



**World Council
of Churches**

**WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC)
Week of Prayer for Overcoming Racism and Xenophobia
March 19 - 25, 2023**

Day One

Invitation to Prayer

Let us in silence enter this moment of prayer.

Silence

God of justice, we hear again your call to let justice run down like water,
And righteousness like a mighty stream. (*Amos 5:23-24*)

Direct our hearts and thoughts today towards the indigenous communities everywhere that are
experiencing injustice.

Open our ears again to hear your word of instruction to us,
recalling that you have already spoken of that which you require of us:
to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with you, our God. (*Micah 6: 8*)

Amen

♪ **No hi ssi tenlo** (*You Lead me*)

No hi ssi tenlo

Written for WCC week of prayer for Overcoming
Racism and Xenophobia 2023

Cielo Thono

Soprano

hi ya le he-i No hi_ ssi - ten - lo, ke - jang n-tsa wi hi ssi - ten - lo

Alto

Tenor

Bass

5

Ji na hi te - shi nu bvu le lah, No nan ke - ti-zen wi he cca ya ben.

hi yo hi

Ji na hi te - shi nu bvu le lah, No nan ke - ti-zen wi he cca ya ben.

9

Hi ya no ti-tsa-ki tse lo, hi pi no ke-me-shen

yo hi yo hi yo hi yo hi yo hi ya le he hi yale he hi ya le

Hi ya no ti-tsa-ki tse lo, hi pi no ke-me-shen

hi yo hi yo hi yo hi yo hi yo hiya lehe hi ya le he

14

sa, tang - wi ke-we-u tsu ya la i len we-u ya tsu

he hi ya le he hi ya le he hi ya le he hi ya le

sa, tang - wi ke-we-u tsu ya la i len we-u ya tsu

hi ya le he hi ya le he hi ya le he hi ya le he

18

lo hi - yo hi - yo hi - yo hi - yo

he hi - yo hi - yo hi - yo hi - yo

lo hi - yo hi - yo hi - yo hi - yo

hi ya le he hi - yo hi - yo hi - yo

Hi ya le hei No hissi ten lo,
 ke jang n tsa wi hi ssi ten lo
 Ji na hi teshi nü bvü le lah,
 No nan ketizen wi he cca ya ben.
 hiyo hiyo hiyo hiyo
 Hi ya no titsaki tse lo,
 hi pi no kemeschen sa,
 tangwi keweü tsü ya la
 i len weü ya tsü lo hiyo hiyo hiyo hiyo

*You lead me,
 In my darkest hour, You lead me,
 Though the world leave me,
 In your love I'll find peace.
 hiyo hiyo hiyo hiyo
 Keep me closer,*

*Let your light that shines,
Shine on my path.*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 24

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it,
² for he has founded it on the seas
and established it on the rivers.
³ Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
⁴ Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
who do not lift up their souls to what is false
and do not swear deceitfully.
⁵ They will receive blessing from the Lord
and vindication from the God of their salvation.
⁶ Such is the company of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob.
⁷ Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in!
⁸ Who is the King of glory?
The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle.
⁹ Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in!
¹⁰ Who is this King of glory?
The Lord of hosts,
he is the King of glory.
The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it.
The world and all its people belong to him.

The Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God.

Reflection

The creation story of A'chiks, an indigenous community in Meghalaya, India shows us the interdependence and participatory roles in co-creating the earth and its inhabitants.

In the beginning there was no land and darkness was everywhere over the vast watery plain. Having a plan to give birth to the Earth, Tarara-Rabuga, Dakgipa-Rupugipa, Stura-Pantura, Bisikrom-Bidatara, Dingipa-Babra, Pattigipa-Rarongipa (the names of supreme being with a variety of attributes and functions given to the being), commissioned a lesser female spirit called Nostu-Nopantu to carry out this plan. As there was no place even to set her foot on, Nostu-Nopantu rested herself upon a spider's web which was stretched over the waters. To start with, Tarara-Rabuga, Dakgipa-Rupugipa, gave a handful of sand to Nostu-Nopantu, but when she began to do her assignment, it was found that sand particles would not stick together. Therefore, she sent Angkerong (a big crab) underneath the

water to fetch some amount of clay so as to fasten the sand-particles together into a shape. However, disappointingly, Angkerong returned because the water was too deep for him. Then Nostu-Nopantu sent Chipong-Nokma Balpong-Gitel (a small crab), but he was also frightened by the depth of the water and had to return without fulfilling his work. Finally, Chiching-Balching (a dung beetle) was sent, who could with much effort, return with a lump of clay; and with the aid of which Nostu-Nopantu fashioned the earth. The earth that Nostu-Nopantu gave birth was called the “Mane-Pilte” (Mane means ‘the mother earth’ and Pilte ‘the mother of homeland’)...

Of all the animals of the land created by Dakgipa-Rugipa, bullock-ape and jungle-fowl were created first, and their mission on earth was to utter loud cries and prevent Mother Earth from falling asleep and neglecting her function of productivity. In the water, the first aquatic animal created was a frog, whose special function was to proclaim the advent of rain to all living creatures by his loud croak... Dakgipa-Rugipa, then, felt the necessity of putting human beings on this Earth. So, she called all her other lesser spirits and declared her intention to create the human beings and placing them on the Earth. Dakgipa-Rugipa, then, created man and woman in her dwelling place, which was seven layers underneath the Earth and the sea, and gave them Chichri-Chijanggi (water of life)... which can be interpreted as a degree of “spirituality”. Human beings are to share their spirituality with other creatures to give them sustenance on earth.¹

The account of Psalm 24 directs us to the creator who owns and values its creation. The subsequent verses describe the liturgy with a call and response among worshippers. It shows us the symbiotic relationship between the creator and the worshippers. We are called to care for and honour God’s creation. It calls for a communal response. Just as Miriam’s song was a communal song, a response to Miriam’s call to join her in dancing and singing. In indigenous traditions, not only people but the whole world belongs to the creator and therefore honour each other. The text and the story remind us of our interconnectedness with the nature and the spirit of God dwells and directs us to do just-good.

Prayers of Intercession

Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice. Proverbs 1: 20.

God of wisdom, as we remember the wisdom of our ancestors that had a symbiotic relationship with the earth, we affirm that the indigenous wisdom, teachings, and traditions that have been handed down through the ages are invaluable. We confess our culpability in the erasure of indigenous wisdom by means of brutal assimilatory practices and genocide. We pray for indigenous communities resisting assimilation and fostering life-affirming practices.

God of wisdom, hear our prayer.

Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine and led all the women as they played their tambourines and danced. Exodus 15:20.

God of creation, as we remember indigenous communities and creatures of land, water, and air who are inadvertently affected by the green economy transition, we affirm that indigenous communities are the protectors and stewards of biodiversity, and that their voices are essential for decision-making policies. We confess our complicity in the loss of indigenous peoples’ traditional way of

¹ Chakme C. Marak, “Opata Amua, Den.bilsia, A-song Kosi, Salrak Tata or Wachi Tata: Traditional Eco-Spirituality of the Achik People,” and Behelson N. Areng, “Creation of Human Beings in Achik Traditional belief”, eds. by, Razouselie Laseto and Eyingbeni Hümtsoe, in *Doing Tribal Theology Tribal theology with Tribal Resources*, (Jorhat: ETC Programme Coordination, 2009).

livelihood, culture, and identity and we pray that in the pursuit of green energy with its birds' and bees' ecology, that the lives of indigenous peoples will not be destroyed.

God of creation, hear our prayer.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now, and not only the creation but we ourselves... Romans 8: 22-23.

God of the oppressed, as we remember the humanitarian crisis caused by the illegal mining of mineral resources on indigenous lands, we affirm that indigenous traditions teach us that we are interconnected with nature and that nature sustains us. We confess our greed and our complicity in exploiting the earth for profit and we pray for communities that are resisting extractive industries.

God of creation, hear our prayer.

However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. 1 Corinthians 2:9-10.

God of the past, present and future, as we remember the indigenous communities that are ravaged by the *Doctrine of Discovery*, we affirm the Divine relations with indigenous spiritualities and practices. We confess our complicity in dehumanising indigenous communities through militarisation and our notions of superiority that denigrate indigenous customs, culture, and food. We pray in solidarity for indigenous peoples' sovereignty, self-determination, and fundamental human rights. We repent of the damage done to indigenous communities because of the inaccuracies inherent in the *Doctrine of Discovery* and may we be led to support the well-being of all indigenous communities. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

God of the past, present and future, hear our prayer.

Blessing

As we honour the God of our ancestors,

may we hear again the call of God to strive for justice, joy, and peace.

And may the presence of the Prince of Peace sustain us in all our striving. Amen

**UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
Week of Prayer for Overcoming Racism and Xenophobia
March 19 - 25, 2023**

Day Two

Prayer

Eternal God,
 you who ransomed all people for yourself from every tribe,
 and language and people and nation;
We acknowledge that we were all baptized by one Spirit to form one body.
Creator God, you created us as one human race,
 nullifying all the divisions which we have created among ourselves.
As we are gathered here today, we do so renouncing all that divides us,
 and choose to celebrate our oneness as a human community.
We recognize that we are diverse, coming from various cultures;
 having different skin colour and different bodies;
 yet uniquely and wonderfully created by you.
Remind us today that we are all equal before you, sharing in one humanity,
 and called together with all of creation into the fullness of life. **Amen**

♪ **God of the moon and stars**
 www.youtube.com/watch?v=MqWPjYW-lAY

Scripture Reading: Revelation 5: 9-10

¹ Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals, ² and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” ³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁴ And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁵ Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

⁶ Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, with seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. ⁸ When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ They sing a new song:

“You are worthy to take the scroll
 and to break its seals,
for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God
 saints from every tribe and language and people and nation;
¹⁰ you have made them a kingdom and priests serving our God,
 and they will reign on earth.”

The Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God.

Reflection

In the midst of the pandemic, a young woman from Indonesia, living in Europe, entered into a supermarket to buy groceries. She encountered a man, who began pointing his finger at her and shouting “Corona!”, “Corona!” In other instances, people from Northeast India, who share features with East Asians were spat at, refused accommodation and ridiculed in New Delhi during the lockdown. In the United States of America, in recent times, there have been several instances of anti-Asian racial violence, including mass shootings.

COVID-19 exacerbated racism in general and racism against Asians in particular. In many ways, the virus exposed prejudices and became a metaphor for xenophobia. Unsurprisingly, the first response to the virus was to close borders and keep those who were ‘*different*’ outside. Just as there was a fear of the virus infecting the human body, there was also the fear of the social body being infected by those who looked different and whose culture was different. The pandemic brought to the surface already existing prejudices and allowed the opportunity to convert them into practice, both individually and institutionally.

The Biblical text, from Revelation 5, speaks to us about the lamb who is able to open the seal. The book of Revelation is often called apocalyptic literature; the term refers to drawing back the veil to expose what is happening. The book of Revelation is a text that seeks to uncover what is really happening. Written in the context of the Roman Empire, this book reveals its brutality.

In chapter five, we find that the author is mourning that there is none to open the seal except for the slain Lamb. In stark contrast to imperial thinking that valorizes power and violence, we find that only the powerless lamb can open the seal. The Lamb symbolizes vulnerability, even more so a lamb that has been slain. Yet it is this symbol of utter vulnerability that is able to open the seal.

Even more so, the Lamb is able to bring together the various tribes and nations. Vs 9 indicates to us that it was because the Lamb was slain that it was able to bring people together. We must not read this as violence is necessary for the making of peace; instead, the text indicates that peace and reconciliation will not come from power, it will not come from violence; rather, it comes from powerlessness.

In our struggle against racism, particularly remembering racism against Asians, the text speaks to us, saying that we cannot do this through power. We cannot bomb countries into democracy. Instead, it comes from powerlessness; it comes from people's movements working in the regular everyday practice of overcoming prejudice, in movements rooted in the experiences of those who suffer the effects of racism that are working to change policies and structures. The church is called to join such movements and work with them towards changing our society.

An Affirmation of Faith:

We do not believe in exploitation of the earth for the sake of economic profit,
But we believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

We do not believe in the obscene accumulation of power,
But we believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord.

We do not believe in the increasing distance between those who make the decisions and those who suffer from them,
But we believe that God became human and was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

We refuse to give our consent to militarization and the making of weapons of mass destruction,
For we believe that our Lord Jesus Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

We do not believe that the forces of death will prevail,
But we believe in the resurrection of Jesus, his ascension and that he is seated at the right hand of the Father.

We do not believe that the world is at the mercy of the powerful,
But we believe that Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead.

We do not believe in the ideology of the predominance of market forces, consumerism or materialism,
But we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord the giver of life.

We do not believe in hierarchy, prejudice and discrimination,
But we believe in the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints.

We do not believe in revenge or the annihilation of the oppressor,
But we believe in the forgiveness of sins.

We do not believe that death is the end,
But we believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen

Prayers of Intercession

Merciful God, we implore you to listen to the cries of injustice that come out of our suffering world: the cries of the women working in sweatshops who wages are but a pittance compared to the prices the garments are sold at.
Lord, hear our cries.

Hear the cries of the Dalit women brutalized, and whose daily wages are being denied her and the cries of refugees looking to escape poverty and violence.
Lord, hear our cries.

Hear the cries of political prisoners being tortured by the military junta and those of minorities suffering religious and ethnic violence.
Lord, hear our cries.

Merciful God, hear the sighs that come out of our hurting world: the sighs of commercial sex workers standing under streetlights and the sighs of the unemployed standing in lines at the employment bureau.

Lord, hear our sighs.

Hear the sighs of farmers watching over their wilting crops the sighs of factory workers caught in the drudgery of work.

Lord, hear our sighs.

Merciful God, listen to the shouts that come out of our broken world: the shouts of women who have had enough abuse and the shout of crowds on the street calling for political change.

Lord, hear our shouts.

Hear the shouts of protestors singing songs of solidarity and of the workers who will not be subsumed under the logic of profit. Hear too the shouts of the earth that yearns for rest.

Lord, hear our shouts.

Merciful God, listen to the laughter that come out of hopeful world: the laughter of the child happy in the arms of its caregiver and the laughter of friends at the end of a day of work.

Lord, hear our laughter.

Hear the laughter of women who find solidarity in each other, the laughter of those who resist because they see victory in sight and the laughter of the oppressed because they have hope!

Lord, hear our laughter.

Sending

As we leave this place today, we go, in the name of the Triune God to:-

Live simply, care deeply, love dangerously, forgive freely and pray daily;

To surrender our lives in the hand of a gracious and merciful God. Amen

**UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
Week of Prayer for Overcoming Racism and Xenophobia
March 19 - 25, 2023**

Day Three

Prayer

Oh Lord our God,
In whom there is no East or West, North or South.
There is no black or white, yellow or chocolate in your perception of your creation.
The whole world is yours; the entire universe is yours and yours alone.
You God see the entire humanity as one big family of yours.
You remind us that *'the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof;
the earth and they that dwell therein'* (Psalm 24:1).
In you there is no division or partiality in your response to our needs
and in the provision and protection of your own because you are a God of inclusiveness,
and not of exclusiveness.
You are not selective in your grace towards us humans,
as your air is available without discrimination to all,
and your desire is for all of us to be part your one big family.
We confess our inability to reflect the image of God in our dealings with each other,
with respect to our attitudes of favouritism, partiality and ethnocentrism.
We ask for forgiveness for ourselves and our communities.
We are in your presence to commune with you.
In this moment, we pause to reflect on you in the light of our shortcomings and our predicaments.
We pray with hope believing, because your steadfast love endures for ever. **Amen**

♪ **My only hope**

Scripture Reading: Philippians 2:1-7

If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, ² make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was^[a] in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human, The word of the Lord,
Thanks be to God.

Reflection

In our text we are made aware that the issue of discrimination and racism has to do with ‘*me*’ and the ‘*other*’ or ‘*we*’ and the ‘*others*’. It is the difficulty or challenge in seeing things through the lenses of the ‘*other*’. We see the ‘*other*’ as so different from us and discrimination and racism is the result usually when we treat others as inferior to us.

This is because we view the ‘*other*’ from our own eyes. But Galatians 3:28 says, ‘*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*’ Even when the ‘*other*’ is different in terms of language, it does not change the fact that humanity together is still perceived as one body (Act 2:6). Romans 10:12 makes it clear that there is no difference between the callers who call in different ways from different contexts, with different symbols, with different colors and cultures to God, in prayer.

We therefore need total re-wiring of our minds, attitudes, actions, mannerisms, utterances, relationships and transactions with the ‘*other*’ who is not ‘*our type*’ or ‘*our comfortable colour or race*’ or ‘*creed*’. We need to treat them with decorum by considering them above our own self interest as Christ did for humanity in laying down his life for all without discrimination or exception.

Prayers of Intercession

We are at your throne of grace to bring our petitions before you in our world that is filled with hatred, prejudice, discrimination, fear, mistrust, and xenophobia. We do so mindful that the people of Africa and African descent have, to a large extent, borne the brunt of these ills.

Lord hear our prayers as our petitions come to you.

We come praying remembering that the conflicts and wars being fought inside and outside the continent of Africa and among people of African descent have aggravated the situation. Lord hear our petition for places where there are conflicts and wars in our world as a result of xenophobia causing hardships and more racist violence in our world.

Lord hear our prayers as our petitions come to you.

We pray for women and children who are vulnerable victims in areas where discriminatory systems have caused groups and gangs to operate with impunity in their situations. We pray that you intervene on behalf of the weak in these situations.

Lord hear our prayers as our petitions come to you.

We pray for areas where the political climate is so volatile that it has reached a breaking point due to xenophobia. We remember the situations in some parts of Africa where repatriation due to ethnic, racial and nationalistic sentiments has led to displacements and repatriation of people of African decent back home due to their colour.

Lord hear our prayers as our petitions come to you.

We pray recalling the many work places where there is discrimination, especially against people of African descent who, in attempting to improve their living conditions, have migrated to Western and Eastern Europe but have been met with much suffering caused by attacks due to discrimination and xenophobic.

Lord hear our prayers as our petitions come to you.

Lord, we pray for those who live in neighbourhoods or belong to institutions where they are outnumbered by the majority and are singled out and abused by their neighbours or colleagues. We pray too for those who suffer injustice because of their race, ethnicity, colour or creed. Hear us as we pray for all whose lives are in turmoil because of political systems, social practices and ideologies that perpetuate racism, xenophobia and discrimination in our world today.

Lord hear our prayers as our petitions come to you.

Lord, our hope and anchor, we thank you for hearing and answering our prayers. We believe that our petitions will not go unattended by you. In the name of Jesus we pray. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer *(each in our own language)*

Blessing

**May our inner being be strengthened with faith and not fear
so as to be enabled to stand firm for what is true,
what is good and acceptable will of the triune God. Amen.**

**UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
Week of Prayer for Overcoming Racism and Xenophobia
March 19 - 25, 2023**

Day Four

Prayer

Disturb us, Lord,
 when we are too well pleased with ourselves,
 when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little,
 when we arrived safely because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord,
 when with the abundance of things we possess
 we have lost our thirst for the waters of life;

Having fallen in love with life,
 we have ceased to dream of eternity and in our efforts to build a new earth,
 we have allowed our vision of the new heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord,
 to dare more boldly,
 to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery;
Where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.

We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes;
And to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love. **Amen**
(Attributed to Sir Francis Drake, 1577)

Scripture Readings: Colossians 3: 11-14 & Ephesians 2: 11-13

¹¹ In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, enslaved and free, but Christ is all and in all! ¹² Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

¹¹ So then, remember that at one time you gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision"—a circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—

¹² remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

The Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God.

Reflection

We live in a world where the colour of our skin and our gender continues to divide us in spite of our best efforts to overcome racism and promote unity. This division is seen in our communities, in our

politics, and even in our churches. But what does the Bible have to say about racial justice and the way we should respond to this division?

In Galatians 3:26-29 Paul emphasizes the unity we find in Christ, regardless of any difference in race or ethnicity. By recognizing this unity, we can begin to experience true racial justice: a world where all people can come together in harmony and respect to denounce the social evils which exist.

I was born and raised in Guyana, where the politics of race and class were quite glaring to begin with, the Presbyterian Church had come to an agreement of a split based on racial divide rooted in the dirty legacies of slavery. I wish things had been different, for a people who continue to suffer at elements of neo-colonialism and fascism. While governments and socio-political advocates continue to wage war, the church has mostly been silent.

Silence to injustice has permeated our churches, our communities and even nurtured systemic gender structures. Such cultural norms and policies still mostly keep women and children under the influence of passive social sin, particularly what in South Korea can be understood as the transmission of “*yugyo*” and “*nunchi*”; meaning the ritual honouring the heritage of a “*Confucian Sense*” of patriarchy in a highly competitive society. Therefore, females who are racially other are at a double risk, firstly, for their visible racial difference, as well as being ignored or sidelined because of their gender. Sometimes, this translates to being ignored when complaints are filed about discrimination, or hearing concerns minimized as overreaction. Moreover, on occasion, the stares receive suggest that ‘*outsiders*’ are not welcomed.

Christianity calls us to a higher standard, for even in a world filled with division, we have the opportunity to model what true unity looks like and take action to promote justice. K. C. Abrahams expressed this concept well in these words, “there is no hungry African, Indian or Chinese; there are only hungry/ suffering people longing for emancipation and redemption.” By embracing this vision of true justice, we can create a world where everyone can live in peace and harmony.

May we all be bold in our faith, understanding that we are all children of God, and be willing to work together to bring about the peace and unity that the world so desperately needs.

Prayers of Confession and Renewal

Inclusive and loving God, we confess that racism is sin and an obstacle to your mission to bring about the Beloved Community.

Forgive us our divisiveness and help us to be agents of unity and reconciliation.

Just and reconciling God, we confess that in our current context, racism is systemic and manifests in both individual acts and structural injustices.

Forgive us our divisiveness and help us to be agents of unity and reconciliation.

Eternal and faithful God, who mothers and fathers us, we confess that discrimination against women and the perpetuation of violence by diminishing their gifts and skills is not part of your desire for us as those made in your likeness.

Forgive us our divisiveness and help us to be agents of unity and reconciliation.

Healing and gracious God, we confess that reconciling relationships in a multi-ethnic society and working for justice and peace require an ongoing commitment of time and energy.

Forgive us our divisiveness and help us to be agents of unity and reconciliation.

Lord's Prayer *(each in our own language)*

Sending

We have seen and heard the struggle against racism in our world today;

We continue to stand in solidarity with the oppressed and strive for justice.

May we go into the world now inspired to be agents of change and hope against racism.

May the Triune God bless us all in our efforts. Amen.

**UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
Week of Prayer for Overcoming Racism and Xenophobia
March 19-25, 2023**

Day Five

Prayer

O God, you have created us and fashioned us uniquely,
 endowing each of us with individuality of body, mind and spirit to worship you.
We all have abilities; we each seek fulfillment and wholeness.
We also have disabilities; we celebrate that you miraculously created each of us.
Seeking shelter from the vulnerabilities that we all share,
 we claim our promised place in your Household of Faith.
Through your invitation, affirmation and love, you transform us.
Thanks be to you O God and to your Beloved Son Jesus Christ,
 through whom we pray. **Amen.**

♪ **Help Us Accept Each Other**
 www.youtube.com/watch?v=N71oXSJe80U

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many members yet one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ²²On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect, ²⁴whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, ²⁵that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

Reflection

To describe a group of people as relating to one another as the various organs of the human body working together was not original to Paul but he used it in an original way. For him, the body was not a city or a state but the whole Church. He emphasises that Christ is the head of the body on

whom the whole Church thereby depended on and that no member is dispensable or worthless because each has a vital role. The evident diversity among the members of the body makes clear that the aim is not uniformity but dynamic unity.

Another significant, but more recent, change in body language has been in the way people with disabilities are described. At one time people with impaired mobility were called '*cripples*' and those with cerebral palsy were called '*spastics*'. Whether or not these terms were intended to be derogatory or patronising, that is how they felt to those so described. So other terms were used instead, though still with the risk that today's euphemism might become tomorrow's term of offense. What does that mean? Is it that at the start of the Race of Life persons with disabilities are the ones with extra weight? Or as it is in golf, where having a handicap is a positive thing! Though it may not be true that 'handicap' means 'cap in hand', there remains a taint that those so described are classed as always being in need of charitable support. The term has even been exported so that in France people with impairments are referred to as '*les handicapés*! More recently there has been a change from '*disabled*' to '*impaired*'.

But the most important shift is from the impersonal, indefinite terminology of '*the disabled*', '*the blind*', '*the deaf*', etc., to '*persons with...*' Although this may appear more cumbersome, it makes the vital affirmation that we are first and foremost people and not to be defined impersonally by a medical condition or impairment which we happen to have. This comes from the long debate between medical and social models of disability. Is my disability caused by something defective in me or by the ways in which my environment disables me? Where is the problem: is it me or in society?

Paul's analogy of the members of the body clearly affirms each one to be of intrinsic and inalienable value whatever they can or cannot do. 'There are no worthless members of the Body of Christ; "each one has received a grace-gift according to the measure of the giving of Christ" (paraphrase of Eph. 2: 7), and so has a ministry which finds its appropriate place in building up the whole body. Tragically, there are many who have never realised that and so never used their gift in their ministry.

Two areas of theological reflection which use body language are ecumenism and disability. How are they related? Both address situations where some people may be despised or rejected because of their significant differences from the majority. The invitation and inclusion of persons with disabilities means more than simply making it possible for them to be present. Instead it affirms that persons with disabilities are necessary and essential members of the Body of Christ. Inclusion is a two-way street: the church should include persons with disabilities, and persons with disabilities too should also be "*include-able*." This inclusion affirms the one Spirit who indwells all Christians and draws us together as one Body.

Prayers of Intercession & Thanksgiving

Let us pray for all God's people.

For people who are blind and cannot see,
and for those who can see but are blind to people around them,
God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For people who move slowly because of accident, illness or disability,
and for those who move too fast to be aware of the world in which they live,

God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For people who are deaf and cannot hear,
and for those who can hear but who ignore the cries of others,
God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For people who learn slowly, for people who learn in different ways,
and for people who learn quickly and easily but often choose ignorance,
God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For people who have chronic illnesses for which there is no known cure or relief,
and for people who live in unholy fear of developing a chronic illness,
God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For people who feel isolated by their disabilities,
and for people who contribute to that sense of isolation,
God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For people who think they are worthless and beyond your love,
and for people who think they don't need your love,
God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For families, friends and caregivers who serve people with disabilities,
and for those who feel awkward in their presence,
God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For all the people in your creation, that we may learn to respect each other,
and learn how to live together in your peace,
God, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.

Sending

We go forth to celebrate and serve one another, rejoicing in our diversity.

Together, we serve the world,

until we become a Community which reflects God's Oneness and Peace.

We go forth in the name of God, the Father, God, the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
Week of Prayer for Overcoming Racism and Xenophobia
March 19-25, 2023**

Day Six

Call to Prayer

God of all,
God of Children,
 your love for the little ones was exemplified in your invitation:
 let the young ones come.
God of Children,
 you who cautioned against hindering the children from realising their full potential,
 we thank you for all the children you have created in your image in all their diversities.
Hear our laments as we mourn for the children who have been denied their childhood
 by the unjust systems of this world. **Amen**

♪ **Awesome God**
www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5dcczS2GsE

Scripture Reading: Matthew 18: 2 – 6 & 19:13 – 15

² He called a child, whom he put among them, ³ and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

⁶ “If any of you cause one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.

¹³ Then children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them, ¹⁴ but Jesus said, “Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” ¹⁵ And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

The Word of the Lord,
Thanks be to God.

Reflection

Parents generally are driven by the desire that their children will be better than them; that their children will have better experiences than their own; that life is worth living if they can help their children excel more than they did. In Jesus’ time, where poor parents were struggling to put their children on higher pedestals, bringing children to Jesus was worth their efforts. Maybe an encounter with Jesus could change the destiny of their children many would have thought. Therefore, parents from all walks of life were bringing their children to Jesus for a blessing. Quite possible, such a blessing could be the spark that changed their fortunes. However, whenever power is assumed and

assigned, power filters also to those around the source of power. In this case, such manifestation was seen in the actions of the disciples by virtue of their close association to Jesus. They became gatekeepers, deciding who would get nearer to Jesus and in that capacity children were deemed not worthy of being near Jesus. Consequently, the disciples tried to stop parents from bringing their children to Jesus. Seeing this, Jesus then gives a message of rebuke and instructs the ‘gatekeepers’ that children must come to him to receive a blessing.

As we pray, let us reflect on how many times we have acted like the disciples and not brought children to Jesus in word and in deed. Are we the parents who leave children at home when it is time for church? Do we give our children time to ask even the difficult questions regarding their faith? How much are we contributing to the work of the church as it relates to children? How much encouragement do we offer?

Do we encourage our children to keep exploring their faith and relationship with Jesus? It is our duty to share Jesus’ blessing with the children as he commands. Proverbs 22:6 sums it up beautifully through reminding us: *“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it”*.

Prayers of Intercessions:

Awesome God, we thank you for all the children that you have blessed us with in this world, we pray for all the children who are not seen as children because they are born into racialized communities.

Hear our prayers, Oh Lord.

God of love, as conflict, disease and hunger force children to move to new places, we pray and ask for you to open our hearts to welcoming them and providing them with shelter.

Hear our prayers, Oh Lord.

Compassionate God, we pray for all the children whose images have been made money-making machines for some who have humiliated the image of God in these children.

Hear our prayers, Oh Lord.

Awesome God, we pray today, give us the purity of heart to accept the childhood of all children irrespective of their ethnicity or the work of their parents and share Christ’s love with them.

Hear our prayers, Oh Lord.

Compassionate God, grant us a listening ear to our children as they help provide solutions to the world’s challenges such as climate change, racism and xenophobia.

Hear our prayers, Oh Lord.

The Lord’s Prayer *(each in our own language)*

Blessing

**May the blessings of the Triune God lead us to deepened faith
so that as God’s children we will bless others even as we are too are blessed. Amen.**

UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
Week of Prayer for Overcoming Racism and Xenophobia
March 19-25, 2023

Day Seven

Prayer

God of life,
We thank you for creating us, and all around us, in love.
We celebrate your wisdom that holds and sustains life in its interconnectedness.
We thank you for telling us that it is justice
and compassion alone that ensure life for us and for all. (*Micah 6.8*).
Hear us as we pray in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

Scripture Reading: Luke 19:1-7

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. ² A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. ⁵ When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” ⁶ So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. ⁷ All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” ⁸ Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” ⁹ Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

Reflection

The despised tax collector Zacchaeus stand out as a significant character in Jesus’ story. In fact, he is not the only such person whose encounter with Jesus challenges systems and structures that degrade humanity. Who else might be included? To name a few: (1) the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4: 5-30); (2) the Samaritan man who was cured of leprosy (Luke 17:11-19); (3) the Canaanite woman who challenges Jesus to recognise her right to life with dignity (Matt.15:21-28); (4) the love and faith of the Roman centurion who reaches out to Jesus for the healing of his sick servant (Matt.8:5-13); (5) the tax collector whose spirituality was declared more authentic than that of the Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14). These and many others are the key conduits of Jesus’ ministry and mission.

We see from these examples that Jesus seems to make clear that it is neither descent nor work that matter, but the capacities to be truly human – to love and respect others as much as one does for oneself. By affirming the humanity of the poor and the marginalised – the unnamed women and widows, servants and slaves, the unclean and the sick, the tax collectors and the othered, Jesus asserts that God’s reign will not happen as per the preferences of the powerful and the privileged. Instead, it occurs with the dreams of and collaborations among those in the struggle against exclusionary and exploitative cultures and systems. A just and inclusive world is possible only when all are able to live with dignity and justice.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, forgive our captivity to privileges and prejudices that mislead us to deny your image and presence in others and their lives. Help us to be conscious that we reject and disrespect you and your generosity every time we do so. Forgive our apathy and indifference toward the neglect, abuse and exploitation of people who are disempowered and enslaved. Help us to liberate ourselves and dismantle all such soul-destroying and life-diminishing cultures and traditions. As we praise and thank you for the beauty and wonder of the vast diversity of your creation, help us to accept one another as Christ has accepted us. (*Romans 15.7*) **Amen.**

♪ Mahadiga

(A song by and about Madigas, one of the most discriminated Dalit communities in South India)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TutDCtzxsg

Prayers of Intercession

Compassionate God, as we thank you for the promise of life for all through Jesus Christ, we pray for those who are denied of possibilities for life with dignity and justice.

Lord, hear us, we pray.

We pray today –

For the tens of thousands of Haratin people in Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria and parts of Western Sahara who are trapped in worst forms of slavery and dehumanization....

Lord, hear us, we pray.

For the Forgeron and Nok people in West Africa who are discriminated on account of their traditional occupation of iron artisanry.....

Lord, hear us, we pray.

For the small and scattered Bantu communities who are spread over 24 countries in Africa....

Lord, hear us, we pray.

For the Quilombo and Palenque communities of African origins in Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, and Venezuela....

Lord, hear us, we pray.

For the Roma people who are mocked at and despised in many countries in Europe....

Lord, hear us, we pray.

For the Burakumin who are kept at the lowest level of Japanese social system because of their occupations and are considered as polluting

Lord, hear us, we pray.

For the stateless Rohingya people in South and Southeast Asia and the many small and poor Indigenous peoples in Asia and in many parts of the world....

Lord, hear us, we pray.

For the Dalits and hundreds of small and disempowered communities who continue to be exposed to intense experiences of poverty, discrimination, and exclusion on account of caste system in South Asia.

Lord, hear us, we pray.

Blessings

May God who created us,

make us feel the heartbeat of God in all the interconnected

and interdependent diversity of God's creation.

May the blessings of the Triune God help us to "go and do likewise" (*Luke 10.37*). Amen

Contacts: Dr. Masiwa Gunda (masiwa.gunda@wcc-coe.org) and Rev. Dr. Mikie Roberts (Mikie.Roberts@wcc-coe.org)