



# Prayers for Peace

an ecumenical cry from the heart

## Praying for peace: A resource packet

*Today the war in Iraq has claimed over 2,000 American lives, untold Iraqi lives and hundreds of thousands of maimed, wounded and dispossessed.*

*The National Council of Churches USA joins with others in calling upon Christians as individuals and as congregations to pray for peace — for an end to the bloodshed — for a new beginning — for concord between nations and persons.*

*This resource packet is designed to enable such prayer for individuals and groups who will undertake this prayer discipline as a part of their own deep longing for peace.*

*We offer here a selection of liturgical materials from NCC member communions and ecumenical partners around the world.*

## World Council of Churches

### Prayer for Peace with Iraq

Lord of hope and compassion, Friend of Abraham  
Who called our father in faith to journey to a new future,  
We remember before you the country of Iraq from which he was summoned  
Ancient land of the Middle East, realm of the two rivers,  
Birthplace of great cities and of civilization.  
May we who name ourselves children of Abraham,  
Call to mind all the peoples of the Middle East who honour him as father.  
Those who guard and celebrate the Torah,  
Those for whom the Word has walked on earth and lived among us  
Those who follow their prophet, who listened for the word in the desert  
And shaped a community after what he heard.  
Lord of reconciliation, God of the painful sacrifice uniting humankind  
We long for the day when you will provide for all nations of the earth your  
blessing of peace.  
But now when strife and war are at hand, help us to see in each other a family  
likeness,  
our inheritance from our one father Abraham.

Keep hatred from the threshold of our hearts, and preserve within us a generous spirit

which recognizes in both foe and friend a common humanity.

This we ask in the name of the one who came to offer us the costly gift of abundant life.

(In Arabic Abraham is often called "El Khalil" which means 'the Friend [of God]'.  
Ur and Haran, the cities from which, according to Genesis, Abraham was

summond by God both lie within the territory of modern Iraq.)

*(Alan and Clare Amos—Iona Community)*

**The following two texts are taken from the Ecumenical Prayer Cycle on the Gulf region:**

O God, who art the unsearchable abyss of peace,  
the ineffable sea of love, the fountain of blessings  
and the bestower of affection,  
who sendest peace to those that receive it;

Open to us this day the sea of thy love  
and water us with plenteous streams  
from the riches of thy grace  
and from the most sweet springs of thy kindness.

Make us children of quietness and heirs of peace,  
enkindle in us the fire of thy love;  
sow in us thy fear;  
strengthen our weakness by thy power;  
bind us closely to thee and to each other  
in our firm and indissoluble bond of unity.

*Syrian Clementine Liturgy*

**Litany for Iraq**

For lasting peace in this ancient land – From you, O Lord.

For wisdom and compassion for all in authority – From you, O Lord.

For comfort for families separated or bereaved – From you, O Lord.

For the release of captives – From you, O Lord.

For safety and security for minority communities.

For refreshment for the weary and healing for the sick – From you, O Lord.

For continuing faithfulness of the ancient churches of this land – From you, O Lord.

For tenacity of spirit for small Christian groups – From you, O Lord.

For the mutual enrichment and support of those of different Christian traditions –  
From you, O Lord.

You, Lord of all, we confess;  
You, Lord Jesus, we glorify;  
For you are the life of our bodies  
And you are the Saviour of our souls.

The response in the litany and this hymn both come from the Chaldean liturgy. The ancient hymn celebrates Christ the source of resurrection in all situations of death and deprivation. (in: *With All God's People*, p. 21, 22)

*Excepted from the World Council of Churches website*

### **Orthodox Prayer from the Liturgy of St. Basil**

Remember, O Lord, all civil authorities, and the armed forces; grant them peaceful times, that we also in their tranquility may lead a calm and quiet life, in all piety and sobriety. In thy goodness guard those that are good, and make good those that are evil, by thy loving kindness...

And all those that are in need of thy great goodness of heart, and those also who love us, and those who hate us, and those who have commanded us the unworthy to pray for them, do thou remember, O Lord our God, and all thy people, and upon all pour out thy rich mercy, granting to all their petitions which are unto salvation. And those whom we through ignorance or forgetfulness or the multitude of names have not remembered, do thou thyself remember, O God, who knowest the age and name of each, and knowest every man even from his mother's womb. For thou art the Helper of the helpless, the Hope of the hopeless, the Savior of the storm-tossed, the Haven of the voyager, the Physician of the sick. Be thou thyself all things to all.

*The following prayer authored by Christian, Jewish and Muslim clergy was used during the Gulf War in 1991:*

Eternal God, Creator of the universe, there is no God but You.  
Great and wonderful are Your works, wondrous are your ways.  
Thank You for the many splendoured variety of Your creation.  
Thank You for the many ways we affirm Your presence and purpose,  
and the freedom to do so.  
Forgive our violation of Your creation.  
Forgive our violence toward each other.  
We stand in awe and gratitude for Your persistent love  
for each and all of Your children:

Christian, Jew, Muslim,  
as well as those with other faiths.  
Grant to all and our leaders attributes of the strong;  
mutual respect in words and deed,  
restraint in the exercise of power, and  
the will for peace with justice, for all.  
Eternal God, Creator of the universe, there is no God but You. Amen.  
*Excerpted from Current Dialogue, World Council of Churches*

## **National Council of Churches**

### **Safekeeping God**

Safekeeping and Remembering One,  
Be with us at this hour.  
We come to you in prayer,  
Not because we are so adept  
At knowing one another's deepest needs,  
Nor so merciful that we can promise to respond,  
But because we trust  
In your understanding and generous spirit.  
Holy are you, God, for bearing our pain,  
Sharing our grief, and weeping with us  
Holy are you, God, for entering our suffering.  
Blessed be your name. AMEN

*Linda Patrick-Rosebrock, Sing Out New Visions, NCC USA.*

*Quoted in For the Peace of the World, A Christian Curriculum on International Relations*

## **Islamic Society of North America**

### **Muslim Prayers**

*Allahumma antas-salaam,  
wa minkas-salaam,  
wa ilaika yarjaus-salaam,  
haiyyina rabbana bis-salaam,  
wa adkhillna daras-salaam,  
tabarakta rabbana wa-ta'laita,  
ya zal jalali wal ikram*

O God! You are the Peace.  
The everlasting peace is from You  
and it returns to You.  
O our Sustainer! Grant us the life of true peace  
and enter us into the abode of Peace.  
O Glorious and Bounteous One!  
You are blessed and majestic

### **Muslim Prayer for Peace**

In the name of Allah,  
the beneficent, the merciful.  
Praise be to the Lord of the  
Universe who has created us and  
made us into tribes and nations  
That we may know each other, not that  
we may despise each other.  
If the enemy incline towards peace, do  
thou also incline towards peace, and  
trust God, for the Lord is the one that  
heareth and knoweth all things.  
And the servants of God,  
Most gracious are those who walk on  
the Earth in humility

### **Muslim Prayer for Peace in Iraq and Throughout the World**

O God of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad! Bring peace and tranquility to  
the people of Iraq who have been plagued with pain and suffering;

O God! We appeal to you bring our soldiers back safe and help our nation to be  
one that is given to truth and justice

O God! We call you with your beautiful names: the One, the Holy, the Sovereign,  
the Just, and the Peace. We call with love and sincerity to bring peace to our world  
and guide our steps to do what is right and what pleases You.

O God! You are the Source of Good, the Guardian of Faith, the Preserver of  
Safety, the Exalted in Might, the Supreme: All Glory belongs to you! Help us to  
see our glory in serving you and upholding the values of compassion and justice  
on earth.

O God we beg you to forgive our sins and ask you not to hold us accountable for mistakes and missteps we did or were done in our names. Our Lord give us the humility to recognize our mistakes and limitations, and the strength and courage to choose right over wrong and justice over pride.

O the Eternal and Compassionate Lord! Fill our hearts with your Love, and help us to love one another, and show compassion to your servants throughout the world and your creation.

O God! We ask you in submission and humility to allow wisdom to triumph over vanity, truth over falsehood, and love over hate.

Amen.

*(Thanks to Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed, Secretary General, Islamic Society of North America)*

## **The Shalom Center**

### **Kaddish of Mourning**

May the Great Name rise before our eyes:

The Name that weaves together all the names of all the beings in the world.

May our hearts and eyes weave

All these names together in one Name, the double spiral that underlies all life.

And may we also see the Great Name Pulsing at the heart of our own names.

For in the Great Name

There remain forever present

the names of all those who have touched our lives, even those we can no longer touch;

The names of those we love,

Those who were our enemies,

Those whom we have intimately known,

And those whose names we know only from a list, Only as a number.

Far beyond all praise and poetry,

all celebration and all consolation,

Is this Great Name.

And yet we lift our voices and our breathing In the act of life that gives the Name Its meaning.

We lift especially today the names

Of those who died a violent death;

Those who were killed by those who bear the Holy Image, Killing those who also bear the Holy Image.

For this civil war within Your Being,  
This tearing of God's Image at Itself,  
Your Self,  
we know that you are inconsolable  
And so are we.

Our only solace is to beg you:

You Who make peace and harmony

Teach our minds, open our hearts,  
To make peace within ourselves, among ourselves,  
Within and among the children of Abraham,  
The children of Sarah,  
The children of Hagar;

A peace that weaves together in reconciliation All Yisrael, all Yishmael, All the communities that call out Your many Names - And even beyond, All those who dwell upon this planet.

In the ultimate reaches of the universe,

Teach our minds, open our hearts,  
To make peace within ourselves, among ourselves,  
Within and among the children of Abraham,  
The children of Sarah,  
The children of Hagar;  
A peace that weaves together in reconciliation  
All Yisrael, all Yishmael,  
All the communities that call out Your many Names –  
And even beyond,  
All those who dwell upon this planet.

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El Maleh Rahamim/  
God, Filled with Compassion

El Maleh Rahamim:  
God, filled with Motherly Compassion,

grant a full and perfect rest  
under the wings of Your sheltering Sh'khinah/ Presence  
-- among the lofty, holy and pure,  
radiant as the shining firmament --  
to the souls of all those of all Your peoples  
who have been killed in and around the lands where  
Abraham our Forebear walked --  
Make them welcome to their eternal home.  
May they rest in Your Edenic Garden of Delight.

Please, Master of Mercy,  
envelop them  
in Your comforting, protecting wings forever;  
Bind up their souls in the Bond of Life.  
For You are their Portion, their Inheritance.  
May they rest securely in Peace,  
and we say:  
Amen.

*Translation by Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, 1996, as modified by Rabbi Arthur Waskow, 2005.*

### **Ashes, Stones, and Flowers**

#### **In Memory of the Dead of 9/11, Iraq, And All Victims of Terrorism and War**

For vibrant lives suddenly and shamelessly sacrificed we lift up the ashes of our loss, O Source of Life.

For the lives that continue, haunted forever by the pain of absence, we lift up the ashes of our remorse, O Wellspring of Compassion.

For the conflagration of flames and nightmare images forever seared into our memories we lift up the ashes of our pain, O Breathing Spirit of the World.

For the charred visions of peace and the dry taste of fear we lift up the ashes of our grief, O Infinite.

For all the deaths that have been justified by turning the love of God or country into fanatical arrogance, we lift up the ashes of our shame, O God.

As we cast these ashes into the troubled water of our times, Transforming One, hear our plea that by your power they will make fertile the soil of our future and by your mercy nourish the seeds of peace.

*The people recite the names of the dead.*

*The people cast the ashes in silence into the water.*

For the ways humanity pursues violence rather than understanding, we lift up the stones of our anger, O Breathing Spirit of the World.

For the ways we allow national, religious and ethnic boundaries to circumscribe our compassion, we lift up the stones of our hardness, O Wellspring of Compassion.

For our addiction to weapons and the ways of militarism we lift up the stones of our fear, O Source of Life.

For the ways we cast blame and create enemies we lift up the stones of our self-righteousness, O God

As we cast these stones into this ancient river, Transforming One, hear our plea:

Just as water wears away the hardest of stones, so too may the power of your compassion soften the hardness of our hearts and draw us into a future of justice and peace.

*The people recite the names of the dead.*

*The people cast the stones in silence into the water.*

For sowing seeds of justice to blossom into harmony, we cast these flowers into water, O Source of Peace.

For seeing clearly the many rainbow colors of humanity and earth, we cast these flowers into water, O Infinite.

As we cast these flowers into this water, Transforming One, hear our plea:

Just as water births life in a desert and gives hope to the wounded, so too may the power of your nurturing renew our commitment to peace.

*The people recite the names of the dead.*

*The people cast the flowers in silence into the water.*

*-- Litany by Rev. Patricia Pearce, pastor of Tabernacle Church, Philadelphia, as modified by Rabbi Arthur Waskow, director of The Shalom Center*

## **The role of the Church in wartime (Orthodox)**

### **The Church and national identity, by A. Kartachov**

Without doubt, from the Christian point of view, war is an evil and a sin, against which the Church is obliged to struggle. Here the Church, listening as a doctor with a stethoscope to the sick heart of the nation, should gather all the strength of its super-human impassivity and evangelic purity of consciousness, in order to show, when in moments of passionate nationalistic taking up of arms, by its non-earthly, prophetic judgement and its authoritative voice, both to its own people, to the enemy and to all mankind the way towards higher justice and towards better, nobler means to achieve it than the iron ultimo ratio. This is the super-humanly difficult service the Church must render.

### **Prayers for Peace in Iraq and the Middle East**

*Pax Christi, together with the National Justice and Peace Network and CAFOD invites friends, members, parishes, schools and religious communities to fast and pray every Friday for peace in Iraq and the Middle East. The following is a special prayer chosen to be shared on that day*

We come to you, God Creator.  
You are the source of life and beauty and power.  
Your son Jesus is the way of faith and hope and love.  
Your Spirit is the fire of love, the fount of wisdom, the bond of unity.  
You call us at all times to be people of the beatitudes,  
Witnesses to the Gospel of peace and love and forgiveness.  
You call us at this time, when war and rumors of war,  
weigh heavily on the peoples of Iraq and the Middle East.  
Their lives are already broken by suffering and violence.

We renew our acceptance of your call.

We promise to work:  
To bring the light of the Gospel to those living in darkness,  
To bring the hope of the Gospel to those living in despair,  
To bring the healing of the Gospel to the lonely,

the disadvantaged, the marginalized,  
And to bring the peace of the Gospel to a divided world.  
Amen.

### **A Prayer for Peace in Iraq**

*After each petition, the people say:*

**Lord, intervene by your Loving Spirit, and save your children from war.**

Almighty and everlasting God, who laid the foundations of the earth, we come to you in the name of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

We give all our adoration to you because you have formed the universe from nothing, you have given us life, and through the sacrifice of Jesus you have allowed us to live in loving relationship with you.

We confess that we are sinful and broken creatures; we have not done your will; and we have hurt others in our effort to protect ourselves. Our only hope is the mercy of Christ.

Merciful and loving God, we pray in the name of Christ that you will pour out your Holy Spirit upon all of creation so that we will be delivered from our warring madness.

For Christ's sake, allow the leaders of the world to find a peaceful solution to the conflict growing around Iraq.

We pray for the loved ones of the tens of thousands of children, women and men who have died in conflict in Iraq since 1991.

We pray for world leaders, that they will be convinced that diplomacy is the true pathway to lasting peace.

We pray that all nations will recognize that true security is only found in the one creator of the universe and not in the accumulation of weapons of mass destruction.

We pray that all nations will become convinced of the need to honour the human rights of their own people  
and the human rights of all the people of the world.

We pray for an end to sanctions against Iraq, and for the establishment of an Iraqi government that is accountable and respectful of human rights.

We pray that the arms race in the Middle-East will come to an end, and that mutual respect and understanding will replace distrust and fear.

We pray that human-kind will be touched by compassion and understanding so that all of the varied and beautiful races, religions, and nations of the earth may live together in harmony, mutual respect and peace.

For the sake of Jesus Christ, our rock and our redeemer and our friend. Amen.  
*The Presbyterian Church in Canada*

### **Dominican Prayer for Iraq**

O God of Peace, of Justice, and of Healing we pray for the people of Iraq. We pray for their safety, security, the restoration of the country and of the well being of each person. We pray that peace be restored.

We pray for Wisdom and Right Judgment for all the leaders who are responsible for decision making.

We pray for Courage and Understanding for all the communities of Iraq and those working in the country that they put aside their differences and come to focus on the common good.

We pray for Counsel for those who are establishing and will be a part of the new government of Iraq that they seek to serve the needs of all the people.

We pray for Fortitude for those who will confront the unjust activities and violence that are taking place within Iraq during these recent months.

We pray for all those who are suffering from the effects of war. May they be filled with Courage, Fear of the Lord and Consolation as they endure the harsh realities of violence.

We pray for Knowledge for those who are commissioned to research and assist the decision makers who need to have the best information to make decisions regarding the needs of the people.

We pray with all our Dominican family in union with Dominic and Catherine that the Holy Spirit lavish the people of Iraq with Her gifts. Amen

*Posted by The Dominican Sisters of San Rafael*

## **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

### **Lord, Teach Us**

L: Lord, so many people are in pain;

C: Teach us the way to peace.

L: When people around us don't agree and think differently;

C: Lord, teach us to listen and understand.

L: When we see people getting hurt;

C: Lord, teach us to speak up.

L: When we see people who are hungry and poor;

C: Lord, teach us to give to them like you give to us.

L: When we see people treated poorly because of their skin color or language;

C: Lord, teach us to be an example of love.

L: When we see war and conflict around the world;

C: Lord, teach us how to make a difference and bring peace.

L: When we see pain;

C: Lord, teach us to bring healing.

L: When we feel low and things don't seem to be going well;

C: Lord, teach us to talk to our friends, our family and to you.

L: When we stop and see all you have given us;

C: Lord, teach us to be thankful.

L: In our lives, our neighborhoods and the world;

C: Lord, teach us to pray and teach us the way to peace.

Amen.

### **Prayers of Confession**

God of Peace, over the ages you have called us to live as peacemakers. You have called us to be a shalom people. You have called us to be Children of God.

We confess that we have not always lived out this calling. We do not want to face the difficulties of being called your disciples. We take the easy way out. We avoid controversy. We don't speak out when we know we should. For these things we ask your forgiveness.

We confess that we are too tolerant of war and violence. We depend on our own power and position to settle differences instead of asking for your wisdom.

Forgive us, Gracious God. We ask that your Spirit guide us to act with loving grace and peace. Be with us in our continuing efforts to be peacemakers. Amen.

*Source: ELCA*

## **Presbyterian Church (USA)**

### **Prayer Service in Response to War**

#### Opening Sentences

One: O God, who called all life into being.  
Many: The earth, sea and sky are yours.  
One: Your presence is all around us,  
Many: Creation is full of your Glory.  
One: Your Spirit enlivens all who walk the earth,  
Many: With God we yearn for justice to be done,  
One: For creation to be freed from bondage,  
Many: For the hungry to be fed,  
One: For the captives to be released,  
Many: For your kingdom of peace to come on earth.

Silence

Hymn—What Wondrous Love is This

#### Confession

One: Almighty God, Maker of all things,  
Many: Have mercy on us.  
One: Jesus Christ, Redeemer of the world,  
Many: Have mercy on us.  
One: Holy Spirit, Giver of life,  
Many: Have mercy on us.

Silence

Merciful God,  
in your gracious presence

we confess our sin and the sin of this world.  
Although Christ is among us as our peace,  
we are a people divided against ourselves  
as we cling to the values of a broken world.  
The fears and jealousies we harbor  
set neighbor against neighbor  
and nation against nation.  
We abuse your good gifts of imagination and freedom,  
of intellect and reason,  
and have turned them into bonds of oppression.  
Lord, have mercy upon us;  
heal and forgive us.  
Set us free to serve you in the world  
as agents of your reconciling love in Jesus Christ.

Silence

Exhortation

Col. 3:12-14 Col. 3:12-14

As God's own people,  
Be merciful in action,  
Kindly in heart, humble in mind.  
Be always ready to forgive  
As freely as God has forgiven you.  
And, above everything else, be loving,  
And never forget to be thankful  
For what Christ has done for you.

Silence

Hymn — O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High

First Reading: Isaiah 2:2-5

Silence

Psalm 22

Second Reading: 1 John 3:13-18

Silence

Gospel Reading: Mark 12:28-34

Silence

Prayers of Intercession

One: Receive our prayers, O Lord, our God,  
Hear us, good Lord.

One: For your church around the world, we ask for new life,  
Hear us, good Lord.

One: Give us a heart to love and reverence you, that we may live according to  
your commandments.  
Hear us, good Lord.

One: For Christians of every land, we ask new unity in your name.  
Hear us, good Lord.

One: For Jews and Muslims and people of other faiths, we ask your divine  
blessing.  
Hear us, good Lord.

One: For our President, and for rulers in every land, that they may do justice, and  
love mercy, and walk in the ways of truth,  
Hear us, good Lord.

One: Bless and defend all who strive for our safety and protection, and shield them  
in all dangers and adversities,  
Hear us, good Lord.

One: To all nations grant unity, peace, and concord, and to all people give dignity,  
food and shelter,  
Hear us, good Lord.

One: For all people who suffer and grieve, we ask you healing peace,  
Hear us, good Lord.

One: Holy God, your Word, Jesus Christ, spoke peace to a sinful world and  
brought humanity the gift of reconciliation by the suffering and death he endured.  
Teach those who bear his name to follow the example he gave us.  
Through our faith, hope, and charity, may you turn hatred to love, conflict to  
peace, and death to eternal life, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn — O God of Every Nation

Closing Responses

One: A blessing on you who are poor,  
Many: yours is the kingdom of God.

One: A blessing on you who mourn,  
Many: you shall be comforted.

One: A blessing on you who hunger for justice,

Many: You shall be satisfied.

One: A blessing on you who make peace,

Many: you shall be called the children of God.

One: A blessing on you who are persecuted for the cause of right,

Many: yours is the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

### Charge

Go out in to the world in peace;

have courage;

hold on to what is good;

return no one evil for evil;

strengthen the fainthearted;

support the weak, and help the suffering;

honor all people;

love and serve the Lord,

rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

### Blessing

May the God of peace

make you holy in every way

and keep your whole being —

spirit, soul, and body —

free from every fault

at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

### **Litany for Peace in Iraq**

*From the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program*

In the terrible context in which Jesus offered a different vision for life — in an era which included the need to confront the Roman Empire that threatened the world at that time — he opened his mouth and said,

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

In the terrible context in which the church and the world confront the empire that threatens today’s world, we open our mouths and say,

“Blessed are the innocent poor in Iraq, for theirs is the support of the faithful.”

Jesus said,

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

We say today,

“Blessed are those who mourn the loss of their beloved in this war, for they will be comforted.”

Jesus said,

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

We say today,

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied.”

Jesus said,

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

We say today,

“Blessed are those who are single-minded in their devotion to God, for they will see God’s love.”

Jesus said,

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

We say today,

“Blessed are the peace-marchers and the human shields, for they will be called children of peace and children of God.”

Jesus said,

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

We say today,

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of peace, for theirs is the conscience of the world.”

Jesus said,

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

We say today,

“Blessed are you when governments who lead and support the war revile you, scapegoat you, manipulate you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely in my

name. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in both heaven and earth, for in the same way they persecuted all peace-loving people who were before you.”

**Amen.**

*Park Seong-Won, 20 March, 2003*

## **Church of the Brethren**

### **A Sermon**

"Community Prayer Service"

Pastor Susan Boyer

Manchester Church of the Brethren (Indiana S/Central District)

Scripture: Romans 12: 1-5, 9-21

Since yesterday morning I have been alternating between weeping and prayer. I have prayed for the victims and their families. I have prayed for the souls of those who plotted this violent act and those who carried it out. I have prayed for my country and its leaders. I have prayed for my brothers and sisters around the globe, and I have prayed for those of us here in North Manchester. I have prayed that this will be a time to bind the community together. Our different responses to the Vietnam War left scars in this community that are still evident to me and I didn't live in North Manchester at the time.

We should be grateful to the people who took the bull by the horns and said, "We need to pray together. . . our whole community. . . together." We sit here tonight as the people of God who live in North Manchester. We needed to gather in order that we might weep together, to sing together, to pray together, and to be reminded that we are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are one body in Christ.

I read to you the scripture from Romans 12. It is Paul's vision of the Sermon on the Mount. There are 30 instructions there. . . Paul's was of putting flesh on Jesus' commandment to love. The reason Paul did this was because the church in Rome was splitting apart. People within the church said that they believed in the power of love but when someone made them mad, the whole thing fell apart.

We are gathered here tonight because evil has harmed our nation. Evil is never happy with just being in charge of one aspect of an event. Evil wants' to control everyone involved: the victims and the perpetrators. If we all put our fists into the air and begin fighting each other, then evil has won the day.

In this letter to the Romans Paul says, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them." Paul knows that the point at which we curse them and each other in the moment in which we stop acting with Christ-like love. It might feel good but it is a submission to evil. Barbara Brown Taylor says, "The only way to conquer evil is to absorb it. . . . Take it into yourself and you disarm it."

I believe that it is possible this national tragedy may escalate into war. I don't think that is the hope of any of us here. However, if our response is then to divide up into opposing camps like we did during the Vietnam War, the we have lost. We have repaid evil for evil and all that is left is a heap of evil.

When Jesus was being nailed to the cross someone said to him, "Do you still think you are the Son of God?" And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing."

Barbara Brown Taylor says it like this:

That is what love is, Paul says: not a warm feeling between like-minded friends but plain old imitation of Christ, who took all the meanness of the world and ran it through the filter of his own body, repaying evil with good, blame with pardon, death with life.

If Jesus could do that for us, then we, followers of Christ, should at least be able to pray together, walk together, love each other.

That is the word of peace I have been called to speak to you tonight. It begins right here with your brothers and sisters in Christ who live with you in the community of North Manchester. I invite you to reach out and hold the hands of the people who sit on either side of you tonight. In the midst of the tragedy that has struck our country and harmed our citizens we must hold on to each other. We must pray together. Please, please, please, I beg of you. .. Let us be the body of Christ.

Holy God, grant that, with the power of your love, we might break down the walls that divide us in this community and instead build bridges of good news. Grant that we may rid ourselves of the weapons of darkness and instead invest ourselves in the works of light. Grant us the courage to be the body of Christ with differing messages to preach. Grant us the ability to take the fragments of our gifts and weave them into wholeness together. Grant us good sight that we might witness your power in a world filled with fear and hate.

Gracious God that unites us as one body, we lift up our collective voices tonight in prayer for those who were killed, injured, whose lives and those of their families will be different from this day forward. We pray for the souls of those who have

acted with hatred and with scorn for human life. We pray for our nation as we grieve in ways that are simply too deep for words. We pray for our leaders that they hear your voice in the confusing babble around them. We pray for all your children this day, we your humble servants in North Manchester, Indiana. Hear our prayer of hope for we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Do You Hear Me God?**

**The following prayer was found in the pocket of a Russian soldier killed during World War II.**

Do you hear me God?

Never before in my life have I spoken to you, but today I want to greet you. You know that since I was a child, they said that you didn't exist... And I was foolish enough to believe them.

Never before have I realized the beauty of your creation. Today only I discovered this beauty, when suddenly an abyss opened.

Above me, a sky filled with stars. Amazed, I saw how they twinkled. How could I have been. so cruelly deceived!

I don't know, Lord, whether you will stretch out your hand to reach me, but for me, I will recognize you, and you will understand.

It's a miracle that in the depth of this terrifying hell, light illuminates me... and that I have been able to see you. I won't tell you anything else, except what a joy it is to know you.

At midnight, we have received the order to attack: but I am not afraid. You are watching us.

Listen, there is the signal. I have to go. Yet, it was so good to be with you.

What I still wanted to say: You know, this combat will be mean. Maybe, tonight I will knock on your door. Even though I never was your friend, will you let me enter, when I come?

But – am I crying? Look what's happening to me! My eyes have opened. Forgive me God.

I am going, and surely I will not come back.

But, o wonder, I am no longer afraid of death.

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