

PRAY FOR A JUST PEACE IN GAZA AND ISRAEL
PRESBYTERIAN CENTER
JANUARY 8, 2009

As followers of the Prince of Peace, who has shown us that true victory comes only through non-violent reconciliation, we yearn for an end to sixty years of conflict, violence, and oppression, all of which have left scars on all parties regardless of ethnic, religious, or political identification and have contributed to wider uncertainty about global peace. It will require not only our fervent prayers, but a renewed commitment to action so that when a cease-fire is achieved, it is followed by a new commitment by all parties to the rule of law as the only path to justice, security, and freedom for all.

The Rev. Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
January 7, 2009

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather in a world of broken bodies and wounded hearts

To worship the God who satisfies our deepest hunger.

We gather in a world of violence and division

To worship the God who welcomes all strangers.

We gather in a world of symbols: crosses, crescents and stars

To worship the God whose only creed is love.

We gather in the world of the powerful and of those who desire power

To worship the God who calls us to each other and into our world.

Come, let us worship the God whose love breaks down all barriers.

LIGHTING A CANDLE

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." We light this candle not to invoke Christ's presence for Christ is with us always.

We light this candle as a reminder of the hope that Christ brings for all people – our sisters and brothers in Gaza, in Israel, on the West Bank, and around the world.

A TIME OF SILENT PRAYER

SCRIPTURE READING

Isaiah 1:5b-6

The whole head is sick,

And the whole heart faint.

From the sole of the foot even to the head,

There is no soundness in it,

But bruises and sores

And bleeding wounds;

They have not been drained, or bound up,

Or softened with oil.

A LITANY FOR PEACE DURING VIOLENCE IN GAZA

O Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world,

Have mercy upon us.

O Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world,

Have mercy upon us.

O Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world,

Grant us your peace.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Gracious God, we thank you during this holy season for the birth in Bethlehem of the Word made flesh, your Son, Jesus Christ; who dwelt among us full of grace and truth.

Lord in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We thank you for his life; his death here in Jerusalem as he carried our sins and suffering, and for his glorious Resurrection in which he gave us new life with him. Lord in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We thank you for entrusting to us the ministry of forgiveness, reconciliation and peace-making for the healing of your creation. Lord in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We pray for all victims of bloodshed, violence and persecution and those who are in danger here in this Land -- in Gaza, Israel, the West Bank and throughout the world. Lord in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We pray for all who grieve for loved ones who have died in the desperation of violent actions this past week. Lord in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We pray for all who promote violence, that their hearts may be turned to the way of peace. Lord in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We pray for children and young people that you may fill them with hope for the future. Lord in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We pray for the guidance of your Holy Spirit upon us, upon Palestinian and Israeli leaders, upon President Abbas, Prime Minister Olmert, upon all those in leadership positions in the military and defense establishments, upon all the leaders of the United Nations and upon all those in authority in the nations of the world to seek peace and pursue it. Lord in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Gracious God, we praise and glorify you. You are our only refuge in a troubled world. Lord in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

Lord God Almighty, you have made all the peoples of the earth for your glory, to serve you in freedom and in peace: Give to us and the people of all the nations a zeal for justice and the strength of forbearance, that all of your people may use their liberty in accordance with your gracious will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalm 46:9-11

God makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
God breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
God burns the shields with fire.
'Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth.'
The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Isaiah 2:4

They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war any more.

Amos 5:24

But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Matthew 5:8

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

A TIME OF SILENT PRAYER

CLOSING PRAYER

Eternal God, our only hope,
our help in times of trouble:
show nations and peoples ways to work out differences.
Particularly this day, we pray for the people and leaders
of Gaza, Israel, and the West Bank,
Do not let threats multiply
or power be used without compassion.
May your will overrule human willfulness,
so that people may agree and settle claims peacefully.
Hold back those who are impulsive,
lest desire for vengeance overwhelm our common welfare.
Bring peace to earth, through Jesus Christ,
the Prince of Peace and Savior of us all. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CHARGE AND BENEDICTION

The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto God's self and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." Christ charges us to practice God's justice and peace and seek life in all its fullness for all people, everywhere.

The courage of Jesus Christ, the love and peace of God and the grace of the Holy Spirit will be always with us.

In the name of Christ, through whom God has made peace with us, I invite you to share signs of peace with one another.
Amen.

Service Notes

Casualty figures for the current violence remain unclear. On Wednesday, January 07, 2009, the BBC reported that:

- More than 600 Palestinians are now believed to have been killed since Israel began its offensive 11 days ago.
- Palestinian health ministry officials say at least 195 children are among those killed.
- Israel has lost seven soldiers on the ground.
- Four people within Israel have been killed by rockets.

See http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7814772.stm.

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The Call to Worship is found in the worship service, *The Resurrection Hope*, created for the Week of Prayer and Witness with Christians in the Middle East. It is adapted slightly.

The Litany for Peace During Violence in Gaza has been used for the past two weeks in worship at the Cathedral of St. George the Martyr in Jerusalem. It is adapted slightly.

The Closing Prayer is found in the *Book of Common Worship*. It is adapted slightly.

## Prayers to Use in the Silence and through the Week

Dear Lord, there is too much hate in the Holy Land. Teach your children in the Holy Land to forgive one another so that their transgressions can be forgiven too. Let all those who are fighting the innocent and killing defenseless people repent from their sins. Restore, O God, the sanctity of life in their hearts. Let them realize that it is you alone God who gave life and no one else should take it without your blessing. Palestinians struggle every day to get their daily bread. The Israeli occupation makes it impossible for them to sustain themselves and their families. God of mercy, we ask you to soften their hearts so that people of Palestine can have bread on the table as well. Create our Lord the conditions for transformation to take place in the lives of all those involved in bringing about a peaceful and just solution in the Holy Land. Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Lord we pray! Amen.

- The YWCA of Palestine, a member of the Joining Hands for Justice Network.—the Joining Hands program in Palestine

God of the universe, we pray for the people of Israel. May the nation know security. May the children sleep free from fear and prosper. Guide Israel's leaders in the way of justice, freedom and integrity. Comfort those who have been wounded by violence. Encourage those who seek to establish a fair and just peace. Grant courage and grace and all that is needed for the living of these days. Amen.

- Presbyterian Peacemaking Program

God of all people, we pray for the Church in Israel/Palestine. May the time come quickly when Jerusalem shines as a city of tolerance and cooperation. We pray for an end to extremism of all kinds. May compassion and justice flood the hearts and actions of those in power and those who desire it. May your Church hold fast to your call to be peacemakers, pressing on to a new day when all are fed, employed, and safe. In Christ we pray. Amen.

- From the worship service, *The Resurrection Hope*, created for the Week of Prayer and Witness with Christians in the Middle East.

### **A Jew's prayer for the children of Gaza**

Lord who is the creator of all children, hear our prayer this accursed day. God whom we call Blessed, turn your face to these, the children of Gaza, that they may know your blessings, and your shelter, that they may know light and warmth, where there is now only blackness and smoke, and a cold which cuts and clenches the skin.

Almighty who makes exceptions, which we call miracles, make an exception of the children of Gaza. Shield them from us and from their own. Spare them. Heal them. Let them stand in safety. Deliver them from hunger and horror and fury and grief.

Deliver them from us, and from their own.

Restore to them their stolen childhoods, their birthright, which is a taste of heaven.

Remind us, O Lord, of the child Ishmael, who is the father of all the children of Gaza. How the child Ishmael was without water and left for dead in the wilderness of Beer-Sheba, so robbed of all hope, that his own mother could not bear to watch his life drain away.

Be that Lord, the God of our kinsman Ishmael, who heard his cry and sent His angel to comfort his mother Hagar.

Be that Lord, who was with Ishmael that day, and all the days after. Be that God, the All-Merciful, who opened Hagar's eyes that day, and showed her the well of water, that she could give the boy Ishmael to drink, and save his life.

Allah, whose name we call Elohim, who gives life, who knows the value and the fragility of every life, send these children your angels. Save them, the children of this place, Gaza the most beautiful, and Gaza the damned.

In this day, when the trepidation and rage and mourning that is called war, seizes our hearts and patches them in scars, we call to you, the Lord whose name is Peace:

Bless these children, and keep them from harm.

Turn Your face toward them, O Lord. Show them, as if for the first time, light and kindness, and overwhelming graciousness.

Look up at them, O Lord. Let them see your face.

And, as if for the first time, grant them peace.

*With thanks to Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman of Kol HaNeshama, Jerusalem.*

- This prayer was reprinted in an online article in the Ha'aretz newspaper by Bradley Burston. See <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1052871.html>.

In the Name of God, The Everlasting Merciful, The Cherisher  
Of the Worlds and Worthy of all Praise,

Our Lord: You have created us from a single (pair) of a male

And a female and made us into Nations and Tribes that we may

Know one another (not that we may despise each other) so

Help us to love each other and take the hatred and anger from our

Hearts so that the People of The Book (Christians, Jews and Muslims)

In the Middle East may live in Peace and Justice. Amen.

- Dawud Ahmad Assad Council of Mosques, USA, New York, NY, posted by the National Council of Churches

In the name of God, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful:

Guide us on the straight way, the way of those whom thou has blessed.

Help us so that we do not transgress the bounds of what is right and lawful.

Take us out of deep darkness into light.

Make us not bear burdens which we have no strength to bear.

Help us bring about mutual affection and understanding between us.

Grant us Thy forgiveness and blessings, O Our Sustainer,

for with Thee is all journeys' end. Amen.

- Mian Ashraf New England Islamic Center, Sharon, MA, posted by the National Council of Churches