

UNIVERSAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR STUDENTS 2021

*“God of hope,
may your life-giving
rivers overflow and
transform our
suffering world”*





INTRODUCTION

“God of hope, may your life-giving rivers overflow and transform our suffering world”

The cover image, a bit desolated and dim but in reverence and prayer, reflects the difficult situation the world is experiencing in times of isolation and pandemic. However, it also highlights the tone of reflection and hope of this year's UDPS celebration, which will surely differ from other celebrations in recent years.

Throughout 2020 and so far in 2021, the world has been marked by a global pandemic without recent precedents, which has changed our ways of surviving, relating and acting as a community.

Millions have lost their lives due to the health crisis, and many other millions have been sick and isolated from their loved ones. Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis has caused the exacerbation of other crisis which have persisted for decades: political and economic, social, environmental and spiritual crises. Jobs have been lost and small businesses have closed. Global inequalities have increased and millions of people have impoverished. The most vulnerable communities have been the most affected ones because even though the virus does not discriminate over social, economic, and health conditions, vulnerabilities do discriminate.

The human rights crisis has become extremely evident; in many cases, preventive measures have helped contain the virus. In many others, such measures have been used as an excuse for not ensuring compliance with human rights to people, stigmatizing human rights defenders. This had already been warned by the group of UN special reporters on Human Rights in March 2020. Violence against women and children has augmented during times of

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Universal Day of Prayer for Students 2021

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World Student Christian Federation - 2021



INTRODUCTION

women and children has augmented during times of lockdown and according to the latest reports, they will be the ones who will be more at risk in the near future.

Nevertheless, just like the small candle in the image, hope is kindled in the community and it flows in the life-giving rivers that our God provides. We, the members of Student Christian Movements around the world, seek to spread that light, lighting other candles of hope along with those who are in most need of comfort.

For this reason, as members of the Federation we come together to pray and to act prophetically for the defense of life; against any expression of hate or exclusion and in favour of those who suffer the most because of this pandemic, for those who live on the margins of society, so that they may have a dignified and abundant life.

On this day of February, at the beginning of 2021, we have many uncertainties, sadness and losses, but we also have the radical hope in the kingdom of God and its justice. That a New Earth and a New Heaven will be created where the rivers of life flow to heal our wounds, and to transform our suffering world into a world of hope and justice.

Marcelo D. Leites
WSCF General Secretary



Historial background of the UDPS

Every year individuals, churches and communities around the world unite to lift up students in prayer on Student Sunday, also known as the Universal Day of Prayer for Students (UDPS).

Student Sunday is coordinated by the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), and has been celebrated since 1898, making it one of the oldest ecumenical days of prayer. It serves as one of the tangible signs of our common life and connection between students and alumni of WSCF all around the world.

The UDPS was first celebrated on Sunday 13th February 1898 at the second meeting of what was then known as the General Committee of the World Student Christian Federation. The participants of the Federation's then ten member movements believed



that intercessory prayer should be a vital ingredient in the life of a world-wide body of Christian students. As a result, the early leaders of the federation called on Christian students around the world to join together in February each year for observance of the Universal Day of Prayer for Students.

During the world wars when it was impossible to hold WSCF meetings, the major bond of unity between those separated from one another by the ravages of war was the annual observance of the Day of Prayer for Students.

For more than a century students and friends of WSCF have observed this Day of Prayer as a way to express their common commitment as witnesses of our faith in God and in each other, to the world both inside and outside our academic communities.

The WSCF publishes ecumenical services of worship on a theme that relates to the Federation's theme of study for the year or responds to current events and issues of concern to the world's students.

Suggested preparation to celebrate the UDPS 2021

Please adapt the following suggestions to new health measures and proper protocols.

You can adapt this year's service using video conference services and online tools.

If your region's current situation and authorities provisions allow groups to meet, use all the measures and protocols provided by your local or national government.

Stay safe and healthy.

- Appoint a small committee of interested persons to organize the service and to assign parts to leaders and readers. Try to involve a diverse group of people to prepare for the liturgy.

- Feel free to adapt the service for your region and/or context.

- Try to organize a good choir to lead the singing. The choir may vary/change the sung parts and select different hymns or songs if desired. Parts to be sung may be spoken if preferred. You can also replace the suggested songs in this liturgy to adapt to your local language and customs. Brainstorm creative and symbolic acts in the service that would serve to highlight the theme.

- Give adequate time for the preacher (student, Senior Friend, or clergy) to prepare a short sermon (recommended 7-12 minutes). She or he may select other Bible readings for the service as the spirit leads.

- If you wish to add a service of Eucharist together with this prayer service, please do so according to your tradition.

- Organize the collection. This year, devote your collection to the All In One Boat Campaign to help support the work of the Federation.

- Inform churches in different parts of the country and invite them to organize this service in their local congregations or fellowship.

LITURGICAL ORDER

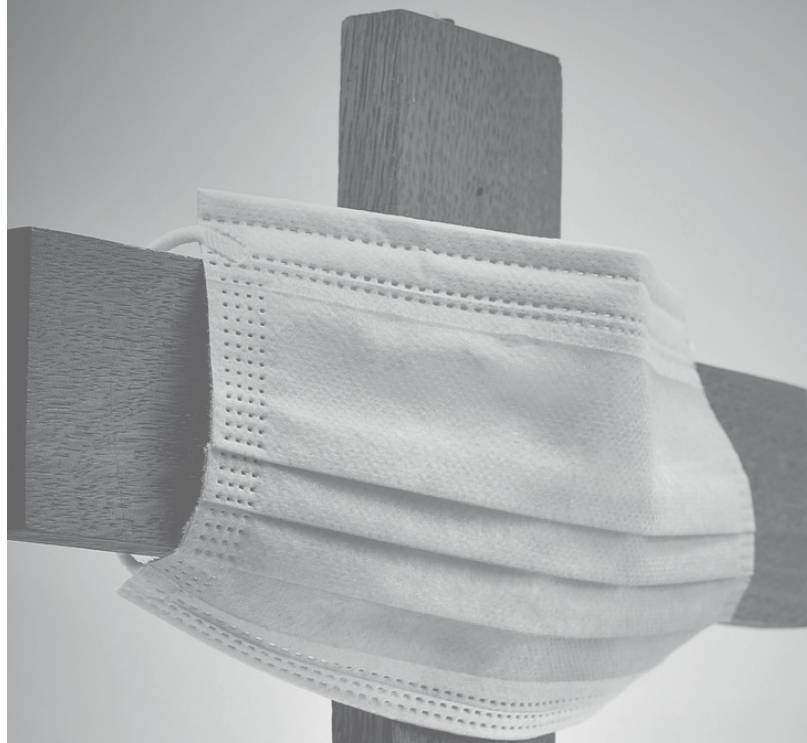


Imagen de Jeyaratnam Caniceus en Pixabay

Legend: **L**-Leader; **P**-People;   -Stand up

Introduction to the celebration

L: Up to here God has accompanied us through valleys of pandemic, isolation, injustice, and death, and has affirmed the good news of solidarity, faith and hope. The presence, testimony and values promoted by the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) throughout 126 years continues alive in each and every one of us as we continue the legacy of unity in diversity and the struggle for transforming our world in a better place. May the Spirit of God lead us in this celebration and inspire us to continue the journey of prayer, peace and justice, committing ourselves to the abundant Life in Jesus Christ, Living Water that refreshes and revitalizes our path.

From our places, we invite you to share words, gestures of welcome to the people next to us showing our hospitality, traditions of welcome, acceptance, and respect for the sacred experience of life that each one brings with him or her to this celebration. (Short time to exchange greetings with background music).

-Prelude: Hebrew dance “Mayim-Mayim” or music played by local musicians/ entrance of liturgical elements.

-Invocation: (In the liturgical center there will be a large container with water that will connect three circles formed with colorful pieces of fabrics representing traditional motifs from different countries. Two people will form a couple to lead the invocation (6 people). Each couple will be placed in the center of one of the circles and will make a liturgical gesture suggested in relation to the text).

L 1 and 2: (they will agitate the water and lift it with their hands spilling it on the container)

1- This is the water of Creation. In the beginning the Spirit of God danced over the water and made it the fruitful element of life.

2- It is also the dangerous water of the flood turned into covenant of God’s love, opportunity of a new creation, promise of salvation and purification.

Halle, Halle, Halleluja

Anonymous, Caribbean

People Response:



L 3 and 4: (one of the two will give water symbolically to the other to drink)

3- This is the water of Sustenance and Health. Living water offered to people thirsty for justice: women, children, those sick along the path. Miraculous water that nourishes and satiates.

4- Water turned into wine to celebrate the fiesta of life. Water that springs from the wound of a life of commitment to the kingdom that is possible for all.



Legend: L-Leader; P-People;   -Stand up

Halle, Halle, Halleluja

Anonymous, Caribbean



Hal - le, Hal - le, Hal - le - lu - ja.

Hal - le, Hal - le, Hal - le - lu - ja.

Hal - le, Hal - le, Hal - le - lu - ja. Hal - le -

lu - ja, Hal - le - lu - ja.

People Response:

L 5 and 6: (they will share a gesture of blessing)

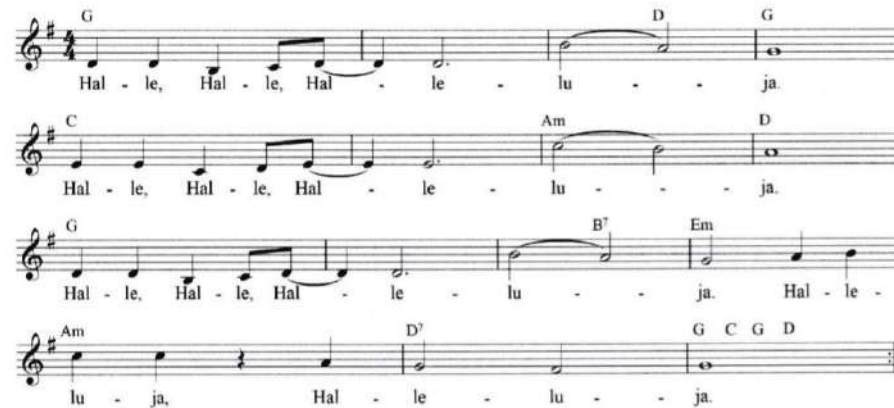
5- This is the water of Liberation and Hope. Through it the people walked towards their freedom.

6-This is the water with which Jesus was baptized, the water of our baptism, which launches us on the path of discipleship marked by questions, certainties, encounters, prophetic challenge.

All: The water that gives us "joy in hope, patience in tribulation and perseverance in prayers." (Rom. 12, 12)

Halle, Halle, Halleluja

Anonymous, Caribbean



Hal - le, Hal - le, Hal - le - lu - ja.

Hal - le, Hal - le, Hal - le - lu - ja.

Hal - le, Hal - le, Hal - le - lu - ja. Hal - le -

lu - ja, Hal - le - lu - ja.

People Response:

Prayer

Let us pray: God of history, you have told us: "I am the water of life, whoever comes to me will never be thirsty" and in that eternal promise we trust. You call us and gather us today in this place, we are your people and a sign of unity in your name. As Christians, we feel challenged to be witnesses of your Gospel in the world in which you have placed us.

God of joy, how can we sing to you in the midst of so much suffering of death?

God of hope, how can we announce your Good News surrounded by uncertainties?

God of justice, how to transform the world with so much apathy, individualism, and remaining isolated, distant?

We need to remember your Truth:

You who incarnated the Gospel of humility, service, sharing, healing, inclusion, liberation in times of hegemonic empires;

You who were betrayed, wounded, denied, abandoned;

Legend: L-Leader; P-People; ♀ ♂ -Stand up

You, crucified and buried;
 You, our God: you have risen!
 God of Life, in today's realities we find your answers:
 unveiling our eyes to see you in the most vulnerable of our communities and our entire world and do not
 play the game of the structures that generate and legitimate injustices;
 celebrating our life stories with gratitude in our hearts for the many blessings we receive from you and regain
 faith in small things, those that happens every day;
 trusting the promise of your love and eternal company, to turn our anxieties into certainties that allow us to
 continue.

At this time together as young people and students, we want to affirm you with our charismas, creativity,
 resilience, solidarity, sensitivity, optimism, care, responsibility, commitment to your kingdom. We want to
 refresh ourselves with the good news of a living ecumenical youth, with a sense of the historical moment and
 testimony of the values of faith in Jesus Christ to whom we all proclaim from every corner of this world. Amen.

♀ ♂ **Hymn:**

16. El Mensaje Que Hoy Proclamamos

Latin American Trad.

El men - sa - je que hoy pro - cla - ma - mos es jus -
 Hear the mes - sage we are now pro - claim - ing a - bout

ti - cia es paz pa - ra el mun - do El men
 ju - tice and peace for the whole world. Hear the

La fe faith el a mor la es - pe -
 With faith and with love and wi - th

ran - za de un mun do me - jor.
 hope we sh - all fight for the the world.

La fe faith el a mor la es - pe -
 With faith and with love and with hope we shall fight for the world.

2. El mensaje que hoy proclamamos,
 es dar nuevas de vida a los pobres.
 La fe, el amor, la esperanza de un mundo mejor.
 La fe, el amor, la esperanza de un mundo mejor.

2. Hear, the gospel we are proclaiming,
 it gives new life to those who are poorest.
 With faith and with love and with hope we
 shall fight for the world.
 With faith and with love and with hope we
 shall fight for the world.

Biblical Reflection: *(Main Scripture Ezekiel 47, supported Scripture John 7, 37-38, Mark 1, 9-11) - Text read in several languages*

What does this text has to tell us today in the middle of a world pandemic? How does it nurture hopes in our different contexts?

Ideas to motivate the group's reflections:

-Ezekiel is a prophet and a priest. His vision from the exile consists of restoring the worship to YHWH in the Temple when returning to the Land, but in a renewed way. A new Temple with a healing function as described in this vision of the life-giving river flowing from the Temple that becomes a visual parable of sustaining and transforming hope for the land.

-Equitable division of God's land (47: 13-23). God is the source of the life-giving fruitfulness land.

-God overflows the temple, transcends it. The old concept is "going to the temple" to meet God from the sacrifices and offerings. In Ezequiel, God overflows and goes out to nourish and heal the people and all of Creation.

-The gradual growth of the waters in the temple suggests process. That is how we foresees changes and develop methodologies for leadership training and for gradual transformation in our societies.

-Integral health demands an ecological reflection of the need to care and act in favor of the Earth. The land that has been violated is now restored in its rightful function.



Hymn: *UDPS 2021 propose you to select a hymn that represents your local and community reality close to your tradition, culture or context.*

Intercession/Commitment: *(The sound of the waters will be listened to in off and before each expressed reason, images will be shown on the projector related to the situations that are described. Example: Photos of glaciers, rivers, oceans, salt waters, drought situations, water commercialization, storms / and others of the WSCF in their option for justice)*

L: The WSCF has sailed on its ecumenical ship for 126 years, allowing itself to be challenged by the most demanding circumstances and realities for youth. Today the symbol of the water challenges us to continue announcing hope in the midst of tribulations. The water is creation of God, it is a sacred element that gives life, a life that needs to be cared for. When life is threatened or denied in any way, as Christians we can't remain indolent, quiet, inactive. We are called to announced and struggle for individual fullfulness, which become the liberation of the community. For it is written "if one member suffers, every member suffers with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Corinthians 12:26). We are called to be a praying community that cares for one another and for the whole of creation.

(Slides with background music)

L7: The waters of the glaciers and rivers are a free source of sustenance necessary to live: drinking water to consume. Unfortunately, we have been corrupted by the power of the market and we have privatized this resource, taking advantage of the need and scarcity of many who live in desert areas, far from water sources and in other cases even appropriating the natural water reserves in foreign countries. As a global fellowship, we do not want to be insensitive to these realities. We want to continue being a critical, empathetic, conscious Federation that struggles for a fair, equitable and solidarity-based distribution of the resources we have in the planet. We want to be "drinking water" for this "thirsty world".

P: We commit to offer waters of life and hope

(Slides with background music)

L8: In the salty waters we remember the cry of those people and communities who suffer as a result of the injustices that legitimize the dominant systems of our world. Many migrants cross the seas and borders in search of a life opportunity, women and children are victims of physical and psychological violence, poverty is increasing and also social gaps, unemployment, children labor force, and low-paid work are more established realities, discrimination are increasingly as the result of an inherited and archaic morality. The salty water also has the property to heal, regenerate, and give life. We want the WSCF that we build together to add new flavors of peace and justice, of equity and dignity in this world today; that we care and take care of human beings and claim for their rights, their safety, their well-being, their fullness of life.

P: We commit to offer waters of life and hope

Legend: **L**-Leader; **P**-People;   -Stand up

(Slides with background music)

L9: Countless mysteries lie in the deep waters of the oceans. Sometimes we think we know everything, understand everything, have control of everything, but God constantly places us before new things, unknown realities. We want to be a Federation of humble people and recognize our vulnerability and limitations before the mystery of God. We want to look deep into human existence and all of Creation to always live with the capacity of wondering, with the joy of surprises, and with the desire to learn from the experiences of other people and nature.

P: We commit to offer waters of life and hope

(Slides with background music)

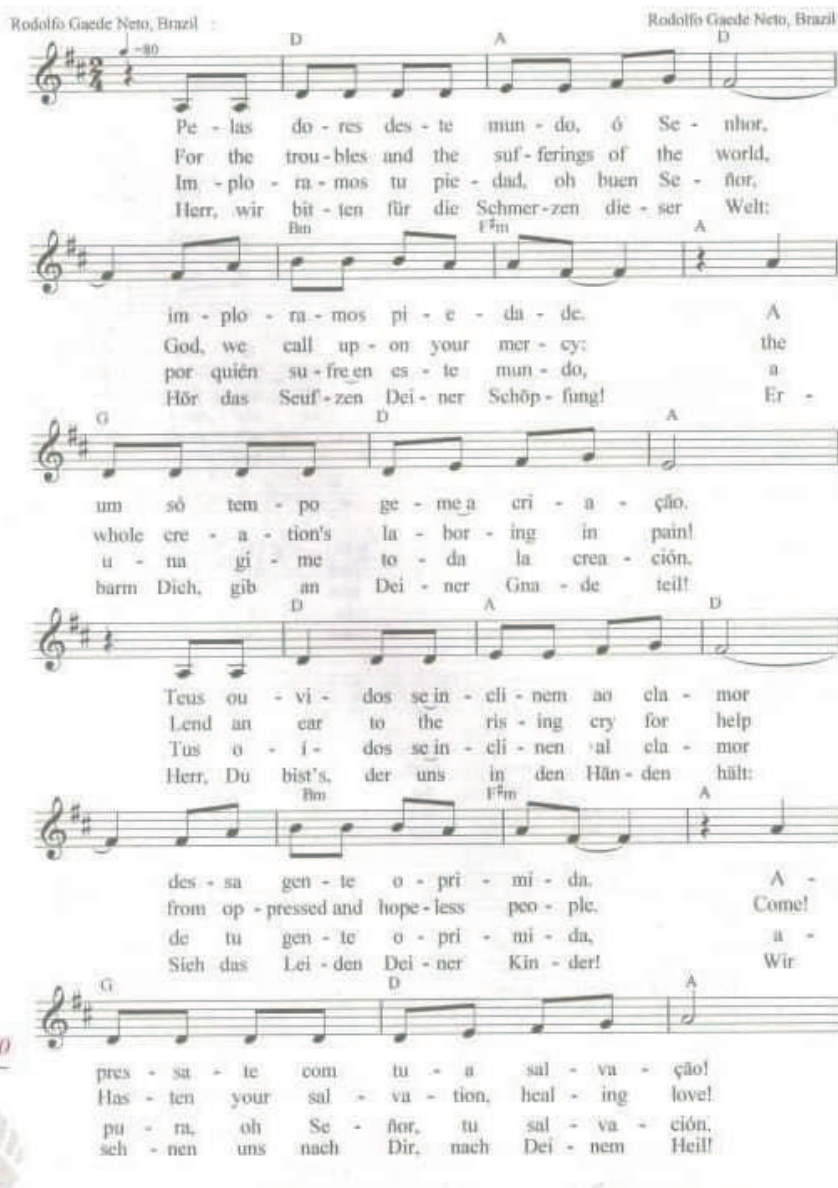
L10: In the calm waters, with smooth streams and white sands, may privilege do not accommodate us. The turbulent and rough waters are sometimes necessary to get us out of our comfort zones, to shake us when we fall into individualism, apathy, alienation.

P: We commit to offer waters of life and hope. Amen.

  **Hymn:**

39. Pelas dores deste mundo

Rodolfo Gaede Neto, Brazil



Pe - las do - res des - te mun - do, ó Se - nhor,
 For the trou - bles and the suf - ferings of the world,
 Im - plo - ra - mos tu pie - dad, oh buen Se - ñor,
 Herr, wir bit - ten für die Schmer - zen die - ser Welt:
 im - plo - ra - mos pi - e - da - de. A
 God, we call up - on your mer - cy: the
 por quên su - fre en es - te mun - do, a
 Hör das Seuf - zen Dei - ner Schöp - fung! Er -
 um só tem - po ge - me a cri - a - ção.
 whole cre - a - tion's la - bor - ing in pain!
 ti - na gi - me to - da la crea - çion.
 harm Dich, gib an Dei - ner Gna - de teil!
 Teus ou - vi - dos se in - cli - nem ao cla - mor
 Lend an ear to the ris - ing cry for help
 Tus o - i - dos se in - cli - nen al cla - mor
 Herr, Du bist's, der uns in den Hän - den hält:
 des - sa gen - te o - pri - mi - da. A -
 from op - pressed and hope - less peo - ple. Come!
 de tu gen - te o - pri - mi - da, a -
 Sieh das Lei - den Dei - ner Kin - der! Wir
 pres - sa - te com tu - a sal - va - ção!
 Has - ten your sal - va - tion, heal - ing love!
 pu - ra, oh Se - ñor, tu sal - va - çion,
 seh - nen uns nach Dir, nach Dei - nem Heil!

"Pelas dores deste mundo" / "For the troubles of this world" / "Imploramos tu piedad" (WCC World Assembly, Book of Worship and Prayers "Em tua Graça" No. 39 pages 120-421) Author: Rodolfo Gaede Neto, Brazil

Legend: L-Leader; P-People; ♀ ♀ -Stand up

Thanksgiving and water blessing: (adapted from *Liturgy: On the river of life. Gratitude for water. Ecumenical Symphony. Meeting of the WCC Executive Committee, September 17, 1993. Sigtuna, Sweden*). The liturgist will say this placed next to the container of water in the liturgical center.

L: O God, listen to the pleas of your people. We celebrate our creation and our salvation. Listen to our prayers, and with your blessing touch these waters that give fertility to the fields, freshness and cleanliness to human beings. Through these waters you give us a new birth and renew us in holiness. May this life-giving element be a sign and mean of our renewal and freshness, and enable us to share the joy of all creation, sanctified by Christ in his baptism. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

P: Amen.

L: As we leave this place we are invited to touch the water with our hands to participate in the renewal forces of these waters and receive the blessing of our God.

♀ ♀ Blessing: (adapted from *Liturgy: On the river of life. Gratitude for water. Ecumenical Symphony. Meeting of the WCC Executive Committee, September 17, 1993. Sigtuna, Sweden*).

L: May God, who has created all the waters of this Earth; Jesus Christ his Son, who is the Living Water for us, and the Holy Spirit who purifies, renews us in these waters, and unites us in the same baptism and in love, be with us in our daily challenges and struggles and guide us to be justice and peace-makers wherever we go.

P: Amen.

Legend: L-Leader; P-People; ♀♂ -Stand up

♀♂ Final song:

SCM Solidarity Song

Saw Mathew Aye (Burma)

“SCM Solidarity song” english version

1. The song we sing, not for our - selves. For those who are op -
 2. The way we work, not for our - selves. For those who are op -
 3. The life we owe, not to our - selves. Wo - men and men work

pressed and chained. Build up a new so - ci - e - ty. Let's share and feel with
 pressed and poor. Suf - fer with them and let us know in strug - gle we will
 hand in hand. Un - i - ty will tri - umph. This hope and vis - ion

them. Come S C Ms, u - nite, be one. Pull out in - just ice from this world.
 win.
 share.

Live with peo - ple, build — to - geth - er. One day we'll reach a new just world.

SCM Solidarity Song

(G)

Composer: Saw Mathew Aye

Arranger: Marcos Martinez

Trad: Gerardo Oberman

“SCM Solidarity song” spanish version

Por quien es - ta en o - pre - sión, por
 quien ca - yó, can - ta - mos hoy. Cre - ar, su - mar y
 com - par - tir, ser pueble en paz vi - vir. Se -
 a - mos MEC en u - ni - dad, lo justo ha - ga - mos hoy bri -
 llar Un mun - do nue - vo na - ce - rá, se -
 rá la nue - va so - cie - dad.

Por otros es nuestra misión:
 por quien es pobre, o está en prisión,
 sufrir con ellos y saber
 que habremos de vencer.

La vida es buena en unidad,
 mujeres y hombres, con bondad
 buscando juntos la visión
 con fe, esperanza, amor.



Prayer from Europe Region (ERC, June 2020)

READING

Romans 8:21 - that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

PRAYER

We pray for healing. Lord, many people face serious health issues, it might be the Corona Virus, it might have other reasons. Please hold all our loved ones, all our siblings around the world in your hand. Send healing to the ones suffering and be with the ones that worry about their loved ones.

We pray for solidarity. Father, around the world we witness people not following the recommendations that are meant to support all of us. Please help people understand the bigger picture and support them in limiting themselves in order to protect other.

We pray for support. Mother, the financial foundation of many people around the world is instable at the moment. Students lose their scholarships, families lose their income, small companies cannot stand the new regulations and go bankrupt. Please help us to show solidarity with the ones in need and help also political leaders to look for fair offers of help, supporting the ones in need instead of the ones asking for help the loudest.

We pray for deliberation of the leaders. Almighty, we see governments taking profit from extraordinary situations. Please send your holy spirit for people on all levels to understand the need of thoughtful and sensitive actions.

We pray for our own souls. Holy spirit, come and refresh us, as we are socially distanced. As we have to find new ways of explaining and understanding the reality, we find ourselves in. Come to our houses, help us to find the balance between our professions and our well-being. Protect our souls and our bodies from getting ill through this situation.

We pray for equality. Jesus Christ, you treated all humans equal and didn't make a difference based on nationality or ethnicity. Teach us to do the same and to take our own privileges not for granted and give us the strength to stand with siblings around the world and in our own environment and help us protect all their rights equally.

We pray for freedom of the oppressed. Mighty king, we see governments oppressing people and taking away laws and democratic structures. Be with our siblings in need. Help us to raise our voices and not remain silent.

We pray for our environment. Creator, due to other dominant issues, people tend to forget about the responsibility we share for your creation. Help us remember and advocate for the protection of this planet and all being on it.

We pray for awareness in many different areas. Guide us to develop awareness for consequences of our actions, awareness for people that need our help, awareness for issues that need our attention.

God, we place all our concerns, fears, everything that makes us struggle and that leaves us speechless in the prayer your son taught us. We pray in our own languages.



Prayer from Middle East Region:

READING:
Mark 4:38-40

From the promised land with the faith of the Phoenicians and the repentance of Nineveh, we pray together for the healing of our beloved ones, our students and youth in the entire universe, same as Naaman the Syrian has healed the youngman: we turn our hearts to You, gracious doctor, look over us and hand us Your healing.

We pray together for those who have given their lives back to the Creator: Rise, O our beloved God, and console the pain of our dreadful hearts.

We pray together for the world to be saved! O God, bring us back to the unity with Your true worship.

Let us unite to face, as one, the various health, scientific, social and economic epidemics. Our faith is in You, for in the midst of the storm, we are neither afraid nor disturbed, because You are with us, as you were with your people during the plagues of Egypt.

And when we cry, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?", we shall be hearing the voice of the Lord taming the storms around us saying, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

Prayer from the Latin America region

PRAYER FOR HUMANITY

We come to you at all times and in all places, because we know that you are always present in our world, in our daily history.

During this global crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we recognize our fragility as human beings and with humility, we intercede so that your peace and justice are done in our world. We also turn to you with grateful hearts because now you reveal yourself in multiple ways, offering hope for all of your creation.

Certainly, this virus has spread very fast and has reached us all regardless of social, racial, ethnic, geographical origin, age, ideology, sexual orientation ... However, we recognize that the consequences of this reality are different for each individual, each community, each society.

The socio-political systems in which we live have generated, in some cases, attention and care for the people; but in others, the common good has not been a priority, but production and consumption at all costs, the assurance of profits, the commodification of health services, and even the circumstances have been used to accentuate xenophobia, declare wars and persist in the economic blockade against other nations, as it has been the attitude of the United States towards Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Iran.

We pray for all the families of those who have died from this disease and for those who are sick or at risk of contagion, especially for the most vulnerable ones: impoverished and marginalized communities, the elderly living alone, children and women victims of violence who have to stay with their aggressors at home, displaced peasants, people living in the streets, immigrants who are in the borders and those who must continue working to survive and without access to health care, young people who see their life projects postponed without economic solvency, citizens subjected to the realities of war and armed



ANNEXES: Regional prayers and study materials for group reflections

conflict, Afro-descendant populations, health personnel and all people who day by day put their lives at risk with effort and sacrifice to guarantee different social services, medical care, food, etc.

God, may your Spirit move us to love without conditions, to practice solidarity and responsibility towards the life of the other, and all of your creation. Help us, citizens and rulers, to act with wisdom, justice, and humanity from every space of action we have. May violence and imperial actions are never an option, but the commitment to peace, the search for solidarity, creative and resilient solutions to face this crisis.

May we, O God, recognize your presence in the good news that has emerged from this context: the healing of nature, the return of species that seemed extinct, the oxygenation of the air, the networks of support and sorority among so many people who have given themselves mutual and selfless help, the extra time for resting, reading, caring for the family, the children, and the practice of other activities that we usually do not do because of the dynamics of study and work.

In isolation and quarantine, you have extended your sanctuary to our homes, we have made room for you in our families and our hearts. In the readjustment of our lives, you have offered the opportunity to restore Creation and to make us more aware of the need for its care and a harmonious relationship with it.

We thank all religious organizations for their resources, prayers, and accompaniment with concrete gestures that continue to make your Kingdom possible in our midst. We join the call of the High Committee of Human Fraternity to join in prayer on this day and at every moment for the current world health crisis.

We do not know when this uncertainty will end. There are many social and economic challenges that we face now and that will come in the future, but we are sure that you, God of Life, will be leading our steps so that our faith is visible in the commitment to your justice and your peace.

WSCF Global Talks

COVID-19, as a global pandemic, continues having dangerous effects on the health and lives of people. However, the coronavirus crisis has exacerbated the profound system of inequalities that we live with and have presented to us different intersections that impacted the lives of the most vulnerable in different ways: the poor, the informal workers, the women, the youth, and the employment, the situation of forces displaced people and refugee and asylum seekers. It has also shown the fragility of democracies to align the States' focus to prevent, avert and minimize the impact of COVID and its multiples dimensions and intersections.

This first dialogue discussed the intersectionality of COVID-19 with other existing social and political crises, and how it affects different dimensions of our social, economic, and cultural life, considering the experiences and work of SCMerS from other regions. As an organization that promotes prophetic voice and mission, WSCF focuses on recognizing the ecumenical youth and student movement's role, to understand the pandemics' impacts on the most vulnerable, and propose ideas as a global fellowship.



The first WSCF Global Talk meeting took place on 27th June at 13GMT.
Click here: <https://bit.ly/3de631d>

Articles and testimonies written on 2020 on the COVID-19 situation

HUMAN RIGHTS AND COVID-19

Published in *"The crisis beyond the crisis: Inequalities, human rights and violence"* by WSCF LAC in May 2020

By: Laurence Blattmer.
WSCF LAC Friend - UN Human Rights specialist

For decades and even centuries, epidemic and pandemic have sparked ethical questions on how to adequately control transmission of a disease. Ethical considerations relevant to public health measures include to address the fine balance between reducing virus spread through restrictive measures (e.g. confinement and travel bans) and acting within a human rights framework. According to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), restrictions on the rights for reasons of public emergency do not concern all rights, as some of them remain absolute under any circumstances(1) and the restrictive measures must be lawful, necessary and proportionate(2). States' responses to address epidemic and pandemic have also serious implications on economic, social and cultural rights. Limitations to the enjoyment of those rights are "determined by law only in so far as this may be compatible with the nature of these rights and solely for the purpose of promoting the general welfare in a democratic society.(3)"

And yet, human rights are too often set aside and unjustifiably violated by governments in this type of context. Typical human rights violations are for example the adoption of discriminatory laws, the harassment and disproportionate use of force by agents of States, the unnecessary and disproportionate restrictions on press freedom, the denied access to health services, to social security, to water and sanitation, to crucial information, etc. The spread of disease and the measures taken to curb it particularly impact the most vulnerable populations.

The current coronavirus pandemic is no exception to it. People in precarious forms of labour, migrants and refugees, indigenous peoples, people deprived of liberty, LGBTI, older people, people with disabilities, health care workers and women and girls(4) are among those disproportionately affected by the current crisis. This crisis is clearly deepening existing social inequalities and is destabilising health and social programmes already weakened by years of underinvestment.

Here are just a few examples of worrying situations. While States urgently need to take steps to slow down contamination, we observe negligence on the part of many governments to protect



groups that are particularly at risk, such as detainees. Various countries like Mexico, Benin, Eritrea and Egypt are failing to take quick actions to improve basic sanitary conditions in detention centres and to reduce overcrowding to avoid massive contamination. In many parts of the world, governments' responses are discriminatory, disproportionate, unnecessary and even illegal. In the Philippines for example, soldiers have been ordered to shoot the individuals who resisted the lockdown. In India, several state governments' responses are discriminatory, such as making names of people affected by the virus public as well as stamping homes of people in quarantine(5). In Hungary, a new legislation is now giving, for an indefinite period, the power to the government to bypass parliament when ruling and is criminalizing people spreading so-called misinformation on Covid-19(6). The social and economic impacts of this crisis on the most vulnerable are also neglected by many countries. In Dominican Republic, several efforts have been undertaken to protect the financial sector whereas entire sections of the population works in the informal sector, the current measures to support people's livelihoods clearly do not benefit everyone. It is

essential that all States make use of maximum available resources to ensure the delivery of basic services to its population.

In this context, independent UN human rights experts have urged States to deal with the crisis in strict accordance with human rights standards and to approach it in a holistic manner⁽⁷⁾. On March 16, they stated that “emergency declarations based on the Covid-19 outbreak should not be used as a basis to target particular groups, minorities, or individuals. It should not function as a cover for repressive action under the guise of protecting health nor should it be used to silence the work of human rights defenders.”⁽⁸⁾

It is absolutely fundamental to be alert in this period. Civil society actors do have a critical role in monitoring and documenting the implementation by States of their international human rights obligations. This role is essential in preventing future abuses and violations of human rights committed during the crisis and to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable.

Alongside national and regional human rights institutions and mechanisms, the UN human rights system can offer interesting additional opportunities for the civil society to report human rights violations, especially that the national human rights bodies’ work is for the most part temporarily suspended or very restricted. Here are a few examples of actions the civil society can take with the UN mechanisms:

1. Human rights defenders or victims can submit information about allegations of human rights violations to the UN Special Procedures, and request them to communicate with the concerned government in order to end the violation and provide redress for the victims. This type of communication can also concern a specific draft bill or a government policy that threatens the enjoyment of human rights.

2. NGOs can turn to the UN Treaty Bodies, that are committees of independent experts monitoring the implementation of the human rights treaties by Member States. The next review of a Member State can be an excellent occasion for the civil society to share its findings and opinions on the impacts of the State’s sanitary measures on the enjoyment of the rights enshrined in the respective treaty.

3. The Treaty Bodies can also receive and consider, under certain conditions, complaints by individuals alleging violations of the rights enshrined in the treaty corresponding to its mandate.

4. The civil society can bring a critical voice on the human rights record in a country by participating in the next UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which monitors the implementation of the human rights obligations of each UN Member State every 5 years (see the Calendar of reviews for the 3rd cycle).

As democratic safeguards are restricted in



many countries at the moment, it is paramount that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) continue developing online methods that will enable civil society to monitor and report in a secure manner on human rights issues and violations in their country.

This crisis is highlighting the weaknesses of our social and economic systems based on differentiated treatment according to social status, gender, religion, income, origin, age, race, etc. Beyond the sanitary crisis, it is indeed an existential crisis that is at stake, that of a humanity that continues to defend a way of life that is leading to its ruin. While climate change and the destruction of our environment and wildlife clearly evidence the inappropriateness of our current system based on infinite economic growth and exploitation of natural resources, States' passiveness continues to be predominant.

As the pressure on States is only increasing with this sanitary crisis, it would be about time that they increase significantly investments in public health and social services, ensure inclusive social protection programmes, implement climate justice, improve access to decent work, adequate housing, sanitation and water and ensure that people live in a healthy environment. The current extraordinary mobilisation of resources to deal with this crisis could be the catalyst of positive long-lasting changes.

But will the Covid-19 crisis really be a wake up call? Are we likely to return to 'business as usual' as soon as the spread of the virus is under control? And won't the States prioritise external debt's repayment instead of investing massively in health, education and social programmes once the sanitary crisis is over?

The global recession that is unfolding can be disastrous for human rights, but it can also provide an opportunity to develop innovative solutions. This crisis should be an impetus to open a real and fundamental debate on values in our societies, on our mutual obligations and on what we collectively consider to be more important than economic growth and corporate profit. This period provides us with a golden opportunity to remind our governments about the interconnectedness of our societies and of each individual and that no one can be left behind. And history shows us that when governments fail us, citizens mobilize, build organizations and networks, confront the dominant culture and bring transformations that form a strong legacy for rights and liberties for future generations. Our societies, on our mutual obligations and on what we collectively consider to be more important than economic growth and corporate profit. This period provides us with a golden opportunity to remind our governments about the interconnec-

tedness of our societies and of each individual and that no one can be left behind. And history shows us that when governments fail us, citizens mobilize, build organizations and networks, confront the dominant culture and bring transformations that form a strong legacy for rights and liberties for future generations.

(1) Right to life (Art. 6), prohibition of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Art. 7), prohibition of slavery and servitude (Art. 8), freedom from imprisonment for inability to fulfil a contractual obligation (Art. 11), prohibition against the retrospective operation of criminal laws (Art. 15), right to recognition before the law (Art. 16) and freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Art. 18).

(2) UN Human Rights Committee, CCPR General Comment No. 29: States of emergency (Article 4), 31 August 2001, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.11.

(3) Article 4 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

(4) Global rapid gender analysis for covid-19, accessible at: https://www.carefrance.org/ressources/themas/1/93a8e81-8640-Global-RGA_COVID_RDM_3.3.1.2.pdf.

(5) Human Rights Watch, India: COVID-19 Lockdown Puts Poor at Risk, 27 March 2020, accessible at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/27/india-covid-19-lockdown-puts-poor-risk>

(6) International Press Institute: Hungary: Press freedom threatened as Orbán handed new powers, 30 March 2020, accessible at: <https://ipi.media/hungary-press-freedom-threatened-as-orban-handed-new-powers/>

(7) OHCHR, COVID-19 and its human rights dimensions, accessible at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/COVID-19.aspx>

(8) OHCHR, COVID-19: States should not abuse emergency measures to suppress human rights – UN experts, accessible at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25722>

Laurence is a Canadian-Swiss lawyer specializing in human rights. She has extensive work experience in the defense of human rights at the UN level and in strengthening the actions and advocacy of civil society in the promotion of human rights in the world. Prior to her position as Program Coordinator at Dominicans for Justice and Peace, Laurence worked with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and contributed to the work of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. She holds a Master's Degree in International Law from the Graduate Institute in Geneva and a Bachelor's Degree in International Relations and International Law from the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), Canada.