

CIRCLE OF PRAYER

“We Lift Our Voices for the
Integrity and Well-being of
God’s Creation!”



*Many pairs of hands folded together in prayer
reach out to touch the whole earth*

VOLUME TWENTY-FIVE

CIRCLE OF PRAYER
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Theme:

***“We Lift Our Voices for the Integrity
and Well-being of God’s Creation!”***

Devotional thoughts and prayers to be used when
participating in the Fellowship of the Least Coin

Prepared by

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

for

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE LEAST COIN

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PRAYER OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE LEAST COIN

O loving Creator, we present ourselves in your divine presence to thank you for all the bountiful gifts of life. We are especially grateful for the Fellowship of the Least Coin which binds us together in love and forgiveness around the globe. Free us from all doubts and prejudices, we pray. Inspire us to live in solidarity with humankind that we may know the joy of giving and receiving.

Dear God, accept this least coin “token of love.” Make us mindful of the miracles of these coins. Let us honor your creation with love, as shown through the life, death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus the Christ.

Amen.

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED

**to participate with the Christian Women
of every continent in**

The Fellowship of the Least Coin

THE BASES OF BELONGING

are

**concern for reconciliation,
prayer for fellow Christians,
intercession for those in special need of God's grace.**

THE TOKEN OF PARTICIPATION

is

**a "least coin" set aside by the individual as each prayer
is offered and contributed annually to a common fund
which is given in the name of Christian women without
identification of its original source. This fund is used for
ministries of mercy on every continent; for experiences
which create Christian community across national, racial,
cultural, economic and denominational lines; and for work
for justice and peace throughout the world.**

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SUGGESTED REFLECTION AND PRAYER CALENDAR

Concerns / Issues	WHAT TO REFLECT ON & PRAY FOR
JANUARY: Christian Unity	For Christian Unity to be more visible and concrete in local communities
FEBRUARY: Love and Solidarity	For us to be more courageous to stay open and welcoming in our diversity and differences in race, gender, class, etc.
MARCH: Women and Women's movements	To learn more about the concrete situation and issues women face in our communities, and to pray and work with them.
APRIL: Earth/ Ecological Justice	To work with others who are working to help mend God's creation and seek justice for the Earth
MAY: Human Trafficking	For us to know more about this issue, and to find out how we can help prevent trafficking
JUNE: Children	For children to be treated as human beings everywhere. For us to know the situation of children in situations of conflict, poverty, migration.
JULY: Migrant Workers and Migration	For us to know why people migrate, and for migrant workers to be treated fairly everywhere.
AUGUST: Indigenous Peoples/First Nations	For us to learn about their struggles, and how we can work with them.
SEPTEMBER: Justice and Peace Movements	For more people to be socially awakened and take part in peace movements
OCTOBER: Farmers and Farm Workers	To know the issues farmers and farm laborers face, and how can we support them.
NOVEMBER: Violence	For groups advocating to end all forms of violence, esp. against women and children, and how we can work with them.
DECEMBER: Human Rights and Dignity	For us to learn more about our rights, and to pray for people whose rights and dignity are violated.

FOREWORD

“We’ve had enough of exhortations to be silent. Cry out with a hundred thousand tongues. I see that the world is rotten because of silence.” - St. Catherine of Siena

With a hundred thousand words we cry out in this issue of the FLC Circle of Prayer Volume 25 (CoP 25), with the theme, “We lift our voices for the integrity and wellbeing of creation!” We lift different voices from around the world - from different contexts, social locations and personal experiences. Not just to reflect on our particular experiences, but to pray for our needs to make our world a better one to live better lives.

Women belong to the group or voices that are “the preferably unheard”. But here we are, raising our voices to be heard by more people, and raising our prayers to God who hears and sees. We do not want our world to rot, nor do we want to be still exhorted to remain silent. Now we speak, and with this voice and speech of our realities, we utter our prayers for the wellbeing of all of God’s creation.

I pray that you have an engaging and profoundly life-giving and life-changing individual and collective reflections using this resource, the FLC Circle of Prayer 25!

Light and joy to us all,



LIZA B. LAMIS

*Executive Secretary
ICFLC*

We Lift Our Voices for the Integrity and Well-Being of God's Creation!

“Go up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news! Lift up your voice in strength, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news! Lift up your voice, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’” - Isaiah 40:9

This text of Isaiah has been identified as a prophecy that represents God’s calling. It calls us to look and act in anticipation of a future that is not yet here, but that we can certainly foresee. All of this is possible because we trust in a God that is with us, reversing and transforming our present reality and encouraging us to move towards that future that is yet to come.

You can see that the call is to go up on a high mountain where nothing is hidden; but also where one can see beyond one’s limited perspective. In spite of the fact that much pain and sorrow surround us, we do not fear, because God is with us - still re-creating and transforming the world and everything in it, including ourselves.

There are those who can only see doom and condemnation. Such a message pushes people into a dark pit of fear and despair. When that happens, some may feel guilty or frustrated. They are not able to find possibilities because they cannot see any. Others may continue to act as if nothing is happening. They may not hear and see because they don’t want to face the reality that is crushing and suffocating all of creation.

We lift up our voices, because that is what we are, bearers of good news. This task is not done in shame or fear. The message is true, and it brings good news to those that need to hear it.

There is a command to climb the mountain, and from there, open our eyes to see the future that is approaching. There is an imperative to proclaim that God is in our midst, and that God opens new possibilities and opportunities to hear the good news of peace and reconciliation to all of Creation.

As women, bearers of good news, we lift up our voices with clarity, with boldness, with passion, with strength, with love, so that the world may know and experience the Glory of God, revealed to us in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. We lift up our voices in prayer, because we know God hears and answers!

Hear our voices through this Circle of Prayer!



REV. YAMINA APOLINARIS-CONCEPCIÓN

Convenor, CoP 25 Committee



Hope in Despair

Aline Deyirmenjian, Lebanon
Text: Jeremiah 29.11

It is a declaration that God has a plan for us, yet in the midst of our trials, misfortunes, poverty, sickness, death or being a refugee we are lost. “Future”, “hope” and “a plan” become a luxury to some of us. We are trying to survive the moment. Yet, without hope and a plan for a future who can survive?

As a social worker I faced refugees who had lost everything. They didn't know where their future lies, or when would they immigrate and how will they survive. A father came to my office telling me that they fled from their homeland. His 30 year-old son who worked and provided for them a home and food had a heart attack and passed away. This father was not only grieving for his own son. He was also concerned about their future, how would they survive, where should they bury their son, or who would cover the burial expenses. Plans were shattered.

With each story of each life situation we are lost. We might ask God where the prosperous life is, and a future that was promised. We don't even have hope for the future anymore.

This verse begins with “I know the plans I have for you.” God has a plan for each and every one of us. It isn't our own plans God should fulfill but God's. Where, when and how is not in our hands. We are in God's hands. In our despair and exile when we are weak, we seek God - calling and praying. God promises to listen. In praying we find God, and there is our destination, our hope that doesn't disappoint us (Romans 5.5).

PRAYER

O God you are the provider of all. You know our past, present and future yet during difficult times we rely on ourselves and our wisdom which lead us to hopelessness. Help us to lift our eyes to you from whom our help comes from, and where our hope and future lie. Amen.



Aline Deyirmenjian is a member of the Armenian Evangelical Ashefieh Church, with a background in psychology and works as a social worker in the Armenian Evangelical churches in Beirut. Aline is married, and gifted with a daughter and son.

Women Step Forward in Faith

Annette Poitier, The Bahamas

Text: Numbers 27.1-11

The story of these five courageous young women is truly a story of faith. It gives us a glimpse of their family life through their names, all ending with the letters 'ah' - a contraction of the Hebrew form Jehovah, so that each of these girls bears in her name, the name of God. This was a common practice among the Hebrews, especially those who had strong faith. This indicates that they were from a very godly home.

These five young women came to Moses at a time when he was numbering the people of Israel in order to determine the allotment of land when they came into the promised land. Their father had died and they had no brothers. They were in a vulnerable position. Standing before the assembly was a risk that could lead to shame for any woman. But these young women knew military history and the law. Their request was clear and to the point. They appealed, not to Moses, the leader, but to the grace and mercy of God. And God said 'Yes'.

In 2002, after much petitioning and processing of laws in my country, the inheritance laws were finally changed so that if a father or mother died without a Will, all of the children, boys and girls, would share the properties equally. Prior to 2002, the entire property would have been passed on to the oldest male child and if there were no male children, then it would have passed on to the oldest male relative. Daughters, sisters, mothers, aunts, would be left with nothing. One of the stories used in the petitioning to Parliament and to the Legal System was the story of the Daughters of Zelophehad. We owe these five young women our gratitude.

However, in many communities today, women are still among the most vulnerable. Our cultures send many conflicting messages on

who is worthy to have, or not to have. Throughout scripture God uses the least and the most vulnerable to bring change. The five daughters challenged the status quo through faith and spoke the truth with great clarity. They pointed the way to which each and every person created in God's image is called to participate. This story sends its message in Jesus, who lived and died to protect the most vulnerable and to empower them to live a new life by his Spirit. Our call as Christians in every culture is to remind our people that Jesus came to make all things new in an all-embracing Kingdom of God, a Kingdom that includes everyone.

PRAYER

O gracious God, break down the barriers that separate us. Teach us to listen to the orphan and widow, the rich and the poor, the male and the female, and to allow their stories to shape ours. Give us courage to take risks to address injustice in our day. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Annette Poitier, a retired educator, now serves as Local Preacher in the Methodist Church in the Bahamas. She has been Chairperson of the World Day of Prayer International Committee and an ICFLC member.

God Hears!

Biyoora Shaya Kaneshapillai, Sri Lanka
Text: Genesis 21.16

A Montessori teacher who works with our church, a sole breadwinner with a 12 year old son, lost her husband during the 2007 to 2008 civil war. As a widow she took care of her family's needs. She became pregnant with her boyfriend who is 17 years her junior. There is an unwritten law in my country that says widows cannot re-marry, and women are not allowed to marry men who are younger than them. Our church kicked her out; her family members and friends rejected her.

With some friends in our church, we visited her and listened to her agonies and hardships. I believe it was God's way to have sent some people to listen to her, comfort her and give her courage to face our patriarchal and oppressive community. God always takes the side of people who are abandoned and stigmatized by society where the law rather than mercy prevailed. In her situation, God listened to her agony. Now she has her baby and she married her man. Now she is challenging the norms and living a role model for other women who are the sole bread winners and raise their families by themselves.

The first half of Genesis 21 is the story of Hagar the Egyptian slave oppressed by Abraham and Sarah. After having 'used' Hagar, they kicked her out from their family domain. In v.16 we read Hagar 'lifted up her voice and wept.' Verse 17 starts, "And God heard the voice of the boy..." For us this means God hears the voice and the weeping of the poor and abandoned people. Always, God identifies God's Self with the oppressed and the helpless. The Hagars amongst us must not faint nor fear, for God hears and sees, and will never forsake you.

PRAYER

God of life and love, you are the source of all life. We pray for those unable to live life fully because of gender-based violence, injustices and double standards. You have created all mortals with equal dignity and honor, with some enjoying their life and privileges at the expense of others. Many of us cry and struggle to live a life of peace, love, justice and care. Help us to love, care and serve one another. Through us show mercy to those in need. Wipe our tears away through people who listen to our cries and become your answer to our prayers, and that we may live the abundant life promised in Jesus Christ. Amen.



Biyoora Shaya Kaneshapillai is currently pursuing her Master of Divinity degree at Union Theological Seminary, Philippines. She will be the first woman pastor in the Church of the American Ceylon Mission (CACM), in Sri Lanka.

Longing for the Feminine Presence of God

Deborah Blades, USA
Text: Psalms 25.21

About ten years ago, I came across this book, *The Swallow's Nest: A Feminist Reading of the Psalms*, by Marchiene Vroon Rienstra. Psalms, like all Scripture, was written in male normative language and imagery for God and human experience. Rienstra, acknowledging Psalms' expression of wisdom, lament, and full range of human emotions in responding to God, has paraphrased each Psalm emphasizing, celebrating the feminine aspects of God, human nature and lived experience. What emerges is familiar language and thought, deeply rich, offering a meaningful devotional rendering for praying and meditating in new and enriching ways.

One of my interests as a feminist theologian is examining language as a tool, a system of power, and addressing the embedded abuses commonly thought of as "common sense." The almost exclusively male imagery and language for God continues to reinforce a language system that privileges men, legitimizes male dominance over all (patriarchy), and contributes to the erasing of the feminine aspects of the Divine. So what happens when social/culture/religion doesn't reflect experiences/perspectives of women or other non-white groups of people? What happens to girls/women when maleness is normative in language and women consistently hear words that don't reflect or name them?

- a) Women internalize they are secondary in the general cultural narrative; not primary.
- b) Women do not develop adequate mental representations as key actors in the world.
- c) Women, equally created in the Divine image, are not reflected in the Divine.
- d) Women run the risk of living in positions of subjection rather than subjects.

- e) With no framework as primary subject, women lose their voice.
- f) Loss of voice leads to voicelessness. Who will speak for you?
- g) With no one to speak for you, you are silenced.

Psalm 25 is a beautiful prayer that might be the prayer of an older woman being divorced by a callous and unfaithful husband. She opens her heart to God, offering her life to God, will not depend on self, but waits for God who is her refuge. Lonely and afflicted, troubled, distressed, she considers the pain of her mistreatment yet her eyes are fixed on El Shaddai (breasted one), knowing God will redeem all of her distress.

The goal is not to just replace masculine God-language with feminine. The biblical affirmation is: God is neither male nor female, but beyond both! God's nature includes qualities reflecting female and male in varying ways. We struggle getting past God called Father, or using feminine language for God. Let us start by thinking of the Holy Spirit as more feminine, so that our aspects can be more fully open to God's transforming grace in our lives. What might happen for women in our world if we were to affirm, nourish and empower the neglected and oppressed feminine Divine in the human soul, the church, society and the world?

PRAYER

May the blessing of El Shaddai, our Helpmate, Protection and Salvation, nourish our souls and restore our bodies through this day and forever more. Amen.



Dr. Deborah Blades, a feminist theologian from Fresno, California, ministers alongside her husband, a Presbyterian minister. She counsels and mentors women who have endured spiritual/religious abuse.

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One in Christ Jesus

Darwita Purba, Indonesia
Text: Galatians 3.28

Tata (not his real name), a transman, shared his story: “I once entered a church to worship, but everyone looked at me with a strange look. Then I heard a sermon from the priest on the pulpit saying: “Women should dress like women and men dress like men.” I felt the sermon was directed at me. Since then, I don’t want to come to church anymore.” A similar statement was made by Joe, a lesbian: “I heard the Pastor’s sermon about Sodom and Gomorrah, he stated that the LGBTIQ group are sinners and to be punished by God. I was afraid to hear that, since then I did not come to church anymore.”

The two stories above are of those who have non-heteronormative sexuality or gender, or often referred to as LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer). Most of them are uncomfortable in the church because they are often blamed by the church. They are regarded as sinful, immoral, and they bring infectious diseases to others. Finally, they are far from the life of the community of believers. Though they really miss fellowshiping with believers in the church, unfortunately the church members reject them.

Paul in Galatians 3.28 talks about the situation in the Galatians namely, the religious relationship between Jews and Greeks. Paul sought to erase religious distinctions between Jews and Greeks. The consequence of eliminating this distinction is the problem of servants and free people, as well as men and women undergoing change. The slaves became free, and so the women who were demeaned got the same privileges as men. Paul wants to emphasize that there are no boundaries in Christ; all are one in Christ Jesus.

This statement of Paul emphasizes that in Christ there are no longer boundaries of ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, social status, and so on. Before Christ all are the same. The church does not know

any boundaries, because the church is a collection of people who do not know these boundaries. So the church is something that is fluid and without limits.

Based on the description above, the church that knows no boundaries also does not impose limits on gender and sexuality; or the church does not recognize gender and sexuality. Therefore, anyone can enter the fellowship of believers, including those who have non-heteronormative sexuality or the LGBTIQ people. The church is a fellowship space that is open to all, because all is one in Christ Jesus. Unity in Christ breaks down all walls, including walls of gender and sexuality. Thus, those who have non-normative gender and sexuality are also part of this Unity in Christ Jesus.

PRAYER

O God, teach us to understand that we are all one in You, that Your love is unlimited and always open to everyone. Amen.



Rev. Dr. Darwita Hasiani Purba is a Pastor in the Simalungun Protestant Christian Church and Chairperson of Association of Theologically Educated Women in Indonesia.

Claiming Your Rights is Giving Others Justice

Francoise Niyonsaba, Rwanda
Text: Numbers 27.1-11

Women pastors in my church face the same challenge I had when I did my studies in Bachelor of Theology. Most of us were working far from home and mostly our husbands don't like to leave homes and live where the women are serving or studying. This caused problems in a family: the mother lives away, father and children are also living by themselves. It was not easy for the whole family. One day, we, women theology students invited the head of the women's department of our church to meet and have conversation with us about the challenges we face and our suggestions. We requested the church through her to assign women to churches near their families so that they can live as a whole family. From then on most of women pastors in our church worked in church and stayed with their families as well. This increased the stability of church ministry and boosted the wellbeing of families.

This story is similar to what Zelophehad's daughters did. The daughters said that Zelophehad's name should not disappear because he had no son. As his daughters, they need the land from their father's family. They raised their voices to claim their right to inherit and as a result, Israelite women were then entitled to their inheritance. Some names of the Israelites disappeared because they didn't have sons; but from the time of these committed women, some families are now recognized in Israel. Because of what they did others got their rights.

If we raise our voices we can help others get justice. Therefore, if we stand together and lift our voices to advocate for our rights, God's creation will get justice.

PRAYER

God of all creation, we bow before you. We lift together ours hands and voices to glorify your name. In humility we show you this planet where many of your creation are living. There are many calamities and disasters, many of these are human-made but others are natural. All these create many refugees and migrants. We pray that through your hands you show us mercy. Help those in exile, save those who suffer because of calamities. O God, protect our environment so that all creation will receive your salvation now, while waiting for your full salvation. O God, we pray that you bring justice, peace and love in this world. Where people don't harm others and we live without gender-based violence and all people have equal rights. We ask you to give us strength so that we can be responsible stewards who care for other creation. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



Rev. Françoise Niyonsaba is a Pastor in the Presbyterian Church of Rwanda, a Bachelor in Theology and Religious Studies graduate from the Protestant University of Rwanda.

Gender-based Abuse; A Challenge for All

Fiona Buchanan, Scotland

Text: Numbers 27:1-11

No need to look far these days to uncover the reality that we still have a long way to go to achieve gender equality. Our lives are littered with stories and often dangerous experiences women face daily because of their gender throughout the world. Piece them together and they form a web of haunting experiences and voices declaring that violence against women is the greatest human rights scandal of our time.

In Numbers 27.1-11 we read the story of Zelophehad's daughters, and the gender-based rights abuses that women commonly experienced at that time. This included an absence of inheritance rights, especially when a father died leaving only daughters. The result was a male relative inheriting his property instead of his daughters, a practice ratified by Mosaic Law. This repressive law was challenged by the daughters of Zelophehad, resulting in a significant change to the legal status of all Israelite women born into a family without a male heir. They identified an injustice and spoke out, challenging the patriarchal traditions of the time and forging a new path for women to have their rights recognised.

Many churches throughout the world have already clearly demonstrated their commitment to responding to gender inequality as a fundamental matter of faith. In Scotland, the Church of Scotland's Gender Justice Project seeks to assist ministers and congregations to support women in their midst. Many churches also engage with broader public campaigns on violence against women, including taking part in Thursdays in Black, and the 16 days of activism to end gender-based violence. The Scotland chapter of Side by Side, the faith movement for gender justice, shines a light on the challenges that faith communities face when working towards gender justice.

It is refreshing to see churches recognise that culturally-held gender norms and values have created a landscape in which expectations about men and women's respective places in society are damaging – for everyone. We see violence in the form of domestic abuse directed at women specifically because they are women and linked to society's expectations of women. It is up to all of us to make explicit and challenge these damaging gender constructions, and the structures and ideologies in the Church and in society that perpetuate gender inequality and lead to violence against women. We need women, and we need men, to be those challenging voices.

PRAYER

God, you taught us to speak out for what is right. We pray for an end to violence against women; that governments will protect the human rights of women; and for women and men to be partners for change, working together with mutual trust and respect. God of equity and justice, thank you for your vision of a world where gender justice will bring fullness of life. Amen.



Fiona Buchanan is the Campaigning and Advocacy Coordinator for Christian Aid Scotland, and a Co-President of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women. An elder in the Church of Scotland, Fiona works with women from across Europe to promote initiatives for peace, justice and reconciliation.

The God With Us!

Genny B. Dumay, Philippines
Text: Genesis 21.14-20

One of the bravest mothers I met is a solo parent named Beth. She has a lively nine year-old daughter with Down syndrome. When Beth's husband knew that she was carrying their first-born child with Down syndrome, he advised her to abort the fetus. She refused and instead chose to have her pregnancy carried full term, and to raise her with much love and care. When Beth gave birth to a baby girl with Down syndrome her husband abandoned them. Every year Beth would bring Michaela to Manila for medical checkup that lasts for weeks. She would stay with us and we witnessed her deep love and care for Michaela.

Beth has related how she struggled with rejection, abandonment and helplessness as a solo parent of a special child. Like Hagar she felt she was put in the wilderness to fend for herself and her baby. "I feel weak thinking of the future of my child. But I have learned to live with God's abundant grace of the present. This loving God has never left us and I feel strong to care for my child."

Like Beth, Hagar shows us that no matter how difficult life is, we are not alone. Both women dared to believe in God who 'sees us', who is compassionate and who holds a great promise and hope for each child. Both stood up to arise for their children. They have shown the power of God whose heart is on the side of the unjustly treated. With Hagar and Beth, we also lift up our voices with boldness to stand for the worth and rights of everyone, especially the downcast who have no one on their side. With them we work and pray for those who are made to suffer because we know God hears and answers their cry.

PRAYER

Loving God, you see with compassion our present conditions of slavery, children who cry out for comfort and food; mothers who lost their children because of senseless wars crying out for justice

and accountability; overseas working parents whose hearts are torn by pain and separation longing to be with their children; innocent children and women who are abused and silenced crying out for justice and healing; Indigenous Peoples whose lands are taken away by the powerful and feel helpless to fight back;... (other intentions can be added here).

Hear our cries as you heard the cry of Hagar in the wilderness. Help us arise from our fears and slavery; to always trust you and to walk with faith knowing that you are with us always, leading towards what is just, peaceful and true. Empower us to proclaim the good news that you are “God with us” - providing us new hope, opportunities and possibilities to live life in its fullness. Amen.



Sr. Genny B. Dumay, RGS, is an indigenous Good Shepherd sister from the Cordilleras working as a community social worker among children and women in Manila. Currently she is doing a research on children’s issues for the Vicariate of Bontoc Lagawe.

Little Throng of Worshipers

Julie Adlawan, Philippines/Australia

Text: Psalm 35.10

I pastorally accompany a community who lived most of their lives in the environment of drug use, violence and social discrimination. One day I organised a reunion for women who have now moved to a more decent and safe place before the Government barricaded the place, with an intention of a warming for Wilma (pseudonym) who lives on her own and has been in depression for many years now. Wilma's only companion in the house is a dog which added to her stress when it was diagnosed with cancer. Me and my team prepared everything for the party and gave her a token for she loves gardening.

Inspired by prayer, I thought of something that would tap their emotional and spiritual hunger without preaching to them (since some of them don't practice their faith/religion). After showing a video about self-image and self-esteem as a woman breakthrough came over. One jumped in and started speaking of her own feelings of insecurity and self-isolation in that area. I knew that this space of Vulnerability has become a "Sacred space" where I affirmed each one of them; that they are "seen" with dignity and grace; and that they are an important part of the community they built before. The rest of the women in the room shared theirs with tears. We finished the day with a prayer.

After fifteen years as neighbours this is the first time that they are able to thank each other and affirm each one another of how much their presence made them feel "seen" and consoled" amidst an aggressive environment they lived in. This is only few of a many grateful hearts revealed to us in the ministry which we, Missionaries of God's Love Sisters is grateful of. With this, I want to give glory and praise to God as it says in Psalm 35:10 "With my mouth I will greatly extol the Lord; in the great throng of worshipers I will praise him. For he stands at the right hand of the needy, to save their lives from those who would condemn them".

PRAYER

I thank and praise you O God, that though we are scattered and wounded, you faithfully and tenderly gather us in the name of Love. May these soft voices, almost like dried tears of your little ones reach you that we may receive the Love that can never be taken from us from now on. Let our small acts of love and faith in you and in each other bring us to hope, joy and peace. Amen.



Sr. Julie Ann Adlawan from the Philippines belongs to the Missionaries of God's Love Sisters, a home-grown Roman Catholic religious community in Canberra, Australia, that proclaims the God's Good News to the poor, young and marginalised.

Freedom from Slavery

Janejinda Pawadee, Thailand

Text: Romans 8.21-22

*A*s a social worker, I've been working and helping many women and girls from all forms of exploitation including sex trafficking. I followed law enforcement to different brothels and karaoke bars looking for victims who were forced into prostitution. Women and girls especially from Thailand, Cambodia, Lao and Myanmar told me that they only wanted to earn money but didn't want to sleep with men.

Nid (not her real name) was invited to come to work in Thailand by her mother who married a Thai. She was only 15 when she crossed the border to Thailand and worked in a karaoke bar. As undocumented, she earned very little from sex work. Later, she and her friends were found and removed from the karaoke bar. They were identified as victims of human trafficking because they are under age of 18. Nid and her friends have been placed at a government shelter.

After spending some time in government shelter, she was repatriated to her country. Nid has no place to live because her mother is living with her husband in Thailand and her older sister got married and lives with husband's family.

Nid stays with her sister. She is unhappy because she has no job and income, and just relying on her sister since she returned home. She lost hope and courage to live. I visited her a few times to encourage and support her. I asked friends from NGOs in her country to support and help her to get a job. Nid has no place to live and no family to rely on. She lives alone and lonely in the big city. I pray that she will be filled with hope and courage to live her life befitting of a human being created in God's own image, and not be trapped again in any form of exploitation just because she is vulnerable. May God keep her and girls like her safe from evil, and to enjoy her life as we do.

PRAYER

Dear Mighty God of creation, hear the cries of those trapped in the dark corners called brothels. They work long hours providing services to strangers, and live in fear from arrest as undocumented and illegal workers. These women are groaning and suffering, waiting for help to be free from exploitation and slavery. Because they are your creation, have mercy on them. Amen.



Janejinda Pawadee is Aftercare Manager of LIFT International in Chiang Mai, Thailand; and a social worker working passionately for human rights and gender justice. She is actively involved with the advocacies of her home church, the Church of Christ in Thailand.

Let Us Confess

Laurence Gangloff, France

The World Day of Prayer (WDP) is a global ecumenical movement led by Christian women who welcome all to join in prayer and action for peace and justice on the first Friday of March. In 2018, the writer country was Suriname, and women from Suriname offered to the world their concerns and joys. The questions from yester-years are still the questions and prayers of today, because the same environmental issues are challenging us today.

Let us hear the voices of women from Suriname and pray all together:

“We are created in God’s image. We are worthy just because God loves us, but the Creator holds us accountable for how we care for the environment and all the beings on earth. We can’t be careless or wasteful. It is time to seriously think about what we have done to God’s creation. God is trustworthy, and the Spirit of God prays with and for us. Let’s not lean back but do our utmost to preserve the earth for those who come after us. Let’s make others aware that we all are responsible to take care of the environment. May our creator, give us wisdom, strength and courage to carry on God’s call for climate justice.

Let us with the whole world **confess** our negligence in caring for God’s creation. O God, it seems that we are unable to understand how the negligence in our daily lives impacts the whole of creation.

All: O God, we ask you to forgive us.

Creator God, we affirm that all your creation is very good. But we have to confess our guilt in living with your creation without concern for caring. We recognize that development without sustainability or consumption without preservation endangers the future of the earth for the next generations.

All: *O God, we ask you to forgive us.*

We confess that we have not done enough to advocate for your creation with our governments.

All: *O God, we ask you to forgive us.*

We confess that we have not paid enough attention to the needs of our neighbours as Jesus told us to do. Let's have a moment of silence for personal prayer.

PRAYER

God, creator of the world and God of all humanity, we are here in your presence to ask for forgiveness for what we have done to bring harm and destruction to your creation. Forgive us for our neglect of creation and the intolerance that we have had towards each other. We are sorry for what we have done and would like to commit ourselves to being better stewards of your creation and caretakers of our neighbours with Jesus Christ as our example. Amen.

Note: *This confessional prayer was written by WDP Committee from Suriname for the 2018 celebration. Used with permission.*



The Rev. Laurence Gangloff is a Lutheran pastor in Strasbourg, France, and represents the WDP International Committee as its Chairperson (2017-2022) to the ICFLC.

We Lift Our Voices Against Gender-based Violence!

Marianna Apresyan, Armenia
Text: Numbers 27.1-11

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and due to calamities such as earthquakes, wars, political upheavals, socio-economic instability and low-level sex education, a stereotypical mentality in society emerged in Armenia. As a result, increase in sex-selective abortions and gender parity disorders has been reported. That is, the number of baby boys has substantially exceeded the number of baby girls. Additionally, sex-selective termination of pregnancy is carried out mainly at the 12-14 weeks of pregnancy which affects a woman's reproductive health.

Usually the sex ratio is 104-106 boys for every 100 girls. Although the number of boys born in postpartum period is high, the numerical ratio of young girls and boys becomes equal as the number of the boys' deaths is higher. During the Soviet period about 80,000 to 85,000 children were born in Armenia. Now there are 40,000 to 43,000 births, a sharp decrease in the birth rate.

According to official data, if the first-child ratio for boy and girl is 100 girls to 114 boys, and Armenia has found itself in third place in the world after China and Azerbaijan, our third child-ratio is the highest in the world, with 100 girls to 160 boys.

Preference for having a baby boy is primarily conditioned by the ideology of maintaining the family and the surname, the male-dominant position in the family, a more active role and the influence of boys in society, the men's high social standing and the parents' vision of having baby boys who will take care of them later in the future, and to whom they will hand down their possessions.

The biblical example of the daughters of Zelophehad and the action of Moses teach us not only to act justly and to follow God's law, but

also to accept boys and girls equally as God's creation. Preference for male over female children is a form of discrimination on the basis of gender. Aborting a female fetus because she is not male is a form of violence based on gender. This is against God's will that is to welcome all children as God's gifts regardless of their gender.

PRAYER

Almighty and merciful God, receive in your arms the souls of all baby girls killed as a result of abortion. Hear, O Jesus Christ, the voices of women who are forced to undergo abortion and forgive their sins. We pray and ask the Holy Spirit to give them peace and to bless them. Amen.



Marianna Apresyan holds doctorate degrees in History and Theology, and belongs to the Armenian Apostolic Church. She is currently Co-President of Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women.

Lifting Our Voices for Those on the Run

Martina Heinrichs, The Netherlands

Text: Genesis 21.14-20

The story of Hagar, an Egyptian slave whom Abraham sent away into the desert with her baby boy, ends up with hope as God is in solidarity with her, saving her child and making him the father of a great nation and even of a new religion: Islam. God is with those who are on the edge of society. God stands on the side of the “other”, of outcasts and strangers, those who do not fit into the norms of main stream society. Jesus says: “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Matthew 25.35, 36).

In the last years huge numbers of men, women and children left Africa and tried to enter Europe seeking a better life, escaping from war and violence, hunger and unemployment, poverty and hopelessness. And what ‘receiving’ countries do? They offer no hospitality but a strict policy of closed borders, cruel and inhuman laws which forbid ships in the Mediterranean Sea to rescue the refugees in their poor and dangerous rubber dinghies. Some succeed in reaching Europe, but then they are so-called ‘illegal’- without papers, undocumented.

I work with gay and lesbian refugees who had to flee from the homophobia of churches and social groups in their home countries. They have been told that they are sinners, and were banned from their faith communities. They were threatened to be killed. Arriving in a European country, again they are refused. Luckily, there are some networks and groups that help these people during court procedures and trials, and find a place for them to live and work.

Psalm 24 says, “The earth is God’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.” So, who are we to determine that the have-nots and those in danger are not allowed to enter the area of the haves, the rich ones? Why can we not share?

PRAYER

Dear God, you are with the homeless, with those who had to flee like Hagar. You are in solidarity with refugees who had to escape from injustice, violence and war. You created the earth for everyone in fullness and abundance. Help us to open our hearts and hands to receive the strangers and refugees, to share our riches, and give shelter and hospitality to those in need. Help us to fight for better and just laws for everyone. Let all violence and wars end, and fairness, love and respect prevail. In Jesus' name, with the inspiration and strength of the Holy Spirit, Amen.



Martina Heinrichs is a Roman Catholic feminist theologian and Programme Director at the Retreat Centre and Priory of the Dominican Friars in Huissen, the Netherlands. She represents the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women (EFECW) to the ICFLC.

Groaning Towards Fullness

Margaret Lacson, Philippines/Japan
Text: Romans 8.21-22

I have been accompanying Filipino communities in the Yokohama Diocese and in the past two years I was able to assist in starting a Home Rosary ministry. We have determined that the Home Rosary is a good way to reach out to many Filipino women, wives of Japanese men, who are not able to come to church.

In praying the Rosary and meditating on its mysteries we get to reflect on the life and ministry of Jesus, and to have deeper awareness of God's presence in our lives. We reflect and pray with the biblical texts of the mysteries, and we feel enriched in faith and in the sharing of wisdom for the many problems and troubles of life as migrants in Japan. When we pray together, we realize that we are all human beings with varying burdens and troubles, and we give strength to each other. The following are some of the women's stories:

- One woman attempted to end her life. She was missing at the gathering for the home Rosary so we gave her many calls. When she came to Church two days later we found out that she was trying to end her life during that time. She shared with us that she believes it was Mama Mary who kept her from dying.
- Another woman's daughter had committed suicide. Only in praying with her the Mysteries of the Resurrection and the Ascension could we help console her in the reality of New Life with Christ for her daughter in the New Heaven and New Earth where all tears are wiped away.
- A woman who cares for five children in the home reflects on the mystery of Mary as one who has experienced being a woman and a mother on earth. She understands what a woman goes through in life as well as a woman's sufferings, concerns and joys as she cares for a growing family.

These are but a few stories of the women “groaning in labor pains” as they strive to live daily, trying to stabilize their lives in order to live meaningfully and with dignity as migrants in Japan. Sometimes they are lost and are searching. It is through our faith that we are brought together in prayer wherein we find God in our midst and we share strength with each other.

PRAYER

O God, Creator of All Life, we believe You are with us and we are with You, groaning together in labor pains for a world free of slavery and corruption. Bless our lives. Bless our efforts to live fully and with dignity as migrants in Japan. May our efforts bring FULLNESS OF LIFE to all other migrants in Japan and throughout the world, that all may live in the glorious freedom of the children of God. Amen.



Sr. Margaret Lacson is a Filipino Maryknoll Sister sent to Japan in 1993 and works with migrant communities there since 1999.

Prophetic Voices of Youth

Marilyn Lariviere, USA
Text: Hebrews 3:6-10

"If today you hear his voice harden not your hearts." The letter to the Hebrews reflects on when the Israelites doubted God, and as their hearts were hardened, we see that God became angry with that generation.

For us today in the USA, in many instances, it is the YOUNGER generation, not the ADULTS who have now become the leaders. On February 14, 2018, a former student at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shot and killed 17 people, CBS News began following a group of students who banded together to fight back. They set out to let the world know immediate change is needed to save lives. We could see the students' raw emotions as they grieved and worked around-the-clock in an effort to change the gun laws of this country.

Student Delaney Tarr shared her thoughts: "The shooter was able to legally purchase that semi-automatic rifle and come into my school and slaughter 17 of my people. Because of these gun laws, people that I know, people that I love have died. And I will never be able to see them again. Seventeen people of my peers, my teachers, they died. ...Ultimately, the only way I feel I can really heal is if I try to make a difference. Because of the systematic failure of our government on every level, people are dying every day."

Emma González on "Face the Nation": We have a website, March For Our Lives. We're going to do a march in March on Washington where we get students all over the country are going to be joining us... the adults let us down.

The "March For Our Lives" Rally took place in Washington, D.C. and cities around the country and the world.

In my hometown on Cape Cod, in March 2018 I joined hundreds of youth and adults who came together on the Town Green to listen to

student speakers who called for change in our gun laws. As Local Vice-President of Grandmothers Against Gun Violence, I was asked to speak at the Rally. However my brief comments were simply to say that my generation has failed in making the world safe for our children and grandchildren, and that it is time for us to support the leadership of our young people. Our generation has hardened our hearts and worshiped the God of consumerism.

May we work at being open to the Holy Spirit and listen to the prophetic voices in our midst!

PRAYER

Creator God, we offer our grief, our anger, and our frustration at the senseless shootings in our country and in the world. Help us to turn our emotions into action to make a difference and to keep our children safe from violence. Help us to keep our hearts open and filled with compassion. Amen.



Marilyn Lariviere is a human rights advocate, grandmother and ecumenical leader. She was past president of CWU USA, and immediate past Honorary Treasurer of the ICFLC.

If the Earth Shakes...

Marines Santiago Calderon, Puerto Rico
Text: Romans 8.21-22

In 1979 a tropical song by Johnny Pacheco and Héctor Casanova went viral on the radio: “*Si la tierra tiembla yo me voy de aquí*” (If the earth shakes, I’ll get out of here). I didn’t understand the context of such composition since we rarely experience earthquakes in PR. The Caribbean is the highway of storms and hurricanes. We had such a hard experience in 2017 because of Hurricanes Irma and María, and still, we are dealing with its consequences. Another type of storm hit us previously: a fiscal debt since 2008 and the government doesn’t explain how we got there.

Our more than 200-year colonial status aggravates our political and economic situation. And if that weren’t enough, for the first time in decades, and since December 2019, the south side of the main island is trembling. More than 300 seismic movements in less than two weeks have affected the area. This frequent seismic activity has shown that we have an infrastructure that needs to be revisited by new construction standards.

As usual, different voices have raised trying to make sense of this unusual situation. And the religious voice is crucial for our culture. Puerto Rico had been subject to more than 500 years of colonization, first under Spain, imposing Catholicism since 1492 and United States since 1898 brought Protestantism. Catholicism and Protestantism mixed of course with our popular religion brought by African slaves and other culture influences to the Caribbean.

Recently an alleged prophet spoke in God’s name. His words caused more anxiety and disturbance to our people: that we were under God’s damnation for our sins. All human beings are sinners; that’s the reason for Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. But let’s think again. Is God punishing innocent people, the God who sent the beloved son to die for humanity really hate us all? People lost their homes, children

don't have schools, and the sick didn't get medical attention. Almost 8,000 are in total despair, sleeping in parks and improvised shelters in the plaza or square. People all over the Island have poured their hearts to the south by sending water, tents, food. They have offered psychological counseling, and teachers to attend children. Churches have been providing food, spiritual care, and shelter. The list goes on.

But then, God's voice came through an experienced pastor in the radio: "When the earth totters, with all its inhabitants, it is I who keeps its pillars steady" (Psalms 75.3).

PRAYER *(You may say your own prayer for the Earth and the natural world around you, and for you as its caretakers.)*



Marinés Santiago Calderón is a Pastor of the Christian Church Disciples of Christ in Rio Nuevo Dorado, Puerto Rico, Co-coordinator of Pastoral de Mujeres y Justicia de Género del CLAI in Puerto Rico, and professor at Universidad Teológica del Caribe en Recinto Dorado.

Laughing and Weeping

Rima Nasrallah Beirut, Lebanon

Text: Genesis 21.5-21

This is a story about laughter and weeping. Read from the perspective of those for whom the story was first written, this narrative must have sounded ridiculous. Hagar was an Egyptian slave. Abused by a powerful Israelite family in order to fulfil their dream of a dynasty, then tossed aside – even kicked out – when her services were no longer needed. The powerful family, in the person of laughing Sarah, was not ready to tolerate the offspring of the slave. And the slave ended up in a desert. Would this resonate with a story well known to those Israelites hearing it? It sure should! A reversal of the parameters of the Exodus story. Shockingly, the traditional heroes are the villains here and the victim is the Egyptian.

This Egyptian slave woman was sexually abused at the orders of her mistress. Abandoned by the father of her son who sends her off alone, unprotected and without sheep, escort, or mule - though he had plenty - only a skin of water for her infant.

Lebanese society relies a great deal on female domestic workers. Girls and women are brought to Lebanon by local dealers to serve in the homes of families from all religious backgrounds and various socio-economic levels. It is estimated that 250,000 domestic workers are in Lebanon to serve 4.5 million people. These women are at the mercy of both dealers and the families who function within the sponsorship system called kafala; a system restricting the domestic workers' movements and keeps them at the total mercy of the family with whom they live. A great majority of these domestic workers experience abuse, some sexual in nature leading to alarming rates of deaths; at least one reported death per week!

The word of the domestic worker is rarely, if ever, taken seriously by the authorities and no matter what the offence, it is the domestic worker who ends up abandoned 'in the desert' after having satisfied the needs of the family.

In the Biblical text, Hagar lifted up her voice and wept, echoing the cries of thousands of domestic workers in the region. As experienced readers of scripture, we tend to sympathise with Sarah, Abraham and Isaac rather than with the outsider. But God's narrative always sides with the oppressed and walks with those who need an 'exodus'. Though humans have abandoned Hagar, God did not.

God heard Hagar, just like God heard the Israelites when they were slaves in Egypt. God hears the cries of Ethiopian, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Philippine, and Kenyan women today. And God demands of the Church to open its ears and respond to these cries by allowing these women access to "the water of life" that will quench their thirst and give new and better life.

PRAYER

God, you hear the cries of your people wherever they are. Help us to hear as you hear; and respond by offering deliverance transcending the barriers of race, ethnicity and religious difference. Amen.



Rev. Dr. Rima Nasrallah is Assistant Professor of Practical Theology at the Near East School of Theology and pastor at the National Evangelical Church of Beirut.

Rape is No Joke!

Arceli Pepito-Bile, Philippines
Text: Romans 8:21

Romans 8:21 speaks about the liberation of creation from bondage. It is important to name the “bondage” that creation continue to experience. It is by naming them that we are able to find our way to liberation and freedom. I will name one, gender-based violence.

“As long as there are many beautiful women, there will be more rape cases.”¹ This is one of the many rape ‘jokes’ that the Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said in his many speeches. The president’s remark is a powerful example of the culture of blaming the victim for her rape. Rape victims need justice; blaming them does not help at all.

What would rape victims feel in hearing this remark? What would the perpetrators feel? What does this remark teach our children? What would be the impact of hearing ‘rape jokes’ from a national leader?

In the Philippines, male dominance in a patriarchal society has significantly affected the lives not only of women, but even of the young and our children today. Violence against women and children has worsened because of the political, socio-economic and cultural situation. According to the Center for Women’s Resources, one woman or child is raped every 53 minutes; and one woman is battered every 16 minutes. Seven in 10 victims of rape are children.

Adults play a significant role in creating a safe and better world for children. As educators, it is important that we women invest our time in teaching our children and young people the value of respect. It is important that children learn to embrace the sanctity of life and the dignity of every person.

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2018/08/31/philippine-president-says-so-long-women-are-beautiful-there-will-be-cases-rape/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.b74276b5da58

While we teach young girls about loving and protecting themselves, we also need to teach young men and boys about respect to women and girls as human beings. Men and boys have to take responsibility in their sexual behavior. Rape is a power issue. Rape is abuse of power using sex as a weapon. No one should think that he or she has the right to do something against the will of another. Rape is just wrong and rape jokes are unacceptable.

For those who have become victims of gender-based violence, let us embrace them with our prayers and include them in our advocacies towards gender justice. To liberate creation from its bondage, we need to do something. Now.

PRAYER

Loving God, teach us to value every person. Remind us always that we are all created in your image. Empower us to resist all forms of violence; and help us to be advocates for gender justice. Amen.



Arceli Pepito-Bile is a deaconess in the United Methodist Church. She is currently the Acting Program Secretary of the Unit on Ecumenical Education and Nurture of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines.

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The World Day of Prayer (WDP) program of 2018 was written by the women of Suriname, a country located in South America. Under the theme “All God’s creation is very good,” this small country in the global south, with its 15.3 million hectares of forest covering approximately 94% of its surface area (FAO, 2015), was “crying out” to the world.

Why do we trash where we live? Why is the water we drink contaminated? Why are sea turtles endangered? Why is there so much violence among human beings and destruction of the environment? There is such a disconnection between what is believed and what is lived out.

Every year WDP publishes a Journal which gives a global picture of the annual observance. Reading the 2018 Journal based on the Suriname program, we get a clear idea of how environmental care is a global concern. From climate change perceived by the droughts or high tides in the Marshall Islands, to sand mining, deforestation and water pollution in Grenada, to the connection of environmental crisis to gender based violence in Ghana, World Day of Prayer communities brought to the forefront of prayer the endangered future of the next generations.

The sisters from Suriname established the connection between faith and life by demonstrating how simple acts based on informed prayer can affect the global community. In Germany, they have suggested reducing the consumption of meat and dairy, riding a bike when possible, and avoiding cosmetics with micro plastic particles.

Guatemala wants to initiate a campaign to preserve water, decrease the consumption of products that contaminate nature and of materials that cannot be re-used. Whereas in Lebanon, the WDP committee distributed cedar shoots to give back to the Earth.

In our collective ‘cry out’ we lift up our voices for the integrity and well-being of God’s creation. We remember the people of the forests and the environmental leaders who have been martyred by the forces of greed, like Berta Cáceras in Honduras, and others who live threatened by those forces, like Francia Marquez in Colombia.

PRAYER

Creator God, we have seen the ‘grass drying out and the flowers fading’ (Isaiah 40: 8), but we trust that your word of justice will stand forever. Nurture our heart and witness in your love. Amen.

Note: Text adapted from 2018 WDP Journal, From eye-opener to hands-on, by Rosângela Oliveira. https://worlddayofprayer.net/uploads/7/4/0/5/74052031/wdp_journal_2018_fa_final.pdf



Rev. Rosângela Oliveira is an ordained minister of the Methodist Church in Brasil. She is WDP International Committee Executive Director since 2012, after serving the United Methodist Women as Regional Missionary for Latin America for 10 years.

Self-care, God's Care

Maria Sophia Lizares, Philippines/Australia

Text: Isaiah 40.6-11

I broke my kneecap some months ago, slipping on a piece of plastic and falling over. Some friends suggest that there is a divine message behind the injury. Perhaps God was telling me to slow down, to know the limits of age. They talk about my knee. My body. As if it wasn't mine. When they do that, I feel they devalue my experience with my own body. I claim my voice to say: It was just an accident. Integrity is defining my experience for myself and claiming my voice to speak from it.

Tightly bandaged with a rigid brace strapped around it, my knee and leg seemed to belong to doctors and nurses, in fact to the whole health system that filed my medical history into the national data base. It also became an agenda item at work. Who was liable if I was injured doing my usual duties, or maybe in the event of an emergency? I was reduced to a broken kneecap, an insurance risk. A statistic, instead of a human created with dignity in the image of God. I raise my voice to say: True, the grass withers, the flower fades, but God's promise of wholeness stands forever! I will mend. I am not a liability; I am an asset. In radical person-centred care, I define myself.

Yet in the safety of the brace, my knee mended in darkness just as God knits us in our mothers' wombs. I remove the brace daily to air my knee and say hello to it, rubbing it gently with lavender-scented lotion. Knowing, touching, loving it the way God soothes my soul and gathers it like a lamb in almighty arms. I allow God to touch me, to define me, to love me.

In the caring touch of many, I see God: in my husband of strong arms and good humour, in the physiotherapist who cheers each milestone, and in friends who ply me with stories and pictures of the world beyond a broken kneecap. Then there is the sun and the rain, the eucalypts and the spring flowers. God's creatures all, they are to me ministers of a loving servant God, leading me gently.

PRAYER

Gentle God, help me fall in love with the mess of my life. Sanctify the mess of my life, this wild, uncontrollable, unplanned, unexpected moment of existence. Dignify it with your loving attention. Expand it with Your hope, Your courage and my gratitude. Make me a mess-iah. (adapted from Jeff Foster)



Rev. Maria Sophia Lizares from the Philippines is a journalist, sociologist and Third World theologian in diaspora, and an ordained minister of the Uniting Church in Australia serving in the Perth Hills. She has been Chaplain in a church community services agency engaged with those experiencing homelessness in the inner city.

Painfully Aware

Nguyen Thi Thuy Trinh, Vietnam

Text: Romans 8.20-23

In April 2016 Vietnam faced with what is thought to be the country's worst environmental disaster. Water pollution from toxic industrial waste discharged by a steel plant of Formosa Plastics poisoned up to 125 miles of Vietnam's central coastline, killing more than 70 tons of fish, affecting 450 hectares (1,112 acres) of coastal reef, of which half were totally destroyed. Today, lives remain ruined as locals still wrestle with poverty and sickness due to polluted waters. Today, Formosa pollution still sends people to prison in Vietnam as the government cracks down on protesters seeking compensation.

When creation groans, we, too, groan. The environmental crisis is not simply ecological. Deep down it is our inability to live with genuine regard for our fellow human beings and all living beings. The danger of our time is our immersion into the digital world to an extreme. We are cutting ourselves from feeling fully alive, from connecting with each other and having a sense of meaning and purpose that comes from belonging to something greater than ourselves. We thought we could step outside of our environment to examine it and control it, but we are not separate from nature. Nature is who we are, down to the cellular level. Nature builds us, nourishes us, and breathes us every second of every day. We are merely that part of nature that can think, feel, and act self-consciously.

Therefore, being connected with nature is so critical to our well-being and the well-being of the world. Science and technology have somehow limited out definition of knowledge to reasoning and rationalization. What about knowledge that comes from cooking, being able to walk, gardening or prayer? I recall my childhood memories when together with friends we played in the forest, immersing ourselves in the waterfalls, or simply laying down upon the earth, and looking at the sky. Those were peaceful and awesome moments. I can still

experience it myself afresh as a living being among other living beings alive in this world. There is no inside or outside. I am in the world, but the world is also moving in me. I am acting on it, but it is also acting on me. In some mysterious ways, intimate contact with nature gives us knowledge and awareness of ourselves that we can come to in no other way. That also includes the very felt knowledge that we belong to something greater, a reality that embraces every living being, a wholeness in which we live, move and have our being.

PRAYER

Creator God, Mother of all living beings, we are all yours. Teach us the wisdom and humility of the children of God to recognize you in one another and in the whole creation. Be with us as we struggle to protect our common home. Amen.



Nguyen Thi Thuy Trinh from Vietnam is currently a Master of Arts in Religious Education (Scriptures) student at the Institute of Formation and Religious Studies (IFRS) in the Philippines.

Created in God's Image

Vasiliki Mavroska, Greece

Text: Genesis 1.26-27

Reading the Bible from its beginning, I cannot stop thinking of our being created by our Triune God. It is an extraordinary fact that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, and I am really fascinated that humankind bears the image and likeness of God. Ontologically speaking, men and women belong to the unity of the Triune God, and that also means the same in the Church. St. Maximus the Confessor wrote that the universe is the Church herself, and the Church is the universe.

The human crisis in my country with the refugees mainly from Syria, is the denial of a good number of European Countries to accept them as people of God - whether they be Christians or Muslims, Europeans or not, and having their own customs and traditions. "Being created according to the image of God" means that we - all living persons, not only the baptised ones - have the possibility to become gods by grace. "According to the likeness of God" means that we have all the advantages to reach our goal. With only one condition: our free will, in order that "creation itself will set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Romans 8. 21).

There is a blaring, ultimate need to recognize the "other" as "me"; to open our eyes and to meet the original beauty which God created us with; to join our voices and our prayers for a united world, with our great differences and variations, mixtures and parallels. I pray for this!

PRAYER

Dear Triune God, help us open our eyes so that we may see, when we discriminate and don't see anything. Help us to see your glory and your holy face. Touch and open our hearts to see your face in all those in hunger, seeking refuge and on the run.

The world has been created so well! Please God, help us see that and act for the wellbeing of the world. We pray and humbly ask you to help us see the beauty of the world and feel blessed and safe. Amen.



Dr. Vasiliki Mavroska is Associate Professor of Dogmatics at the Ecclesiastical Academy of Athens, a board member of the Greek National Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women (EFECW), “Damaris the Athenian”, and a mother of two young children.

Living Hope

Valamotu Palu, Tonga/Australia

Text: Romans 8. 21 – 22

Hope is so meaningful when we go through pain and sufferings. Hope is needed when we are desperate for freedom and joy. Hope liberates and bring lights into darkness.

Our human history is littered with wars and disputes, natural and human-made disasters, violence and crimes. When we are out of strength and especially out of faith, we start asking the “Why” questions. Why do we suffer? Why God allows us to go through pain and struggles? Why me? Why us? Why now?

In v. 18, Paul begins with this affirmation, “I consider that what we suffer at this present time cannot be compared at all with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.” He continued to affirm that regardless of the pain, all of God’s creation are eagerly waiting and longing for the revelation of God and that was the hope, the living hope.

How does this message lift the spirits of people in the smaller island nations of the Pacific who love their islands and struggle with climate change issues, while watching these islands slowly washed away by the sea? How does it help women who silently suffer violence every day? Families separated, starved and in refugee camps because of wars? The Indigenous People who mourn the destruction of their rainforest, lands and their identities? The young people on the streets who feel that home is no longer safe for them? People who think they have everything but have no peace of minds and hearts? People who have lost faith in themselves and in the Living God?

We are all responsible to help and to reach out to each other in so many different ways. If you wish to make this world a better place, shine your light so that we can see each other’s eyes and say to each other, “God is with us always. God is the Living God and we should have a Living Hope.”

PRAYER

We thank you God for giving your life in suffering and dying on the Cross so that we may have fullness in life. Your resurrection brought us hope regardless of what we are struggling with these days. Instil your wisdom in our hearts as we suffer injustices. Bestow your grace upon us so that we can respond to all suffering as people with a living hope. May the FLC movement continue to be an instrument of Peace, Love and Reconciliation to the world. Amen.



Rev. Valamotu Palu was Chair of the ICFLC in 2003 to 2004, former General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, former member of the World Council of Churches Executive and Central Committees. An ordained minister of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, she is currently serving Tonga Parish Uniting Church in Sydney, Australia.

YOU ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE
with Christian Women, Men, Youth and Children
of every continent in the **FELLOWSHIP OF THE LEAST COIN**

THE BASES OF BELONGING
are concern for justice, peace and reconciliation; and
intercession for those in special need of God's grace.

THE TOKEN OF PARTICIPATION
is a **"Least Coin"**

set aside whenever Prayer is offered
and contributed annually to a common Fund
which is given in the name of Christian women
without identification of its original source.

This fund is used as **"gifts of love"**
for ministries of mercy on every continent;
for experience which creates Christian community
among those of different national, racial, cultural,
economic and denominational backgrounds.

The least coins are tangible token of our prayers
offered individually and collectively.
Those contributions—**"Gifts of Love"** however small or large,
may be sent in the name of **Fellowship of the Least Coin.**

Send your FLC Offerings to:

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<i>Name of Account Holder:</i>	CHURCH WOMEN UNITED OF CAPE COD
<i>Full Name of Beneficiary:</i>	Mary Martin, ICFLC Honorary Treasurer marymckeemartin@outlook.com; icflcph@gmail.com
<i>Full Address of Beneficiary:</i>	4176 Neely Meadows Court, Norcross, GA 30092 USA

Kindly note to email Mary Martin, and copy to icflcph@gmail.com
Thank you!

From:

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