

Prayers of the People

*in response to the September 11, 2001, tragedy
Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church
New York, New York
The Lord's Day, September 16, 2001
The Rev. J.C. Austin*

This is offered as a sample of a fine pastoral prayer in a time of tragedy.

In the beginning, your Spirit brooded over the chaos and the void;
in the beginning, your Word called forth order, beauty, and life, and it was good.
Throughout the ages, you have come when your people called out in distress;
you have come when your people ignored your will and hurt one another.
You have come for your people again and again: through history, through prophecy,
through the cross.
Now, in our city, there is chaos foaming in the wake of evil deeds.
Now, in our city, there is a void where buildings once stood, where loved ones and
friends once worked.
Now, in our city, make your Spirit felt amidst the chaos; let your Living Word speak in
the void.
Call forth order, beauty, and life once again, for your people are in distress.
Fill us with the confidence of the Psalmist who boldly proclaimed:
You are in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; you will help it when the morning
dawns.
Lead us to your comfort and give us new confidence in the stability of your steadfast love.
Lord God, Lamb of God, have mercy on us.

(silence)

You alone can give hope and comfort in the face of despair and fear; send your Spirit to
intercede for us, for we do not know how to pray in the face of so much pain, so much
confusion, so much need.
Lord God, Lamb of God, have mercy on us.

(silence)

We pray for your power and grace to rest upon all who are in pain and grief over loved
ones: for those who wait to hear news, and for those who know too much; for those who
were able to speak before the end, and for those with things left unsaid; for those whose
faith is battered, and for those who search anew for their forgotten faith; for all who
struggle to understand.
Assure them all of your faithfulness and grant them your peace that passes
understanding, that they may know that through Christ death no longer has the last
word.
Lord God, Lamb of God, have mercy on us.

(silence)

We pray for those who were able to escape the Towers and the Pentagon, and for those who feel they should have been there, could have been there; help them to feel thankful for life and not guilty for it.

We pray for all of us traumatized by the images we have seen, the stories we have heard, the things we have imagined; help us not to give in to fear or hatred, nor to be blinded to your grace at work even now.

Lord God, Lamb of God, have mercy on us.

(silence)

We rejoice and give thanks for those who reflect your light shining in the darkness, that the darkness cannot overcome: for the courage of the rescue workers in the minutes, hours, and days after the first crash; for the instinctive selflessness of our firefighters, police officers, and all who rallied in the crisis and reached out for the sake of others; for the dedication and perseverance of health care workers, trauma counselors, and all who tend to the expanding web of victims; for the calm and inspiring leadership of our mayor and other leaders; for the outpouring of love and solidarity from across this nation and world.

Help us to see your hands and to hear your voice at work in each of them, tending to all in need through them.

Lord God, Lamb of God, have mercy on us.

(silence)

As this nation and our government search for answers and look to respond, help us to live by the ways of your kingdom rather than the kingdoms of this world. We are plagued with the temptation to strike out, to strike back, to hurt our perpetrators as they have hurt us, even to hurt those who we think may look or act like them. Lead us away from such temptation and into the fullness of your radical peace that overwhelms all that would hurt, hate, or destroy.

Give us a hunger to receive and promote your justice rather than achieve and pursue our vengeance, for your justice is the cornerstone of any true peace.

Move us beyond a desire to repay the perpetrators in kind, and lead us into a desire to stop the spiraling cycle of violence, so that others will not endure our pain again.

Protect our minds and hearts from the hatred that piloted those planes of destruction, that we might give witness to your redeeming grace at work in the world, even and especially in the face of evil.

Lord God, Lamb of God, have mercy on us.

(silence)

We commend to your love all those whose lives have been ended by this tragedy: investment bankers and security guards, secretaries and stockbrokers, firefighters and police officers, janitors and receptionists, soldiers and civilians; as far as the list goes, as different as the names and professions may be, we hold all of them before you as those whom you gave your image to carry and your Son to redeem.

In the midst of our mourning, yet we still dare to rejoice that nothing in all creation can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus.

Lord God, Lamb of God, have mercy on us.

(silence)

In faith and hope and expectation, as your disciples called to serve, we pray the pray our Lord taught his disciples, saying: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. **Amen.**

A Litany of Remembrance, Penitence and Hope

We light a candle in remembrance for all those who suffered and died on September 11th in New York, Pennsylvania and at the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia. We light a candle to remember those who still live and who suffer because of the events of that day.

One: When we remember the stockbrokers, office workers, maintenance workers, bystanders, window-washers and all the others who worked together so valiantly to help each other, we can say together,

***All:* We remember great courage.**

One: When we recall the firefighters who rushed upstairs as most everyone else was racing out, we can say together,

***All:* We remember selfless service.**

One: When we recall the police officers who stood to protect and defend the people and performed their duties until the towers came crashing down on top of them, we can say together,

***All:* We remember selfless sacrifice for the safety of others.**

One: When we recall the thousands of workers, women and men and, old and young, single and married, American-born and those born in countries around the world who did not escape the buildings, we can say together,

***All:* We remember the loss of human life.**

One: When we recall those citizens who rushed to help, did all they could to help, we can say together,

***All:* We remember and give thanks for dutiful commitment to those in distress.**

One: When we recall the people who stood in line at the nation's blood banks to make living donations from their very bodies, we can say together,

***All:* We give thanks for those who live on to pass on life and love.**

One: When we remember the millions of Americans who gave so generously of their life and labor to endow funds to help the survivors and their families recover from their losses, we can say together,

***All:* We are grateful for generosity.**

Remembrance begins with deep, personal identification. It begins with remembering the affliction of our brothers and sisters, and marking their pain as our own. Remembrance

is a sacred moment when we raise up and hold to the light of the eternal moment, the good who have passed.

We light a candle, in penitence, recognizing that we have not done enough to address the sources of anger, hate, dehumanization, rage and indignation that lead to acts of violence

One: In our sadness, horror and shock we acknowledge that our own fears turned murderous and we have sought revenge, sometimes against even the innocent.

***All:* We confess and regret our own anger and recognize its dangers to our spirits, our health, our community, and others.**

One: In the midst of the aftermath of the events of September 11th, 2001 we have been tempted to seek only our own good, hear only our own truth, acknowledge only our own suffering

***All:* We know that peace will come to us and to our children only when the concerns of justice anywhere become the subject of political and social will everywhere, and that no justice leads to no peace**

One: In striving for national security and domestic peace we run the risk of confusing might for right and participating in the very behaviors we condemn

***All:* Guard and guide our country that in our search for security we may not trample the rights of the innocent nor disregard the rule of law. Let us not confuse leadership within the global community as the voice for the whole community.**

Repentance means to turn away from wrong deeds. Repentance means choosing instead deeds which require moral restraint, and are more beneficial to all persons who suffer.

We light a candle to light the way to a better world for our children and our children's children, and all the children of God.

One: We recall with joy the unity we felt in the outpouring of help, kindness, thoughtful words and deeds from at home and around the world.

***All:* We must hold firmly to our unity, borne forward now not of tragedy but of loving kindness.**

One: We place fresh confidence in international organizations and conversations that bring the diverse gifts of the world to the problems of poverty, injustice, terror and strife

***All:* We long for wise policies that forego short term gain for long term stability, justice and peace.**

One: In a year filled with tragedy we dare to hope for an era yet to come in which the slaughter of innocents, greed, the ambitions of power, and cultural, racial and religious bigotries are but memories of a dim and unenlightened past.

***Unison Prayer:* God of the ages, before your eyes all empires rise and fall yet you are changeless. Be near us in this age of terror and in these moments of remembrance. Uphold those who work and watch and wait and weep and love. By your Spirit give rise in us to broad sympathy for all the peoples of your earth. Strengthen us to comfort those who mourn and work in large ways and small for those things that make for peace. Bless the people and leaders of this nation and all nations so that warfare, like slavery before it, may become only a historic memory. We pray in the strong name of the Prince of Peace. Amen.**

Liturgy by Rev. Eileen W. Lindner and Rev. Marcel A. Welty

Litany for World Peace

[A]

Remember, O Lord, the people of this world divided into many nations, religions, and tongues. Deliver us from every evil that stands in the way of your saving purpose, and fulfill the promise of peace on earth among those with whom you are well pleased; through Jesus Christ.

Amen

From the curse of war and the human sin that causes war,
O Lord, deliver us.

From pride that turns its back on you, and from unbelief that will not bow to you,
O Lord, deliver us.

From national vanity that poses as patriotism, and from loud-mouthed boasting and blind self-worship that admit no guilt,
O Lord, deliver us.

From self-righteousness that will not compromise, and from selfishness that glories in the oppression of others,
O Lord, deliver us.

From the lust for property or power that drives humanity to kill,
O Lord, deliver us.

From trusting in the weapons of war, and mistrusting the councils of peace,
O Lord, deliver us.

From hearing, believing, and speaking lies about other nations and religions,
O Lord, deliver us.

From groundless suspicions and fears that stand in the way of reconciliation,
O Lord, deliver us.

From words and deeds that encourage discord, prejudice, and hatred; from everything that prevents the human family from fulfilling your promise of peace,
O Lord, deliver us.

[B]

Lord of Israel, and God of all the nations: we pray for your children across the whole earth, of every land and race, that they may be strong to do your will. We pray especially for the church in the world,
Give us your peace, O Lord.

For the United Nations,
Give us your peace, O Lord.

For international federations and alliances promoting cooperation among peoples,
Give us your peace, O Lord.

For world leaders, and for departments of state, ambassadors, diplomats, and statesmen,
Give us your peace, O Lord.

For those in military service, that they may live for the establishment of peace and justice,
Give us your peace, O Lord.

For all who in any way work or pray to further the cause of peace and goodwill,
Give us your peace, O Lord.

For civilians in every land,
Give us your peace, O Lord.

For those who declare themselves enemies, that at last we may find reconciliation,
Give us your peace, O Lord.

Eternal God: use us, even in our ignorance and weakness, to bring about your holy will on earth. Hurry the day when people shall live together in your love; for yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

(Adapted from The Worshipbook, Westminster, 1970)

Prayer of Intercession in a Time of War

These prayers of intercession are adapted from a litany released by the former Theology and Worship Ministry Unit during the Persian Gulf War. They appeared in "Monday Morning" magazine's issue of March 4, 1991.

Only in following God's ways can we know true peace. Yet the world persists in pursuing its own ways. Confident that God's will is peace, we are bold to pray for a world torn apart by conflict.

Let us pray for peace.

(Silent prayer.)

God of the nations, in this time of war, renew the vision you give of a world at peace. Move leaders of nations to seek ways to resolve this conflict. Let the desire for peace overpower every self-interest. Break down walls of hostility. Purge from us old suspicions and the spirit of revenge. Silence weapons and open doors to peace.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Let us pray for those who are taught to think of one another as enemies.

(Silent prayer.)

God of compassion, make your presence known to all the families whose members have been killed, whose homes are being torn apart, and whose lives are under threat. Especially we pray for innocent children who cry out in fear. Remind us that the people of Afghanistan have fears, loves, and hopes like ours. Help us to acknowledge them as our brothers and sisters in the human family.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Let us pray for those who are sent into battle.

(Silent prayer.)

God of mercy, hold in your care those of each nation engaged to fight in war, those who fly, those who fight in the sand, those on the seas, those behind the lines who support others in direct combat. Free them from hate, and make them as eager for agreements of peace as they are for victory.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Let us pray for all who in conscience cannot participate in war.

(Silent prayer.)

God of love, in Jesus Christ you show the way to live in peace and goodwill. Guard those whose convictions keep them from serving in war. Hold them steady when misunderstood. Keep them free from self-righteousness. Give them both the grace to love brothers and sisters who fight and the courage to speak out for peace.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Let us pray for families separated by the conflict.

(Silent prayer.)

God of mercy, comfort families in each nation whose sons and daughters, wives and husbands, agonize each day for the safety of loved ones. Especially remember children whose mothers and fathers have been taken from them, who weep at night in fear and loneliness.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Let us pray for those of us who are of Middle Eastern descent.

(Silent prayer.)

God of mercy, we pray for the well-being of all in this nation who are stereotyped by others because of name or appearance, and especially for those of the Muslim faith and those of Middle Eastern descent. Keep others from treating them as enemies. Give understanding and surround them with support when they are confronted with suspicion and are mistreated.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

(Other petitions may be offered in a similar manner.)

O God, you made of one blood all races and nations of earth, and you sent your Son Jesus Christ to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near. Pour out your Spirit on the whole creation, bring the nations of the world into your fellowship, and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Amen.

A Prayer for Reconciliation

Prayer before the silence adapted from the Book of Common Prayer (1993), from Daily Prayer, Supplemental Liturgical Resource 5 (copyright © 1987 The Westminster Press); prayer [1] in the Book of Common Worship (1993), from Praise God: Common Prayer at Taizé, copyright © 1975 by Les Presses de Taizé (Oxford University Press, 1977); prayer [2] from the Book of Common Worship (1993).

This prayer needs to be offered slowly, with silence in the ellipses for people to offer their own petitions to the Lord either silently or aloud. This may be a bidding prayer.

Eternal God, we thank you for being with us today, and for every sign of your truth and love in Jesus Christ.

Especially we thank you for the gift of peace in Christ, ... for

- reconciliation in our relationships ...
- each new insight into your love ...
- energy and courage to share your love ...
- the ministries of the church ...

Gracious God, we remember in our own hearts the needs of others, that we may reach up to claim your love for them, and reach out to give your love in the name of Christ.

Especially we pray, in the wake of recent events in our land, for

- those who are bereaved, who have suffered loss, and who are frightened for the future ...
- leaders of our own and other nations, who must decide how to respond to violence ...
- those across our nation who suffer false blame or who are maligned by stereotypes or ill-designed profiling ...
- neighbors of other faiths, with special concern for Muslims [and Jews] ...
- churches around the world who live among Muslim neighbors ...

(Silence followed by one of the prayers below)

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

Or ,

(2) Lord Christ, at times we are like strangers on this earth, taken aback by all the violence, the harsh oppositions. Like a gentle breeze, you breathe upon us the Spirit of peace. Transfigure the deserts of our doubts, and so prepare us to be bearers of reconciliation wherever you place us, until the day when a hope of peace dawns in our world. **Amen.**

Sample Prayer from an Interfaith Service

Adapted from a prayer used at an Interfaith Service of Prayer and Reflection in Time of Peril at the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York City, on September 13, 2001, planned by A Partnership of Faith in New York City

Our Creator,

tonight we speak with one voice,

to thank you for the precious gift of life.

Together as one, we mourn the deaths of so many innocent victims.

Together as one, we seek to console one another and the people of our land who have lost so many they have loved to violence of any kind.

Together as one, we thank you for all public servants who remind us of the dignity of the human spirit and whose acts of heroism and service are an example to us all.

Together as one, we are thankful for the rescue workers, fire fighters, nurses, doctors, clergy, and civil leaders who work tirelessly in crises and who themselves have suffered tremendous loss.

Together as one, we are grateful for the guidance, support and courage shown by our leaders.

Together as one, we pray that you

keep those who work, or watch, or weep.

Give your Spirit charge over those who sleep.

Tend the sick,

give rest to the weary,

bless the dying,

soothe the suffering,

pity the afflicted,

shield the joyous,

for your love's sake, we pray.

Amen.

Prayer for Children

Great God our Loving Parent, Guardian of all families: bless the children, and encourage their laughter. Bring them safely through injury and confusion and fear, so they may live the promises you give. Do not let adults be so preoccupied with our purposes that we fail to hear their voices or pay attention to their questions and their special vision of the truth; but keep us with them, ready to listen and to respond in love, even as in Jesus Christ you have loved us, your grown-up, wayward children. Amen.

Adapted from *The Worshipbook* (Westminster, 1970)

Prayer For City People

Eternal God: you are bringing your holy city to earth, where death and pain shall be no more, and people shall live together in your light. We pray for cities, where, in high towers or close-built houses, your children work and live. Ease tensions and break down separation, so that even strangers may know themselves to be citizens among citizens, governed by Jesus Christ, who came into Jerusalem as our Savior. Amen.

Adapted from *The Worshipbook* (Westminster, 1970)

Prayer For Healing

By your power, great God, our Lord Jesus healed the sick and gave new hope to the hopeless. Though we cannot command your power, we pray for those who want to be healed, especially for those whose lives have been shattered by acts of terror. Close wounds, cure infection, remove hatred from human hearts, and make broken people whole again, so they may live to rejoice in your love. Help us to welcome every healing as a sign that, though death is against us, you are for us, and have promised renewed and risen life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Adapted from *The Worshipbook* (Westminster, 1970)

Prayer For the Dying

Almighty God: by your power Jesus Christ was raised from death. Watch over dying men and women. Fill their eyes with light, to see beyond human sight a home within your love, where pain is gone and frail flesh turns to glory. Banish fear. Brush away tears. Let death be as gentle as nightfall, promising a day when songs of joy shall make us glad to be together with Jesus Christ, who lives in triumph, the Lord of life eternal. Amen.

Adapted from *The Worshipbook* (Westminster, 1970)

A Prayer for Travelers

*adapted from the "Book of Common Worship" (1993),
The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the
Cumberland Presbyterian Church*

The world is yours, mighty God,
and all people live by your faithfulness.
Watch over those who are traveling
in these perilous days,
especially those who fly from place to place.

May they be careful, but not afraid,
and may they safely reach their destinations.

Wherever we wander in your spacious world,
teach us that we never journey beyond your loving care,
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.