waiting for you, O Lord, as one who longs for the morning.

Keep us under the wings of your steadfast love.

Grant us with your mercy which never comes to an end and is always new every morning.

Great is your faithfulness, O Lord.

Amen.

Tomas Jerico M. Aliwalas





Prayer by the Geneva Secretary of the World Methodist Council

God, creator of the world and all humankind:

Have merci on us, the people from all nations of the world.

We are all affected by COVID-19. Yet the burdens are unequally shared.

Some have access to vaccination and health care; others are told that they must wait.

Some earn more money than ever; others lose their last coin.

Some find comfort in a caring environment; others are far away from home, lonely, exploited and neglected.

Jesus, wounded healer: We urgently need you.

You are in solidarity with those who are most affected by the many negative consequences of COVID-19. You are sick, you are homeless, you are a stranger, you are exploited, you are dying.

Your love is universal.

We separate. We neglect. We forget.

You unite. Your compassion embraces all creation. You remember everyone. Because of your sacrifice there is life, life stronger than death.





Holy Spirit, transforming and renewing power: Teach us to
interconnect with one another.

Only when all are vaccinated the pandemic is over. And when all
are fed and save, we together will celebrate life in abundance.
Inspire us to share God's love so that the world will be filled with
mercy and joy. Empower us to be Christs hands and feet to
reach out to neighbors and strangers.

God, creator, healer, transformer: In you is hope for all the world.
To you be the glory.

Bishop Rosemarie Wenner

Geneva Secretary







CHAPTER 2

**Daily Services
for a COVID-19
Week of Prayer**

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, you 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 participate fully in our traditional liturgical and cultural rites. We have struggled for survival as lockdowns have negatively impacted our local economies. 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 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 a 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 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 not to 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 to you,
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.



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 need 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 we do everything we do 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

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

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” ²⁰No, “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.” ²¹Do 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. Indeed, 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 that 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 that exist and contribute to the suffering brought by 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))



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
leadership positions.

Give 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 envelop 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 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 various leadership styles from small communities and villages to political leaders with a 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. One would not have expected these qualities 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

Lord, we pray for our leaders' health and well-being, who themselves face risks to their health as they serve the wider community.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray that they lead by example, guiding society, equipped with reliable and accurate information, inspiring faith communities to serve our common humanity with unconditional love.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.



Lord, we pray that the leaders of different faith communities, leaders from the government, civil society and the scientific community work together with humility and mutual respect across boundaries and borders to overcome this pandemic.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for leaders of the pharmaceutical industries, states, and inter-state organizations, that access to the vaccination against COVID-19 may be granted to the most vulnerable everywhere, regardless of their purchasing power.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray that you grant each of us the grace and courage to take our responsibility and leadership in our contexts, to act with deep compassion and care for the people and creation we have influence over.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

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 his countenance upon you and give you peace.



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 believe once again 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 in our minds when we are sick. Depending on the nature of our illness, it can be like an all-consuming fire if we are not careful. 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. We do not know their ages, their family of origin or 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 God's healing power was manifested through Jesus. Yet unlike other instances in which those seeking healing asked directly, this community of outcast lepers approached Jesus, pleading for mercy. In essence, they sought 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 were – human beings created by God and reflecting that divine image. In uttering these words, they interceded for a change in them and for change 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 the 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 themselves as no longer marred by leprosy can be viewed 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 that 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 also voice 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, cities, and in both the public and private sectors, 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 childcare providers 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 protective equipment that help us to protect ourselves from the pandemic. We pray that we can ensure that all have equitable access to the protection 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.





DAY FIVE

Prayers for Protection

With more than 312 million doses of vaccine having been administered by 9 March 2021, we pray for an equitable distribution of vaccines, especially in low-income countries, so that people everywhere will be protected.

Opening Prayer

God, as our heavenly Father,
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.
Envelop 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 behaviours 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 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 routine. 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 a serpent bit someone, they should look to the serpent on the staff, and they would 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, you, like a 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. 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 fundamental 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 is minimized, and lives preserved, protect them as they take great risks 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 the 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 is 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.**



DAY SIX

Prayers of Hope

*We celebrate the signs of hope as people are being helped,
particularly 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 name of 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.’ Nelson Mandela’s words are also timely, “May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.” Hope is a bridge that helps us to journey from the difficulties and depravities of the present to a future that 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 maintain still that we are a ‘hope-filled’ Christian people.

In these times, Christian hope, though, also embraces other signs of hope which helps us 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 organizations 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.





CHAPTER 3

**Information for
Action by Communities
of Faith**

Introduction

*When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days,
fasting and praying before the God of heaven.
Nehemiah 1:4*

When Nehemiah was in the citadel of Susa, he received reports of the dire situation of the remnants of his people who were back in Jerusalem. What he heard made him weep. He turned to God in prayer and fasting. Nehemiah followed up the prayer with action by helping rebuild the wall of the city of his ancestors. Like Nehemiah, we need to keep our feet firmly on the ground and be rooted in reality as we pray to God to liberate us from this crisis caused by the pandemic. We also need to be equipped to take follow up action. As we pray each day, focusing on a specific facet of the pandemic and the response – *Lament, Communities, Leaders, Protection/Vaccination, Healing/Workers and Hope* – the resources give us the facts related to that aspect. It guides us on how we can follow up with practical action and point us to examples of how churches and communities have responded to the challenge.

Jesus commanded us to go beyond listening to his teachings and to put them into action to ensure that our communities stand on a firm foundation (*Matthew 7:24*). The path ahead is not easy, but through Christ, who strengthens us, we can achieve this together. (*Philippians 4:13*)

Deputy General Secretary Prof. Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri



DAY ONE

Lament

*Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation
and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children;
she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.
Jeremiah 31:15*

Facts and impact

- *Death:* More than 116 million people have been confirmed to have been infected by COVID-19, and 2.6million people have died from the disease (as of 8 March 2021).
- *Dying alone:* For millions of people, facing death in times of isolation and quarantine has meant a lack of closure, where there was no time to accompany the dying or say goodbye to them. This has contributed to people experiencing immense loneliness, pain, loss and often a sense of guilt.
- *The poor suffer more:* This pandemic has brought suffering and death to people everywhere, but its impact is not shared equally. The poor are at greater risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19 due to crowded living conditions, doing work that makes them more vulnerable to infection and limited access to healthcare. Others who have





- been disproportionately impacted have been the elderly, homeless people, undocumented migrants, prisoners, and indigenous peoples.
- *Funerals*: The suppression or abbreviation of funeral rituals has been a traumatic experience for bereaved family members, causing immeasurable loss and pain, as they are prevented from fulfilling their last homage to the loved one who has passed away.
 - *Loss*: The deaths of parents and grandparents are also having a unique and devastating impact on children. A parent's death also has other significant consequences, such as loss of income or care.

Suggestions for action

- *Accompaniment*. Accompany the bereaved and loved ones by being present and listening, providing bereavement and mental health support and practical help as needed for the short and long term. The response needs to be both from an individual and the community level.
- *Death and Dying*. Work and advocate for support services to be provided, including end of life and palliative care and funeral arrangements, while adhering to measures of social distancing and limitation of numbers for visits and gatherings. Work to maximize participation and support using social media and available technologies.
- *Remembering*. Memorializing and remembering the people we have lost; to speak their names, to honour their lives and to renew the strength of those who they have left behind.



- *Respecting the living and the dead.* Promote policies that ensure that the deceased and their loved ones are treated with respect, with sensitivity to their traditional, cultural, and religious rites within the given public health constraints.

Examples of church and community responses and resources

- [WCC podcast dealing with death and dying](#)
- [COVID-19: Leading the church in a post-crisis world \(Lutheran World Federation\)](#)
- [A Psalm of lament and praise in a time of coronavirus-Methodist Church](#)
- [COVID-19, Tearfund Bible-study on lament](#)



DAY TWO

Hurting and Suffering Communities

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members
of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.
For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks,
slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
If one member suffers, all suffer together with it;
if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.
1 Corinthians 12: 12, 13, 26*

Facts and impact

- *Hunger and water crisis:* In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic added 130 million hungry to the 690 million hungry and chronically malnourished.¹ In the first few months of 2021, people who need humanitarian assistance and protection have risen by 40% to 235 million in 2021, almost entirely due to COVID-19. Safe and consistently available water supply and waste management practices are essential to prevent human-to-human transmission of the corona-

1. State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, 2020,
<http://www.fao.org/3/ca9692en/online/ca9692en.html>





virus, but 2.2 billion people worldwide do not have safe drinking water, 4.2 billion people do not have safe sanitation, and 3 billion lack basic handwashing facilities².

- *Loss of livelihood and impoverishment:* We witness suffering in all our communities, with large sections of the population having lost their work due to the pandemic. This significantly impacts the informal labour workers, who make up 60% of the world's workforce and 80% in Sub-Saharan Africa³. It is also estimated that an additional 140 million people descended into living in extreme poverty on less than US\$1.90 per day in 2020⁴. And yet, global food prices rose close to 20% in the last year (January 2020-January 2021)⁵.
- *Increased vulnerability of children:* Child protection services have been disrupted in 104 countries, seriously limiting access to prevention and response services for 1.8 billion children and young peo-

2. WHO 2019, <https://www.who.int/news/item/18-06-2019-1-in-3-people-globally-do-not-have-access-to-safe-drinking-water-unicf-who>

3. Women and men in the informal economy, International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2018, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_626831.pdf

4. Poverty and food insecurity could grow dramatically as COVID-19 spreads - IFPRI <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/poverty-and-food-insecurity-could-grow-dramatically-covid-19-spreads>

5. World Bank, 2021, Food Security and COVID-19 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/agriculture/brief/food-security-and-covid-19>



ple⁶. The pandemic disrupted education systems, forcing 1.6 billion learners out of schools in more than 190 countries, impacting 94 % of the world's student population. The crisis also put at least 85 million more children at risk of violence⁷. As many children are heading back to class, it is estimated that nearly 10 million children who live in low-income countries, in refugee camps and warzones may never return to school – especially girls⁸. There is a reversal of the significant gains made in reducing the number of child labour cases,⁹ and 13 million extra child marriages are expected to occur in the years immediately following the pandemic¹⁰.

- *Increased vulnerability of women:* There are reports of gender-based violence, especially domestic violence, having increased by 40% in

6. Protecting children from violence in the time of COVID-19: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/protecting-children-from-violence-covid-19-disruptions-in-prevention-and-response-services-2020>

7. COVID -19 could put 85 million children at risk of physical, sexual and emotional violence- World Vision <https://www.wvi.org/stories/ghana/covid-19-could-put-85-million-children-risk-physical-sexual-and-emotional-violence>

8. Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond, UN, August 2020; https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/08/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_and_education_august_2020.pdf

9. Child labour gains since 2000 'could be wiped out by COVID' <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/06/1066172>

10. Millions more cases of violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, unintended pregnancy expected due to the COVID-19 pandemic <https://www.unfpa.org/news/millions-more-cases-violence-child-marriage-female-genital-mutilation-unintended-pregnancies>



some countries since the onset of this pandemic, the most vulnerable and marginalized women being the most impacted¹¹. Women's work and careers have also been hampered by the burden of unpaid care work and child-care. Women make up a large share of employment in many industries most immediately affected by COVID-19, such as retail and hospitality. They spend significantly more time caring for children than their male counterparts. School closure, home-schooling, and the inability of grandparents to share in responsibilities add extra burdens^{12 13 14}.

- *Situations of other vulnerable communities*: Migrants and the nearly 80 million forcibly displaced people worldwide are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, as the pandemic has aggravated their

11. Gender-based violence and COVID-19 : UNDP May 2020; <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/gender-based-violence-and-covid-19.html>

12. Unpaid care work in times of the COVID-19 crisis: Gendered impacts, emerging evidence and promising policy responses, Esuna Dugarova: https://www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/09/Duragova.Paper_.pdf

13. Women at the core of the fight against COVID-19 crisis: OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19): <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/women-at-the-core-of-the-fight-against-covid-19-crisis-553a8269/>

14. Parents, especially mothers, paying a heavy price for lockdown: Study from the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the UCL Institute of Education <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14861>



often-precarious living conditions¹⁵. COVID-19 also poses a significant threat to the 20 countries that experience the most conflict and suffering from severe food emergencies, with more than 19 million people at risk of famine (including Afghanistan, Yemen, Congo, Somalia, and South Sudan)¹⁶. People deprived of their liberty, such as people in prisons and other places of detention, are more vulnerable to the pandemic. The estimated 10.35 million people incarcerated in the world include many people with chronic diseases and complex medical needs who are more vulnerable to COVID-19¹⁷.

- *Increased vulnerability of people living with HIV*: The pandemic has increased the possibility of losing out on the gains made in the struggle to overcome HIV over the last 20 years¹⁸. More than 12 million people have still not accessed HIV treatment, and 1.7 million people became infected with HIV in 2019 because they could not access essential services. The situation was made worse in 2020, with the use of criminal law or other unjustified and disproportionate

15. World Risk Report (WRR), 2020 edition: <https://weltrisikobericht.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/WorldRiskReport-2020.pdf>

16. Risk of famine in four countries, warns UN agencies' report; <https://www.wfp.org/stories/risk-famine-four-countries-warns-un-agencies-report>

17. Onyeka Otugo and Brooke Wages: COVID-19: The Additional Sentence for the Incarcerated. *Health Equity*. 2020;4(1):403-405. Published 2020 Sep 30. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1089%2Fheq.2020.0017>

18. The cost of inaction: COVID-19-related service disruptions could cause hundreds of thousands of extra deaths from HIV- <https://www.who.int/news/item/11-05-2020-the-cost-of-inaction-covid-19-related-service-disruptions-could-cause-hundreds-of-thousands-of-extra-deaths-from-hiv>



repressive measures in relation to COVID-19 exacerbating inequalities and perpetuating stigma, resulting in a devastating impact on the most vulnerable in society, including many people living with HIV¹⁹.

- *Increase in overall morbidity:* The impact on the overall health services, compounded by fear and the lockdown and restrictions imposed, meant that suffering and deaths increased in communities. The treatment of people with existing illnesses, chronic disease and cancers were seriously hampered, and the rate of new diagnosis of various diseases dropped.

Suggestions for action

- *See:* We do not have to travel far to identify hurting people and communities if we are more sensitive, listening and being receptive to pain and suffering. We should start the search from our own homes and our communities but responding to those near us should not make us blind to needs from afar. The neediest and most marginalized people and communities are not often represented around the table of decision-makers; neither are they visible nor audible.
- *Judge:* Discernment is crucial as we analyze the crisis in our contexts, as the impact of COVID-19 is interconnected and complex,

19. Rights in a pandemic – Lockdowns, rights and lessons from HIV in the early response to COVID-19 <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2020/rights-in-a-pandemic>



deepening and exposing existing vulnerabilities and inequities. Faith communities are best placed to do this due to our interdisciplinary nature and the moral and ethical framework foundational to our belief and practice.

- *Act:* We must respond to needs promptly, without delay, acting in collaboration with others as we cannot overcome the pandemic in isolation. We must approach and work with those in need with humility, acknowledging God's presence and God's agency in the vulnerable community.

Examples of church and community responses and resources

- [WCC Statement on the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and sexual and gender-based violence.](#)
- [Covid-19 and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence-WCC](#)
- [Lutheran Churches in the frontline against 'silent pandemic'](#)
- [Anglican Alliance: COVID-19: how can churches respond?](#)
- Churches are assisting with multi-month dispensing of HIV treatment, organizing home deliveries of medicines, or providing financial assistance, food and shelter to at-risk groups. [Prevailing against Pandemics by Putting People at the centre, UNAIDS 2020](#)



DAY THREE

Leaders

*Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds;
for riches do not last forever, nor a crown for all generations.*

Proverbs 27:23-24

Facts and impact

- *Leading by example:* Leaders are in a position to direct or influence the behaviour of others or the course of events in the context of the COVID-19. This is especially true of religious and spiritual leaders, who are trusted by the community. In this pandemic context, an informed leader who is updated with reliable information and takes wise counsel, can guide communities effectively in this crisis. It is vital that leaders are able to read the signs of our times – discern, pray, advise, and work for solutions and a way forward.
- *Shared and holistic leadership:* Countries that address the pandemic holistically, working with the leaders of the different domains, with mutual accountability, had greater success. The “COVID-19 Global Response Index” has been tracking 36 countries from December 31, 2019, through January 1, 2021 (including G20 nations and several other developing and middle-income countries). The Index tracks national leaders’ responses in critical policy areas, including public





health directives, financial responses, and fact-based public communications. The ranking reveals that success does not depend on economic prowess. As of 1 January 2021, the top five ranks are held by Kenya (first place), Ghana, Ethiopia, New Zealand, and Australia²⁰.

- *Commitment for international and regional cooperation across boundaries:* Viruses do not need visas to cross borders. The solutions to viruses also need to work across national boundaries. The tremendous and unprecedented advances in the development of tests and vaccines were only possible because of the global scientific community's international and non-partisan collaboration, sharing knowledge and information, even as national borders were sealed. Never before have so many experts in so many countries focused simultaneously on a single topic and with such urgency. The leadership of the scientific community in collaborating and sharing knowledge is an inspiring lesson in working together for the world.
- *Remembering and learning from experience:* The leadership in countries in Asia and Africa with previous experience in facing epidemic diseases, such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Ebola, set an example to the world on fighting the novel coronavirus pandemic. These countries that took early and effective measures due to their

20. COVID-19 Global Response Index, Foreign Policy magazine, <https://globalresponseindex.foreignpolicy.com/>



previous experiences were also successful in preventing the spread of COVID-19. While previous outbreaks have affected certain regions, the current pandemic has spread across the globe, and much of the world did not heed the experience and wise counsel of those who have suffered in the past.

Suggestions for action

- *Unity in action.* This crisis is an important moment when leaders of diverse faith communities, government, civil society, and the scientific community need to stand shoulder to shoulder. They can bring about visible unity and work together with humility and mutual respect to overcome this pandemic.
- *Advocating for accountability and transparency:* Advocating and ensuring accountability of our leadership and striving for transparency is vital for the recovery of the world. COVID-19 is not just a health, humanitarian, or socio-economic crisis. It is a crisis that tests the resilience of governance systems and institutions. Leadership should ensure accountability and oversight mechanisms are in place to prevent the risks of corruption and fraud so that people will continue to trust their governments and institutions.
- *Personal responsibility:* Each person should take responsibility and leadership in their contexts, to act with deep compassion and care for the people and circumstance that they have influence over.



Examples of church and community responses and resources

- **Pastoral letter to WCC member churches and ecumenical partners**
- **Practical considerations and recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID-19** (Developed by WHO and faith-based organizations)
- **UNDP, 2020: Transparency, Accountability and Anti-Corruption Service Offer for COVID-19 Response and Recovery**





DAY FOUR

Healing

*For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal,
says the Lord, because they have called you an outcast:
“It is Zion; no one cares for her!”
Jeremiah 30:17*

Facts and impact.

- *Broken health systems:* The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates that weak health systems anywhere affect us all. Global health efforts have focused mainly on narrow, disease-specific interventions, and the ideals of overall health care systems strengthening have mostly gone unfulfilled. There is a critical need to reimagine and repair the broken global health systems and invest much more efforts, people, and resources to make health systems more resilient and capable of protecting societies²¹.

21. Shamasunder S, Holmes SM, Goronga T, Carrasco H, Katz E, Frankfurter R, Keshavjee S. COVID-19 reveals weak health systems by design: Why we must re-make global health in this historic moment. *Glob Public Health*. 2020 Jul;15(7):1083-1089. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2020.1760915>. Epub 2020 Apr 30. PMID: 32352911.





- *Diversity of Frontline workers:* As frontline workers are at increased risk of being affected by COVID-19, it is vital to acknowledge the diversity of frontline workers who serve communities:
 - Nurses, doctors, allied health professionals, hospital and community-based health workers, chaplains, care providers in care homes
 - Sanitation workers and those who work to keep the environment clean and healthy
 - Service providers, such as police, drivers and public transportation workers, shop attendants, hairdressers, all who interact with and serve the public and ensure society's smooth functioning
 - Teachers and childcare providers ensuring the formation, training, and provision of a safe environment for children and young adults
 - Pastors, social workers, counsellors who contribute to spiritual and mental wellbeing
 - Humanitarian workers serving the most vulnerable communities around the world
- *The gender dimension of care:* Frontline health-care workers are at increased risk of being affected by COVID-19 compared with the general community²². It is also important to highlight that

22. Nguyen LH, et al. Risk of COVID-19 among frontline health-care workers and the general community: a prospective cohort study, *Lancet Public Health*, VOLUME 5, ISSUE 9, E475-E483, SEPTEMBER 01, 2020: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(20\)30164-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(20)30164-X/fulltext)



women form 70% of workers in the health and social sectors but are under-represented in leadership and decision-making processes in these sectors. On average, there is a 28% gender pay gap in the health workforce²³.

- *Mental health*: Faced with new realities of unemployment, working from home, home-schooling of children, and lack of physical contact with other family members, friends and colleagues, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on our mental and physical health. Religion and spirituality have a strong influence on mental health, especially on the relief of suffering, affecting health outcomes and minimizing the consequences of social isolation²⁴.

Suggestions for action

- *Caring for the carer*: Frontline workers and caregivers have continued to provide care and service despite exhaustion, personal risk of infection, fear of transmission to family members, illness or death of friends, colleagues, and patients. They face many sources of risk, stress and anxiety, and long shifts combined with unprecedented

23. Gender equity in the health workforce: Analysis of 104 countries, Health Workforce Working paper 1, WHO, 2019: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/311314/WHO-HIS-HWF-Gender-WP1-2019.1-eng.pdf?sequen>

24. Lucchetti G, Góes LG, Amaral SG, et al. Spirituality, religiosity and the mental health consequences of social isolation during COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*. November 2020. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764020970996>



restrictions, including personal isolation²⁵. For the long-term resilience and healing of our communities, it is critical to ensure that support and care are provided for frontline workers and caregivers to take care of themselves, their families, and children.

- *Advocate for strengthening health systems and public health:* The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the fragile health systems and the need to build resilient health systems and invest in high-quality universal health coverage (UHC). The world can only achieve a healthy future by placing the health and wellbeing of populations at the centre of public policy. This includes correcting the underinvestment in the health workforce, with estimated global shortages of 18 million health professionals worldwide, mostly in low- and middle-income countries²⁶.

25. Mehta, S., Machado, F., Kwizera, A., Papazian, L., Moss, M., Azoulay, É. and Herridge, M., 2021. COVID-19: a heavy toll on health-care workers. *The Lancet Respiratory Medicine*, 9(3), pp.226-228.

26. Working for health and growth: Investing in the health workforce, WHO 2016, <https://www.who.int/hrh/com-heeg/reports/en/>



Examples of church and community responses and resources

- [WCC COVID-19 support, episode 1: Mental Health](#)
- [On World Mental Health Day, “expect your colourful life”, WCC](#)
- [Christian Aid, A reflection on love and healing in this time of coronavirus](#)
- [Caring for Caregivers during the COVID-19 Crisis – UNICEF 2020](#)



DAY FIVE

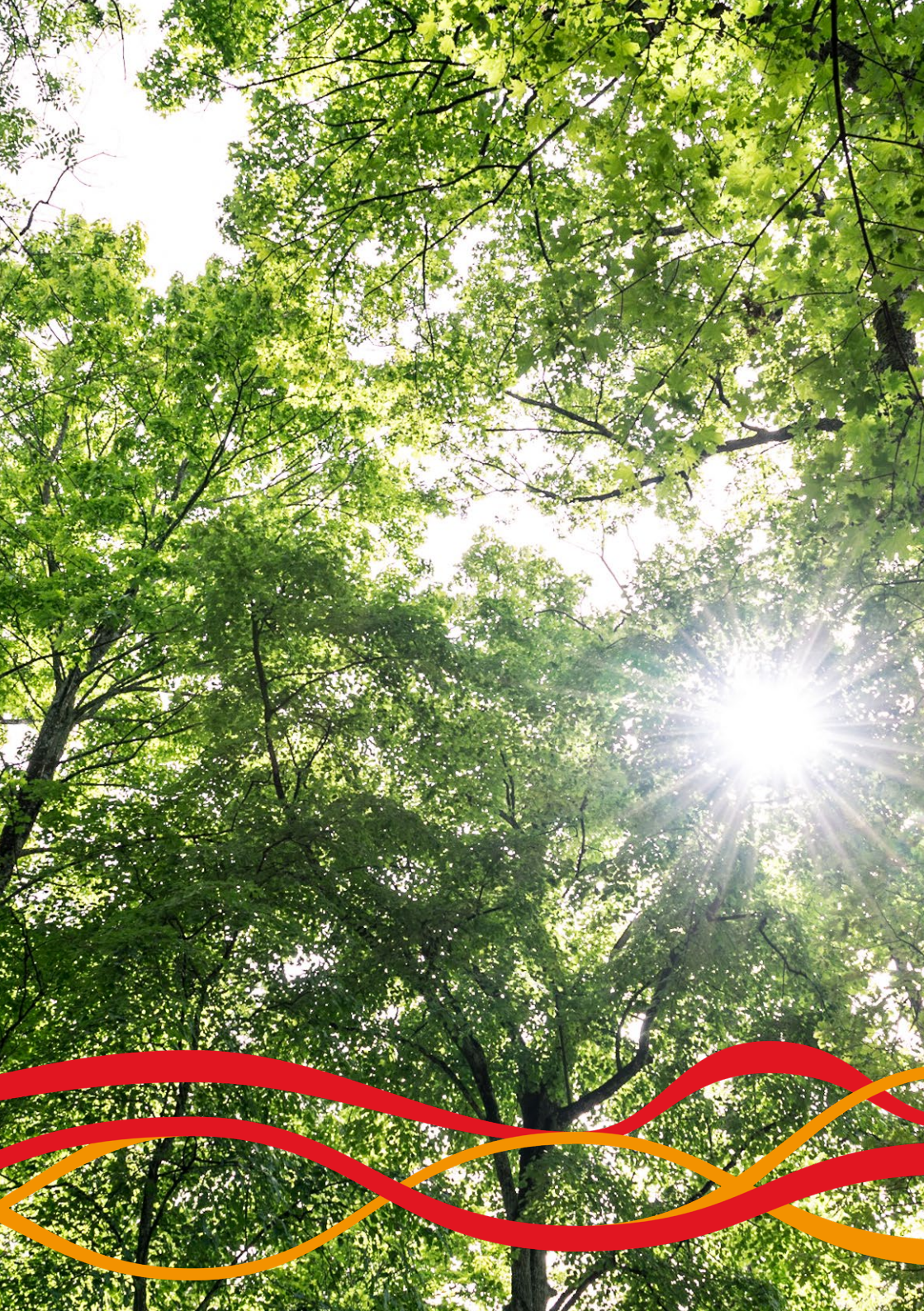
Protection

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me.
Psalm 23:4*

Facts and impact.

- *Prevention is better than cure:* Since 30 January 2020, when WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, scientists have gained a far better understanding of COVID-19 transmission. They have developed the tools to manage the virus. It is clear that keeping physical distance, avoiding crowds and gatherings, wearing masks, maintaining respiratory and hand hygiene, keeping rooms ventilated, and working or studying remotely when possible have all contributed to protecting people. As these preventive measures continue to be essential, the availability of the vaccines that have been developed in a record time is a game-changer in overcoming the pandemic. Adequate global coverage of vaccinations will allow communities to resume everyday life, children to resume school, and families to recover their livelihoods.





- *Equity and Justice- No one is safe until everyone is safe:* A global vaccination strategy is the only practical way forward. It is also a moral imperative as only a truly global vaccination strategy can ensure that we can overcome the pandemic, giving equal value to the lives of both the rich and the poor. But with just ten countries having administered 75 per cent of all vaccines, and most of the countries in the global South yet to begin vaccinating their people, the challenge of ensuring global coverage is significant. Even if individual countries manage to eliminate their outbreaks and the virus is allowed to spread unchecked in the global South, the virus will keep mutating and keep returning to plague the global North. The COVAX facility²⁷, a global risk-sharing mechanism for pooled procurement and equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, addresses this challenge.
- *Information and misinformation:* There is overwhelming scientific evidence about various facets of the COVID-19 pandemic and the SARS-CoV-2 virus, and reliable information on prevention, care and management of the disease is freely available today. But we are in the era of social media where information sharing is free and without restraint. So, there is also a lot of misinformation on COVID-19. People tend to focus on how much their friends and followers will 'like' their posts and the amount of positive social reinforcement they will get, rather than accuracy. A single non-expert with a large platform, whether a celebrity or a political figure, can have a disproportional

27. COVAX Facility: <https://www.gavi.org/covax-facility>



tionate effect on the population²⁸. The battle of attention between reliable information and misinformation is a matter of life and death.

- *Vaccine hesitancy*: The reluctance or refusal to vaccinate, despite the availability of vaccines, threatens to reverse progress made in tackling vaccine-preventable diseases. It is a significant problem and made it to WHO's list of top 10 global health threats in 2019²⁹. Despite the excellent safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines, public skepticism about the vaccines persists. If people of faith and the health-care community speak with one voice, it will substantially contribute to overcoming distrust and hesitancy.

Suggestions for action

- *Lighted to Light*: Be informed with reliable, up to date knowledge on the subject and share it systematically and in a responsible manner. Counter misinformation and fearmongering. We should go beyond focusing on misinformation, not overlook people's real concerns, and address their uncertainties and anxiety.
- *Strive for justice and equity in accessing vaccinations*:
 - Advocate with leaders of governments to make COVID-19 vaccines a global public good – accessible, available, and equitably distributed – to ensure that frontline workers, people with

28. 'A guide to overcoming COVID-19 misinformation', National Geographic, published October 22, 2020 <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/guide-to-overcoming-coronavirus-misinformation-infodemic>

29. World Health Organization. Ten threats to global health in 2019. <https://www.who.int/news-room/spotlight/ten-threats-to-global-health-in-2019>



underlying health conditions and older populations get vaccinated first, as proposed by WHO. Advocate for the COVAX facility to meet financing requirements to successfully provide countries with vaccines, to ensure full vaccination coverage and help overcome the pandemic globally.

- Advocate for the waiver on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) patents to ramp up the production of COVID-19 related diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines across many countries on a larger scale, at lower prices. This is justified by the urgency of the situation and due to the fact that governments and the philanthropic sector have massively subsidized the discovery, research efforts, testing (clinical trials) and manufacturing capacities also by securing advance purchase agreements of the vaccines and diagnostics.³⁰
- *Lead by example*: Communities trust religious and spiritual leaders, and they can therefore influence others' behaviour and the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders must follow the steps for protection visibly and consistently. When it is their turn to receive the vaccination, leaders should also receive the vaccination publicly, inspiring confidence and giving assurance to the community.

30. Big Pharma takes it all: A Public Eye Report, March 2021: https://www.publiceye.ch/fileadmin/doc/Medikamente/2021_PublicEye_BigPharmaTakesItAll_Report.pdf



Examples of church and community responses and resources

- **Fair allocation mechanism for COVID-19 vaccines through the COVAX Facility**
- **Solidarity: “Invitation to reflection and engagement on ethical issues related to COVID-19 vaccine distribution” – A joint statement by the World Council of Churches and the World Jewish Congress**
- **Appeals and advocacy: Christian health networks call for global equity and solidarity for COVID-19 vaccine access**
- **COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy: 12 Things You Need to Know, Dr Sherita Hill Golden, John Hopkins Health**
- **COVID-19: Going Beyond Misinformation To Build Vaccine Confidence, Social Science in Humanitarian Action Platform 2020**



DAY SIX

Hope

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 8: 38, 39

Facts and impact

- *Solidarity and love:* Hope manifests when people acknowledge each other, crossing all divisions and boundaries in solidarity, responding to others' needs, manifesting unconditional love.
- *Courage and inspiration:* Hope is nurtured by individuals and groups' courageous and selfless actions, as they risk their lives and health to serve others.
- *Envisioning the future together:* Hope flourishes when we build a better future together, nurturing compassionate relationships with each other and with the creation.

Suggestions for action

- *Mobilize action without delay:* Let us respond to the needs promptly, in consultation with those whom we are serving, collaborating with





other stakeholders, without hesitation, with humility, and seeing God in those whom we serve.

- *Sow seeds of inspiration:* Let us lift up and share inspiring narratives, acknowledging and supporting heroic individuals and communities serving selflessly.
- *Dialogue and collaboration:* Let us use this crisis as an opportunity to build coalitions and alliances of hope and courage with different sections of society, denominations, and faiths. The virus does not discriminate and impacts all relentlessly. We have to act together to protect and nurture all life.



Examples of church and community responses and resources

- [Building Hope Together – Anglican Communion Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [ACT Alliance COVID-19 Responses](#)
- [NCCI Constituents responding to COVID-19](#)
- [“Serving a Wounded World”: WCC, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 2020](#)
- [Transformational reading camps restore hope in the midst of COVID-19 – World Vision](#)
- [Stronger together: A story of solidarity, psychosocial support and hope in the time of COVID-19](#)

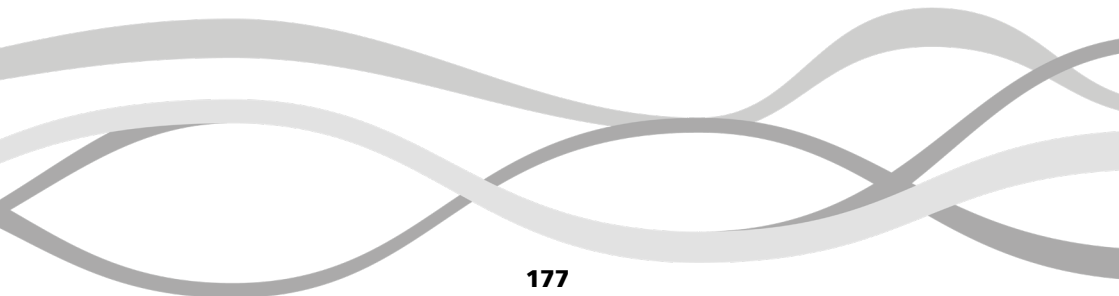




CHAPTER 4

**COVID-19 Resources
Produced by the WCC**

March 2020 – February 2021



Introduction

From the beginning of the pandemic, the World Council of Churches took from beginning important steps to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, including cancelling or postponing meetings, limiting travels, and offering online communication instead of person-to-person gatherings. As the COVID-19 pandemic caused widespread loss and hardship, people worldwide have drawn closer to the World Council of Churches, showing an increased interest in many channels of communication. Among the most appreciated WCC offerings, especially on the web and in social media are prayers, spiritual resources, Thursdays in Black information, interviews with church leaders and pastors, good practices, and the WCC journals.

In response to the worldwide spread of the coronavirus and millions of cases of COVID-19, the WCC has worked closely with churches, and regional and national councils of churches through the following initiatives:

- Created a webpage with all the latest and most authoritative information on the pandemic and advice for churches, available in English, French, German, Spanish, and Arabic



- Produced a webcast to share essential information about the virus and the pandemic from authoritative medical personnel in the WCC and WHO
- Organized a joint campaign with the Thursdays in Black Ambassadors, warning of potential problems caused by social isolation, including spousal and child abuse
- Created a webinar, attended by 1200 viewers, in which churches and church professionals from many regions and confessions exchanged perspectives and best practices on online ministry and how to handle the ecclesial and practical challenges posed by the pandemic
- Published a collection of previously published articles on health and hope in a special combined journal edition
- Made available the expertise of the COVID-19 Support Team, consisting of nine key medically trained and pastoral staff to advise churches on measures they can take to reframe their gatherings, liturgies, programming, and pastoral care for those affected by the virus
- Produced a thematic issue of *The Ecumenical Review* on “**Christ’s Love in the Midst of Pandemic**” with theological reflections on the challenges of COVID-19 against the background of the WCC assembly theme.



Together with the Regional Ecumenical Organizations, the WCC co-signed a joint pastoral statement affirming the urgency of standing together to protect life amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. (<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/a-time-for-pastoral-prophetic-and-practical-christianity-a-joint-statement-from-the-world-council-of-churches-and-regional-ecumenical-organizations>)

The WCC and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) have released a joint document, *Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity: A Christian Call to Reflection and Action During COVID-19 and Beyond*. The purpose is to encourage churches and Christian organizations to reflect on the importance of interreligious solidarity in a world wounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/serving-a-wounded-world-in-interreligious-solidarity>



Webinars, webcasts, videos

- Panel: **Coping with the Coronavirus** (31 March 2020)
Webinar on Churches' ministry online (29 April 2020)
NIFEA E-conference on Economy of Life in a Time of Pandemic
(28 May 2020)
White Privilege in COVID-19 and White Supremacy in Mission
(19 October 2020)
**Persons with disabilities in the context of the COVID-19
Pandemic** (22 October 2020)
Indigenous Peoples: Wisdom and Resilience (29 October 2020)
People at the Frontlines: the Gift of Life (5 November 2020)
People on the Move: Solidarity and Advocacy (12 November 2020)
The impact of COVID-19 on People on the Move in Europe
(23 November 2020)
**The impact of COVID-19 on People on the Move in the Australian
Context** (23 November 2020)
Conflict Zones and COVID-19: A call to compassion
(26 November 2020)



...ative reaffirms
justice and peace in



World Council of Churches

Inspiring the worldwide fellowship of churches to work together for unity, justice and



justice

World Council of Churches Christmas greeting 2020: Fragile

Hope (28 November 2020)

WCC-PCID Launch Translations of Document on ‘Serving a

wounded world in Interreligious Solidarity’ (5 February 2021)

COVID-19 continues to bring profound hardship to stateless

persons, webinar shows (15 March 2021)

In crises, faith gives ‘support, comfort and guidance,’ WHO

head says at WCC webinar (15 March 2021)

Podcasts

WCC COVID-19 support playlist:

Episode 1: mental health

Episode 2: child rights

Episode 3: the human right to water

Episode 4: persons with disabilities

Episode 5: racism (part 1 and part 2)

Episode 6: HIV

Episode 7: death and dying



Publications

**Ecumenical Global Health COVID-19 Response Framework
Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity
Healing the World**

**Health and Hope: The Church in Mission and Unity, a special
virtual combined issue of *The Ecumenical Review* and
*International Review of Mission***

**Christ's Love in the Midst of Pandemic: Moving the World
to Reconciliation and Solidarity. A thematic issue of *The
Ecumenical Review***

WCC's COVID-19 Resources Page

Dedicated Resource Webpage

Bible Studies

Questions and Answers

Prayers





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