

# St Philip's Prayer Circle

## Continuing our Prayers for The Middle East

### January 18, 2024

**READER:** *As we begin this Prayer Circle, we acknowledge that we gather on the unceded territory of the Mississauga people, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Haudonosaunee, Algonquin and Huron Wendat People. May we honour the Indigenous stewards of this land, and work to grow in right relationship with all Indigenous peoples. We recognize that our Creator God moves us forward together in healing, respect, and unity for future generations.*



**READER:** On November 16, our Prayer Circle prayed for peace in the Middle East. We thought and prayed, that this war, which had started on October 7, 2023, would be over. The complexity of this conflict seems incomprehensible, and at times very overwhelming. The people living in Israel, the West Bank, and in Gaza, have moved from waiting for the conflict to end to trying to survive in a war zone. People who have been kidnapped, don't know what will happen to them, and their loved ones don't know if or when they may be released. People's homes, work, hospitals, communities, their livelihoods, have been completely destroyed. And for those trying to leave, to protect themselves and their families, the distress is unimaginable. The whole world is watching as the conflict continues, the war wages on, and no end seems to be in sight.

**READER:** As of January 7, 2024, the Gaza Ministry of Health reports that at least 22,835 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed, around 70% of whom were women and children, while around 58,416 others have been injured. An additional 1,000 Israelis have been killed, sadly 82 journalists – of which 75 are Palestinian, 4 are Israeli and 3 are Lebanese, and over 136 UNRWA aid workers.

**READER:** We know that the Gaza Strip's area is 365 square kilometers, with a population of about 2.3 million people, 40% of which are children under the age of 14. Just as a comparison, Prince Edward County is 3 times the size 1,050 square kilometers and a population of 24,000, which is 1% of the population of Gaza. It is hard to think what the devastation must be in this very overcrowded territory.

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**READER:** So today, once again, we continue our prayers for peace – peace in Israel, peace in Gaza. We pray for the end of this war, and for healing and reconciliation to prevent further deaths, further destruction, further broken relationships. Taking a moment to centre our hearts, let us say this prayer for peace in the Middle East:

**READER:** God of mercy and compassion, of grace and reconciliation, pour your power upon all your children in the Middle East.

**READER:** Jews, Muslims and Christians, Palestinians and Israelis. Let hatred be turned into love, fear to trust, despair to hope, oppression to freedom, occupation to liberation.

**READER:** And that violent encounters may be replaced by loving embraces, and peace and justice could be experienced by all<sup>1</sup>.

**ALL: AMEN**

**READER: Our Psalm is number 19, the Lord blesses His People with Peace**

Ascribe to the LORD, you heavenly beings,  
**ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.**

<sup>2</sup> Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;  
**worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.**

<sup>3</sup> The voice of the LORD is over the waters;  
**the God of glory thunders,  
the LORD thunders over the mighty waters.**

<sup>4</sup> The voice of the LORD is powerful;  
**the voice of the LORD is majestic.**

<sup>5</sup> The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;  
**the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.**

<sup>6</sup> He makes Lebanon leap like a calf,  
Sirion like a young wild ox.

<sup>7</sup> **The voice of the LORD strikes  
with flashes of lightning.**

<sup>8</sup> The voice of the LORD shakes the desert;  
**the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh.**

<sup>9</sup> The voice of the LORD twists the oaks  
and strips the forests bare.

**And in his temple all cry, "Glory!"**

<sup>10</sup> The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;  
**the LORD is enthroned as King forever.**

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<sup>1</sup> Reverend Said Ailabouni, Xavier University

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<sup>11</sup> The LORD gives strength to his people;  
**the LORD blesses his people with peace.**

Gracious creator of heaven and earth, your Word has come among us as the true Son of righteousness, and the good news of his birth has gone out to the ends of the world. Open the eyes of your people to the light of your law, that all may be purified from sin and serve you without reproach for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Light and our Life.

ALL: **AMEN**

**READER: A reading from the Gospel of Matthew: The Beatitudes**

**All: Glory to you Lord Jesus Christ**

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.

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

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

This is the Gospel of Christ.

ALL: **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

**READER: We pray for Peace in the Middle East**

In the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful: Guide the people of Israel and Palestine to the straight way, the way of those whom you have blessed.

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Help all your people to not transgress the bounds of what is right and lawful.

Take all your people out of deep darkness, into your light.

Make it that your people do not bear burdens that they have no strength to bear.

Help your people bring about mutual affection and understanding that is needed to end this war.

And grant your people forgiveness and blessings, as you are our sustainer, for with you is all journey's end<sup>2</sup>.

ALL: **AMEN**

**READER:** Almighty God, after almost a century of mistrust and fratricide, please inspire Jews, Christians and Muslims to take the path of reconciliation in the Middle East.

Your people ask for your forgiveness, O God, yet it is hard to forgive past hurts, and enemies. May your words touch those who still stray in the wilderness of vengeful violence, forgetting your command to "forgive and overlook, till God accomplish His Purpose; for God hath power over all things."<sup>3</sup>

ALL: **AMEN**

**READER:** O God, we pray for protection, safety, comfort, and a peaceful resolution to the violence that afflicts the infrastructures of Gaza and Israel. We pray the destruction of infrastructures will end, for protection of the hospitals, the schools, the homes. And we pray for the safety of those sheltered within these structures.

ALL: **AMEN**

**READER:** Two peoples, one land,  
Three faiths, one root,  
One earth, one mother,  
One sky, one beginning, one future, one destiny,  
One broken heart, to be healed by our One God.

**READER:** We pray to you, Lord, to grant us a vision of unity.  
May we see the many in the one, and the one in the many.  
May you, life of all in the world, source of all amazing differences, help us to see your way clearly.  
Guide us gently and firmly toward each other, toward peace<sup>4</sup>.

ALL: **AMEN**

**READER: We pray for those who are living in this conflict:**

Lord, we pray for your protection over the innocent lives in Israel and Palestine. We pray for the hostages and their families. We pray for the people who want to live in peace, and are faced with the

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<sup>2</sup> *Miran Ashraf, New England Islamic Center, Sharon, MA*

<sup>3</sup> *Abdelwahab Hechiche*

<sup>4</sup> *Rabbi Sheila Weinberg, Jewish Community of Amherst, Amherst, MA*

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unrelenting atrocities of war. We pray for those bringing food, water, shelter and sustenance to the people of Gaza. We pray for the doctors, who have left the safety of their homelands, to help the people of Gaza.

**ALL: Lord, you are the God who heals. Please bring your comfort and healing to those who are hurting.**

**READER:** Father of all mercies, we pray for the families who have fled their homes in fear. We lift up the mothers and fathers who have escaped with only their children, leaving everything else behind. Their country has changed, their lives will never be the same, and they are afraid of the future. We lift up the communities who have taken in refugees and displaced people, even though they may be struggling themselves. We thank you for their generosity and compassion towards those in distress. We pray for the displaced people coming to Canada, that they may find rest in peace, and are comforted to know they are welcomed in our country.

**ALL: Lord, you are the God who provides. We pray that timely help and support will reach all who are in need.**

**READER:** Father, there is so much pain and conflict across the Middle East. We pray for leaders throughout the region and ask you to turn their hearts towards peace. As our leaders and those around the world consider how to respond, please grant them wisdom and insight to end this war.

**ALL: Lord, you sent to us your Son, Jesus, who is the Prince of Peace. We pray for an end to the violence and bloodshed, and ask you to bring a new dawn of peace across the Middle East.**

**READER:** Lord, we pray for your protection over the innocent lives in Israel and Palestine. We pray for the hostages and their families. We pray for the people who sought safety and are faced with the unrelenting atrocities of war.

ALL: **AMEN**

**READER: We pray for the children, affected by this war:**

O God, source of life, creator of peace. Help the children of Israel, the West Bank, and of Gaza, who are anguished and confused, to understand the futility of hatred and violence. Grant them the ability to stretch across political, religious and national boundaries, so they may confront horror and fear through the understanding that your children must continue together in the search for justice, peace and truth.

With every fibre of our being we beg you, O God, to help that your people do not fail nor falter<sup>5</sup>.

ALL: **AMEN**

**READER:** Dear Heavenly Father, we bring this situation before you and ask for a swift end to violence. Our hearts are breaking for the children and families in Israel and the Territories, who have and continue to experience the unspeakable horror of attacks, bombings, and the destruction of war,

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<sup>5</sup> Rabbi H. Rolando Matalon, Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, NY, NY

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all around them. We pray for peace and ask that you will guide the hearts and minds of those in leadership to stop these atrocities.

ALL: **AMEN**

**READER:** We especially pray for those children who have been physically and emotionally injured, and for those who have lost loved ones, that you will provide the right people with the right resources to help them, and that you will protect each child, on all sides of this conflict. Lord, we ask for your wisdom for all those involved and for the wider international community<sup>6</sup>.

ALL: **AMEN**

**READER:** We pray for the safety and preservation of the school structures, so that when the war comes to an end, the children of Gaza and Israel will have a place to go; to learn, to play, to start bringing their lives back to normal.

ALL: **AMEN**

**READER: We pray for peace in Jerusalem**

O God of peace, you have established Jerusalem as the Lord's House and a place of peace, and you have called on all who live there to love you and prosper.

Instill in her inhabitants - Jews, Christians, and Muslims - a hunger for justice and dignity and a resolve to end the distrust that culminates in violence and destruction.

Grant the people of Jerusalem the wisdom and patience to build a city where Israelis and Palestinians reside in safety, free from oppression, and committed to the good of all. In this endeavor, make every person an agent of your peace.

O God, forgive your people's indifference, and stamp out the prejudices that lead to hatred. Fill all persons with the reconciling spirit of your presence. So may we join people of good will - in the Middle East and throughout the world - who raise before Jerusalem's gates their insistent Shalom and Salaam:

"Peace be within your walls...Peace be within you."<sup>7</sup>

ALL: **AMEN**

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<sup>6</sup> World Vision UK

<sup>7</sup> The Reverends Harry and Judith Hoehler, First Parish (Unitarian-Universalist), Weston, MA

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**READER: We pray for those working for Peace:**

Lord God, we turn to you when conflict is a daily reality for our sisters and brothers in Israel and Palestine.

We promise you to work to our utmost abilities for peace and reconciliation in the region. But we know we cannot do it alone.

We very much need the strength of your presence in our midst if we are to overcome the obstacles of this war.

So, our prayer at this moment is that you add your support to our efforts, that you show yourself as a tower of strength in those moments when the barriers seem impassable.

Together we can become beacons of hope for just and peaceful societies in the land so very dear to the peoples of your covenant<sup>8</sup>.

ALL: **AMEN**

**READER:** Sustain an undiminished hope, O God of hope, those who continue to labour with undiminished determination to build peace in the land from which, of old, out of brokenness, violence and destruction, hope emerges for so many of faith.

Bless all the spiritual seed of Abraham together with the light of your presence.

For in the light of your presence, we pray for a way of justice, for mercy, and a vision of peace.

We praise you O God, giver of peace, who commands us to peace<sup>9</sup>.

ALL: **AMEN**

**READER: We pray for those who are Separated from your Peace:**

Lord, we are molded, each one of us, in your image, and within our souls there is your fingerprint, that none can erase. We pray for a change of heart for those who have no regard for anyone but self, who put no value on human life.

**READER:** We pray for a change of heart for those nations and individuals who abuse and kill. We are not called to be judge or jury, but we are called to be agents of change, and we do so through prayer.

And if the butterfly that flaps its wings should be your people's attitude to the other, Lord, then may the hurricane this generates reach into the hearts and souls of those for whom we pray, and reveal to them how precious are those for whom they have no love, and how precious they are, who now bring tears to the eyes of God.<sup>10</sup>

ALL: **AMEN**

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<sup>8</sup> Reverend John T. Pawlikowski, OSM, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, IL

<sup>9</sup> Rabbi Herbert Bronstein, Northshore Congregation Israel, Glencoe, IL

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/prayer-index/prayers-for-peace>

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**READER:** O God, source of life, creator of peace. help your people, who are anguished and confused, to understand the futility of hatred and violence. Grant your people the ability to stretch across political, religious and national boundaries, so they may confront horror and fear by continuing together in the search for justice, peace and truth.

With every fibre of our being we beg you, O God, to help us end this war.

ALL: **AMEN**

**TOGETHER LET US PRAY THE LORD'S PRAYER:**

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 trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever,

**AMEN**