



On April 2-8, the Virginia Conference will participate in a week of intentional prayer for the mission of The United Methodist Church and for the work of the Commission on a Way Forward which began meeting in January. This week of Praying Our Way Forward is an initiative of the Council of Bishops as a part of their larger commitment to lead the church in every part of the world in times of worship, study, discernment, confession and prayer for God's guidance.

Each annual conference in The United Methodist Church will participate in this prayer ministry which was launched on January 1 in the North Carolina Conference and will conclude in the West Angola Episcopal area in June 2018. Churches in each of the 16 districts of the Virginia Conference will be invited to participate in focused times of prayer by their district superintendents. In addition to participating in each conference's designated week of prayer, individuals are invited to join the initiative beyond the week of April 2-8 by praying daily and fasting weekly for the church, mission and future.

Resources for both congregational and individual participation in Praying Our Way Forward may be found at <http://umcprays.org/>. In addition, Virginia Conference prayer resources may be found on these pages.

--Bishop Sharma D. Lewis

Prayer for April 2 by Bishop Sharma D. Lewis

Eternal God, you promised in your Word, "...do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God..."

O God, I release my worries and concerns about the future of our denomination.

O God, I choose the discipline of prayer to seek your direction in all matters of life.

O God, I intercede on behalf of the 32 members on the Commission on a Way Forward. Grant them peace and clarity in their moments of study, dialogue and reflection.

O God, I thank you for each member that was chosen for their love, commitment, gifts and graces they bring to The United Methodist Church.

O God, grant them wisdom, and guidance as they seek your face about the future of our denomination.

Lord in your mercy. Hear my prayer.

Amen.

Prayer for April 3 Conference Day of Prayer

In a season of discernment,
as your Church, in which we have met you,
meets across divides,
as a Commission confers on A Way Forward,
as we hunger for a way beyond our walls,
Pour out your Spirit, as we say,
on us gathered here.
By your Spirit, we say,
make us one with Christ,
one with each other,
and one in ministry to all the world.
Until, in your Spirit,
the blurred and blinding chaos
of this broken world and Church
resolves into a feast
and you are host and Lord. Amen.

Prayer for April 4

O Lord, We come to you today both as individuals and as a body. Sometimes we too clearly hear the voices of division and fear around us. Sometimes those voices seem to echo within us. At those times it is difficult to hear your voice within.

Help us to be still. In the stillness help us to let go of all the voices that shout at us demanding attention. Help us to let go of all the emotional attachments that carry us to places of hopelessness or frustration or anger. Help us to trust you and to trust each other.

As we let go, fill us with an awareness of your presence...not just in us individually... but in the community that is Christ's body.

In that presence may we hold each other and all of your creation in loving peace and harmony. May we hold The United Methodist Church. May we listen to all of our collected voices with love and without judgement. In our hearts may we lift those voices before you. As we hold all of this in our hearts may we seek the peace and unity of love that are your kingdom. May we hold each other and our church in our hearts and prayers as we journey ahead. Lead us, we pray to that place of hope and safety and peace that is your Kingdom here on earth. Through Christ we pray. Amen.

Prayer for April 5

For a fire we would spark together
but which only now flickers in our withered imaginations,
For a blaze that warms
and does not lay waste,
For the hearth we would gather around
and admire the way a fine light dances in each others' eyes,
For a way forward
on a Word-lit path,
For a fire in winter, Lord,
we pray. Amen.

Prayers for April 6 from United Methodist Book of Worship

In the morning:

New every morning is your love, Great God of light,
and all day long you are working for good in the world.
Stir up in us desire to serve you,
to live peacefully with our neighbors,
and to devote each day to your Son,
our Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

At noon or mid-day:

God of mercy,
this midday moment of rest is your welcome gift.
Bless the work we have begun, make good its defects
and let us finish it in a way that pleases you.
Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the evening:

As you have made this day, O God,
you also make the night.
Give light for our comfort.
Come upon us with quietness and still our souls
that we may listen for the whisper of your Spirit
and be attentive to your nearness in our dreams.
Empower us to rise again in new life to proclaim your
praise, and to show Christ to the world.

Prayer for April 7

O Lord!

We ask that you would come among us and bring comfort, peace and unity. We pray, O Lord, that you would allow us to be illuminated to your will for the church we call United Methodist, and for the world. Bring those from both extremes into peaceful and constructive discussion that we may share the concerns and the brokenness that exists within all of us.

Allow us to truly love one another that we may share in the healing of the world around us. Where there is strife let us begin unity and peace. Where there is anger and fear, let us bring hope and love.

Lord we ask that you open our hearts to your mighty words, that we find solace among them. Where we have different understandings illuminate your desire for your wisdom of those words. Lord we pray that the voices of disunity can be filled with understanding and wisdom as Solomon found truth even in unconventional ways. Allow us to be your disciples, your people and find love for one another in the way that you love us. Amen.

Prayer for April 8 – The Wesley Covenant Prayer

I am no longer my own, but thine.

Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.

Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine.

So be it.

And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven.

Amen.

Additional Readings and Scriptures for the week of prayer

Reflections by Rev. Alex Joyner (A Pastor in the VA Conference on the Eastern Shore)

If unity means the silent suppression of our vital selves, Jesus,
then we don't want it.

If unity means a single tone instead of a symphony, sweet Jesus,
it may as well be a noisy gong or clashing cymbal.

If unity means monochrome rather than Technicolor,
why should the blinded see?

But

if the heartbeat in my chest is echoed in my neighbor's,

If you do play in ten thousand places
and in the features of our faces,

If you, on the way to the cross, should pray that we be one,
may it be so

unto your glory everlasting. Amen.

(With acknowledgements to Gerard Manley Hopkins)

WITH my glasses off

the thing I think I know

becomes indistinct and fresh.

A deer's tail becomes a great white feather.

A distant tree, a man by the roadside hailing me.

When I run without my lenses

the world slips out of bounds

and newness emerges

like angels in our midst.

Since we are surrounded, cloud-like, by such witnesses,

can we see a little less clearly, Lord?

Can we lay aside our sharpened judgments

for some new appraisal of the scene?

And could the thing we think we know and want

emerge as something unimagined

but vivid clear to fuzzy sight?

UNITY is a derivative of what we want.

What we want is wholeness, health, salvation.

What we want is to be able to unfold in your presence

to let shadows fall out into light.

What we want is to be seen and known.

What we want is the source and end of our wanting.
Then all these things will be added unto us,
Unity not excepted.
We want the unity of the set apart,
 the Abrams and Sarais
 pulled out of other journeys
 to undertake a new one
One, holy people
 ready to build an altar of gratitude
 even when the promised land
 is struck by drought
As ours, so obviously,
 is.
We seek a way - not an end.
The end is a little hard to put into words
 but it has the aspect of an empty tomb
 and a pearl-gated city.
The way declared itself, however.
 Walked among us even.
With hands unworn from creation's work,
 submitted to all the wounding the world can wield,
 yet wears the scars in glory.
We look for the Way Forward
 because it is our one necessity.

HOW good and pleasant it is
 for brothers and sisters to dwell together in unity!
So the psalmist says
and we believe it could be so,
 though our glimpses of such goodness and pleasantness
 are scant and near mythical.
Yet we long to live together -
 to see as you see
 and love as you love -
until our funhouse mirror of a creation
 reflects your giddy desire
 that we should all be one.
We dream a frame that can contain
 a picture that is us.
Our self-constructed models are too dangerous,

spindly, fragile.
They break and injure when we try to force the glass.
We've made them far too large.
We need a frame the size of a child,
a gift,
a cherished one,
which You alone can give.

WE pray that our shoulders
will not be lent to one more wheel
whose work amounts to vanity.
The good gift of our strength,
such as it is,
is too easily wasted on
projects of our own design.
We want a cause that
calls forth our faith, our best, our all,
a labor that
is fed by a native trust in You,
so long neglected.
Help us not to offer gifts
that cost us nothing.

MY sun is my sister's sun.
My moon is my brother's moon.
The air we breathe is the same.
The wounds we suffer,
the tender joys,
the deep longings —
we know them inside out.
The hope we have is nowhere else but in you.
My sun is my sister's sun.
My moon is my brother's moon.
And alike we pray to know your greater light
in the likeness of Christ.

The Beatitudes

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

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

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

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

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

7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

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

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

10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:1-12

What God Requires

6 "With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?

7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

8 He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you

but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:6-8

Imitating Christ's Humility

2 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion 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 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 was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:1-11

The Greatest Commandment

34 When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, 35 and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36 "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" 37 He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the greatest and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Matthew 22:34-37

Jesus' Prayer for His Disciples *John 17*

17 After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

6 "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8 for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. 13 But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. 14 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 15 I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. 16 They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

20 "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24 Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

25 "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.