

Broken Bread

Compassion, Peace and Justice Newsletter, Presbytery of Des Moines
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Prayer

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Prayer is at the heart of worship. In prayer through the Holy Spirit, people seek after and are found by the one true God who has been revealed in Jesus Christ. They listen and wait upon God, call God by name, remember God's gracious acts, and offer themselves to God. Prayer may be spoken, sung, offered in silence, or enacted. Prayer grows out of the center of a person's life in response to the Spirit. Prayer is shaped by the Word of God in Scripture and by the life of the community of faith. **Prayer issues in commitment to join God's work in the world.**



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Just Prayer

Constance Padmore, International Justice Mission
IJM is an international organization focused on human rights, laws and law enforcement. It is currently the world's largest anti-slavery organization.

ASKING HARD QUESTIONS

It's so easy to avoid asking God the hard questions. It's uncomfortable, possibly even scary. At the same time, we have seen so many miracles of justice we may be tempted to think it's *our* work, *our* strivings that bring justice to the hurting and oppressed. Maybe we don't really *need* this whole prayer thing at all.

But God constantly uses seemingly impossible obstacles to remind us that the work of justice is done by him. In following Christ in obedience to his justice mission, we have the privilege of seeing his mighty power at work.

And we'd miss it if we don't pray.

ENCOUNTERING GOD

The heart of our Father is to bring us into deeper relationship with him, to hear his voice and to let him hear ours. Remember when Jesus was teaching his disciples to pray? He said "[Your] Father knows everything you have need of but ask him anyway" (Matthew 6:8)

This is the heart of a Father who wants to be in relationship with us. He puts desires in our hearts and draws us by his loving kindness toward him, especially through the things we most desire, or even most desperately need. He knows them but he wants to talk to us about them. And, from our place of desire and want, we discover *his desires, his wants. We discover his heart.*

And in that process he may lead us to big and bold prayers. God says, "Ask of me and I will give you the nations for your inheritance the ends of the earth for your possession" (Psalm 2:8). This is the promise he made to the Israelites, and it is the promise that holds true for us today. He is saying: Ask me and I will give more than you could imagine— a possession for today and an inheritance for tomorrow, for generations to come. *But will you ask of me?*

POOR IN SPIRIT

We did pray (and continue to pray) for an end to slavery. And we are seeing God move in response to our prayer.

But in that place of desperation— of asking God for something that seemed to be totally impossible— I was reminded that, while it seems like it should take great courage and confidence to ask God for big things, it is exactly as he says: It takes being poor in spirit.

Our greatest moments of faith often come from our greatest desperation— when we feel least confident and least full of courage. When we throw up our hands and say, "Lord if you are able— and in the next breath, "Lord, help my unbelief" (Mark 9:22-24).

A JOURNEY AHEAD

So my prayer is that you would be led in a journey with our Father not because of your faith, not because of your courage, not because of your confidence— though I know God has given each of us a good measure of all those things by his Spirit— but because you are poor in spirit. We are desperate for the hand of God to tip the scales in a battle for justice where it seems "the wicked prosper" (Jeremiah 12:1) and the poor and oppressed go without a defender.



I pray that you will join the declaration and promise from our God "because of the groaning of the weak and the suffering of the oppressed," therefore I will arise" (Psalm 12:5).



*Lord God, you are a redeeming God.
It is not your desire that any of your children
should suffer.
You hear their cries and you come from heaven
to save.
As we gather to remember your saving purposes
for all who are oppressed,
give us minds, hearts and wills to hear your
word to us, and then to live it.
We pray this in the name of Christ the Savior.
Amen.*

Eunice T. McGarahan, A Study of the Belhar Confession and its Accompanying Letter (Louisville: Office of Theology and Worship), p. 6.

Stoking the Fire: Praying

*The Presbyterian Hunger Program's
Hunger Ministries Series*

When we be praying for you, we often say as food recipients walk out the door. It may be an assurance that our concern for them does not end with the bag of groceries they carry. Or maybe it is a way of reminding both them and us that we are in more than the food distribution business. We have done our part, but there is much that we are unable to do. Now we pray that God will guide, protect, and empower them in their search for wholeness and security. Prayer relieves the heavy burden of responsibility for the other and makes genuine caring possible.

Praying for those we serve also helps us to understand them better. There is no better way to develop an understanding of a person— whether a child, a spouse, a parent, a coworker, or even an enemy— than to pray for them. What do we understand their needs to be? Their vulnerabilities? Their strengths? Their hopes and fears? How would God change us so that we would be more helpful to them?

But *how* do we pray? There are times and settings where sitting down to pray individually with a food recipient is not only appropriate but essential. In times of crisis or great stress, the prayer we share may be more important than the food we give.

Many of the folks we serve may expect that we will offer to pray for them. Knowing that we are a ministry of the church, they may feel confused- even slighted- if we do not. On the other hand, our prayers may feel oppressive to others. And wooden, rote prayers may seem more like program requirements than expressions of genuine concern. Prayer should always be a part of *our* experience of interaction with a food recipient; we will need to decide individually whether it is appropriate to share it verbally with them.

Bringing our prayer concerns to a gathering of food ministry workers also helps maintain the faith orientation of our work. At regular staff meetings, volunteer training events, Bible study, and board meetings, we can lift up prayers for the specific needs of specific participants- even if privacy concerns prohibit the use of their full names. Again our praying is a way of letting go of the heavy burden of responsibility while trusting God to use us in responding to their needs. It also assures that no group can focus exclusively on the mechanics of running a program rather than the needs of the recipients or the promises of God.



PRAYING TOGETHER

Consider forming a prayer group composed of both food ministry workers and recipients. Often we feel reluctant to invite recipients to our congregational worship service, fearing that they may be made to feel unwelcome, that they may feel uncomfortable, or that the particular style of our worship may not be appealing to them. A prayer group in which we all share equally presents none of these problems, however. Program volunteers learn much about faith from

the prayers of recipients who place trust in God in very difficult circumstances. And volunteers begin to be seen not as social workers but as sisters and brothers in faith. Praying together can move everyone toward the elimination of the *us*+ and *them*+ divisions and stereotypes that often stand in the way of real growth and change.

God of all goodness we give you praise and thanks for all the blessings of this life.

We are grateful for:

the gift of food

and the opportunity we have

to feed others in your name;

the blessing of shelter,

and the challenge before us

to care for the homeless;

the love of family and friends,

and your call to love those

who are lost and alone;

the fellowship of the church,

and the presence of Christ in the lives

of our needy brothers and sisters.

Lord help us to accept your blessings

and your challenges with gratitude,

and may we find that through your grace,

blessings become challenges

and challenges become blessings.

Amen

BANQUEST OF PRAISE, BREAD FOR THE WORLD

The Prayers of Martin Luther King Jr.

John Dear, Jan. 15, 2013 On the Road to Peace

Recently, I came across a new collection of prayers by Martin Luther King Jr., *Thou, Dear God: Prayers that Open Hearts and Spirits* (edited by Lewis V. Baldwin, Beacon Press, 2012). For his birthday [January 15], I thought I'd offer here a sample of those prayers to encourage us on our journey so we might be, like Dr. King, people of prayer, peace, justice and nonviolence.

His prayers, of course, raise questions about our own prayers. To whom do we pray? How do we pray? What do we ask for? Thomas Merton taught us the apophatic prayer of sitting in the void, in darkness, while St. Ignatius Loyola

taught us to use our imaginations and fantasize about the Gospel (pick a story, imagine you are in it, feel what it's like, notice what Jesus looks like, listen to what he says to you, and so forth). Medieval monks taught *lectio divina*, reading the scriptures prayerfully, while others emphasize the prayer of communal liturgy and Gospel hymns. Personally, I recommend 30 minutes of silent time every day to dwell in intimate love with the God of peace, with the nonviolent Jesus.

Every Christian tradition advocates intercessory prayer- begging God for what we need. Ask and it will be given to you,+ Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:7). Ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you+ (John 15:7). All that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours. And when you stand to pray, forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance so that your heavenly God may in turn forgive you+ (Mark 11:24-25).

Contrary to what we often hear in our parishes, I think we should beg God for every *global* gift of disarmament, justice and nonviolence as a way to pray for the coming of God's reign. Our public intercessions should be bold and clear, like this: For an immediate end to the U.S. war in Afghanistan; for the abolition of drones, handguns, machine guns, bombs, fighter bombers, Trident submarines, nuclear weapons and the death penalty; for all the relatives of those who have died from U.S. warfare, that they may have restitution and comfort; for a redistribution of the world's wealth so that every child will have food, clothing, housing, health care, education and dignity; for policies that protect the environment and halt global warming; for an end to extrajudicial murder, rendition, torture and Guantanamo; for our conversion to Gospel nonviolence; for the church's rejection of the just war theory and active practice of the Sermon on the Mount.+ These are the intercessory prayers, I think, that God wants to hear, that get us beyond our cultural narcissism into compassion for the whole human race. To pray such prayers is to work publicly through the grace of God that they might be answered.

This is what I hear in Dr. King's prayer- a cry for strength to carry on the work of peace and justice; for courage to be nonviolent, come what may; for blessings on the movements for civil rights, justice and peace; for healing for the oppressed and the oppressors; and for the coming of God's reign of peace, love and nonviolence here and now. May all our prayers for peace and justice be answered!



Thou Eternal God, out of whose absolute power and infinite intelligence the whole universe has come into being, we humbly confess that we have not loved thee with our hearts, souls and minds, and we have not loved our neighbors as Christ loved us. We have all too often lived by our own selfish impulses rather than by the life of sacrificial love as revealed by Christ. We often give in order to receive. We love our friends and hate our enemies. We go the first mile but dare not travel the second. We forgive but dare not forget. And so as we look within ourselves, we are confronted with the appalling fact that the history of our lives is the history of an eternal revolt against you. But thou, O God, have mercy upon us. Forgive us for what we could have been but failed to be. Give us the intelligence to know your will. Give us the courage to do your will. Give us the devotion to love your will. In the name and spirit of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

God, help us as individuals and as a world to hear it now before it's too late: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and God's justice and all these other things shall be added unto you."

We thank you for your church, founded upon your Word, that challenges us to do more than sing and pray, but go out and work as though the very answer to our prayers depended on us and not upon you. Help us to realize that humanity was created to shine like the stars and live on through all eternity. Keep us, we pray, in perfect peace. Help us to walk together, pray together, sing together, and live together until that day when all God's children—Black, White, Red, Brown and Yellow—will rejoice in one common band of humanity in the reign of our Lord and of our God, we pray. Amen.

Let the Spirit Move You

from TAKE A PRAYER WALK by Linus Mundy

ENRICHING YOUR PRAYER LIFE

Put on your walking shoes and consider the following five steps for taking a stroll with your soul. I hope these ideas will help you to hear the message in those murmurings buried inside your heart and to discover that those murmurings are coming not only from your heart but from God's heart.

STEP ONE: RETREAT

Trappist monk/writing Thomas Merton, who lived in a silent hermitage for most of three years before his death, wrote, "No writing on the solitary, meditative dimension of life can say anything that has not already been said better by the wind in the pine trees."

As people of faith, we have God *and* nature and God *in* nature. We believe with the psalmist that "the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork" (Psalm 19:2). Even though God is beyond anything we can see, touch, taste, or smell, we can encounter a glimpse of God's grandeur in the wild. God's grandeur (and the wild) are certainly present back at home, too. But sometimes only by retreating from our daily worlds can we see that all of life is blessed—including the noise and ordinariness back home.

Writer Edward Hays reports that since the mid-1960s an entire library of books has been written about various methods for prayer. While the methods and practices are many, they are all

directed towards the same end, namely, to still the flow of thoughts and desires that keep the mind and heart constantly occupied and thus to make one more available to God. Going on a prayer walk is sure to make your mind and heart more available.

STEP TWO: REVITALIZE, REFRESH, RENEW
The Lord wants us to have life and have it more abundantly. There's hardly a better way to prove there's life in our bodies than by moving them. Moving our bodies is healthy and life-giving, even life-extending. Good things happen within our body chemistry and good feelings come when we are physically active. Prayer walking is a great exercise for body and soul.

Taking a prayer walk can become an enjoyable part of your total spiritual fitness program, something you can get mind, body and spirit into together. Steady, rewarding growth in our self awareness is the natural by-product of our spiritual exercise.

STEP THREE: REMEMBER AND REINVENT
As you persevere in your prayer walks, you will build up memories, seeing how the landscape and you change over time. As the weeks, months, and years pass, you will look back, knowing you have reinvented a simple spiritual path toward holiness.

STEP FOUR: REPENT
A prayer walk provides fertile ground for repentance and conversion. As we get out on the trail, we are in the midst of a very *changed* environment. We can readily see that this is not our home or office, etc. with all its trappings and routines. Out here we can better appreciate the physical change (that one's easy). But we also can become more receptive to the change of heart and mind to which Scripture calls us.

STEP FIVE: RETURN AND REPEAT
When our prayer walk ends, does our prayer end? Physical fitness experts assure us that the effects of exercise continue long after the exercise has stopped. Similarly, by adopting an attitude of prayer through repeated prayer walks, we integrate the values we find out there and carry them with us in our busy lives.

What our prayer walk can teach us, really, is that *it's all holy ground we walk on*—whether that

ground is in the laundry room, in the workplace, or under the roomy skies.



Creating your own prayer walk experience:

- Realize that your real journey is an interior one. You are looking for Love and opening up to Grace.
- As you set out, make it clear to God and yourself that this is a walk *toward* holiness. You have prayerful *intentions*. Not finding prayer or holiness on every step or every prayer walk is not failure.
- Make it *your* prayer walk. Walk at your pace, on or off the path. Turn your heart to God via traditional prayers, spontaneous prayer, centering prayer, or sometimes %no+prayer.
- Things to take along (optional): a walking stick, a notebook, spiritual reading, a pet, a friend, a child, inspiring music, none of the above.
- Things to take along (*not* optional): the cry or song in your heart, the people you love who are living and dead, your dreams, your true self.
- Things to take along and %drop off+bit by bit: your hurts, your worries, your false self.

*“Take a walk—but don’t go anywhere.
If you walk just to get somewhere,
you sacrifice the walking.”*

-Slow-down Therapy

Times of Prayer

from GIFTS OF MANY CULTURES,
Maren C. Tirabassi & Kathy Wonson Eddy

PRAYER MEETING

About prayer what people commonly do whenever any of the household is seriously ill is

to invite a whole lot of friends for a prayer meeting. If the evening is fine and warm we sit in the courtyard on rush mats, the men on one side and the women on the other. The host will say what he has called the meeting for, and while he is about it, he will add a number of supplementary biddings. Mary is taking an important examination, Peter is away catching a turtle, Uncle is going for a journey, and so on. We start with a hymn, a lilting ragtime sung to drum and cymbal. There follows the Bible reading with a brief (or not so brief) sermon attached. Then begin the prayers, the president first and then others, often repeating each other, and the good Lord is informed of a lot of things that he knows very well already. Then sometimes we go on far into the night with hymn after hymn. Usually at about 1:00 or 2:00 a.m., the final prayer is said, some light refreshments are served, and everyone trails off across the fields to their own homes.

Dacca, Bangladesh

TONGSUNG KIDO (PRAY ALOUD)

In Korean congregations, among others, Tongsung Kido is a popular and important part of prayer life. Usually the congregation is given a specific time period, with a common theme of petition or supplication. Then all pray aloud at the same time. The voices of others will not bother them when they concentrate on their own earnest prayers, longing for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Korea

SIMULTANEOUS PRAYER AND INTERCESSORY CRYING SERVICE

In the United Congregational Church of Mozambique, there is an infrequent service focused on intercession and confession, and turning over of both personal and community burdens to the Lord. The worship leader will ask the community to all join in simultaneous prayer, and the sound of it is as a waterfall of voices in which each is bathed. Each person prays out loud with no attention whatever to anybody else. Many languages are used, not just the official common language of the church, for this prayer is for God, who knows all languages, and nobody else need understand. A couple minutes into this prayer time, anywhere from three to fifteen women will work their way forward to the center front of the church and fall to their knees.

As they pray, they begin to cry and sob and wail. Ritually, on behalf of everybody present, they divest themselves of burdens that are indeed heavy, laying them before Jesus and pleading for mercy and for strength. It is a very special cathartic and cleansing time.

The experience closes when the pastor or lay leader starts the hymn. Slowly the babbling of voices and the sobs of those crying subside and more and more join the singing, and soon glorious four-part *a capella* harmonies are wafting into the streets, proclaiming once again the faith of those within that, indeed, Jesus can and will hear their prayers and help and heal.

Ruth Brandon Minter, Mozambique

THE DIRECTIONS

(Face East)

From the East, the direction of the rising sun, we receive peace and light and wisdom and knowledge.

We are grateful for these gifts, O God.

(Face South)

From the South comes warmth, guidance, and the beginning and the end of life.

We are grateful for these gifts, O God.

(Face West)

From the West comes the rain, purifying waters, to sustain all living things.

We are grateful for these gifts, O God.

(Face North)

From the North comes the cold and mighty wind, the white snow, giving us strength and endurance.

We are grateful for these gifts, O God.

(Face Upward)

From the heavens we receive darkness and light, the air of Your breath, and messages from Your winged creatures.

We are grateful for these gifts, O God.

(Face Downward)

From the earth we come and to the earth we will return.

We are grateful for Your creation, Mother Earth, O God.

May we walk good paths, O God, living on this earth as brothers and sisters should: rejoicing in one another's blessing, sympathizing in one another's sorrows, and together with You renewing the face of the earth.

Native American, U.S.A.

Prayer for a Prayer

Knower of this, that, and the other,
I am becoming aware of things I wish were true.

my lust and my duplicity,

the desire to have more money,

a craving to be well thought of far and near.

These small truths do not shake the universe, I know,

nor do they block your care for me.

They just make it hard for me to talk to you.

I would be silent. I would sulk and cringe.

I would head for beaches or for ball games

and forget your ways,

but nothing stays buried in my soul.

Nothing I wish to neglect recedes forever.

Can I rely on your knowing this,
to help me pray what I must pray?

And if you know what I will say,

why is it so important for me to say it?

And what does it mean,

when I have always thought of you as far above me,

watching, smiling, frowning,

as I imagined Grandpa, who died and went to heaven,

that now I sense you someplace in my middle
and also all around me, clear and real as air?

God, to whom am I speaking?

And what does it mean to say a prayer?

And how does this fit

with the dance of light in treetops

or the wind howling in the dark?

I only know to pray, to ask, to cajole,

to badger the Almighty,

if almighty is what you are.

I only know to explain to you

what you already understand.

Father, Mother, Spirit, Child,

Force of Life and Press of World,

in your own way be known to me.

Bless those who pray with bones or feathers

or mystical cards or whirling wheels,

and be mindful of us

who are silent toward you most of the time

but who gratefully live

in the midst of all these prayers.

Robert Jones, from *Prayers for Puppies, Aging Autos & Sleepless Nights*

Grains of Truth



"I prayed for
freedom
for twenty years,
but received
no answer
until I prayed
with my legs.

Frederick Douglass



"We never know how God will answer our prayers, but we can expect that He will get us involved in His plan for the answer. If we are true intercessors, we must be ready to take part in God's work on behalf of the people for whom we pray."

Corrie ten Boom