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UCC sharing 46 prayers online in 24 hours during May 7 Interfaith Day of Prayer

On the National Day of Prayer, the United Church of Christ is releasing 46 original prayers written by people of many faiths, in a multitude of voices. Religious scholars, deployed military, social activists, educators, authors, poets, a politician and a migrant living in sanctuary have authored appeals that touch on the need for the divine in this time of the novel coronavirus pandemic. The church’s interfaith “prayer warriors” range in age from a 95-year-old former UCC officer to a 7-year-old child.

They pray as one for moral and spiritual renewal — for a country grappling with greed, for politicians more concerned with economic stability than human life, for a world at war with a deadly virus.

“A virus invisible to us, yet very present with us brings sickness. We cannot ignore or avoid its presence,” writes the Rev. Geoffrey Black, a past UCC general minister and president (2009-2015). “Now we are awakened to the uncertainties of time and place.”

As retired Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson asks, “Do you mean for this virus to be a wake-up call about how we’re treating the most vulnerable among us — even the earth itself — long before the virus?”

These quotes are from two of 46 prayers to be shared online at UCC.org and on the UCC Facebook page beginning at midnight EDT Wednesday, May 6, and continuing for 24 hours through midnight Thursday, May 7. Readers will be able to access a new prayer every hour from midnight through noon. The frequency of the prayers will increase to every half-hour through 6:30 p.m. From 6:45 p.m. until midnight, a new prayer will be presented every 15 minutes. The Rev. Traci Blackmon, UCC associate general minister, kicks off the series with an additional introductory prayer on Facebook at 6 p.m. Wednesday.

Rooted in firm belief in the power of their intercessions, the prayer warriors ask for strength, offer thanks, and look for grace and guidance in the days ahead.

“Send fresh your anointing of grace and mercy upon those who believe, yet doubt your presence. Guide us, Father Mother God, always with your light so that men and women will see you and your glory through all that we do and all that we are,” writes Dr. Pernessa Seele, an immunologist, CEO and Founder of Balm in Gilead, Inc., a faith-based organization that works for improved public health systems and the elimination of health disparities.

“SpiritGod, we stand in need of your healing spirit,” writes human rights activist Ruby Sales, founder and director of Atlanta’s SpiritHouse Project. “Touch our hearts, and in the place of
greed that makes us gobble up everything for ourselves, replace it with compassion and generosity.”

The prayer warriors also express grief for what has been lost and look with hope at the new normal that will emerge after COVID-19.

“Sovereign God, help us focus less on constraints and fear; but rather consider that we are all a part of a new vision for the hope of many nations and the healing of our world,” writes Rev. Dionne Boissière, chaplain of the Church Center for the United Nations.

Presiding Episcopal Bishop Michael Curry prays: “Help us to place our hands in your hands and in the hands of each other that we may walk together and work together until our nightmares are ended and your dream is realized on earth as it is in heaven.”

“Blessed are you, O God,” prays Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. “Bring life even where there is death.”

The Rev. Mitri Raheb, a Palestinian Christian, sends his prayer from Bethlehem, calling for wisdom. “While states and countries are building walls of separation and promoting segregation in the name of security and self-protection, open our eyes in this time of a global pandemic, to recover our common humanity, dignity and equality.”

As a church of extravagant welcome, the UCC is inviting people of all faiths to add their prayers to the stream of UCC posts on Facebook.

“Although May 7 is National Day of Prayer, this call for prayer is from a higher power than Congress,” Blackmon said. “The voices gathered here are representative of the world’s horrors and our hopes. I am deeply grateful and strengthened to know that this call to pray is reverberating around the world. In this space the number of people who’ve answered the call to contribute to this communal cry serves to remind us that God is indeed still speaking and we have the power to heal the world.”

UCC leaders contributing prayers include General Minister and President John Dorhauer and his four living predecessors — Black, John Thomas, Paul Sherry and Avery Post, who is 95 — as well as Associate General Minister Karen Georgia Thompson. Religious traditions represented in the prayers include Baptist, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Evangelical, Lutheran, Methodist, Unitarian Universalist, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Baha’i and Dutch Reformed. Among the North American contributors are people from African American, Asian American, European American, Indigenous and Latinx communities.

A complete list of prayer contributors appears below.

Prayer contributors, Interfaith Day of Prayer, United Church of Christ, May 7, 2020

Rev. Dr. Jim Antal, United Church of Christ minister, climate justice activist and author
Imam Naeeem Baig, Outreach Director, Dar Al-Hijrah Islamic Center, Falls Church, Va.
Bishop William J. Barber II, Founder, Moral Mondays; co-architect, The Poor People’s Campaign
Rev. Cameron Barr (vice-chair) and Yvette Wynn (chair), United Church of Christ Board
Rev. Dr. Traci Blackmon, Associate General Minister, UCC
Rev. Louie Blue Coat, Eagle Butte, S.D.; Council for American Indian Ministry, UCC
Rev. Dr. Allan Boesak, Dutch Reformed Church minister, anti-apartheid activist, South Africa
Rev. Dionne Boissière, Chaplain, Church Center for the United Nations
Annabelle Callahan, age 7, Philadelphia
The United Church of Christ, a mainline Protestant denomination, has nearly 900,000 members and 5,000 congregations nationwide. Headquartered in Cleveland, it is a church of many firsts: the first mainline denomination to ordain a woman, the first to ordain an openly gay man and the first predominantly white denomination to ordain an African American. More on the UCC’s ecumenical and interfaith ministries is here.