

**Ten Days of Prayer and
Thanksgiving for the Roma**
March 29–April 7, 2012



Ten Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Roma

About this resource

This resource was created in partnership between Presbyterian World Mission and Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Inc.

Burkhard Paetzold, PC(USA) regional liaison for Central and Eastern Europe, facilitates the PC(USA)'s work with the Roma in that region. (Learn more about Burkhard's work at <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/missionconnections/paetzold-burkhard>.) Burkhard also coordinates the Roma Bridging Group on Mission Crossroads PC(USA), a social networking website for building effective and faithful mission work. Join the group at <http://missioncrossroads.ning.com/group/romapeoplebridginggroup>.

Liz Searles and her husband, Doug, have served as mission coworkers in Poland. They are now itinerating in the United States, speaking in congregations about their work. See <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/missionconnections/searles-douglas-and-elizabeth>.

Presbyterian Women's connections with the Roma began with the 2008 Global Exchange to Eastern Europe. Learn more about the trip in the March/April 2009 issue of *Horizons*; order item HZN09210 through Presbyterian Distribution Service, 800/524-

2612; \$4 plus shipping. PW continues its support of the Roma with the "Weaving a Future" basketmaking enterprise; see page 12.

Presbyterian Women initiated its first "10 Days of Thanksgiving for the Roma" in 2011. Go to www.presbyterianwomen.org/missionmatters to find the 2011 booklet, which highlights the situation of Roma in 10 European countries.

About the Roma Flag

The Roma flag (page 4) is blue on top—representing the eternal, the spiritual—and green below—representing the earth and organic growth. The central red circle represents both a wheel—a reference to the Roma's migratory heritage—and a reference to the Ashok Chakra, which originated in India (as did the Roma).

The flag and the anthem "Opre Roma!" ("Roma, Arise," in English) were approved at the First World Romani Congress (London, 1971), funded in part by the World Council of Churches and the Indian Government. More than 20 countries sent representatives. Listen to "Opre Roma!" at www.youtube.com/watch?v=7d74qevRxck.

Opre Roma! (Roma, Arise!)

*Djelem, Djelem, longone dromensa, maladilem
bakhtale Romensa.*

*A, Romale. Katar tumen aven, e tsarena,
bakhtale dromensa. A, Romale. A, Chhavale. Vi
mansa su bari familiya, Mudardala e kali legiya.*

*Aven mansa sar e lumnyatse Roma kai
phutale e Romane dromensa. Ake vriama, usti
Rom akana, Amen Khudasa misto kai kera.*
A, Romale. A, Chhavale.

I have traveled over long roads, I have met
fortunate Roma. I have traveled far and wide,
I have met lucky Roma.

Oh, Romani adults. Oh, Romani youth. Oh,
Romani adults. Oh, Romani youth.

Oh, Roma, from wherever you have come,
with your tents along lucky roads. I, too, once
had a large family, but the Black Legion mur-
dered them.

Come with me, Roma of the world, to
where the Romani roads have been opened.
Now is the time. Stand up, Roma. We shall
succeed where we make the effort.

Oh, Roma adults. Oh, Roma youth. Oh,
Roma adults. Oh, Roma youth.

—Translation by Ron Lee

Ten Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Roma

March 29–April 7, 2012

April 8, 2012, is International Roma Day, a day of celebration of Romani culture, history and people. It's also an opportunity for those of us who know little about the Roma (often pejoratively called "gypsies") to learn about them, and to move past stereotypes and media depictions. This year, as Roma in Europe continue to face discrimination and violence, there likely will be more demonstrations than celebrations around the globe.

A report from the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights notes that Roma people are Europe's largest and most vulnerable minority, subject to exclusion, discrimination and hate speech from Europe's citizens and governments (www.coe.int/t/commissioner/source/prems/prems79611_GBR_CouvHumanRightsOfRoma_WEB.pdf).

In the ten days leading up to International Roma Day, April 8, use this booklet to pray, learn and share with others about the Roma.

Pray

As you use this resource, hold International Roma Day, which this year falls on Easter Sunday, in your daily prayers. Pray for peaceful and positive demonstrations. Pray that those who stigmatize or loathe Roma will not be moved to hate speech or violence. Pray that people of the majority culture all over Europe may come to see Roma as fellow children of God. Pray for tolerance and forgiveness on both sides.

Scripture tells us that prayer can help break the chains of poverty, exclusion, enslavement and violence. Consider Acts 12:5–7 and 2 Corinthians 1:8–11. Mohandas Gandhi said "Prayer is not an old woman's



idle amusement. Properly understood and applied, it is the most potent instrument of action."

Learn

For each of the ten days leading up to April 8, this booklet focuses on a different area of concern for Romani people. Each entry helps us learn about one of the many challenges the Roma face, and helps us focus our prayers on one that issue for the day.

Share

Encourage others to learn more about the Roma and tell them about what you've learned. Use these materials in as many different ways and places as you can during the ten days leading up to April 8. (And don't feel bound by the dates; you can use it at any time of the year when you feel moved to support the Roma.) Use the materials all in one meeting, or split them up in any way you wish. Use the resource in personal devotions, group worship or in small prayer groups; use it at retreats or meetings, clusters or gatherings, before or after a potluck or other group activity.

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Day One ♦ March 29, 2012

Ten Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Roma ♦ Give Thanks for the Roma!

Scripture

"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God . . . will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

—Philippians 4:6–7, NRSV

Pal'ikeriben

Pal'ikeriav tuke, Devla, vash o
jivipen, vash oda, hoj som Rom,
hoj jav tire dromeha savore
Romenca.

Hoj rodav lenge o chachipen baro,
o chachipen sasto.

Pal'ikerav tuke vash e romn'i, vash
o chhave, so mange len bich-
had'al andre miro jivipen.

Pal'ikerav tuke, Devla, vash o
chhon, so o soviben mange anel,
kaj man rat'i te sast'arel.

Pal'ikerav tuke vash o veshu, vash
o chirikle, so sako tosara
usht'aven man gil'enca.

Pal'ikerav tuke, Devla, vash o
sast'ipen, vash o miro the mire
chhavengro the savore
manushengro.

Pal'ikerav tuke vash e chereshn'ori,
so adaj terd'ol jekh jekhuri, vash
lakero parno uripen, so balzamos
hin pre mire jakha.

Pal'ikerav tuke, Devla, vash o
lachhe manusha, vash lengere
barvale jile.

Pal'ikerav tuke, Devla, vash oda,
hoj som . . .

—Vladimir Olah (1947–2012),
Romani poet, philosopher,
teacher, author and translator,
founder of Matica Romska
(Romani Mother), a Christian and
educational association

Society has always found the Romanies an ethnic puzzle and has tried ceaselessly to fit them, by force or fraud, piety or policy, coaxing or cruelty, into some framework of its own conception, but so far without success.

—*Encyclopedia Britannica*,
"Romanies (Gypsies)," dated 1879

Before we give thanks for the Roma, let's pause to understand who we're talking about. The Roma are an Indo-Aryan ethnic group of at least 11 million,¹ who live largely in Europe but are dispersed worldwide. You may know this group as "gypsies," "tinkers," "travelers" or some other name. The name *Gypsy* stems from an erroneous belief that the people came from Egypt; it is also the origin for the English word *gyp*. In many European languages, the verb *to steal* shares a root with the noun *gypsy*. So using the word *gypsy* reinforces misunderstanding and negative stereotypes.

For this reason, these peoples, who migrated into Europe from northern India some 1,000 years ago, ask to be called "Roma." *Roma* means "persons," in the Romani language. This is significant to a group that has been enslaved—and treated as less than human—in many European countries. Being called "Roma" helps to restore a sense of shared humanity and personhood.

Romani is the adjective, as in "Romani people" or "Romani language." Confusingly enough, the ethnic



Day One ♦ continued

Ten Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Roma ♦ Give thanks for the Roma!



Prayer

Thank you, God, for life, for the fact that I'm a Roma, that I go your way with all Roma.

That I look for it—the great truth, the healing truth.

Thank you for the wife, for the children, that you sent me.

Thank you, God, for the sun that gives life to all.

Thank you, God, for the moon that brings me sleep that restores me overnight.

Thank you for the forests, for the birds that every day wake me with song.

Thank you, God, for health, for mine, for my children's and everyone's on Earth.

Thank you for the cherry tree that stands by itself, alone, for her white veil, that caresses my eyes.

Thank you, God, for good people, for their ample hearts.

Thank you, God, for the fact that I am

—Vladimir Olah (1947–2012),
Romani poet, philosopher,
teacher, author and translator,
founder of *Matica Romska*
(Romani Mother), a Christian and
educational association

designation “Roma” and the country “Romania” have little connection, other than that some two million ethnically Romani people inhabit the country known as Romania. Like the terms *Native American* or *First American*, *Roma* is an umbrella term for many subgroups. Ashkali, Kalderash, Manouche and Lovari are among those considered to be Romani, each with their distinct cultural and linguistic traditions.

Many westerners view Roma with curiosity at best and mistrust at worst. Colorful Romani dress, traveling, music-making, dancing, occult mysticism and a seeming freedom from the constraints of the cultures where they settled all support romanticized (and stereotypical) images of a mythic culture. Myths often mask opposite realities, however: Fascination on the one hand may mask loathing or demonization on the other. Hence, Roma history records discrimination, exploitation, pogroms, persecution, forced migration and even extermination.

Many Roma today live in settlements without the basics: a dependable food and water supply, electricity, heat, education, health care or the possibility of employment.

Give thanks for the Roma!

Pray today and every day, giving thanks for the many gifts Roma have brought to every continent in our world—from flamenco dancing to writing poetry and acting; from keeping traditions of singing and instrumental playing alive to modeling the importance of friends and extended family. Pray today and every day, giving thanks for the courage, resilience, creativity, tenacity and open hearts of the Roma people.



Day Two ♦ March 30, 2012

Ten Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Roma ♦ Pray for an end to segregation, exclusion



Scripture

"The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God."

—Leviticus 19:34

Prayer

O God, we bring before you hearts and minds divided by fear. Move us to bind up those who are wounded, warm those who are chilled, feed those who are hungry and heal those with diseases of the body, mind and spirit.

We pray for Roma people recovering from the harsh winters of Europe. Be with them as they struggle towards health, rebuild broken lives and communities, mourn their dead and recover resurrection hope in the spring.

Be with the Roma, oh God. Move the hearts of the communities who segregate and exclude the Roma. Infuse hearts and minds with your love, we pray. And move us to be faithful and to continue our prayers for Roma in the days ahead.

In the name of Jesus, healer, comforter and friend to the stranger. Amen.

Because many Roma have Indian features, they look different from other Europeans. They easily are singled out for exclusion, scapegoating and violence. They have been called "the Samaritans of Europe," since the loathing they face is similar to what Samaritans and Canaanites experienced in ancient Israel.

Roma typically live in segregated communities. Sometimes neighbors exclude them by building a high wall. In other places, Roma are forcibly relocated to live away from the non-Roma population. Roma rebuild their homes where they are allowed—on river banks, toxic dumps or abandoned mines. People euphemistically call these areas "camps," as if Roma were roving nomads who choose pastoral settings for their homes. However, most Roma have been seeking a settled life with steady employment for nearly a century, mostly without success.

Extended families inhabit makeshift shanties, railroad cars or gutted apartments in abandoned block houses. Running water, power, heat and a dependable food supply may be rare. A few outside taps, outhouses and showers must serve. Virtually no garbage is collected. Bills rarely can be paid and stomachs rarely filled.

In 2012, heavy snows and bitter cold have resulted in yet uncounted deaths and disabilities.¹ Many communities remain isolated, so totals may be months in coming. Most Europeans were forewarned by the media, but most Roma settlements have limited media access. Sudden snows, ice and cold caught them unprepared. Cold and starvation claimed lives, especially the lives of infants, the elderly and people with illnesses.

If Roma gather wood for heat and cooking, they can be arrested for poaching. Toxic housing locations already attack people's health. Diseases such as tuberculosis spread easily in the settlements. Stress additionally compromises health—fear of being harassed, attacked verbally and physically, denied access to services, becoming targets of violence and human trafficking—all contribute to debilitating stress. Combine these with poverty and lack of health education, and high costs for health care, and the result is astronomically high health risks.

Pray for an end to segregation and exclusion, which perpetuate the cycle of poverty and ill health.

Day Three ♦ March 31, 2012

Ten Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Roma

♦ Pray for Roma women and an end to trafficking



Romani women not only face discrimination from non-Roma society, but also suffer under patriarchal Roma customs. Romani culture observes purity laws, *mahrime*, that circumscribe the roles of women. There are strict beliefs about cleanliness that mean hours of washing for women, who shoulder most (if not all) domestic work. Women are responsible for the home, raising children and dealing with social, health and housing issues.

Marriage is viewed as extremely important, so many Roma women abandon or never pursue education to focus on marriage. Child marriages continue in some communities, often out of a desire to protect girls from premarital sexual activity, rape or human trafficking for sex or other servitude. Few Romani women receive an education beyond elementary school. As a result, they are frequently powerless to help their children, or to claim family rights to adequate food, housing, health care, job training and employment, or freedom from hate speech, intimidation, abuse and other violence.

Few Roma women understand the world of finance. Concerned about feeding their children today, they may take loans with usurious interest rates that they cannot possibly repay. When the loans come due, loan sharks may conspire with human traffickers to “help” families wipe out their debt by taking a family member away with promises of work. In some eastern European countries, a disproportionately high number of people who are trafficked are Roma.¹ Roma women and men disappear from their communities to be exploited for forced labor; sex, organ harvesting and illegal adoption.

Non-Roma society stereotypes Romani women in ways that make them uniquely vulnerable to exploitation. Romani girls are thought to be seductive and sexually active. They can be harassed or attacked by larger society over these misconceptions. Also a threat from non-Roma society, forced sterilizations aimed at limiting the Roma population have happened as recently as 2007.

Pray and advocate for an end to the race- and gender-based discrimination Romani women face.

Scripture

“Do not abuse any widow or orphan.”

—Exodus 22:22

Prayer

I praise you, Jesus. Lead us to those paths you want us to walk. I pray for Roma people, that they would bow before you. I pray for Roma, that they would stop playing gaming machines. Descend upon them, make them free of those machines. May they find their way to you. I pray for loan sharks. Nothing is impossible for you. Stop their tricks that they would stop preying on poor people. You said, “For everyone, who knocks, the door will be opened.” And I pray for the government—you see, o Lord, how they curtail our social benefits and how our living costs are sky-high. I put the government in your hands. I put our church into your hands, as well as our pastor and our praise. Thanks to you we know the truth and we are changed for the better. Bless them. Thank you. Amen.

—Sona Kandracová, Roma woman from Vsetín, Czech Republic

Day Four ♦ April 1, 2012

Ten Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Roma ♦ Pray for the education of Roma children



Scripture

“People were bringing little children to [Jesus] in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.’”

—Mark 10:13–14

Prayer

Today, our God, we lift up to you all children who suffer poverty and exclusion, and especially Romani children.

Today, our God, we pray for each child who

a) has to earn money to feed his or her family. Healing God, hear our prayer.

We pray for each child who

b) has no boots where the way to school is muddy or snowy. Healing God, hear our prayer.

Continue the cycle of prayer through z.

E ducation can help Roma integrate into wider society, gain access to government services and improve employment possibilities. Yet, many Roma children do not go to school; few who do continue past elementary school.

What if you can't go to school because you have:

a) to earn money to help feed your family; **b)** no boots, and the way to school is very muddy or snowy; **c)** no money to ride the many miles on the bus; **d)** no friends, only classmates who make fun of you because you are dirty from your walk, or just for being Roma; **e)** soiled your only trousers in fear while vigilantes carrying torches marched and chanted outside your door; **f)** parents who are illiterate and don't understand the need for school; **g)** been told to prioritize your upcoming marriage; **h)** fear that you will be harassed or beaten on the road or kidnapped by human traffickers; **i)** sick grandparents who need someone to stay with them; **j)** so many people living in your one- or two-room home that there's nowhere to do your homework; **k)** a brother who traded your pen, pencil and backpack for food; **l)** a sister who burned your schoolbooks to keep her and her babies warm; **m)** an uncle who sends you out to beg for him; **n)** never seen anyone read a book write with a pencil, so it doesn't make any sense to you; **o)** never seen anyone get up every day and go to work, or heard anyone talk about work in a good way; **p)** been to school and realized it serves children who are mentally- or emotionally-challenged; **q)** repeatedly been humiliated and called stupid by your teacher; **r)** gone to school, but all your classmates' mothers took their children out because you arrived; **s)** no food to eat while everyone else is having lunch; **t)** nothing to talk about with the other kids who are friending each other on Facebook or texting on their mobiles; **u)** passed your 10th birthday and never gone to school at all; **v)** to take care of your six younger siblings; **w)** not learned the national language since moving after your old settlement was bulldozed and you were forcibly relocated; **x)** an older cousin who did well, graduated from high school and got job training. He came back home and said: “Don't bother with school. It's a waste of time. No one out there will give us a job anyway”; **y)** a terrible cough, so they won't let you in the school; **z)** more fun playing by the river; no one cares whether you go to school anyway. What if things could be different?

Day Five ♦ April 2, 2012

Ten Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Roma ♦ Pray for an end to persecution, vigilantism



It seems as if the more the European Union seeks to bind its nations together, the more each seeks urgently to distinguish itself from its neighbors. Nationalism is on the rise, to the point of xenophobia in some countries. Italy, France and Germany are among those who have expelled Roma from their countries, in what many view as racially motivated decisions. As economies decline, people seek a scapegoat for their problems.

The Roma are an easy target. What began as random skinhead violence soon developed into organized armed vigilante activities, and then began to draw in moderate people, who are afraid and looking for answers.

Constance Šimonovská, a church member in Rumburk, Czech Republic, bears witness to days of anti-Roma rage:

I see “normal” residents—not Nazis, but people I meet in the street every day—public employees, parents of my children’s classmates. I see how the crowd moves through the city to supposed Roma houses, faces full of outrage and enthusiasm, as if they were happy to be able to scream out what previously could not be spoken out loud. There were phrases which send chills down your spine: “Gas the Gypsies!” “Go after them with pick and spade!” “Bury them alive!”

In response, Constance and others acted with courage. She continues: “We met with representatives of the Roma and several nonprofit organizations and . . . produced a Declaration Against Racism and Violence Gatherings for peace took place in various places, among them, the Protestant church in Rumburk where about 50 people gathered, spoke about their feelings, expressed sadness, asked for hope, prayed and lit candles. To say ‘No!’ to racism and violence would seem to be a normal thing, but not at this time . . . it took courage to come to the church today . . . These meetings will not resolve the conflict. Nonetheless . . . in the midst of so much hate-filled shouting, other voices should be raised, and we can show each other that we are not alone.”

Today, we pray for transformation, for both the persecuted and the persecutors.

Scripture

“I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!”

—John 16:33

Prayer

God of justice and mercy, save the Roma people. Protect us from anger, hunger, illness, earthquake, flooding, fire, attack, inner fight and unexpected death. Lord, have mercy on us, for in you we have put our trust. Be not exceedingly angry with us, nor remember our many iniquities, but look upon us now as the Compassionate, and deliver us from our enemies. For you are our God, and we are your people. We are all the work of your hands, and upon your name we have now called. Now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

—Margarita, a Roma woman from Albania

Day Six ♦ April 3, 2012

Ten Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Roma ♦ Pray for governments and politicians



Scripture

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven."

—Matthew 5:43–4

Prayer

Our God, you have gathered us into communities and challenged us to develop loving ways to live together and to govern ourselves. And yet some of your people are excluded, some are impoverished, and some are hated, loathed or persecuted from birth. We are divided. We are at war with ourselves and others. Today we especially lift up the needs of the Roma in the communities of Europe. We ask that you make your presence known to those who have the power to hurt and the power to help.

Show healing love on our communities. Infuse our governments with wisdom. Engender a spirit of sacrifice and service among those we look to for leadership in our religious communities, in our town halls and state houses, in the great halls of justice of our cities, and in the high seats of government itself. In the name of Jesus, servant leader, and wise and sacrificial healer, we ask all this. Amen.

Before 1850, Roma could be legally bought and sold as slaves in several European countries. Other countries had laws that excluded Roma from participating in activities or accessing services that were available to the rest of the population.

In the 1930s, Nazis designated Roma "lives unworthy of life" and sought to exterminate them. An estimated one out of four Roma perished, some murdered in their own communities and dumped in mass graves; others were murdered in ghettos or death camps. The number of lives lost is uncertain, but half a million is a common estimate.

More recently, Kosovars accused Roma of collaborating with Serbs in (the former) Yugoslavia. Many fled horrific violence, seeking asylum in the west. They now are being "repatriated," sometimes forcibly taken from their homes. Makeshift settlements are expanding in Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Macedonia, whose residents are unready to welcome Roma.

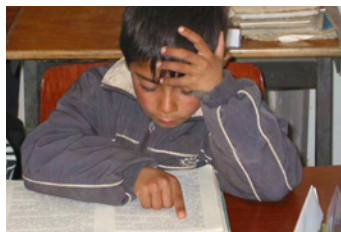
In 2011 and 2012, hate speech, anti-Roma rallies, pogroms and violence increased. Politicians campaigned with promises to "solve the Roma problem." Such political promises usually mean denying Roma services, illegally leveling settlements and forcibly transporting Roma, often without providing any alternative housing.

Twelve European countries have committed to "The Decade of Roma Inclusion" (www.romadecade.org), creating action plans to improve the socioeconomic status and social inclusion of Roma from 2005 to 2015. Unfortunately, too few Roma participated in setting the Decade agenda. Too often, EU monies intended for Roma projects go unused because applications to use the funds are difficult to complete and benchmarks seem impossible to reach. The United States committed in February 2012 to be an official observer of the Decade of Roma Inclusion progress, so realities of Roma life in Europe may now begin to be shared more widely in the United States.

Today we pray for governments and politicians. May they renew or initiate efforts to address the systemic roots of Roma stigmatization and poverty.

Day Seven ♦ April 4, 2012

Ten Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Roma ♦ Pray for an end to segregated schools



Scripture

"You shall have one law for the alien and for the citizen: for I am the LORD your God."

—Leviticus 24:22

Prayer

Our God, we come to you as a people divided. We come to you as a people who need daily reminders to love and accept the stranger in our midst. We come to you as a people who are asked to walk hard roads of reconciliation.

Today we pray for Romani people and all people in Europe. They are "our people." They, too, struggle with what it means to live and learn and work and play together. Our dreams of a better world are made real in the play of children who have not yet been taught to hate. Our hopes for an end to violence and war are shaped by our desires for a world that welcomes all of our children.

Place your hand of blessing on the head of each child in your world today, O God. Place your hand of healing on the hearts of each parent. Bring your reconciling hand to the task of dismantling the walls that divide us, walls physical and walls built in our own minds and hearts. May our desires to segregate ourselves cease. All this we ask in the name of the One who said: "Let the children come." Amen.

Settlements, camps and segregated housing are home to the majority of Roma in Europe. Walls divide children at school, as well. Romani children often are educated separately from the non-Roma population. When Roma children do not speak the language at the school, have no experience in classroom settings or simply find themselves in an anti-Roma classroom, they are often placed in remedial classes or schools.

Romani CRISS (Roma Center for Social Intervention and Studies) offers legal assistance to Roma who have experienced discrimination in education, employment or other public sectors in Romania. In a February 2012 case, Romani CRISS noted, "Ethnic school segregation may only result in a disadvantage both for Roma children and for Romani society in general. This is confirmed by statistical data which indicate that Roma schools register a higher dropout rate compared to the entire system. At such a young age, when the self-esteem and social skills of the children are developing, segregation affects them from an educational, psychological and moral point of view and disrupts the process of social inclusion."¹

Non-Roma teachers and parents often support or even demand segregated education. Some teachers complain that Romani children are not classroom-ready, lacking self-management skills and experience with classroom tools. In some communities, if one Romani child attends a school, parents of non-Roma children withdraw their children in protest.

A recent study of Roma children who had been in segregated schools in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, then mainstreamed in the United Kingdom found that Roma children performed at grade level within two years.² In spite of this evidence and the educational success of some Roma, segregated and substandard schooling for Roma continues.

Today, we pray for an end to segregated education.

Day Eight ♦ April 5, 2012

Ten Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Roma ♦ Pray for an end to deportations, evictions



EPAMAXPPP/Marc Greiner

Scripture

"This is the kind of fast day I'm after: to break the chains of injustice, get rid of exploitation in the workplace, free the oppressed, cancel debts. What I'm interested in seeing you do is: sharing your food with the hungry, inviting the homeless poor into your homes, putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad, being available to your own families. Do this and the lights will turn on, and your lives will turn around at once."

—Isaiah 58:6–7, The Message

Prayer

Loving God, we come to you in prayer for all those who are homeless, all those who are cold and hungry and have no place to lay their head, no fire, no food. As we look around us at our belongings and our comfort, bring to our minds those who are without—physically outside in all weathers, and outside communities of caring and sustenance.

Bring heart to the decisions of those in high places. Stay their hand when they seek to destroy a home. Bring your merciful love to all those who are in power over the widow, the orphan, the jobless, the homeless, the hungry.

Bring your sheltering hand to each Romani person and family who is cold, homeless, hungry or traveling today. All this we ask in the Lord's name. Amen.

When housing is makeshift, temporary or in an abandoned building, it is easy for authorities to evict Roma and destroy their homes. Eviction happens silently and all too frequently in France, Germany, Lithuania, Italy and other countries. Roma may be forcibly resettled far from town, making access to schools and services difficult. Sometimes they are transported outside of the country where they have been residing. Some are "returned" to countries in which they have never lived or countries not ready to welcome them.

For example, Germany is forcibly deporting families who were earlier sheltered as asylum seekers from wars or ethnic cleansings in the former states of Yugoslavia (1992–99) and Kosovo (1998–99). Children in some of these families are now in high school and preparing for university entrance. They wake up one day to be told that they will be moving soon, and going to school in another language before they graduate. Thus, the hopeful scholar becomes a scrap-iron collector; beggar or worse.

Other Roma have migrated to seek the benefits of stronger economies and job markets. Roma often work in conditions and for pay few would accept, some even bound in virtual slavery. Recent schemes have sought to defraud western European governments by collecting state benefits on behalf of large numbers of Roma people, lured into the country with promises of jobs, then held captive in forced labor without pay, adequate food or shelter. Roma are easily targeted for illegal transportation, deportation and human trafficking. People turn a blind eye because Roma historically have had low educational achievement and high unemployment.

Some Roma avoid being documented or fingerprinted, fearing a repeat of a holocaust experience. Others are denied identity papers, passport or permanent residence. Residents of Europe for hundreds of years, Roma have the legal right to free movement in what is known as the "Schengen" zone, a visa-free area with no border checks. Since May 2011, European citizens may seek work in other Schengen countries. Many Roma who have identity papers find them stamped "May not travel," in violation of agreements about free movement of European citizens.

Today we pray for an end to forced evictions, illegal deportations and denied travel rights.

Day Nine ♦ April 6, 2012

Ten Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Roma ♦ Pray for hope and wisdom



Roma woman in Gat, Carpath-Ukraine, weaving a basket. She is a member of one of the communities making baskets being sold through PVV. Photo by Jolan Lakatos.

Scripture

"And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds."

—Hebrews 10:24

Prayer

We give thanks for hope, loving God—hope for the Romani people and for all whose lives are broken. We give thanks that there are actions we can take to enable others to hope. Guide our steps, our thoughts and our decisions in the coming day. Guide us towards actions of love so we may be part of your healing in the world.

All this we ask in the name of Jesus, who acted to change history. Amen.

Non-Roma are called "Gadje" by the Roma community. Gadje who gain the trust of Roma communities help both Roma and Gadje "pitch our tents in the land of hope." Holistic ministry and capacity building address the root causes of poverty and dependency; these ministries are helping strengthen Romani voices and skills so that they can speak and do for themselves.

Roma-Gadje Dialogue Through Service (RGDTS)/ Phiren Amenca encourages young adults from western Europe and the United States to do volunteer work requested by Roma communities in central and eastern Europe. Volunteers serve with a local counterpart in a Roma preschool, youth club, church or the like. This encourages positive identity building in the Roma communities. Learn more at www.rgdts.net.

The Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005–2015) has three years left to improve the socioeconomic status and social inclusion of Roma. Twelve countries with significant Roma populations have committed to the effort. The action plans and goals are very good, and focus on priorities such as education, employment, health and housing. Learn more at www.romadecade.org.

Weaving a Future is a basket-making enterprise begun in two Roma communities in Carpath-Ukraine. While on the 2008 Global Exchange trip to Eastern Europe, Presbyterian Women saw baskets woven by Roma women and invested seed money to help the women start a microenterprise. PC(USA) mission coworker Kathy Angi helped initiate the project. Baskets are for sale through Presbyterian Women; visit www.presbyterianwomen.org/missionmatters to learn more. See page 17 to learn how to donate to PW's Roma development project.

Self-Development of People (SDOP) is a project of the PC(USA) that awards grants to impoverished communities who have a plan but lack the financial resources to improve their communities. SDOP supported Roma in Komoroz, Carpath Ukraine as they developed a farming project, and in Debrecen, Hungary, as they developed a self-supported housing project.

SDOP continues to support Roma development. Give at <http://gamc.pcusa.org/give/E053728>.

Day Ten ♦ April 7, 2012

Ten Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Roma ♦ Pray for an expanding circle of caring

Scripture

"The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance."

—1 Cor. 12:24–26, The Message

Prayer

Embracing God, we thank you for all who courageously reach out to heal the rifts of exclusion, poverty and violence in your world. We give thanks for the patience, courage and life spirit of the Roma. Help us to celebrate and give thanks for Roma people and welcome them to the table of kinship, so they need never again hide their identity or flee in fear.

We believe that your perfect love casts out fear, yet we come together as people with all-too-human fears that diminish perfect love: What will we eat? What will we wear? What if we lose respectability? What if our neighbors take advantage of us? What if someone wants to hurt us? What if ?

Help us to feel and extend God's boundless love. Help us to take on the courage of the One who walks beside us on our journey. Make us instruments of your peace as we expand the circle of caring that helps heal what is broken in our world. And may our prayers of thanksgiving for Roma and our prayers for access and inclusion for Roma continue throughout the year.

All this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, whose courage to care is our example. Amen.

Roma tend to identify themselves with the religion of the majority where they live, but they worship in their own language and in their own communities. In Poland, they may be Catholic; in Turkey or Albania, they may follow Islam; in Hungary, they may be Reformed; farther east, they may be Orthodox. Although there may be outreach to Roma from individual parishes or pastors or people, efforts by church bodies in Europe sometimes are complicated by the realities of finances, politics and anti-Roma feelings. To stand for Roma requires courage and conviction.

All congregations desire a positive and respectable image: identifying with "the least of these" can seem embarrassing, counterproductive or foolish. To identify with Romani people is to identify with the despised, the alien and the stranger at a time when some continue to revel in the heady euphoria of having their own countries and cultures back.

Preaching courage into being is one role of the church. And yet speaking out against racism and for access and inclusion of Roma is a challenge for many congregations and denominations in Europe.

Diakonia Centers in the Czech Republic and in Romania, Reformed Church Centers in Hungary, and other town and village level organizations have developed preschool and after-school programs, parenting, life skills and health training and Bible study. Church-related organizations have helped Roma gain access to health and social services, and to birth certificates and identity cards.

Today we pray for courage and conviction and an expanding circle of caring for the Roma.



Ten Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Roma ♦ Notes

Day One: Give thanks for the Roma!

1. Council of Europe, Roma and Travellers Division, "Roma statistics," www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/default_en.asp

Day Two: End segregation and exclusion

1. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/06/world/europe/europe-struggles-to-deal-with-cold-and-snow.html?scp=4&sq=europe+cold&st=nyt> or http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/15/europe-cold-snap_n_1278569.html

Day Three: Pray for women and to end trafficking

1. <http://www.womenlobby.org/spip.php?article1679&lang=en>

Day Five: Pray for an end to persecution, vigilantism

1. Constance Šimonovská, "On the Current Situation in the Sluknovska Region," September 16, 2011, article for the ecumenical bulletin of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, <http://e-cirkev.archa.cz/en/clanek/1898-On-the-Current-Situation-in-the-Sluknovska-Region/index.htm>

Day Seven: Pray for an end to segregated schools

1. Romani CRISS, press release, February 16, 2012, www.romanicriss.org/PDF/comunicat%20presa%20lona%20Asan_engleza.pdf

Learn more about the statistical data referenced in the quote in the Romani CRISS–Unicef Romania report "Roma School Participation, non-Attendance and Discrimination in Romania," [www.romanicriss.org/PDF/RC%202011%20-%20Roma%20school%20participation,%20non-attendance...%20\(en\).pdf](http://www.romanicriss.org/PDF/RC%202011%20-%20Roma%20school%20participation,%20non-attendance...%20(en).pdf), (Bucharest 2011)

2. Daniela Lazarová, "Roma kids from special schools put Czech education system to shame in Great Britain," February 13, 2012; www.radio.cz/en/section/curaffrs/roma-kids-from-special-schools-put-czech-education-system-to-shame-in-great-britain



Ten Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Roma ♦ Resources

Day One—About the Roma/Pray for the Roma

American Gypsy: A Stranger in Everyone's Land

A PBS documentary about the Marks family in Washington, who are some of the 1 million Roma estimated in the United States today

Council of Europe's Committee of Experts on Roma and Travellers

www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/

A body committed to the protection of the rights of the Roma and the full acceptance and inclusion of Roma into Europe's communities; see an overview of the Roma and the work of the committee at www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/source/documents/defendingRoma_rights_en.pdf.

The Crazy Stranger/Gadjo Dilo

A French film with English subtitles about a French man who goes to Romania to find his father's favorite singer and finds himself in a Roma community, falling in love with a Roma woman

George Soros on the Roma: The Promise of Equality in Europe

www.examiner.com/community-activism-in-salt-lake-city/george-soros-and-the-roma-video

A three-minute video highlighting the discrimination faced by many Roma and the hopes of Roma youth for their culture and people; also includes reflections from George Soros, founder of Open Society Foundations, which promotes building societies that uphold the rights and views of all people

Human Rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe

www.coe.int/t/commissioner/source/prems/prems79611_GBR_CouvHumanRightsOfRoma_WEB.pdf

A report by the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights on the various discriminations and marginalization that Europe's Roma people face

Just The Wind

Winner of the Amnesty Prize at the 2012 Berlin International Film Festival, this film depicts the killings of a Roma family in Hungary

Mundi Romani: The World through Roma Eyes

www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2kErKNI0E8

A three-minute video with clips of Roma people, housing and culture

Why Do We Use The Word Gypsy (Cigany)?

www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhSdQ-ixAmU

A video on the origins and earliest use of the word

gypsy, and the language and attitude shifts that need to happen for Roma to have equality

Day Two—Exclusion and Segregation

"Fear of foreigners: Reasons remain economic as much as ethnic"

www.budapesttimes.hu/2012/02/17/fear-of-foreigners/

February 17, 2012 article by Attila Leitner in *The Budapest Times* summarizes a poll on immigration that reflects much discrimination against the Roma

"Europe and the Roma: Discrimination and ungovernability"

www.genderacrossborders.com/2012/02/16/europe-and-the-roma-discrimination-and-ungovernability/

February 16, 2012, article available on the Gender Across Borders website highlights anti-Roma sentiment prevalent in Europe, and the multiple discriminations that Roma women face

Day Three—Women

Faces of Change

[http://mundiromani.com/videos/?video\[video\]\[item\]=30](http://mundiromani.com/videos/?video[video][item]=30)

A 30-minute video with interviews from 10 exceptional Roma who talk about how Roma are improving their lives and calling for an end to discrimination and marginalization

I'm a European Roma Woman

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ml_RWxwbFqI

A four-minute video of Roma women from all over Europe talking about their experiences of anti-Roma treatment

"Roma women turning the tide of violence and discrimination"

www.unwomen.org/2011/11/roma-women-turning-the-tide-of-violence-and-discrimination/

November 22, 2011, overview of the violence and obstacles to justice that Roma women endure; profiles two Roma women working to end violence against Romani women

Human Trafficking

"Breaking the Silence: Trafficking in Romani Communities"—March 2011 report

www.errc.org/cms/upload/file/breaking-the-silence-19-march-2011.pdf

A report by the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) and People in Need, detailing the prevalence of and complicating factors in the trafficking of Romani people, as well as recommendations on how to end it

Ten Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Roma ♦ Resources, continued

"Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women for the Czech Republic"

www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/ngos/ERRC_2_CzechRepublic_CEDAW47.pdf

October 2010 report outlines the root causes of high numbers of trafficked Romani women, calls for action

Catherine Bearder speech

<http://bearder.eu/en/article/2011/532431/catherine-bearder-on-human-trafficking-in-the-roma-community-speech-in-parliament>

European Parliament member Catherine Bearder highlights the ways that discrimination against the Roma make them easy targets for human trafficking

Day Four—Children's education

"Roma community clean up city streets as they try to integrate into Scottish society"

www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/real-life/2012/02/10/roma-community-clean-up-city-streets-as-they-try-to-integrate-into-scottish-society-86908-23743321/

Annie Brown explores the segregation and discrimination faced by Roma children in schools, and an effort in Scotland to promote acceptance and inclusion for Roma (February 10, 2012, *Daily Record*)

"10 Goals for Improving Access to Education for Roma, Open Society Institute"

www.romadecade.org/files/downloads/Education%20Resources/10_Goals_brochure.pdf

A report on how to overcome the obstacles to the education of Roma children throughout Europe

Day Five—Persecution, Pogroms, Vigilantism

"On the Current Situation in the Sluknovska Region"

<http://e-cirkev.archa.cz/en/clanek/1898-On-the-Current-Situation-in-the-Sluknovska-Region/index.htm>

Article by Constance Šimonovská on anti-Roma demonstrations and political attitudes in Rumburk, Czech Republic, and ways people of faith welcome the Roma, rather than use them as scapegoats; (September 16, 2011, Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren)

"U.S. Pays Much-Needed Attention to Violence Against Roma"

www.humanrightsfirst.org/2012/02/17/u-s-pays-much-needed-attention-to-violence-against-roma/

February 17, 2012 post by Joëlle Fiss on the Human Rights First blog addresses violence and discrimination against Hungarian Roma, and the United States' commitment to join the Decade of Roma Inclusion

"Violence Against Roma on the Rise: ERRC Testifies"

www.errc.org/article/violence-against-roma-on-the-rise-errc-testifies/3968

February 16, 2012, article and video with testimonies from ERRC Executive Director Dezideriu Gergely about the prevalence of violence against Roma and ways that the United States and Europe can work to end such violence

Day Six—Governments and Politicians

"Europe's Roma community still facing massive discrimination"

www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/features/stories/europes-roma-community-still-facing-massive-discrimination-20090408

April 8, 2009, overview of the forced relocations and anti-Roma policies in countries throughout Europe

"Roma People Face Discrimination, Attacks Across Europe"

www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/08/04/roma-people-face-discrimi_n_250868.html

September 3, 2009, article profiles the telling lack of support for a ceremony commemorating the murder of Roma and Sinti people by Nazis

"Immigrant Rights as Human Rights"

<http://blog.soj.net/blogs/2011/01/28/immigrant-rights-human-rights>

Blog post by Helene Slessarev-Jamir on *Sojourners'* blog *God's Politics*; explores the religious foundations of the right to immigrate in pursuit of livelihood or safety; includes reflections on what it means to be a citizen, documented and immigrant (posted January 28, 2011)

Day Seven—Segregated Schools

Romani CRISS (Roma Center for Social Intervention and Studies)

www.romanicriss.org

CRISS defends and promotes the rights of Roma in Romania by providing legal assistance in cases of abuse and working to combat and prevent racial discrimination against Roma in all areas of public life, including the fields of education, employment, housing, and health

"End segregation of Romani children in Slovakia's schools"

www.amnesty.org/en/appeals-for-action/end-segregation-romani-children-slovakia-schools

June 29, 2011, article detailing the types and prevalence of segregation of Roma children in schools in Slovakia

Ten Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Roma ♦ Resources, continued

Still Separate, Still Unequal

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqL0avSX8A&feature=related>

A nine-minute video showing the settlements in which many Slovakian Roma live and the highly segregated school system for Roma children; includes interviews with Romani children and parents

ERRC Research Coordinator Djordje Jovanovic on Romani Children in Institutional Care

www.errc.org/article/errc-research-coordinator-djordje-jovanovic-on-romani-children-in-institutional-care/3959

A three-minute video and transcript about the frequency of placing Roma children in institutional care to keep them out of national schools in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Romania and Slovakia

Day 8—Forced Evictions and Deportations

"Roma People in Europe: A Long History of Discrimination"

www.socialwatch.eu/wcm/documents/Roma_a_long_history_of_discrimination.pdf

Article by Laurant Renzi spotlights many of the anti-Roma policies of governments, particularly forced resettlement

"We'd like a place to stay"—Milan's Roma face eviction"

<http://live.wire.amnesty.org/2012/03/06/we%E2%80%99d-like-a-place-to-stay-milans-roma-face-eviction/>

Article about the continuing forced resettling of Roma people in Italy and conditions in their settlements

Day 9—Hope

Roma-Gadje Dialogue Through Service (RGDTS)/Phiren Amenca

RGDTS is a program that encourages young adults from western Europe or the United States to volunteer to do work requested by Roma communities in central and eastern Europe. Learn more at www.rgdts.net.

The Decade of Roma Inclusion

The Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005–2015) has three years left to improve the socioeconomic status and social inclusion of Roma. Twelve countries with significant Roma populations have committed to support the effort. Learn more at www.romadecade.org.

Presbyterian Women (PW) and Weaving a Future

PW's Roma development project, "Weaving a Future," is helping women in two Roma communities in Carpath-Ukraine launch a basket-making microenterprise. Donate by sending a check payable to Presbyterian Women, "PW UNDI1" on the memo line, to PW

Remittance Processing, PO Box 643652, Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3652. Visit www.presbyterianwomen.org/missionmatters.

PC(USA)'s Self-Development of People (SDOP)

SDOP awards grants to impoverished communities who have a plan to improve their communities but lack the financial resources. SDOP supports Roma development through Extra Commitment Opportunity E053728, which provides funding for Roma communities so that they can identify their own needs and find their own starting point for change. Give at <http://gamc.pcusa.org/give/E053728>.

Day 10—Expanding Circle of Caring for Roma

PC(USA) mission coworkers' Roma ministry

<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/missionconnections/smith-alan-and-ellen/>

Al and Ellen Smith support a Christian Russian Roma Network as part of their work in Germany and Moscow

<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/missionconnections/ayoub-nadia/>

Nadia Ayoub began a new appointment in 2010, serving in early childhood education in Ukraine

"An ecumenical contribution of European Churches and diaconal organisations to the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies"

www.ccme.be/fileadmin/filer/ccme/2011-03-25-EU_Framework_for_Roma_Eurodiaconia-CCME_FINAL.pdf

An overview of the Roma advocacy work of CCME (Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe) and Eurodiaconia in the European Union

"European Roma Policies: Too Little, Too Cheap"

<http://theeuropean-magazine.com/533-nicolae-valeriu/534-european-roma-policies>

Article by Valeriu Nicolae in February 16, 2012, *European* calls for education programs for non-Roma, to help end discrimination against Roma, and for bodies like the European Commission to include Roma leadership.

An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020

http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/discrimination/docs/com_2011_173_en.pdf

Action plan for countries of the European Union to end discrimination against Roma and work for the integration of Roma into their communities

Roma Virtual Network

Email Roma_Daily_News-subscribe@yahoo.com to receive news and information about Roma