

Worship Resources and Reflections

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The Israel-Palestine conflict continues to confound the best minds and confuse the best intentions. The purpose of this service is to offer prayers of understanding and prayers for peace, and to place, once more, this long and painful history into the hands of God, the source of peace.

Passions are strong on all sides of the Israel-Palestine story. The service intends to provide a place of quiet reflection rather than impassioned debate, of self-examination rather than finger pointing, and of taking an action on the side of hope for the future, by investing in the planting of olive trees where olive trees have been destroyed.

“They who plant trees are servants of God, they provide a kindness for many generations, and faces they have not seen will bless them.”

—Henry Van Dyke, Presbyterian pastor and Princeton Professor of English Literature, 1852-1933, alt.

Prelude music

Musicians with responsibility for prelude music should establish an atmosphere that will encourage reflection and introspection.

Call to worship

Why is it so easy for us to be willing to pick up arms and risk our lives, and so difficult to put down those same weapons and still risk our lives—in the cause of life?

—Ramzi Kysia, Muslim-American peace activist

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.

–Psalm 145:15-16

Opening prayer

We gladly confess:

“The eyes of all look to you, and you give them food in due season.

You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.”

That we gladly and confidently confess—

And yet, we notice your creatures not well fed

but mired in hunger, poverty, and despair.

And yet, we notice the power of evil that stalks the best of us:

the power of cancer,

the dread of war,

sadness of death—

“good death”

or cruel death.

And so we pray confidently toward you,

but with footnotes that qualify.

We pray confidently,

but we will not deny in your presence

the negatives that make us wonder.

We pray amid our honest reservations,

give us patience to wait,

impatience to care,

sadness held honestly,

surrounded by joy over your coming kingdom—

and peace while we wait—

and peace at the last,

that we may be peacemakers

and so your children.

We pray in the name of your firstborn Son, our peacemaker.

–“On Theodicy,” from *Prayers for a Privileged People* by Walter Brueggemann. Abingdon Press, 2008. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Song suggestions

There are many choices for singing about God’s care and inclusivity; they should be a prominent part of the service. Songs from the Middle East include:

HWB 427, You shall go out with joy

STS 69, Ya hamalaLah (O Lamb of God)

The Vine and Fig Tree by Mary Miché. Available online.

Ya Rabba Ssalami (God of peace and justice). Available in *We Walk His Way*, John Bell & Wild Goose Resource Group, G. I. A. Publications, Chicago. (800) 442-1358.

Scripture readings with commentary

Psalms 85:10-13 (“steadfast love and faithfulness will meet...”)

Luke 10:30-37 (the Good Samaritan)

Colossians 3:11 (“no longer Jew nor Greek...”)

Stories from Israel-Palestine

If there is someone in your congregation who has firsthand experience in Israel-Palestine, invite him or her to tell stories of those who live there. Or if Israelis or Palestinians live in your area, invite them to tell their stories. The World Council of Churches has also prepared worship materials containing several stories, available online as “It’s Time for Peace.” After the telling of each story, allow silence or sing a refrain.

Praying together

Begin with the Lord’s Prayer. Then, choose one of the following: 1) Edit the prayer in STJ 144 to reflect thoughts and experiences of today’s service, and sing the first stanza of STJ 47 in response. 2) Use the bold-faced response in STS 135 to prayers that are spoken by members of the congregation like the Leader’s prayer, but with specific reference to Israel-Palestine. 3) Keep an accompaniment (or humming) going between sung refrains of STJ 98 and have members of the congregation offer prayers. End any of the three options with the Prayer of St. Francis, HWB 733.

Offering

Since 2001 The Olive Tree Campaign has planted more than 50,000 olive trees in the West Bank and Gaza where trees have been destroyed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The offering on this occasion could be dedicated to The Olive Tree Campaign (online at jai-pal.org/content.php?page=1), or see the back page for an opportunity to give to MCC’s work in Israel-Palestine.

The olive has a long and rich history, many practical uses, and significance as a symbol. A quick review would be an appropriate introduction. There are many biblical images of the olive, including Genesis 8:11, in which the dove

returns to the ark bearing an olive branch, and Hosea 14:6, “His shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive tree.”

Prior to the gathering of the offering, this Talmudic story might be read:

An old man was planting a tree. A young person passed by and asked, what are you planting? An olive tree, the old man replied. Silly fool, said the youth. Don't you know that it takes many years for an olive tree to bear fruit? That's okay, said the old man. Just as others planted for me, I plant for future generations.

A prayer of dedication and song of thanksgiving ends the offering.

Sending

Choral anthem recommendation: Elizabeth Alexander, “Where there is light in the soul.” Available from Alexander Press No. SEA-070-1 (SATB).

So instead of loving what you think is peace, love other [people] and love God above all. And instead of hating the people you think are warmakers, hate the appetites and the disorder in your own soul, which are the causes of war. If you love peace, then hate injustice, hate tyranny, hate greed—but hate these things in yourself, not in another.

—Thomas Merton, from *New Seeds of Contemplation*

Beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

—1 Corinthians 15:58

Clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Amen.

—Colossians 3:14, 17

Abbreviations

HWB *Hymnal: A Worship Book*

STJ *Sing the Journey*

STS *Sing the Story*

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