

Prayers for Europe and the Middle East

Egypt

Context: Coptic Orthodox Christians make up about 15 per cent of Egypt's population of 91 million. They base their theology on the teachings of the apostle Mark, who introduced Christianity to Egypt. In recent years, Egypt's Christians have come under attack from the Islamic State group and are increasingly vulnerable. During Holy Week 2017, attacks on two churches left 45 people dead.

Contributors: The prayers below are drawn from the Coptic Orthodox Liturgy and are provided by MCC national staff in Egypt who are Coptic Orthodox Christians.

Prayer #1

O King of peace,
Give us your peace, establish your peace, and forgive us our sins.
Emmanuel our God is now in our midst, with His Father's glory, and the Holy Spirit.
To bless us all, purify our hearts and heal the illnesses of our souls and bodies.
We worship you, O Christ, with Your Good Father and the Holy Spirit,
For You have come and saved us.
Amen.

Prayer #2

From the Liturgy of St. Cyril: The Prayer of Peace

Priest: We ask and entreat Your goodness, O Lover of Mankind. Remember, O Lord, the peace of Your one holy, catholic and apostolic church.

Deacon: Pray for the peace of the one holy, catholic and apostolic Orthodox church and for God's salvation among the people, and order in every place, and for the forgiveness of our sins.

Congregation: Lord have mercy.

Priest: That which exists from one end of the world to the other.

Prayer #3

From the 3rd hour Coptic Orthodox book prayer

Just as You were with Your disciples, O Saviour, and gave them peace, graciously come also and be with us, and grant us Your peace, and save us, and deliver our souls.

Iraq

Context: Iraq has undergone war almost continuously for nearly 40 years. Recent conflicts have disproportionately affected minority groups within the country. Iraq's Christian minority has experienced persecution at the hands of extremist groups – as well as the broader effects of the conflict which affect all Iraqis –and many Christians have left the country. Still, various historic Christian churches, including the Chaldean Catholic Church, are committed to maintaining a Christian presence in Iraq. MCC supports these efforts in various ways, including English teaching at St. Peter's Seminary.

Prayer #1

Author: Milan Sabah is a seminarian studying to be a priest at St. Peter's Chaldean Catholic Seminary in Ankawa, Erbil, Iraq. Milan is from Ankawa. His prayer appears in English as well as the original Arabic.

Prayer:

يا رب أنر عقولنا و ارشدنا كي نحبّ جميع الناس بمحبّة خالصة و اجعلنا ان نكون أداة السلامك
و أزرع فينا بذرة السلام حتى نشارك بها الآخرين... آمين

Oh Lord, enlighten our minds and guide us so that we love all people with pure love. Make us to be tools for your peace. Plant in us the seed of peace, that we might share it with all.
Amen.

Prayer #2

Author: Nathan Hershberger recently completed a term of service with MCC in Ankawa, Erbil, Iraq, where he taught at St. Peter's Seminary.

Prayer:

Lord, teach us to pray so that our cries for healing reach your ears and fall back like rain on this cracked and riven earth. Bind up the wounded, comfort the sorrowful, house the displaced, and restrain those who commit wicked acts. Bring peace to our tired earth, your garden, and form us into a people worthy of living within it.
Amen.

Palestine and Israel

Context: 2017 marks the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, a written statement made by British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour near the end of the First World War. The statement indicated that Britain would support the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Palestinian Arabs were not consulted about this plan, and were justifiably concerned when Jewish immigration began to dramatically change their home. 2017 also marks the 50th anniversary of the occupation of Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, by Israel after the Six-Day War.

Author: Esther Epp-Tiessen is public engagement coordinator for MCC Canada's Ottawa Office.

Prayer:

*"Then justice will dwell in the land
and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.
The effect of righteousness will be peace
and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever." — Isaiah 32:16–17*

O God of life and love and peace,
We witness the violence and injustice in your Holy Land
And our hearts break.

Our hearts break for all Palestinians—
For the victims of violent attacks from Israelis
For those who have endured decades of occupation and oppression
For those whose homes and olive orchards have been demolished
For those who languish in Israeli prisons and in the "open air prison" of Gaza
For those without nearly enough water and electricity and medical care
For those who are refugees, long displaced from their homes.

Our hearts break for the Jewish people of Israel—
For the victims of violent attacks from Palestinians
For those who live with fear and insecurity
For those who re-live the trauma of the Holocaust over and over.

Our hearts break for the wider world—
For those who are indifferent to the pain and suffering in your Holy Land
For those who distort or turn their eyes from truth
For those who fail to see the humanity of all your children.

Heal us all, O God.
Heal the broken and comfort the sorrowful.
Give hope to the hopeless and courage to the fearful.
Strengthen the peacemakers and reconcilers.
Confront those who practice injustice and commit violence.

We especially pray—
That weapons of war be laid down
That walls of separation and the machinery of occupation be dismantled
That prisoners be released
That demonizing of “the other” cease
That political leaders seek the good of all people in Palestine and Israel.

We pray also for ourselves—
That our eyes will be opened to the ways in which our beliefs and actions have contributed to injustice
and to violence.

O God, whose heart breaks for the world,
May your justice dwell in the land
May your righteousness abide in fruitful fields
May the effect of righteousness be quietness and trust forever
May the effect of justice be peace – enduring peace.

Amen

Syria

Context: War has been raging in Syria since 2011. Over 13.5 million people are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance, with 6.3 million internally displaced. Additionally, 5.5 million Syrian refugees have fled the country for safety in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Indiscriminate violence and airstrikes have killed thousands of civilians, with an estimated 400,000 people killed since the start of the conflict. MCC has been providing food assistance, blankets, hygiene and relief kits, cash vouchers and training for social cohesion and interfaith dialogue to local Syrian partners throughout the war.

Author: This prayer, shared with MCC in 2015, is from the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC). Founded in 1974, MECC is a fellowship of Evangelical/Protestant, Oriental Orthodox, Greek Orthodox and Catholic Church families. MCC has partnered with MECC in Syria for many years.

Prayer:

God of life,
Who cares for all creation and calls us to justice and peace,
May our security not come from arms, but from respect.
May our force not be of violence, but of love.
May our wealth not be in money, but in sharing.
May our path not be of ambition, but of justice.
May our victory not be from vengeance, but in forgiveness.
May our unity not be in the quest of power, but in vulnerable witness to do your will.
Open and confident, may we defend the dignity of all creation, sharing today and forever the bread of solidarity, justice and peace.
This we ask in the name of Jesus, your holy Son, our brother, who, as a victim of our violence, even from the heights of the cross, gave forgiveness to us all.
Amen.

Ukraine

Context: For the past three years, eastern Ukraine has experienced continuous armed conflict. Approximately 60,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) from these eastern regions have fled to Zaporizhzhia, a major centre some 200 kilometres west, where MCC's office is located. Soldiers dealing with significant trauma and struggling to re-integrate into society also make their way from the war zone to Zaporizhzhia. In the meantime, eastern Ukraine has been controlled by non-government forces sympathetic to Russia. Ongoing conflict near the frontlines continues, with regular shooting and shelling impacting what is left of the civilian population. The economy and infrastructure are weak, and it is a difficult and arduous process to cross the frontline into Ukrainian-controlled territory. Many of the remaining civilians are elderly or sick and have been unable to leave. Others simply cannot imagine leaving the land that has always been their home.

Prayer #1

Author: Iryna Dmitriv lives in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, where she is director of MCC partner "Hram." Hram works with veterans and their families to provide psychosocial support. Their project also aims to introduce the idea of peacebuilding to society as a whole. In 2016, Iryna travelled with MCC to Sarajevo, Bosnia as part of a peacebuilding exchange. At this exchange she got to know a pastor from the "other side" of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. While their views are not completely the same, they became friends and began to support one another. For instance, Iryna helped the pastor work on a grant proposal for a project providing large-scale rest and support to families with children who remained in the conflict zone. Iryna's prayer was translated by Katie Geddert, MCC representative in Ukraine.

Prayer:

Our loving God,

As you look down on your children in Ukraine, we ask that you bring this military conflict to an end as quickly as possible. Change the hearts of those who cling to evil and aggression. Help us realize that violence cannot solve our problems.

Heal the hearts of those who have lost loved ones. Be merciful to veterans of this conflict. Help their families and society as a whole understand and accept them.

Please build up the broken economy of our country. Build it up so that stability can be an instrument for peace in society.

Above all, help us build bridges of mutual understanding, regardless of political, religious, social and cultural differences. Help us learn to stop condemning and comparing, and to turn to understanding and forgiveness. Raise up your church to do the work of peacebuilding. Bring about your reconciliation. Lord, grant that people in Ukraine seek you and know you.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Prayer #2

Author: Pavel (his last name withheld for security reasons) is a pastor who lives in eastern Ukraine. Although many people have fled the region, Pavel and others continue to stay because they feel a calling for God's church to keep doing God's work, even in difficult circumstances. Translation provided by Katie Geddert, MCC representative in Ukraine.

Prayer:

O Lord our God, Holy and Righteous, great misfortune befell us. A bloody war has come to our land. Gracious and merciful Lord, give us tears to mourn over our sins and our people. We know that you have allowed this war as a result of our many sins. It's not right for your pure eyes to look on our evil deeds. We are greatly guilty before you. Corruption, lies, laziness, hatred and drunkenness abound. We call ourselves a Christian nation, but are far from you. Your churches are empty, on Sundays our people fill the bazaars and supermarkets. Our women have killed unborn children, our girls have sold their bodies and souls in other countries. Many men have left their country and their families to work elsewhere. Our dignity, morality and sense of right and wrong are destroyed. People who consider themselves Christians kill each other in war. Our children are orphans. Our politicians think more about their own gain than about ordinary people. We prefer money to faith and to the church of your Holy One. We repent before you, Holy God, we confess our many sins before You.

But if possible, Lord, by your great mercy, stop this war, this slaughter, blood, ruin, violence, murder. Say only the word you promised in your Word. You can, for the sake of the elect, shorten these days. For our very own sake, send peace to our torn earth; people are so tired of shelling, pain, destruction, despair and poverty.

We pray for our presidents and rulers. Give them wisdom to agree to stop this fratricidal, despicable, ruthless war. Do not be angry with us forever, God, and have mercy on us by your great mercy. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who loved us so much that he died on the cross for us.

But if it is not so, if the war continues, if the shells will explode and death will destroy people, If even the missiles hit our homes and the places where your children gather, if even the blood and violence continue, we will still believe in you, love you, worship you. Through pain, through the hurt and the tears, we will sing praises to you, God. Because you are our God and there is no other.

Because we believe in the kingdom that is coming, where there will be no war, no death, no pain and no sin. There will be joy, peace and calm for those who love you and believe in your redemption.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
Amen.