



# World Day of Prayer

*Ecumenical Service, Friday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2024*



**“I Beg You... Bear With One Another in Love”**

*Prepared by the WDP Committee of Palestine. Adapted for use in  
New Zealand by World Day of Prayer Aotearoa New Zealand.*

## “Praying Palestinian Women” – By Halima Aziz

This artwork is made in honour of the World Day of Prayer. Through her artwork, the artist represents three Palestinian women praying together in nature in a peaceful place. In her work, the artist has different motives and symbols that indicate the origin of these women and their cohesion. These are the following symbols featured in her artwork:

Olive trees/branches are a sign of everlasting and abundant life because they can live for thousands of years. Some of the olive trees in Palestine today were there during the time of Jesus.

The golden roots are underlining the fact that the Palestinians will always exist and as they exist, they will always resist for their rights and freedom. It is painted in gold because it is something precious, something no one can take away from the Palestinians because they are deeply rooted.

Poppy flowers are abundant and meaningful to Palestinians. They remind Palestinians of loved ones who have given their lives for their country.

Traditional Palestinian dresses like the tatreez (embroidery) thobe (dress) or the white scarf. It represents the Palestinian people and is full of art and history.

The keys are a symbol of the hope to return back to Palestine. Palestinians always carry their keys of their homes they were driven out of with them, no matter where they are around the world, and they pass it on to their children so they will never lose hope.

### **About the artist:**

Halima Aziz (b.1999 in Hagen, Germany) is a passionate Palestinian visual artist and design student based in Germany. Her Mum is from Tulkarm and her Dad is from Gaza. Halima spent her childhood in Palestine. Halima had to experience the war in Gaza in 2008 and survived it. In 2009 she moved back to Germany.

Halima was interested in art from an early age and has always enjoyed painting. She started painting professionally in 2017 while participating in an art school project. Halima often likes to spontaneously let her creativity flow while she paints, trusting the process without planning in advance exactly how and what she wants to paint. But sometimes it takes planning, then she is doing sketches before making her paintings. She enjoys making colorful and eye-catching paintings, most of which express specific feelings or have a specific meaning. Halima is mostly inspired by nature, art museums, books or her native Palestine. Through her paintings she is proudly representing Palestinian heritage, identity, life, culture, history, and tradition. Halima feels closer to her homeland when she paints about it. Her artworks emphasize her feelings and emotions towards what she experienced in Palestine. With each brush stroke painted, she is expressing and highlighting the story of the Palestinian people and their struggle of resisting the occupation. Halima hopes her meaningful paintings inform the world of the Palestinian spirit. Never to be forgotten. Halima paints in acrylic and oil on canvas or sometimes with watercolors on fine art paper.



*“I believe that through my artworks and other talented Palestinian artists’ artworks, people will understand more clearly how we Palestinians feel and what we have to go through. Everyone should care about it because it’s a human right issue. I hope and believe that one day Palestine will be free and that we will be able to peacefully return back to our homes and our families.” – Halima Aziz*



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**“I Beg You ... Bear With One Another in Love”**

### Worship Service

**Preparations** – Gather the following symbols of Palestine:

- Olive branches or leaf (or a photograph or cutout of olive leaf), olives, olive oil  
*Olive trees are a sign of everlasting and abundant life because they can live for thousands of years. Some of the olive trees in Palestine today were there during the time of Jesus.*
- Lemons, oranges, or other citrus fruits  
*Citrus fruits grew abundantly in historic Palestine and were exported all over the world.*
- Cactus plants or leaves  
*Cactus plants are not originally from Palestine, but they have been in the country for many years. Cacti have become natural boundaries between one village and another in Palestine. After the destruction of many villages in 1948, cactus plants still survived in fields where there was nothing else. The cactus plant is a symbol of resilience and survival in the midst of the harshest of circumstances. The cactus plant survives even when everything else perishes. Additionally, the flower and the fruit of the cactus plant are emblems of beauty and sustenance amidst suffering and pain.*
- Jasmine, poppies, or other flowers  
*Jasmine and poppy flowers are abundant and meaningful to Palestinians. Jasmine is used to make tea, which soothes and brings people together. And poppies remind Palestinians of loved ones who have given their lives for their country.*
- Baskets  
*Baskets will be used to hold citrus fruits, cactus plants or leaves, and flowers.*

## **BEFORE THE SERVICE**

[Church bells toll as participants are arriving (if available).]

[Distribute an olive branch or leaf to participants as they enter.]

## **PROCESSION**

[Instrumental version of *I Urge You* starts playing.]

[Leaders process carrying baskets with lemons, oranges, olives, olive oil, cactus plants or leaves, and flowers such as jasmine or poppies. They place the objects on the altar or around the space.]

## **GREETING**

Salaam. Peace be with you.

30 years ago, the women of World Day of Prayer Palestine were invited to write on the theme of “Come, See and Act.” Since Palestine is the land where Christianity was born, the women of World Day of Prayer Palestine were invited again to write the programme for this year.

A group of ecumenical Palestinian Christian women have worked collectively the last 4 years to pray and reflect on the theme “I Beg You... Bear With One Another in Love,” inspired by Ephesians 4:1-7. And now, they are inviting all people around the world to join them in prayer and action.

## **SALUTATION AND RESPONSE**

Leader: We gather in the Name of the Triune God, Creator,  
Son and Holy Spirit.

**All: Amen.**

Leader: God be with you.

**All: And also with you.**

## **OPENING PRAYER**

Let us pray

Triune God, walk with us as we journey  
through the land where you lived and taught.

Open our eyes to see the present suffering of the inhabitants of this land.

Grant us the strength and courage to act and pray with all who suffer around the world.  
Amen.

**PRAYER FOR PEACE – Yarabba ssalami (God Of Peace)**

[All sing *Yarabba ssalami*]

Arabic: Ya - ra - bba ssa - la - mi am - ter a - lay - na ssa - lam.  
English: God of peace, come a - mong us, rain down your peace on the world.

5  
Ya - ra - bba ssa - la - mi im - la' qu - lu - ba - na ssa - lam.  
Make a pati for your good - ness, fill e' - vry heart with your peace.

**Leader:** Let us continue in prayer with the words of Psalm 85.  
Lord, you were favourable to your land;  
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

**All:** **You forgave the iniquity of your people;  
you pardoned all their sin.**

**Leader:** You withdrew all your wrath;  
you turned from your hot anger.

**All:** **Restore us again, O God of our salvation,  
and put away your indignation toward us.**

**Leader:** Will you be angry with us forever?  
Will you prolong your anger to all generations?

**All:** Will you not revive us again,  
so that your people may rejoice in you?

**Leader:** Show us your steadfast love, O Lord,  
and grant us your salvation.

**All:** Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,  
for he will speak peace to his people,  
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.

**Leader:** Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,  
that his glory may dwell in our land.

**All:** Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;  
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

**Leader:** Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,  
and righteousness will look down from the sky.

**All:** The Lord will give what is good,  
and our land will yield its increase.

**Leader:** Righteousness will go before him,

**All:** and will make a path for his steps.

[All reprise singing *Yarabba ssalami*]



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Ya - ra - bba ssa - la - mi im - la' qu - lu - ba - na ssa - lam.  
Make a path for your good - ness, fill e' - vry heart with your peace.

## CALL TO WORSHIP

**Leader:** Let us praise God who brings us together to worship in love and unity.

**All: Unity in the Triune God, transcending differences in views and theological interpretations.**

**Leader:** Let us remember these essential qualities of people of faith: humility, gentleness, patience and love.

**All: We confess our weakness and failure to accept others without judging them.**

**Leader:** With humility and patience, we bear the challenges in our families, society, community and church.

**All: With gentleness and love, we overcome everything. We remain strong in our faith, knowing that we belong to God. Amen.**

## GOSPEL READING

In the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of the gospel of John, Jesus was talking to his beloved disciples in the hours before his crucifixion:

*“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”*

## A STORY OF RESILIENCE

At a crucial moment of his life, Jesus gave the disciples this commandment: Love one another. Bear with one another in love.

In today’s service, we will receive three stories from Palestinian Christian women. Each story is a powerful witness to Jesus’ call to bear with one another in love.

Let us listen to Eleonor’s story. (old woman)

*My name is Eleonor.*

*My skin is wrinkled like the trunk of an olive tree. Like them, I have witnessed many wars and violence.*

*I am a Palestinian Christian – a member of the Greek Orthodox Church in the Holy Land.*

*I come from a deeply rooted old Jerusalem family. In the early 19th century, my great grandfather established St. George's Orthodox Church, which enabled Christians living outside the city walls to have a place to worship.*

*That church remained in existence until the catastrophe, or Nakba, of 1948, when 750,000 Palestinians were forced to flee, disperse and become refugees. My family was included. Due to heavy shelling and bombardment, my parents ran for their lives. They took shelter at my mother's cousin's home, hoping to return soon to their original home and St. George's Church. That never happened. Today, my parents' home and St. George's Church have become the Confederation House, an Israeli cultural centre.*

*Prior to fleeing, my parents' Jewish neighbours offered to store the treasures of the church, including icons and precious communion cups. They promised to safeguard my parents' property and belongings until the family's return.*

*As my brothers and I were growing up, my parents remembered their neighbours graciously as they waited for the big day of return. They imagined themselves collecting these sacred items and thanking these neighbours for keeping their promise. Sadly, my parents have passed away without realizing this dream. And yet, I vividly remember that, despite their pain and suffering over all they had lost, my parents were always thankful and spoke kindly about these Jewish neighbours. My parents taught me how to bear with others in love, always remembering to be grateful for those who do good.*



*As I have gone through life as a Palestinian Christian living in Jerusalem, I have chosen to be fully engaged with all members of the community at local and global levels. I learned from my parents' example how important it is to stay together with others, even when life is harsh and difficult.*

*My commitment to my community started when I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. My Arabic teacher engaged me in running errands for her humanitarian work. She was gentle and loving, which helped me grow to value and love working to make life better for others.*

*Later in life, I designed and implemented humanitarian aid and development programmes, as well as social and community projects. These programmes and projects served all people, regardless of religion, ethnicity, gender, status or need. I was privileged to help hundreds of women in Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank to sustain their families as breadwinners. Many of these projects have grown and spread to other areas, positively impacting many lives.*

*Life has not always been easy. I have setbacks, obstacles, and even threats. However, I firmly believe that our community can be strong together if there is genuine love, understanding, gentleness, humility and patience.*

*Since my childhood, I have known that life is fragile, and peace is not a guarantee. I could have left the country of my roots, but I made the choice to stay and live out Jesus' commandment to love others as God has loved me.*

**2024 Palestine Country Background – Powerpoint**

## **EPISTLE READING**

The scripture theme this year comes from Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

*"I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift."*

## **REFLECTION**

In Paul's address to the Ephesians, he begs the community to bear with one another. The word "beg" is a strong word. It can also be translated from the Greek as "implore," "urge," or "request." This word tells us something about Paul and his relationship to the Ephesians. Despite being an authority figure for the Ephesian church, Paul does not order or command the Ephesians. He begs them, treating them as the higher and more powerful party in the relationship. This is a gesture of great respect and humility. It suggests that Paul loves this community greatly, and that what he is asking is more important than pride and protocol.

And what is Paul asking? He is asking the Ephesians to live a life worthy of their calling. To be worthy of their calling, the Ephesians must live with humility and gentleness and patience. To be worthy of their calling, the Ephesians must bear together in love.

Living under occupation, Palestinians know how hard it is to bear together in love. Occupation attempts to divide Palestinians from each other. When some Palestinians are given privileges that other Palestinians are denied, it divides the community. When some Palestinians have more freedom of movement than others, it divides the community. When some Palestinian faith leaders are treated better than others, it divides the community. Although bearing together in

love under occupation is a challenge, Palestinians are determined to remain a community.

Another aspect of this theme that is difficult for Palestinians is the question of who is included in “one another?” Do we also have to “bear in love” with those who are doing evil to us, and to others? When children in Hebron are arrested simply for walking to school, must we bear with our oppressor in love? When young people are beaten for speaking Arabic in Jerusalem, must we bear with our oppressor in love? When people are not allowed to pass through military checkpoints to visit family or go to work, must we bear with our oppressor in love? It is difficult to hear Paul’s words to “bear with one another in love” in the face of injustice.

In Arabic, the word for “bearing” is *hamel*, which literally means “to carry.” It is a word used in many contexts, including when a woman is pregnant. Women bear life, bringing human beings into the world. And women bear so much more: not only work, family, and community, but also the weight of inequality placed on them by patriarchal societies. Gender-based violence and discrimination creates an unjust burden for women around the world.

Today, some churches around the world, including in Palestine, are working for gender justice. These churches believe that women and men are created equally in God’s image (Genesis 1:27), and that in Christ, there is no longer male and female (Galatians 3:28). Bearing with women in love means treating them as human beings worthy of dignity and justice. Bearing with women in love means lifting up their voices, callings, and leadership.

### **SILENT MEDITATION (5-8 minutes)**

Let us reflect now on the ways that God is moving us to bear one another in love:

- *What challenges does each one of us bear?*
- *What do women bear in our cultures, community and church?*
- *What are ways we bear with each other?*

## HYMN – *I Urge You*

*I Urge You* is a song that was composed especially for this World Day of Prayer service. Let us sing together [listen to] this call to bear with each other in love.

Arabic: Wa at - lu - bu ei - lay - kom - An tas - lu - ku, mo - ta -  
English: I urge you to be pa - tient with the cal - ling you re - ceive,

ha - me - li - na ba - da - ko - m fel ma - ha - ba - ti,  
bea - ring one a - no - ther with love and u - ni - ty.

## A STORY OF TRUTH TELLING

Let us listen now to Lina’s story. (Younger woman in 20s)  
*My name is Lina.*

*On May 11, 2022, I lost my Aunt Shireen, a famous journalist who was killed in Jenin. For me, Aunt Shireen was like the branch of an olive tree, resisting the strong winds that threatened to erase the truth of Palestinian experience.*

*When Aunt Shireen died, Palestine lost an icon, a legend, and a famous Al Jazeera journalist. And yet, Shireen is all of the above and more. She was also my aunt, my godmother at baptism, and my best friend. Shireen has been my role model for as long as I can remember. She was also a role model to many young Palestinian women. Growing up, I aspired to be as successful, professional, and empathetic as her. I will cherish all the moments I spent with her talking about art, politics, and life, watching shows, going on vacations, and spending time with the family.*

*For 25 years, Aunt Shireen dedicated her life to telling the stories of Palestinian experience, and to being the voice of truth. She entered every house in Palestine and the Arab world through the TV screen. The day of her funeral was proof that she had also entered the hearts of Palestinians. The outpouring of solidarity we witnessed at her funeral will forever be ingrained in my memory and the collective memory of Palestine. We are forever grateful to the strong and courageous Palestinians who resisted the threats from Israeli forces and carried Shireen's casket on their shoulders.*

*Many people did not know that my aunt was a Palestinian Christian. Shireen's faith led her to bear with all in love, despite differences in faith traditions. She stood with all who were being harmed. She struggled for both Muslims and Christians to have access to the holy sites in Jerusalem. Her truth telling was even a way of bearing with the occupiers in love. Speaking the truth is a form of loving resistance, because it calls the oppressor back to their humanity.*

*Although Shireen, a branch of the olive tree, was cut down too soon, her legacy lives on. Her memory now nourishes the earth, from which we will gain strength to continue telling the truth and demanding justice.*

*Hearing this story of a woman who dared to speak the truth in love, let us commit ourselves to the journey, as she did.*

**HYMN – Your Word Lights the Path/Walk by the Light of the Word**

Your Word lights the path we are walking.  
We walk alongside you, Jesus.  
And as we walk closely beside you,  
grace, peace and goodness we harvest.  
Along the journey, among the people,  
we sing and praise your way of love.  
Our hearts grow wider from all your kindness,  
joining with the heart beat of your love.

Our world is full of sorrow, struggle, loss and pain,  
tempting us all into despair.  
We are surrounded by enormous, threatening waves  
that leave us anxious and afraid.  
But then your voice arrives and calms the blowing wind,  
clearing all the clouds from the sky.  
And then your face appears and we rise with the morning, waking to  
the strength and hope you bring.

**Refrain:**

*Along the journey, among the people  
we sing and praise your way of love.  
Our hearts grow wider from all your kindness  
joining with the heartbeat of your love.  
Your Word lights the path we are walking.  
We walk alongside you Jesus, And as we walk closely beside you,  
grace, peace and goodness we harvest.*

O God of life and mercy, wondrous is your love.  
We pledge our lives, our hearts to you.  
You are the healing balm that makes us whole again.  
We find our bliss and joy in you.  
Your Holy Spirit lights our souls from deep within.  
You ignite our trust that life is good.  
Your love surrounds us like a mother's reassurance.  
You are with us, for us every day.

**Refrain:**

**INTERCESSORY PRAYERS**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, we now pray for women everywhere, for the world, and for those in need.

After each petition, you will hear me pray "Lead us into a life worthy of our calling." You are invited to respond, "Hear our prayer."

**Let us pray:**

**God of Righteousness**, bless us and make us witnesses of peace and justice. Open our eyes so that we can see things as you do. Protect us from all forms of violence, hurt and revenge. We pray especially for women who are denied education and other basic rights. We pray for women who are abused and suffer violence. We pray that our churches, as well as our governments, will create safe places for women. Help us to raise our voices and use our gifts and talents to help others. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling.

**All: Hear our prayer.**

**Leader:** **Refugee God**, who as a child had to flee a massacre in Bethlehem, you know the plight of refugees and the displaced. Remain with us and help us in these dark and difficult times. Guide and protect refugees and displaced people. Bring them to places of safety. Open the hearts of those receiving refugees, and guide the actions of political leaders so that all needs will be met. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling.

**All: Hear our prayer.**

**Leader:** **God our Rock**, you have taught us to build our lives on you. We pray for those who are homeless. We pray especially with Palestinian families whose homes have been demolished or are threatened to be demolished by Israeli authorities. Bring these families justice and end this evil practice. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling.

**All: Hear our prayer.**

**Leader:** **God of Peace**, we pray for an end to the Israeli occupation and for a just solution to the ongoing oppression. We also pray for the city of Jerusalem, sacred to three religions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. We pray for equality, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, and freedom of expression. Teach us as Christians to follow the way of Jesus, sharing love with all the inhabitants of the land. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling.

**All: Hear our prayer**

**Leader:** **Healer and Sustaining Spirit**, we pray for all those who are sick, who are dying, and who are grieving. We pray for scientists and doctors who develop vaccines and treatments for the COVID-19 virus and other diseases. When we are lost and weary,

strengthen us. Revive our dry branches, so that they yield good fruits again. Give us new life and the hope of the resurrection. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling.

**All: Hear our prayer.**

**Leader:** *God of Mercy*, we have carelessly destroyed your beautiful creation. We have harmed the environment, the flora and fauna, and the creatures of the air, land and water. Our destruction of the earth has caused the climate crisis. Help us to appreciate and love your creation. Help us to repair what we have destroyed. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling.

**All: Hear our prayer.**

**Leader:** *God of Unity*, your child, Jesus, prayed that your disciples and followers would be one, as you are one. Teach us, your servants, to treat others justly, fairly and with love, even though we may speak, live, and pray differently. Bless the global church and bless the faithful women everywhere who share your Good News with others. Lead us into a life worthy of our calling.

**All: Hear our prayer**

**Leader:** How can we thank you, *Loving God*? We know that all our blessings come from you. Do not keep us far from you. Give us grace according to the measure of Christ's gift and fill our hearts with joy.

We offer these prayers, and the prayers of our hearts known only to you, trusting that you hear and answer them.

In the name of God, Creator, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**All: Amen.**

### **THE LORD'S PRAYER – *Our Father in Aramaic***

We continue now with the prayer that Jesus taught us. We will sing in Aramaic, the language that Jesus spoke. This prayer calls us to bear with one another in love through all the difficulties of life.

[All sing *Our Father in Aramaic*]



# Abwoon d'bwashmaya

## The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:9-13 & Luke 11:2-4

Traditional Syriac Melody

C#m G#/B# G# C#m G#/B# G# C#m E

Aramaic: A - bwoon d' - bwash-ma-ya Neth - qa - dash shmakh Tey - tey  
 English: Our Cre-a - tor who is in hea-ven, hal - low-ed be your name. Your kin-dom come, your

6 B C#m A G# C#m C#m G#/B# G# C#m

mal - ku - thakh Neh - wey se - bya - nach ay - kan - na d' - bwash-ma-ya  
 will be done as it is in hea - ven. Our Cre-a - tor who is in hea-ven,

11 G#/B# G# C#m E B C#m A

aph b'ar - ha Hab - wlan lach - ma d' - sun - qa - nan  
 hal - low-ed be your name. Your kin-dom come, your will be done as it is in

16 G# C#m C#m G#/B# G# C#m G#/B# G# C#m

yao - ma - na. Wash - bo-qlan khau-bayn ay-ka-na daph khnan shwo-qan l'khay-ya - bayn.  
 hea - ven. Give to us our dai - ly bread. Give to us what we need.

21 E B C#m A G# C#m C#m G#/B#

We - la tah-lan l'nes-yu-na E - la pat - zan min - bi - sha. Me - tol di  
 And for-give us our sins, as we for-give those who sin a - gainst us. Lead us not in-

26 G# C#m G#/B# G# C#m

la - khie mal - ku - tha wa - hay - la  
 to temp - ta - tion, but de - li - ver us from e - vil.

29 E B C#m A G# C#m

wa - tesh - bukh - ta l'ah-lam al - min A - meyn.  
 A - men, a - men. A - men, a - men.

## **A STORY OF FLOURISHING**

Let us listen now to Sara's story. (Middle aged woman)

*My name is Sara.*

*Sometimes, I feel like the leaf on an olive tree, connected to the roots, blooming from within.*

*I was born and raised in Jerusalem as a Lutheran Christian. Life as a Palestinian woman surely has been, and still is challenging. I am glad that things are changing in society through my church by having ordained the first female pastor.*

*Throughout the years, I have seen and admired the persistence of Palestinians. My own family history is connected to our Palestinian history, which is the case for many. I want to share a story with you that shows what it means to be a Palestinian in our land.*

*My grandparents used to live in Jaffa. They grew up there before 1948, living alongside other Christians, Muslims and Jews. When the state of Israel was created in 1948, it was a catastrophe for Palestinians who had lived on the land for thousands of years. We call this catastrophe the Nakba. The Israeli forces came to my grandparents' home and kicked them out by force. This caused my grandparents to become refugees in Jordan.*

*Many years later, my grandparents came for a visit to Jerusalem and my parents took me and my sibling on a trip to Jaffa. They were excited to show us the home they used to live in. My grandpa told us stories about his childhood, and how he used to plant trees with his father. In fact, that's how we found the house! Everything had changed except for the trees, which helped us to identify the place.*

*Sadly, the people currently living in the house were hostile towards us. I was quite young, but I do remember them shouting and kicking us away from the house. It wasn't like we wanted to go into the house, we were just viewing it from the outside. My grandpa was trying to explain to them and telling them that this used to be his house. However, they refused to hear any part of it and chased us away. The feeling must have been even worse for my grandfather, being kicked out of his own house twice.*

*Later in time, when I visited my grandparents in Jordan, my grandma showed me the keys that her mom had kept when leaving their house. She kept the keys with the hope that one day they would be able to return to their home. Sadly, this is the case for many. Following the two Nakbas of 1948 and 1967, and even until today, people are still being kicked out of their homes. Many have kept their keys with the hope of return, a hope that is passed on through many generations.*

*I know that the tree from where I came is strong and resilient. I am nourished by the love of my ancestors. I can bear with others in love because they did. Their love is what made me bloom as the leaf on an olive tree. Their love has helped me become strong and resilient.*

Let us sing together [listen to] this call to bear with each other in love.

Arabic: Wa at - lu - bu ei - lay - kom - An tas - lu - ku, mo - ta -  
 English: I urge you to be pa - tient with the cal - ling you re - ceive,

4 F C G7 C

ha - me - li - na ba - da - ko - m fel ma - ha - ba - ti.  
 bea - ring one a - no - ther with love and u - ni - ty.

## OFFERTORY

Today we have been blessed by witness of Palestinian Christian women. These stories have shown us the power of bearing together in love.

We come now to a time of offering. [Leader explains how the offering will be used]

### **Our offerings this year will support:**

**Christian World Service** – Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees of the Middle East Council of Churches programme for women’s cooperatives in the West Bank.

The **Bible Society** – the Palestinian Bible Society ‘Child of Bethlehem’ Project reaching out to Christian children with Bible-based programmes.

**Interchurch Council for Hospital Chaplaincy** in New Zealand.

These words from 2 Corinthians call us to give so that all may experience abundance in life.

*“For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. For I do not mean that there should be relief for others and hardship for you, but it is a question of equality between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may also supply your need, in order that there may be equality. As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.”*

May we open our hearts and give generously.

[Palestinian Music plays while offering is taken.]

Let us pray.

**God, our cross is heavy, but together we are able to bear it. May this offering be a sign of our commitment to lead a life worthy of your calling. May it be a powerful instrument towards abundant life for all living things. Amen.**

## **SHARING THE PEACE OF CHRIST**

In the midst of injustices, wars, and suffering, God calls us to bear together in love. When we stay together through difficulty, we live into the peace that God promises us.

And so, we share the peace of Christ as we exchange an olive branch/leaf. As we share this olive branch/leaf, let us speak these words in Arabic: “Salaam al Massih,” which means “The peace of Christ.”

*[Exchange of olive branches/leaves that were distributed at the beginning of the service.]*

## **WORDS OF COMMITMENT**

**Leader:** Please join me in speaking aloud the commitment of your heart.

**All:** **May we commit to working for peace as we stand with all women, particularly those experiencing oppression, violence, or discrimination.**

**May we be faithful advocates with decision makers working on all levels of society, including religious institutions.**

**May we bear with one another in love until God’s justice and peace reign throughout the whole world.**

**Leader:** Let us go now and be agents of peace and justice.

**Hymn:** ‘Your love, O God is never ending’ (Words vv 1,4,5,6: Marty Haugen / ‘The day you gave us Lord, has ended.’ (Words vv 2,3: John Ellerton 1870. Tune: Clement C Scholefield, 1874)

1. Your love, O God is never ending,  
throughout the earth its bounty flows,  
all life and breath on you depending:  
creation's depth your wisdom shows.
2. Across each continent and island  
as dawn leads on another day,  
the voice of prayer is never silent,  
nor dies the strain of praise away.
3. When we're at rest the sun is waking  
our friends beneath the western sky,  
and hour by hour fresh lips are making  
your wondrous doings heard on high.
4. Your love, O God, is world surrounding,  
like arms that firmly, gently hold.  
Your grace, forever new, abounding,  
each day your people to enfold.
5. Your love, O God, is ever yearning  
to touch and heal a world of pain;  
may we in Christ, be ever learning  
bringing to birth that love again.
6. Your love, O God, needs hands and voices;  
to hold with care, for justice call.  
Help us, O God, through all our choices  
to live your love for one and all.

### **BLESSING**

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord cause His face to shine upon you, and grant you peace.

Amen

**POSTLUDE**(Repeat some of the hymns or some other Middle Eastern music)

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## **BIBLE STUDY – Ephesians 4:1 – 3**

### **“I Beg You ... Bear With One Another in Love”**

#### **Introduction**

Ephesians is considered one of Paul’s “prison letters” written in Rome around 60-61 CE. Paul reminds the Ephesians that God chose both Jews and Gentiles to be saved, bringing together people of very different backgrounds. He urges the Ephesians to live a life worthy of the calling they received as people united with one another through Christ’s saving work.

#### **Scripture Reading – Ephesians 4:1-3 (NRSV)**

*“I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*

#### **Questions for Group Discussion**

- Why do you think Paul “begs” the Ephesians rather than commands them?
- What does this suggest how we as Christians are called to resolve conflicts with each other?
- What does it mean to “bear with” someone?
- What are some examples of this?
- What do women bear in your culture, community and church?  
*“Bearing with women in love means treating them as human beings worthy of dignity and justice. Bearing with women in love means lifting up their voices, callings and leadership.” (WDP Committee of Palestine notes)*
- Discuss how we as Christian women can do this in New Zealand.

**Closing Prayer** – You may wish to use Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21

*The complete Bible Study can be found on the World Day of Prayer website – [www.worlddayofprayer.org.nz](http://www.worlddayofprayer.org.nz)*



## **Country Information Palestine**

### **Background**

Who among you has not heard of this tiny spot in the Middle East, that for over 3000 years has been significant to three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam? However, the region is much older and has had many names, depending on the many tribes that have settled at different times in the land. The land has been nourished by an unfolding series of civilizations and structures because of its strategic position as a crossroad to three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe.

### **Geographical location**

The Gaza Strip, or simply Gaza, is located on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, bordering Egypt and Israel. The total area of Gaza is 365 square kilometers (141 square miles), with over 2 million inhabitants. In 1967, when Israel occupied the Palestinian territories, Western powers called the region the West Bank, because it was on the west bank of the Jordan River. After the Oslo Accords of 1993-1995, the West Bank was divided into Areas A, B and C. One of the daily challenges that Palestinians face is the restriction of movement on their own land. In order to travel between any of the areas in the West Bank, Palestinians must go through checkpoints.

### **History**

The region has witnessed the invasion of various powers throughout its history, including the Assyrians (8th century BCE), Babylonians (c. 601 BCE), Persians (539 BCE), Greeks (330s BCE), and Romans (63 BCE). Jesus was born during this era of Roman rule and was crucified by an unholy alliance between political and religious Jerusalem ~ 3 ~ authorities. In the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire invaded and ruled

the region until the end of World War I. In the middle of World War I, a letter was sent from Lord Arthur James Balfour (the British foreign secretary) to Lionel Walter Rothschild (a leader of the Anglo Jewish community). This letter became known as The Balfour Declaration of 1917 and declared the British consent for a national home for the Jews in Palestine. However, the letter clearly stated that the rights of non-Jewish communities in Palestine should be respected.

Support for the creation of a homeland for the Jews in Palestine increased after the end of World War II, largely because of the Holocaust. When the British announced they were leaving, the United Nations adopted the Partition Plan of 1947, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 181, which called for the creation of 2 independent states (Palestine and Israel), as well as a special international status for the city of Jerusalem. Although the UN spoke about two states, until today, no sovereign Palestinian state exists. Tensions between Israel and its neighbours escalated, and in June 1967, Israel launched a pre-emptive attack. The impact of this Six-Day War was dramatic, and the effects are still felt today. Palestinians call this war the Naksa, or the “setback.” In only six days, the Israeli military seized the Sinai and the Golan Heights, as well as occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. The 4 maps show the loss of Palestinian land from 1946-2000. As of July 31, 2019, 138 of the 193 United Nations member states have recognized Palestine as a state, and the Palestinian flag now flies outside of the United Nations.

## **Country Background**

### **Population**

It is estimated that there are over 5 million Palestinians living today in Palestine and Israel. 2% of these Palestinians are Christian, among a majority of Palestinian Muslims. The total number of Palestinians around the world amounts to over 12 million in countries as far as the United States, Canada, Brazil, Chile and Honduras.

### **Biblical Sites**

Historic Palestine includes Bethlehem (where Jesus was born), Nazareth (where Jesus spent his childhood), the River Jordan (where Jesus was baptized), and Jerusalem (where Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead). The Mediterranean Sea lies to the west of historic Palestine, where Paul and the apostles travelled on missionary journeys to spread the good news of Jesus the Christ.

### **Christianity**

In the land from which Christianity spread and different denominations were formed, one can find all forms of Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches. Jerusalem is the seat of 13 historically recognized churches in the Holy Land and beyond. 75% of Palestinian Christians are from the Greek Orthodox Church. The other churches are: Apostolic Armenian Church, the Roman Catholic (Latin) Church, the Greek Catholic Melkite Church, the Assyrian Orthodox Church, the Assyrian Catholic Church, the Armenian Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Lutheran Church, the Coptic Church, the Ethiopian Church, the Franciscan Custodians of the Holy Land, and the Maronite Church. There is also a Baptist, Presbyterian, and United Methodist presence in Palestine.

## **Culture**

Arts and culture keep Palestinian heritage and memory alive. Poetry, visual art, embroidery, dabkeh (traditional folklore dancing), theatre and cinema portray Palestinian life.

## **Agriculture**

The olive tree is a symbol of deep roots, longevity, and a sustainable livelihood. For this reason, we used the olive tree as a symbol throughout our worship service. Olives and olive oil have been used throughout the history of our region for medicinal purposes, healthy cooking, and to bless the foreheads of people. Another plant in Palestine is the cactus, which originally came from Latin America, but which has become an inseparable element of Palestine. This cactus, called the “prickly pear” bears delicious fruit.

## **Education**

Palestinians place a high value on education, with 95.4% of children enrolled in basic education. There are three different systems of education for Palestinians: Israeli, Palestinian, and the UNRWA schools. Within the Israeli and Palestinian systems, there are public and private schools. Traditionally, most schools have separated boys and girls, but more recently, schools have become integrated.

## **Women**

There is a perception/belief around the world that women in the Middle East region are passive, silent, and non-influential. However, the role of women in Palestine (both historically and in modern times) is active and influential. Palestinian women are steadfast, strong and courageous. They are active in tilling the land. Although Palestinian women have played an influential role in society, there is still room

for better conditions. An area that still needs further progress for women is in religious institutions. Recently, some Protestant churches have progressed on gender issues, such as ordaining Sally Azar as the first Palestinian female pastor in Palestine.

Many Palestinian women have become prominent figures in society. Some examples are: Dr. Hanan Mikhail Ashrawi (lecturer at Birzeit University, chief peace negotiator and member of Palestinian Government) and Dr. Vera Baboun (lecturer at Bethlehem University, first female mayor of Bethlehem)

### **World Day of Prayer**

The international World Day of Prayer movement reached Palestine in the 1950s. Some of the women who brought the movement to Palestine were the wives of clergy of various denominations. Aida Haddad, the wife of the first local Lutheran Bishop (Daoud Haddad), got involved. She started by participating as a young reader in worship services, and eventually rose to the position of World Day of Prayer coordinator. In 1993, Aida Haddad was the first Palestinian woman to be elected to Women from WDP Palestine to serve on the World Day of Prayer Executive Committee. Palestine was chosen to write the worship service in 1994, with the theme “Come, See and Act.” Palestine’s involvement with the World Day of Prayer movement has allowed Palestinian women to build bridges with over 100 countries around the world. This has strengthened the Middle East presence and witness. After thirty years, Palestine has been invited once again to write the resource materials for 2024.

The full version of the country backgrounder can be found on the World Day of Prayer website. <https://www.worlddayofprayer.org.nz/>

## DISTRIBUTION OF 2023 OFFERINGS

### **Christian World Service**

Developers Foundation working with poor rural families in the Aklan Province of Philippines and Gender Inequalities and COVID-19 – The Women’s Centre – Sri Lanka. \$5,000

### **Bible Society**

‘Beacon in the Darkness of Illiteracy’ project to provide literacy classes for impoverished illiterate Christian women in Pakistan. \$5,000

**Interchurch Hospital Chaplaincy** \$1,000

**Church Women United Aotearoa NZ** \$500

**WDP International Committee** \$3,000

**WDPANZ Travel Fund** \$500

**WDPANZ Provision for Expenses** \$15,000

### **Future Themes and Countries**

**2025 “I Made You Wonderful” – Cook Islands**

**2026 “I Will Give You Rest: Come” – Nigeria**

**2027 United in Prayer for Peace and Justice – World Day of Prayer International Committee**

Options for Offering:

- Donate today during the Service
- If **banking** your offering – World Day of Prayer account details are: Westpac – Account number – 03-1700-0423420-25

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# Oslo II Map Outlining Areas A, B, and C



**LEGEND**

- Area A – Palestinian Cities
- ▨ Area B – Palestinian Villages
- ▨ Area C – Settlement and military areas, roads, State lands
- ▲ Israeli Settlement

0 5 10 15 kilometers  
0 5 10 miles

Source: Yehudit Alonim, October 6, 1995

## **WORLD DAY OF PRAYER**

Observed on the first Friday in March each year,  
is a worldwide movement of informed prayer  
involving people of many denominations and languages  
in more than 170 countries.

Each year the service is written  
by women in a different country  
who share the hopes and fears, joys and sorrows,  
opportunities and needs, of their country.

It affirms that informed prayer  
and prayerful action are inseparable.



The **World Day of Prayer logo** depicts  
a cross, formed by praying figures  
from the four corners of the earth,  
joined together within the circle of the world.

World Day of Prayer is sponsored by an International Committee  
and organised by a National Committee in each country.

### **World Day of Prayer Aotearoa New Zealand National Committee 2024**

National Liaison Officer, Zella McGirr (Roman Catholic)

Pauline McKay (Chairperson)

Mary Caldwell (Roman Catholic)

Cornelia Grant (Theological Advisor)

Stephanie Johnston (Anglican)

Sheila Nokes (Presbyterian)

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