

SPEAKER

FILM ABOUT THE 2024 Bible Society Australia WDP PROJECT

OFFERING followed by Offertory Prayer



COMMISSIONING FOR WDP 2025—The Cook Islands

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Leader: The Lord's Prayer calls us to bear with one another in love through all the difficulties of life as we do God's will on earth and forgive those who sin against us. Let us pray together: The Lord's Prayer.

CLOSING SONG

WORDS OF COMMITMENT

All: May we bear with one another in love until God's justice and peace reign throughout the whole world.

Leader: Let us go now and be agents of peace and justice.

All: Amen

BLESSING

LEADER: We conclude our service by saying parts of Psalm 85 together and then sharing in the blessing which God gave to his faithful people.

ALL: I will listen to what God the LORD says;
he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants.
Love and faithfulness meet together;
righteousness and peace kiss each other.
Surely his salvation is near those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.

The Lord bless us and keep us.

The Lord make his face shine upon us

and be gracious to us and grant us peace. Amen

Palestine service—copyright 2022 World Day of Prayer International Committee, Inc

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World Day of Prayer 2024

Palestine

'I beg you ... bear with one another in love'



www.worlddayofprayeraustralia.org

Background Information about PALESTINE



Palestine lies at the crossroads of the continents of Asia, Africa and Europe on land that for over 3,000 years has been significant to Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The people of the land have had many rulers, including ...

- * the Roman Empire — in the time of Jesus
- * Muslim rulers, the Crusaders, the Egyptians and the Mongols — from 6th
- * The Ottoman Empire — 16th to end WWI
- * The British Mandate — 1923-1948
- * The Israeli government — 1948 to the present day.

15 May 1948—creation of the State of Israel

Palestinians call this day ‘the Nakba’ (the Catastrophe) because of immediate loss of their land, destruction of villages and major loss of life. Jordan was given control of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Egypt was given control of the Gaza Strip.

June 1967—‘The 6 Day War’

In this war, Israel took control of the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip (from Egypt), the Golan Heights (from Syria) and East Jerusalem and the West Bank (from Jordan). The Sinai was returned to Egypt in 1982. This 1967 war is called by Palestinians ‘The Naksa’ (the Setback).

In 1988 Palestine claimed independence on their pre 1967 land, which was only 22% of their original land before 1948 and the creation of Israel.

As of July 2023, Palestine is recognised in the United Nations as a state with its own government and flag by 139 of the 193 member states. Australia has not recognised the State of Palestine.



Over 5 million Palestinians live today in Palestine and Israel. Only 2% (and falling) are Christian. Most are Muslim. Palestinians live in 2 main geographical regions — the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The total land area is 1/12 the area of Tasmania.

All: God of Righteousness, bless us and make us witnesses of peace and justice. Open our eyes so that we can see things as you do. Protect us from all forms of violence, hurt and revenge. We pray especially for women who are denied education and other basic rights. We pray for women who are abused and suffer violence. We pray that our churches, as well as our governments, will create safe places for women. Help us to raise our voices and use our gifts and talents to help others. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling.

All: Father, hear our prayer.

Leader: *A prayer about those who are sick*

Healer and Sustaining Spirit, we pray for all those who are sick, who are dying and who are grieving. We pray for scientists and doctors who develop vaccines and treatments for the COVID-19 virus and other diseases. When we are lost and weary, strengthen us. Revive our dry branches, so that they yield good fruits again. Give us new life and the hope of the resurrection. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling.

All: Father, hear our prayer.

All: God of Unity, teach us, your servants, to treat others justly, fairly and with love, even though we may speak, live and pray in different ways. Bless the global church and bless faithful women everywhere who share your Good News with others. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling.

All: Father, hear our prayer.

(Offer extempore or prepared prayers of your choosing here.)

All: We offer these prayers and the prayers of our hearts known only to you, trusting that you hear and answer them; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SONG



Palestinian Christian women praying (c. WDP)

INTERCESSORY PRAYERS

Leader: Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, we now pray for women everywhere, for the world and for those in need.

After each petition, you will hear, 'Lead us into a life worthy of our calling'. You are invited to respond, '**Father, hear our prayer**'.

Let us pray:

Leader: God our Rock, you have taught us to build our lives on you. We pray for those who are homeless. We pray especially with Palestinian families whose homes have been demolished or are threatened to be demolished by Israeli authorities. Bring these families justice and end this evil practice. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling.

All: **Father, hear our prayer.**

All: **God of Peace, we pray for a just solution to ongoing oppression. We pray for equality, freedom of religion, freedom of movement and freedom of expression. We pray for the city of Jerusalem, sacred to three religions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Teach us as Christians to follow the way of Jesus, sharing love with all the inhabitants of the land. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling.**

All: **Father, hear our prayer.**

Leader: Refugee God, who as a child had to flee a massacre in Bethlehem, you know the plight of refugees and the displaced. Guide and protect refugees and displaced people. Bring them to places of safety. Open the hearts of those receiving refugees, and guide the actions of political leaders so that all needs will be met. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling.

All: **Father, hear our prayer.**



Shuafat Refugee Camp, East Jerusalem 2010
www.flickr.com

THE GAZA STRIP

In 2006 Israel withdrew its military forces from the Gaza Strip, giving the area back to the Palestinians. However, Israel has imposed severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza, devastating the economy and causing deep recession.

The Gaza Strip has 2 million people (the 3rd most densely populated area in the world), 47% of whom are children.

There are fewer than 1,000 Christians in Gaza but they have a strong commitment to the whole community. The main hospital, Al Ahli, is run by the Anglican Church.

THE WEST BANK

(so named because this territory is on the west bank of the Jordan River).

It includes East Jerusalem.

Oslo II Map

Outlining Areas A, B, and C <https://www.researchgate.net>



Between 1993-1995, the Oslo Accords divided the West Bank into 3 areas and although meant to be temporary, these areas A, B and C still exist today. The Palestinian Authority, also formed in 1994, administers parts of the West Bank from Ramallah, 15 km north of Jerusalem. Israel has set up illegal settlements in Area C and controls movement between all areas, requiring permits and checkpoints. These have hampered Palestinian businesses and health care access. Most water also comes from Area C so Palestinians must buy water from Israel. Water and travel restrictions are Palestine's key issues.

Arts and Culture

The Arts help Palestinians to continue to live with hope by keeping their heritage and cultural memory alive. Poetry, visual art, embroidery, dabkeh (traditional folk dancing), theatre and cinema affirm their lived experience and connect them with the world through exhibitions and competitions.

Education in Palestine

95% of Palestinian children are enrolled in basic education. There are public and private schools. Most private schools are run by religious institutions. The Christian-run schools serve children of all faiths. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees runs schools in the 58 recognised Palestinian refugee camps.



Classroom in Gaza
commons.wikimedia.org

Christianity in Palestine

How amazing it is for Palestinian Christians to have family history stretching back over two thousand years, with many ancestors who lived amongst the locations of the Bible and of Jesus' life! The church in Palestine is a living church with a special mission and vocation. It is rich in heritage and pluralistic in traditions. There are many Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches.

75% of Palestinian Christians belong to the Greek Orthodox Church.

A message to us from the Christian women of Palestine's writing group

We call on you, sisters and brothers in every part of the world, to bear with us in love. We call upon you to unite your prayers with ours for a just and peaceful solution that would bring an end to human suffering. We call upon you to stand in solidarity with us to achieve security and peace for all people around the world.

The Cover Art explained

Artist: Halima Aziz (b.1999)

Three Palestinian women are praying together in a peaceful place in nature.

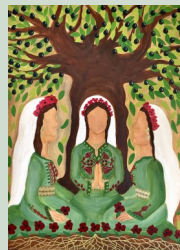
The **olive tree** behind them is a sign of everlasting and abundant life because these trees can live thousands of years.

The women are wearing **traditional Palestinian dress**—the tatreez embroidered dress and the white scarf.

The golden roots show that Palestinians will always exist and as they exist, they will work for their rights and freedom.

Poppy flowers remind Palestinians of loved ones who have died for their country.

The key hung around the neck represents the hope of return to Palestine.



Leader: Let us hear Sara's story

My name is Sara.

Sometimes I feel like the leaf on an old olive tree, connected down to the roots.

I was born and raised in Jerusalem as a Lutheran Christian. Life as a Palestinian woman surely has been, and still is challenging.

My grandparents used to live in Jaffa. They grew up there before 1948, living alongside other Christians, Muslims and Jews. When the state of Israel was created in 1948, the Israeli forces came to my grandparents' home and forced them to leave.

My grandparents became refugees in Jordan.

Many years later, my grandparents came for a visit to Jerusalem and my parents took me on a trip to Jaffa.

They were excited to show me the home they used to live in. Everything had changed except for the trees, which helped us to identify the place.

Sadly, the people currently living in the house were hostile towards us. I was quite young, but I do remember them shouting. My grandpa was trying to explain to them that this used to be his house. However they refused to hear any part of it and chased us away.

Later in time, when I visited my grandparents in Jordan, my grandma showed me the door keys that her mum had kept when leaving their house. She kept the keys with the hope that one day they would be able to return to their home. Sadly, this is the case for many. Even today, people are still being put out of their homes. Many have kept their keys with the hope of returning, a hope that is passed on through the generations.

I know that the tree from where I came is strong and resilient. I can bear with others in love. My grandparents showed me the way.

All: Holy Spirit, we give thanks for Sara's story of bearing with others in love as her grandparents taught her to do. Amen



Olive leaves
wikimedia.org



Modern day Jaffa
www.pxfuel.com

Worship Service 2024

Leader: Let us hear Lina's story:

*My name is Lina.
On May 11, 2022, I lost my Aunt Shireen, a famous journalist who was killed in Jenin. For me, Aunt Shireen was like the branch of an olive tree, resisting the strong winds that threatened to erase the truth of Palestinian experience.*



old olive tree branch
www.pxfuel.com

When Aunt Shireen died, Palestine lost an icon, a legend, and a famous Al Jazeera journalist.

And yet, Shireen was more; she was also my aunt, my godmother at baptism and my best friend. Shireen had been my role model for as long as I can remember.



Shireen Abu Akleh
AL JAZEERA/AFP Wikimedia commons

She was also a role model to many young Palestinian women.

For 25 years, Aunt Shireen dedicated her life to telling the stories of Palestinian experience, and to being the voice of truth. She entered every house in Palestine and the Arab world through the TV screen.

Many people did not know that my aunt was a Palestinian Christian. Shireen's faith led her to bear with all in love, despite differences in faith traditions. She stood with all who were being harmed. She struggled for both Muslims and Christians to have access to the holy sites in Jerusalem. Her truth telling was also a way of bearing with the occupiers in love.

All: Loving Jesus, we give thanks for Lina's story about her aunt who was able to bear with all people and tell their truths in love because of her Christian faith. Amen

WELCOME

Leader: Salaam! This is the greeting used by Palestinian women and it means, Peace be with you! 'Salaam!'

Our service today has been written by an ecumenical group of Christian women of Palestine. They have prayed and worked together over the last 4 years to bring us our service, based on the theme, 'I beg you ... bear with one another in love', taken from Ephesians chapter 4, the Bible reading later in the service.

Leader: We gather in the name of the Triune God. Let us pray. Lord Jesus, be with us as we focus upon the land where you lived and taught. Open our eyes and ears to learn about the suffering of those living in this land today. Grant us strength and courage to pray and to act, with them and with all who suffer around the world. Amen

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: Let us praise God who brings us together to worship in love and unity as we sing this song of praise to Almighty God.

SONG OF PRAISE

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Leader: Let us begin our worship in confession.

All: Triune God, we confess our weakness and failure to accept others without judging them. We confess that we are not always humble, gentle, patient and loving. Yet we know that we belong to you, our Father God, and ask in your mercy that we would be strengthened to love, to walk humbly and to bear with one another in the challenges we find in our families, our community, our churches and our nation. Amen



'We refuse to be enemies' c. WDP

BIBLE READING:

Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 4 verses 1-5 (NIVUK)

4 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, **bearing with one another in love.** ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

SONG: *I Urge You to be Patient* (written for our service)

SILENT REFLECTION

Leader: Let us take a couple of minutes now to reflect on the ways that God asks us to bear with one another in love in the Christian church in Australia. *2 minutes*

THREE STORIES FROM PALESTINE

Leader: Let us hear **Eleonor's story**—an older Palestinian Christian woman:



old olive tree
commons.wikimedia.org

*My name is Eleonor.
I am a Palestinian Christian – a member of the Greek Orthodox Church in the Holy Land. I come from a deeply rooted old Jerusalem family. My skin is wrinkled like the trunk of an olive tree. Like the olive trees, I have witnessed wars and violence.*

In the early 19th century, my great grandfather established St. George's Orthodox Church, which enabled Christians living outside the city walls to have a place to worship.

That church remained in existence until the Catastrophe, or Nakba, of 1948, when 750,000 Palestinians were forced to flee, disperse and become refugees. My family was included. Due to heavy shelling and bombardment, my parents ran for their lives. They took shelter at my mother's cousin's home, hoping to return soon to their original home and St. George's Church. That never happened. Today, my parents' home and St George's Church have become Confederation House, an Israeli cultural centre. Prior to fleeing, my parents' Jewish neighbours offered to store the treasures of the church, including icons and precious communion cups. They promised to safeguard my parents' property and belongings until the family's return. As my brothers and I were growing up, my parents remembered their neighbours graciously as they waited for the big day of return. They imagined themselves collecting these sacred items and thanking these neighbours for keeping their promise. Sadly, my parents have passed away without realizing this dream. And yet, I vividly remember that, despite their pain and suffering over all they had lost, my parents were always thankful and spoke kindly about these Jewish neighbours. My parents taught me how to bear with others in love, always remembering to be grateful for those who do good.

As I have gone through life as a Palestinian Christian, I have chosen to be fully engaged with all members of the community at local and global levels. I learned from my parents' example how important it is to stay together with others, even when life is harsh and difficult. I have designed and implemented humanitarian aid and development programs, as well as social and community projects. These served all people, regardless of religion or ethnicity, gender, status or need. I could have left the country of my roots, but I made the choice to stay and live out Jesus' commandment to love others as he has loved me.

All: **Father God, we give thanks for Eleonor's story of bearing with others in humble love, expressing that love in commitment to community. Amen**



Olive trees outside Jerusalem (c. WDP)