A grayscale electron micrograph of a coronavirus particle, showing its characteristic spherical shape and the dense field of spike proteins protruding from its surface. The particle is centered in the frame, with several other smaller particles visible in the background.

**The impact  
of Coronavirus  
in fragile countries**

Churches Together in Westminster

December 2020



This document was prepared by **Churches Together in Westminster**, an ecumenical organisation affiliated to Churches Together in England.

We promote activities to bring together the clergy and congregations of places of Christian worship in Westminster (about 80 altogether) to explore what ecumenism means. We also enjoy fellowship and come to know other Christians in the area.

Our areas of concern and interest include:

- Ecumenical gatherings
- Refugees
- The homeless
- Prison mission
- London Citizens

Typical events are Conferences, regular “Meet the Neighbours” evenings in each other’s places of worship, special services for Pentecost and Advent and attendance at each other’s events and services.

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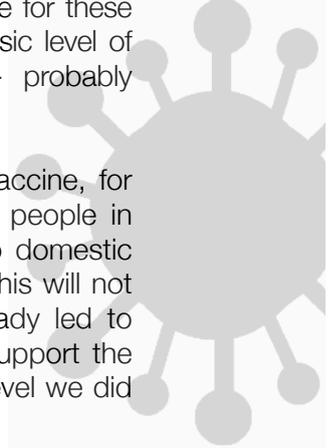
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# The impact of Coronavirus in fragile countries

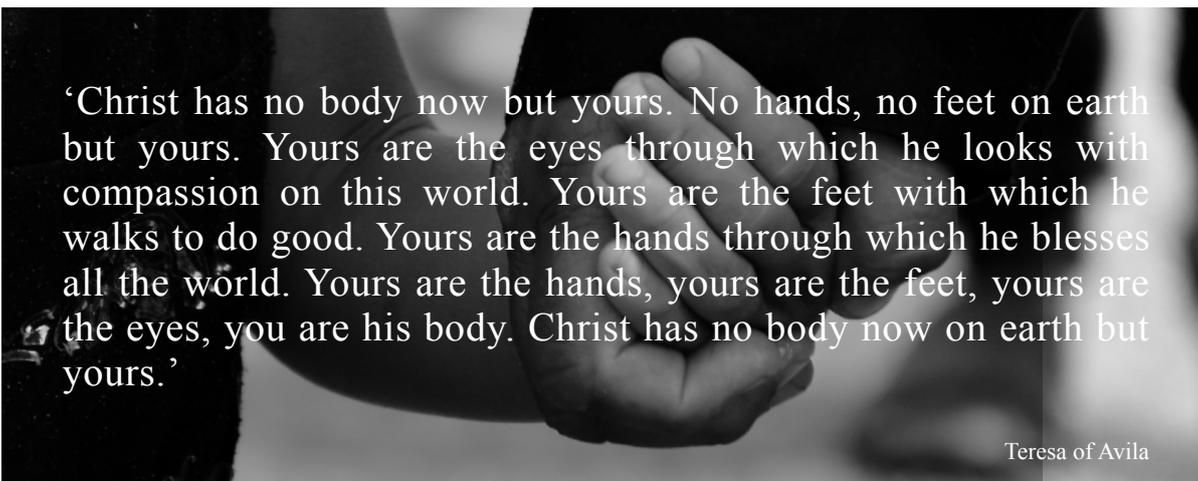
The outbreak of the **COVID-19** pandemic has changed the lives of all people across the globe, most especially in fragile states. We in the wealthy countries of the G20, need to recognise and take responsibility for the fact that our progress, quality and way of life is at the expense of the people of the least developed countries. Lockdown in our High Streets directly affects the livelihoods of those who supply them. Families who depended on this work, have been driven into destitution. Their resources have been utilised for our benefit. The Pandemic therefore in the Western world has directly contributed to making the situation for the poorest and most vulnerable

people in the world doubly dire. Add this to the challenges of famine, political unrest, violence and war; it will take a very long time for these fragile states to regain even the basic level of development they had before – probably decades. We must act now.

The danger is that even with a vaccine, for some time to come the focus of people in the UK will shift almost entirely to domestic issues and to our own recovery. This will not be a quick process but has already led to claims that we cannot afford to support the most vulnerable countries at the level we did before, thus casting them adrift.



**“WE CANNOT AFFORD TO IGNORE OUR GLOBAL COMMUNITY.  
IT’S NOT OVER UNTIL IT’S OVER EVERYWHERE.”**



This resource booklet has been prepared by Churches Together in Westminster to help members focus on those in fragile countries who are suffering from the COVID-19 Pandemic. We hope members will encourage their congregations to engage actively with Christian organisations worldwide in their work with vulnerable communities. An appendix lists organisations we encourage you to consider supporting.

This booklet has been arranged as a series of daily readings around key themes:

Day One	Impact of coronavirus on people in fragile countries
Day Two	Health, shelter and survival
Day Three	Poverty and livelihoods
Day Four	Education and children
Day Five	Violence against women and girls, and gender inequality
Day Six	Impact on those with disabilities
Day Seven	Loss of rights and freedoms
Day Eight	Impact on peace processes and conflict

## Day 1 Impact of Coronavirus on people in fragile countries

With confirmed cases of COVID-19 continuing to rise worldwide, those living in countries affected by humanitarian, political and refugee crises face the most damaging effects of this pandemic. They face higher rates of poverty, lower life expectancy, more starvation, less education, and more child death. They also face more conflict, violence, displacement and insecurity.

In the poorest countries– many also shouldering the burden of disaster or conflict – there are fewer medical facilities, and countless families without proper homes to

isolate in, living in incredibly crowded conditions. COVID-19 can and has spread like wildfire. These are places where many people struggle to cope at the best of times.

COVID-19 impacts freedom of movement and access. Essential service providers and humanitarian agencies, find that conflict, instability and now COVID-19, have significantly impacted the delivery of essential services including health, food and income security, and social services; disproportionately impacting children and women.

Jesus said, “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”

Matthew 25:35-36,40

What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

James 2:14-17

**"We exist only in relationships: with God the Creator, with our brothers and sisters as members of a common family, and with all of God's creatures within our common home."**

*Pope Francis*

The global Christian family is truly embodying Pope Francis' prophetic words as it unites to pray and take action for our common home during this Spirit-filled season. Unite with Christians from all continents to ask for a coronavirus response that embraces sharing, not plundering. Learn the importance of living out Paul's words from 1 Corinthians 12, *'If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it; if one part is praised, all the other parts share its happiness.'* Let's seek to make this a reality as we go about life as part of God's family. *Let's 'rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn'* (Romans 12:15) – being real and honest with one another, and truly being there for each other, in the good times and the bad.

Because, after all, we are family.

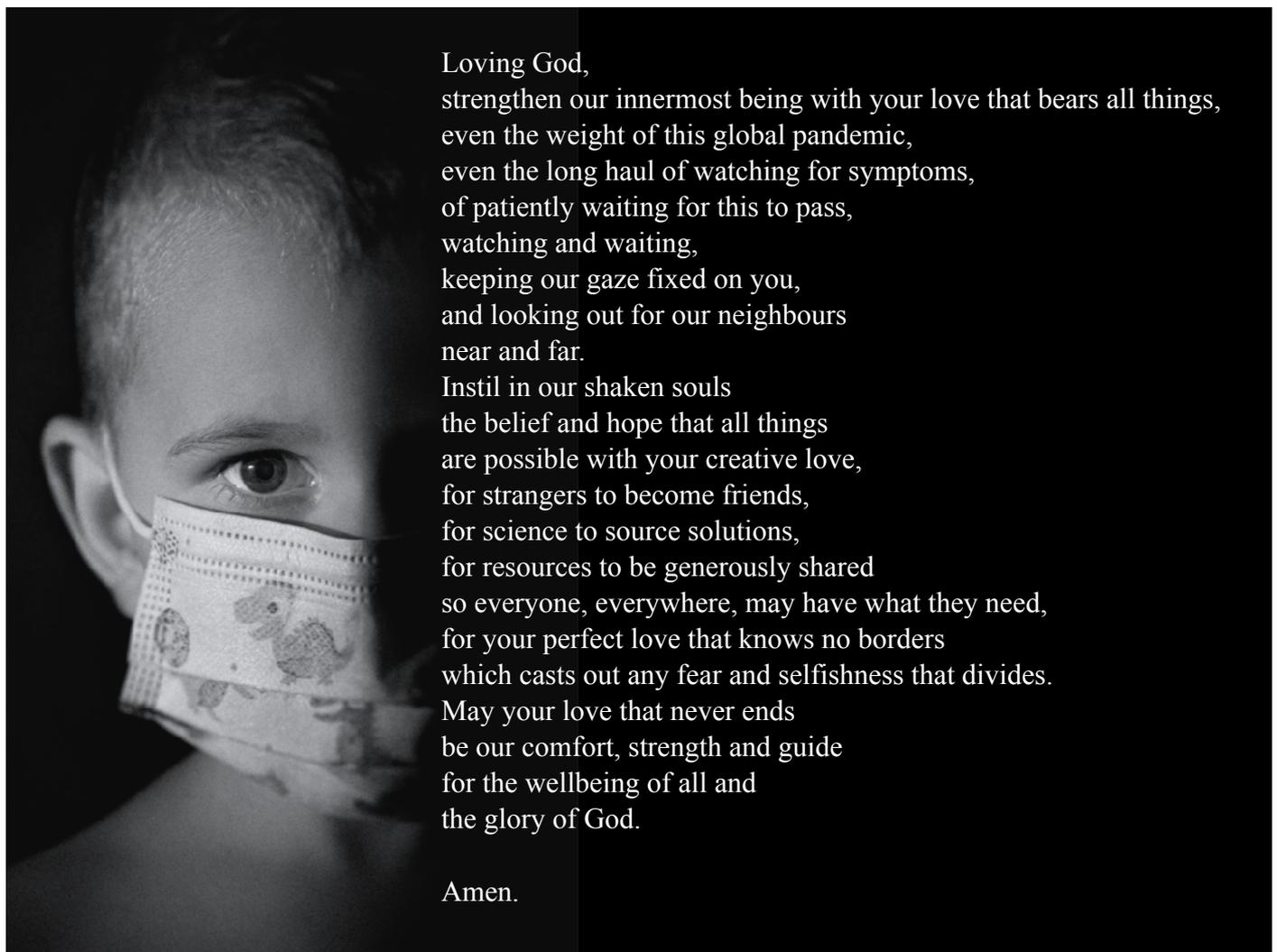
Lucy Olofinjana, Churches Together in England & Wales

‘And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.’  
(1 Corinthians 13:13)

The impact of coronavirus on the international community has revealed, almost brutally, the reality of our global and national structures of economics, social relations, cultural expectations and political capacities. The virus and its potential for death and for brokenness also calls on Christians to revisit our fundamental beliefs and principles, so that we might act with vigour and timeliness in the work we undertake with our partners to remedy poverty and injustice. We believe that all people are created in the image of God, and all carry innate dignity and worth. No one is dispensable and no one should be left behind in the global struggle with this pandemic. This means looking out for people who are most vulnerable, not merely through charity, but in clear policies of investment and resourcing.

‘God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it.’  
(1 Corinthians 12:24-26)

Christian Aid



Loving God,  
strengthen our innermost being with your love that bears all things,  
even the weight of this global pandemic,  
even the long haul of watching for symptoms,  
of patiently waiting for this to pass,  
watching and waiting,  
keeping our gaze fixed on you,  
and looking out for our neighbours  
near and far.  
Instil in our shaken souls  
the belief and hope that all things  
are possible with your creative love,  
for strangers to become friends,  
for science to source solutions,  
for resources to be generously shared  
so everyone, everywhere, may have what they need,  
for your perfect love that knows no borders  
which casts out any fear and selfishness that divides.  
May your love that never ends  
be our comfort, strength and guide  
for the wellbeing of all and  
the glory of God.

Amen.

## Day 2 Health, shelter and survival

Emergency shelter is vital for moving people from overcrowded camps and collective centres to a more private space. Alongside healthcare, providing high quality accommodations for families to isolate in and soap to keep hands clean will help everyone take the same actions we know work here at home.

Efforts to tackle COVID-19 have diverted resources away from other disease control programmes, such as those for HIV, tuberculosis and malaria.

There has been a substantial increase in malaria because of disruption to malaria control efforts. It has also hampered vaccination programmes: already, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, has reported delays to vaccination campaigns and routine introductions which could leave at least 13 million people in the world's least developed countries without protection against measles, polio and human *papillomavirus* (HPV). These are far more deadly diseases which affect and kill more people than COVID-19.

Jesus answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself."

Luke 10:27

From the story of the Good Samaritan: Jesus asked, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Luke 10:36-37

### A Reflection

The story of the Good Samaritan teaches many things, not least that we are in this together! Solidarity! When crises come and people feel bullied, beaten up and left for dead, so they need a place to turn – and yet sometimes help is not found in the most obvious places.

In this Bible story, Jesus is speaking to an expert lawyer. 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and then love your neighbour as yourself' he says. The lawyer is not convinced. He looks for a loophole. 'Who is my neighbour?' he asks. Jesus answers with this story.

A man is robbed, beaten and left dying by the roadside. His health is draining away, he has no shelter and his chances of survival seem slim. He desperately needs help. A priest sees him and ignores him.

Let's pause for a moment. Have you ever been shocked when you were in trouble at who didn't help you? The person that you thought for sure, would stand by your side, or pray with you or call you or love you when you were going through a hellish personal experience? That priest wasn't there for you. How painful to realise that someone you thought you could depend on doesn't turn up for you in your hour of need. This challenges church ministers everywhere.

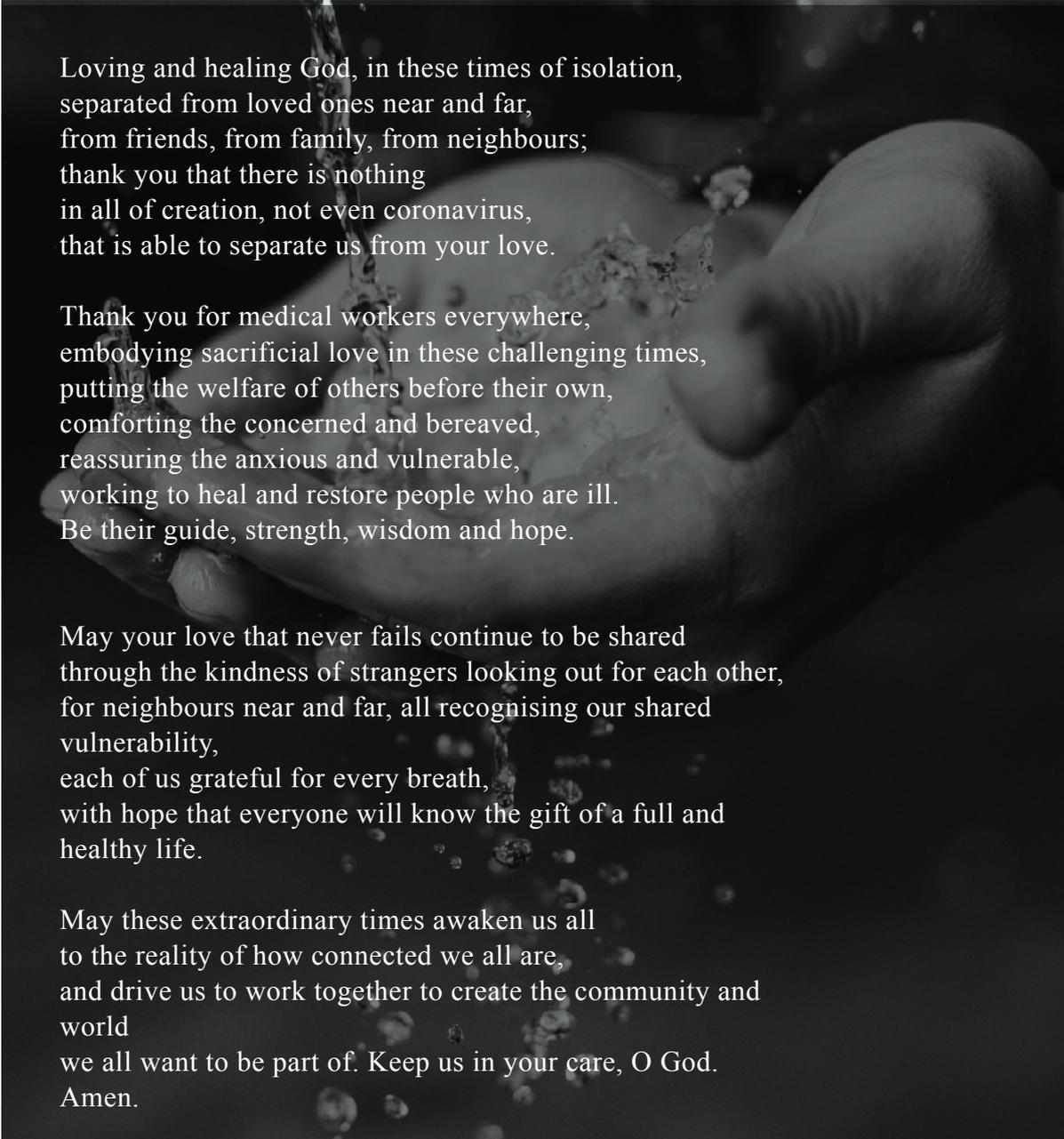
But wait - Jesus widens the scope. A Levite approaches. He does the same. Why choose a Levite? Well - Levites were effectively like assistants in the Temple. They served the Priests. They opened the gates, they played the music, they stood guard, they packed up at the end of worship services; they transported the Tabernacles from place to place; they put it up and packed it down. They were regular churchgoers if you like. So here are

challenging words for the whole Body of Christ, for the whole Church. The story says it's not always the people you expect who will help and bless you.

Finally Jesus introduces the Samaritan. Remember that in this lawyer's mind, there is no such thing as a 'good' Samaritan. The victim who lies bleeding and dying by the roadside is rescued by the most unlikely of saviours. This unlikely saviour becomes our example. God is saying that if you are going to be a Good Samaritan, you have to love like Jesus. You have to love people who don't think like you, look like you, vote like you, dress like you, whose orientation, background and story is different to yours. You cannot escape this big picture of love which has no loopholes. If we cannot determine who our neighbour is, we will never experience the privilege of participating with God in His Kingdom work of healing and reconciliation and agape, unconditional love. In this incredible 2020 COVID world, that message hits us square between the eyes. Our Christ-like responsibility is to bring God's healing, grace and abundant life to all, to the world, without exception. It is challenging work - yet an awesome privilege!

May we follow the command of our Saviour and "Go and do likewise".

Richard Mingay, Regent Hall, Salvation Army



Loving and healing God, in these times of isolation,  
separated from loved ones near and far,  
from friends, from family, from neighbours;  
thank you that there is nothing  
in all of creation, not even coronavirus,  
that is able to separate us from your love.

Thank you for medical workers everywhere,  
embodying sacrificial love in these challenging times,  
putting the welfare of others before their own,  
comforting the concerned and bereaved,  
reassuring the anxious and vulnerable,  
working to heal and restore people who are ill.  
Be their guide, strength, wisdom and hope.

May your love that never fails continue to be shared  
through the kindness of strangers looking out for each other,  
for neighbours near and far, all recognising our shared  
vulnerability,  
each of us grateful for every breath,  
with hope that everyone will know the gift of a full and  
healthy life.

May these extraordinary times awaken us all  
to the reality of how connected we all are,  
and drive us to work together to create the community and  
world  
we all want to be part of. Keep us in your care, O God.  
Amen.

## Day 3 Poverty and Livelihoods

COVID-19 is a crisis like no other the world has faced in recent decades in terms of its economic and social impacts. In many parts of the world, like Yemen, Syria and Somalia, families have lost everything - livelihoods, employment and access to food and other basic necessities. The World Bank has reported on the extent of destitution of the world's most vulnerable people from the COVID-19 pandemic which is pushing between 71 - 100 million into extreme poverty.

A large share of the new poor will be concentrated in countries that are already struggling with high poverty rates, but middle-income countries are also significantly affected.

Almost half of the projected new poor (23 million) will be in Sub-Saharan Africa, with an additional 16 million in South Asia. Households are affected in many ways, including loss of jobs, higher prices, rationing of food and goods with disruptions to health care and education.

As many of their economies are dependent on serving the markets of the world's richest countries, what has happened in the G20 countries has been directly responsible for creating destitution in these already fragile countries. We should recall that most people in the poorest countries will not die directly from COVID-19, but from food insecurity brought about by famine.

### In Time of Famine

A woman's skeleton with lower spine  
Deformed, toes buckled. Bones long fleshless, dead  
Cry out a life spent crushing seed with stones.  
Lord, give us today our daily bread.

A man weeps as his field turns to a bog;  
Elsewhere, a burning sky that cannot shed  
The longed-for rain; black mildew, locusts, blight;  
We dare to dream of a world where all are fed.

Human greed; food snatched out of the hands  
Of those who work the land. A countryside bled  
Of insects, flowers. Prices set by the few.  
Lord, give to each of us our daily bread.

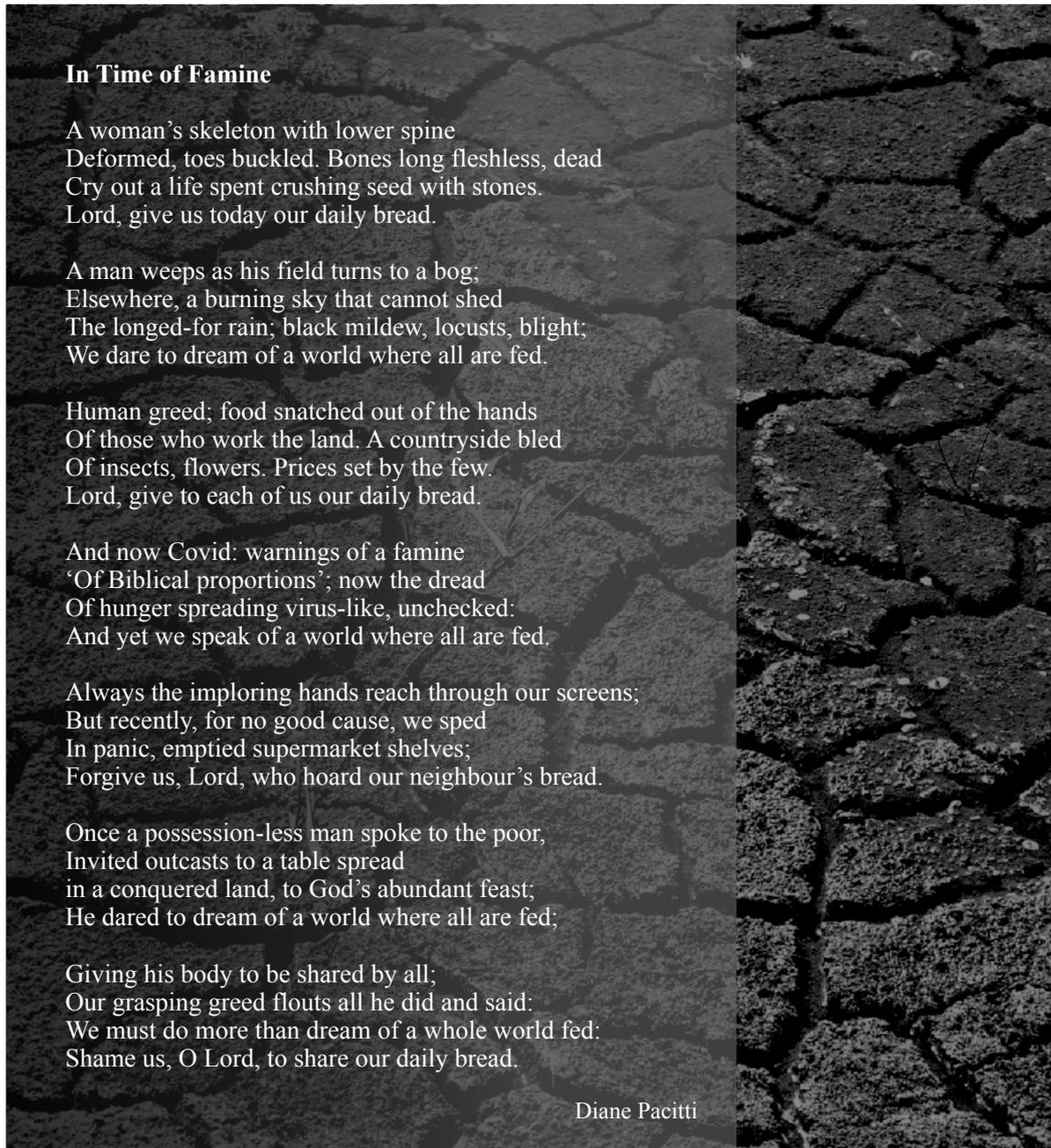
And now Covid: warnings of a famine  
'Of Biblical proportions'; now the dread  
Of hunger spreading virus-like, unchecked:  
And yet we speak of a world where all are fed.

Always the imploring hands reach through our screens;  
But recently, for no good cause, we sped  
In panic, emptied supermarket shelves;  
Forgive us, Lord, who hoard our neighbour's bread.

Once a possession-less man spoke to the poor,  
Invited outcasts to a table spread  
in a conquered land, to God's abundant feast;  
He dared to dream of a world where all are fed;

Giving his body to be shared by all;  
Our grasping greed flouts all he did and said:  
We must do more than dream of a whole world fed:  
Shame us, O Lord, to share our daily bread.

Diane Pacitti



‘It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. Fraternity between all men and women. Here we have a splendid secret that shows us how to dream and to turn our life into a wonderful adventure. No one can face life in isolation... We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead.’

Pope Francis in the Encyclical Fratelli Tutti

### A Reflection

What has tackling poverty to do with the Churches? That's a question I've been asked not a few times under different guises at this time of pandemic, a time when more and more are finding themselves destitute or on the way there. Many in London have lost jobs, livelihoods and homes, and, as this crisis worsens by the week, many more find themselves walking a fragile tightrope between just managing and falling into that abyss where so many have been left in the midst of this crisis. Why should Christians and people of faith, be involved in alleviating poverty when it is really the job of the local authorities and national government? In one sense it's a fair question. And a true fair answer includes the fact that so many people, agencies, NGOs and local and national government, are doing a great deal. We must work with them as faith groups. As Pope Francis would say about this pandemic: we're newly aware on a global scale as the human race how we're all in the same boat, recognising our interconnectedness and interdependency on each other and perhaps also thus discerning a higher more elusive force of nature, for many discovering in the silver linings of this time the spiritual, the other realm, maybe God.

This question about our involvement in social issues is often framed as part of a larger question of why the Church should be involved in politics, or be involved in the real world, or have a mission. For some, thankfully few I know, perhaps we'd prefer to keep our religion completely to ourselves. For me the answer relates to how we view our faith in Christ. The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius teach me to find Christ and my calling right in the heart of the now. This is simply the call of the Gospel. Christ is not to be found just within ourselves nor in our future hope but he is the hope of the world in the facts of everyday life.

So our mission to the poor is the only response the Churches can give, taking account of the facts and knowing our calling as Church. And only the Churches, acting as Church and not an NGO or any other organisation, could do this. Maybe this is challenging us to think too of how we define ourselves as Church, as Christian community, to whatever tradition we belong. Maybe our cage is being rattled as we are coaxed out of our own silos, church buildings, traditions, to define ourselves not by what goes on inside our four walls of buildings and confessions and cultures, but to define ourselves by what and who is outside of them. Another question often asked in my Church during the pandemic has been why are the churches closed? We needed them. It was a very fair question but it wasn't easy to deliver, except to say that, if we are really challenged by the Gospel, maybe we are learning to see how the Church has been less in my building or my community but out there on the streets of the world. The Church is the mission of Christ, especially to the poorest in our society, so even, especially, while our doors are closed that mission is embraced wherever Christ makes himself manifest to his people crying out for his mercy and tender care.

Fr Dominic Robinson, Church of the Immaculate Conception



We pray:

*for those watching their entire income stream dry up  
for those faced with famine and hunger  
for those who have work yet still live in poverty*

God of Love, we give thanks for the beautiful world with which you have gifted us, for sunlight, for cooling breezes, and for all the forms of life that that we have been enjoying so much – the song of birds, the butterflies in our gardens, and all the precious forms of life that delight us and help sustain our lives.

We recall the story of the feeding of the five thousand with loaves and fishes. Help us now to trust that there will be sufficiency as we let go and experience the joy of simpler living, close to the earth.

God of restoration, give us the wisdom to live appropriately in this beautiful world with which you have gifted us. Give us the urgency to act and courage to make changes that honour the earth and all its inhabitants, especially those in the poorest countries most affected by the current crises of COVID-19, climate change, and the precariousness of lives. Inspire all engaged in scientific endeavours to find solutions that can bring about better futures across the world, and especially in those countries who lack resources to fully respond to present needs.

We are your hands in this world. Enable us to use them to multiply your care for all your beloved creation. Make your church a living example of equity and inclusion, a powerful advocate for justice and sharing. Renew us; inspire us.

God, we remember that you are, now as always, in the words of the medieval Hildebert of Lavardin, wholly above presiding, wholly beneath sustaining, wholly without embracing, and wholly within, filling.

Amen.

## Day 4 Education and children

Globally, an estimated 800 million children live in fragile and conflict-affected areas and one in ten live in extremely fragile contexts. Thirty million children forcibly displaced by conflict, already reside in precarious and insecure conditions in low-income and fragile countries.

Worldwide, an estimated 58 million elementary-age children are not enrolled in school. From the age of 15, that increases to 120 million. And this is before COVID-19 struck. In spite of progress over recent decades, many children in school do not achieve functional literacy and numeracy skills due to overcrowded classes, lack of supplies, teachers who need more training, or disruption due to disasters and prolonged conflict and other crises. Now with

COVID-19, some children are forced into adulthood at a very young age, having to support and care for their families, especially where their parents are ill or have died.

During conflict, schools have been destroyed or become unsafe. Millions of young people are becoming refugees and migrants on an unprecedented scale. Students have been forced out of school, making them more vulnerable and at risk of violence, forced labour and permanent displacement, without a guarantee that they can go back to school when they arrive at a safer destination. COVID-19 has exacerbated this. Lack of access to education directly undermines the future of young people and the capability of fragile communities to develop and grow their economies to become self-sufficient.



Start the children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.

Proverbs 22: 6

Jesus took a little child whom he placed among them. And taking the child in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

Mark 9:36-37

## A reflection

I have spent 35 years of my life as a secondary (or high) school teacher. How to reflect on education and children yet not be too particular?

What to say briefly about education? Education is often seen as something that we give to children. Maybe even something we impose upon children. To get them to conform, to prepare them for the structures of our societies, to help them find work, to enlighten them, to expand the workings of their minds, to liberate them from dogma and injustice. A list that improves with length. Education improves the more the individual child is allowed to engage actively with the ideas and the less s/he is told what to think. Education and Faith are connected in that sense: the more doctrinal religions and their temples are, the more they worry me. Too interested in power; not interested enough in harmony.



And just as Faith is a journey for the whole of our lives, so we must strive for those educative verbs of enlighten, expand and liberate to continue well beyond childhood. The internet offers some amazing opportunities and some disturbing threats in that world of life-long learning.

What to say briefly about children? Think about the times when you have cradled a new-born baby in your arms (or watched someone else do so). And how do you respond to words like cradling or nurture? If that new-born was your own, you might have felt an urgent need to cradle and nurture. Hopefully, there was an abundance of joy too. But it seems that we are not just asked to cradle our own children. What are we doing to see to the needs of other people's children? Teachers help to nurture other people's children every day but usually in the context of a particular place. The challenge is bigger than that. Children are both vulnerable and full of exciting opportunities. When you look at the vulnerabilities and opportunities experienced by children around the world, there is much more to do.

The Child's Prayer, which follows, focuses on a range of children whose vulnerabilities are painfully obvious but let us not submit to pessimism. The fundamentals of cradling and nurture are a source of Hope. In prayer, there is a voice saying that the responsibility of providing those fundamentals lies in all of us. And, hopefully, there are voices listening as well!

What to say briefly about the pandemic? Its impact, even in rich countries like the UK, is hugely unequal and maybe something we can learn from 2020 is the extent to which inequality is even more virulent than we realised before. For many across the world, it is not the only thing to worry about; it is yet another thing to worry about. At best, reflecting on children and education is a discussion about futures and the pandemic teaches us that defensive bubbles are not a desirable future. All of us, and especially the children of the world, need a more cooperative and hopeful future. Such cooperation can only happen if we can learn to Love.

Imagine how different your life would be if you had never learned to read or understand numbers. For millions of people in the developing world, this is their reality — and their lack of education significantly impacts their ability to step out of poverty. Join in praying that people everywhere — especially children — will gain the education, wisdom, and discernment they need to reach the fullness of life God intends for each of them.

## A Child's Prayer

Loving God,

Today my teacher asked me to share my thoughts about the virus. And I wasn't sure what to say. I'm not really worried about the virus. I'm not sure whether I can stay at the school. There are days when I am not allowed to go. There are too many things to do at home. I like my lessons but I struggle to find time for any homework and there are no books or pencils here.

Loving God,

I'm not really worried about the virus. It's getting harder to collect water each day. It's been so dry recently that the stream I was using has stopped and now it's an extra four kilometres. My back and shoulders are really sore when I get home. I think the water is clearer. I am not really worried about the virus. We are still trapped in the city. The hooded men won't allow us to escape the shelling. The hospital was hit again last night. My mother says I've got to be the man of the house now.

Loving God,

I'm not really worried about the virus. Some parts of the world are short of water but we seem to be getting too much. I heard one of the elders wail because we lost part of our fields to the sea. I don't know how long we will be able to stay here. I am not really worried about the virus. My uncle wants me to carry a package for him. Across the railroad track. He says it's good that I'm a girl, the police are less likely to search. But everyone knows that the railroad is the boundary.

Loving God,

I'm really worried about the virus but no one has time to listen. Except You, of course.

Amen.

Loving God, protect all children each and every day. Let them know You are always with them, day and night. Watch over them as they play and as they rest; when they are in school and when they are at home; when they are awake, and when they sleep. Keep them safe from harm, especially during these COVID days. Give them courage, give them strength. Help them to remember your unwavering love for them.

Amen.

## Day 5 Violence against women and girls and gender inequality

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored society's reliance on women both on the front line and at home, while simultaneously exposing structural inequalities across every sphere. When resources are strained and institutional capacity is limited, women and girls are bearing the brunt of the fight against COVID-19 while at the same time they face disproportionate social impacts. Hard-fought gains for women's rights are also under threat. Responding to the pandemic's effect on women and girls is not just about rectifying long-standing inequalities, but also about building a resilient world in the interests of everyone.

The interruption or total breakdown of child protection systems, healthcare and hygiene

services, education, and requirements for families to stay confined in overcrowded and inadequate housing has increased violence and abuse towards women and children. They suffer from more physical violence and sexual exploitation, child marriage, child labour, absence from education, and significant mental and psycho-social trauma.

A severe lack of food and increased rates of domestic responsibility due to COVID-19, including caring for sick family members, has put a huge burden upon women. Parents are choosing to prioritise education of sons over girls, which in turn is leading to more girls being forced into marriages while still barely more than children.

She girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong...strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom and the teachings of kindness is on her tongue.

Proverbs 31:17, 25-26

There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28





You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may tread me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,  
Weakened by my soulful cries?

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise.

Maya Angelou (adapted)

#### A reflection

A number of years ago I served as director of an interfaith organisation that worked with abused women and children, providing spiritual counsel and safe shelter. We also educated local churches, temples and community organisations on the dynamics of domestic violence and what we could do to address this devastation to human well-being, as well as lobby local government for stronger laws to protect the vulnerable.

Before I embarked on this work, I thought it was a minor problem "out there". I just didn't hear people talk about it much. Never did I realise how prevalent and hidden it is. Most victims were women and children. I met women who had been burned, stabbed, raped, choked by their partners; children who had been flung down stairs, beaten, and sexually assaulted. Each year I organised a service to remember the women who were murdered by their partners. And through this work, I was reminded of the time I was stalked by a former partner who was armed with a butcher knife, and how my friends sheltered me and kept me safe.

Not everyone is so fortunate to have resources and friends as I had. Not all communities understand the cycle of violence and its impact not only on the abused, but on the entire society. Especially in countries where patriarchy is firmly entrenched and women's rights are fragile, the current pandemic is amplifying the trauma and danger that women and children in abusive situations face. Where can they go? Who can they turn to?

All of us are precious in God's sight. *"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from God (your Father). And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid."* (Matthew 10:29-31a)

This pandemic has created hardship on so many levels across the globe. While I may be frustrated by the limitations of Zoom and pray for the safety and health of my friends and family, I am also mindful of the women and children whose cries of anguish echo across the miles, and the perpetrators whose spirits continue to be broken.

Echoing the words of Teresa of Avila, *"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses this world."*

Service in Christ's name is love in action. Jesus encouraged his disciples, *"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* (John 13:34-35). And so he encourages us.

Rev Joan Ishibashi, St James's Church, Piccadilly

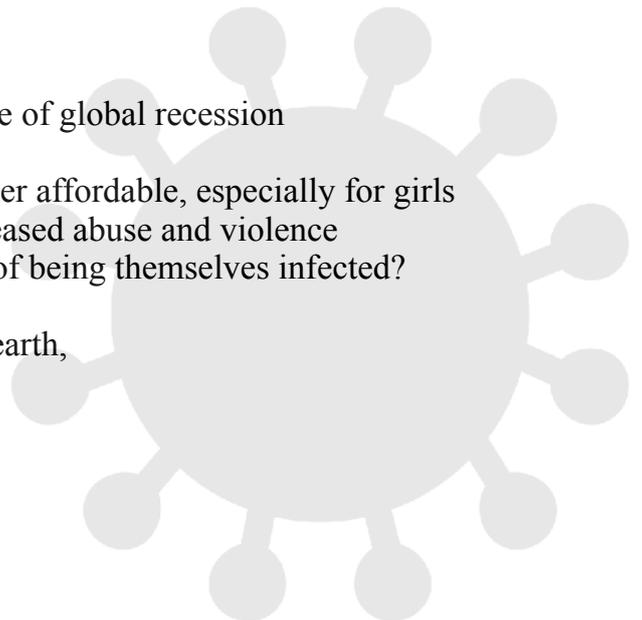
Loving Jesus,  
are you being crucified today  
in the lives of women and children  
in places where COVID-19 is a crisis on top of a crisis?

- where lack of water, lack of food, lack of the basics for good health put the most vulnerable people at extreme risk
- in refugee camps
- where HIV already sickens and kills
- where jobs have disappeared because of global recession
- where there is war
- where schools are closed, or no longer affordable, especially for girls
- where isolation at home means increased abuse and violence
- where caregivers suffer a great risk of being themselves infected?

May we, like the women who loved you on earth,  
bear witness to their suffering,  
stand ready to do what needs to be done,  
affirm life,  
affirm love?

May we use our lives  
to bring good news to the poor  
even at the ends of the earth?  
Amen.

Rev. Maggie Hindley, United Reformed Church



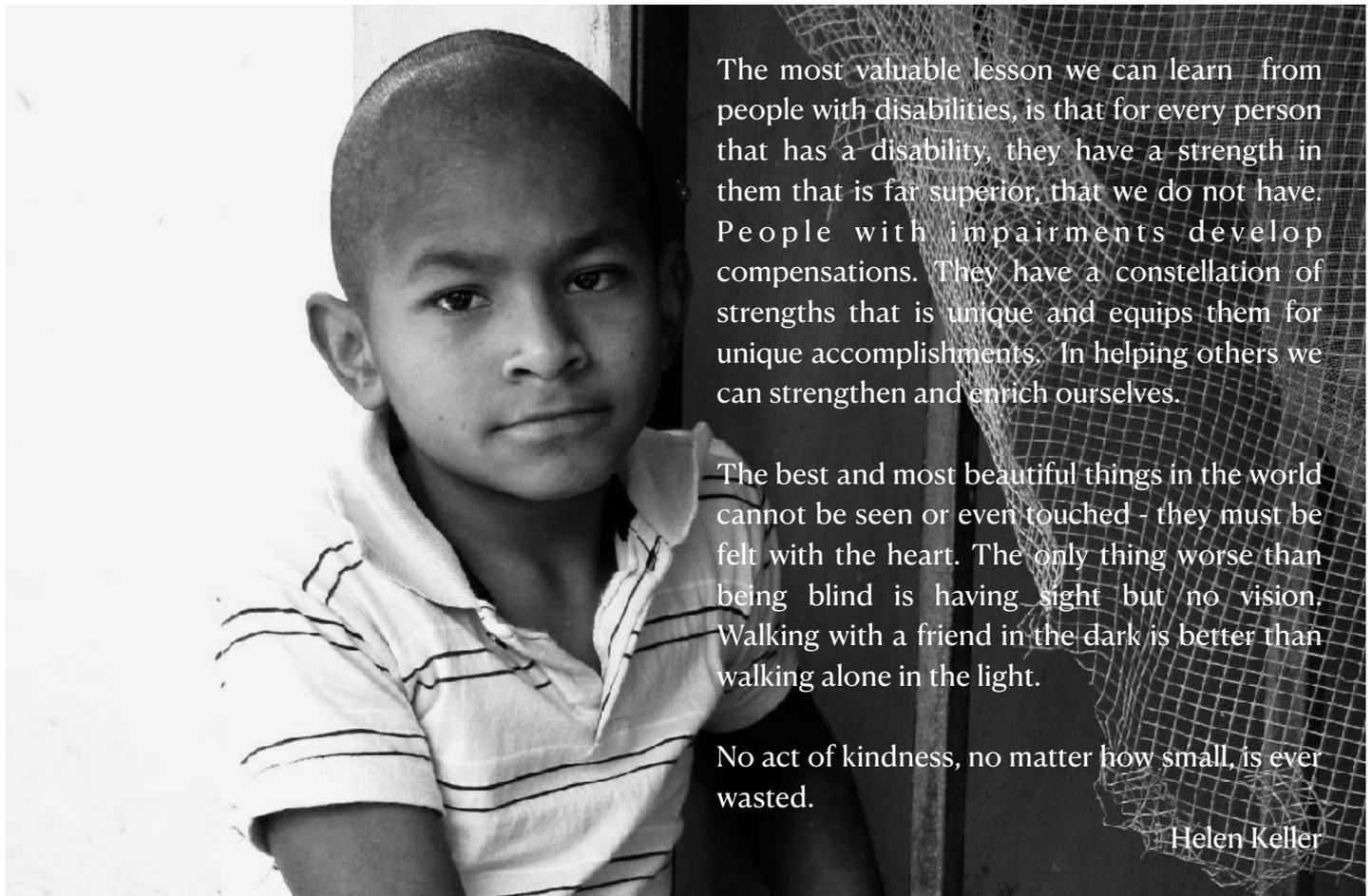
## Day 6 Impact on those with disabilities

COVID-19 has complicated life for people living with disabilities, particularly in fragile communities. They are among the hardest hit by COVID-19. Even under normal circumstances, the one billion persons with disabilities worldwide are less likely to access health care, education, and employment. They are more likely to live in poverty and experience violence.

Some disabled people have no family members to care for them. They are told to stay indoors, but may have no food to eat and no-one to assist them. The government and community forget that they exist. They may not have access to means of communication. They become invisible.

COVID-19 has impacted adults, girls, boys, and children with disabilities distinctly: children with disabilities are at an increased risk of violence, neglect, and abandonment as households and communities struggle to respond. Many are the victims of violence as they are stigmatised because of their disability and even blamed for the pandemic. Persons with disabilities who require dedicated healthcare assistance are

at an increased risk as already stretched healthcare systems are put under increased demand to respond to the outbreak, and freedom of movement and access to services are limited. Increased pressure on formal and informal child protection systems and the potential reduction in essential services has resulted in distinct and disproportionate impacts for girls, boys, adolescent and children with disabilities.



The most valuable lesson we can learn from people with disabilities, is that for every person that has a disability, they have a strength in them that is far superior, that we do not have. People with impairments develop compensations. They have a constellation of strengths that is unique and equips them for unique accomplishments. In helping others we can strengthen and enrich ourselves.

The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched - they must be felt with the heart. The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision. Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light.

No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.

Helen Keller

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works, that I know very well.

Psalm 139:13-14

### A Reflection

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all of us, and people living with disabilities more than most. With compromised immune systems, scarce and unreliable caregivers, and economic insecurity, many persons with disabilities live a vulnerable existence. For me, however, it's just another speed-bump as I, a wheelchair user, roll through life. My universe was already characterised by capriciousness and contingency. I was struck by a hit-and-run driver 23 years ago while riding my bike, and spent six weeks in a coma and another four months in hospital. With only half my limbs functional now, otherwise minor setbacks can derail my plans for days or weeks on end.

COVID quarantine? Isolation? Child's play. I routinely spend quality time by myself in bed or on the couch or in hospital. I'm barred from friends' homes by stairways, and from public restrooms by narrow doorways. A flat tire or mechanical breakdown places me under house arrest. Rough terrain or a sandy beach or a broken pavement or curb can strand me in place. A routine outpatient medical procedure can land me in a care home for a month. It's just another day at the office when you live with a disability.

Detours like this pandemic are not unexpected. I tuck my head, turtle in place, bide my time, and wait for the storm to blow over. They usually do. So far they always have.

My work hasn't suffered. I'm a pastor in the U.S., and once I shifted to an entirely online worship experience, I found my worship attendance to have quadrupled, with busy families finding time to tune in, and curious viewers from across the country finding us. I'm on the phone more often with parishioners now than before the disease hit. We are privileged in our ability to connect virtually, with our abundant technical resources on hand. Others in fragile societies are not so fortunate, with limited access to resources.

Rev. Bob Molsberry, St. Paul's UCC, Iowa, USA

### Reflections from the field

Millions of disabled people live a life of poverty and exclusion. Disability stigma is present in every society, but in parts of Africa and Asia it can be particularly oppressive. In areas where research and technology aren't available, people don't have explanations for conditions which can lead to dangerous misconceptions about disability to form.

"Growing up in Africa, stigma is rife. When I contracted polio, the people in my village could not understand it and they actually wanted to burn our house down and asked my dad to give me up to die. They were so afraid that my disability would be contagious to them. Changing attitudes on the ground is so important to give disabled people like me dignity, rights and opportunity."

Anne Walufa Strike



O God, we are always surprised by You. In stories of healing by Jesus, we discover other ways in which difference is denied. We feel called to seek clarity about the lives of persons with disabilities in terms of high unemployment rate, high poverty rate, and high social exclusion, especially during the pandemic crisis.

We pray that those with disabilities will not be forgotten, as governments and agencies seek to extend the safety net. We seek to be in solidarity with people with disabilities around the world although we do not always understand the differences. And yet, we discover community exists between persons with disability and with allies. Jesus created hope by healing. We create hope by welcoming and empowering in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, grant me the wisdom to see the good in each person I meet. Grant me the empathy to understand their life situation and respect them enough to extend loving support, while sharing God's love with dignity. Allow me, Lord, to recognise opportunities to stand with others, friend to friend.

Amen.

## Day 7 Loss of rights and freedoms

The COVID-19 pandemic is becoming a human rights crisis. It must not be used as a pretext for authoritarian states to trample over individual human rights or repress the free flow of information, the UN Secretary General, António Guterres, warned recently. He said what had started as a public health emergency was rapidly turning into a human rights crisis. Under the guise of exceptional or emergency measures, in some countries human rights

such as equality, freedom of speech, freedom to worship and freedom of movement and the right to protest, have been restricted or violated by imposing authoritarian measures. The Organisation for Security Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) reports that human rights have been affected in 80 countries since the start of the pandemic.

*“Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.”*

Proverbs 31:8-9

“When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

Leviticus 19:33-34



The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion - to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

Isaiah 61:1-4

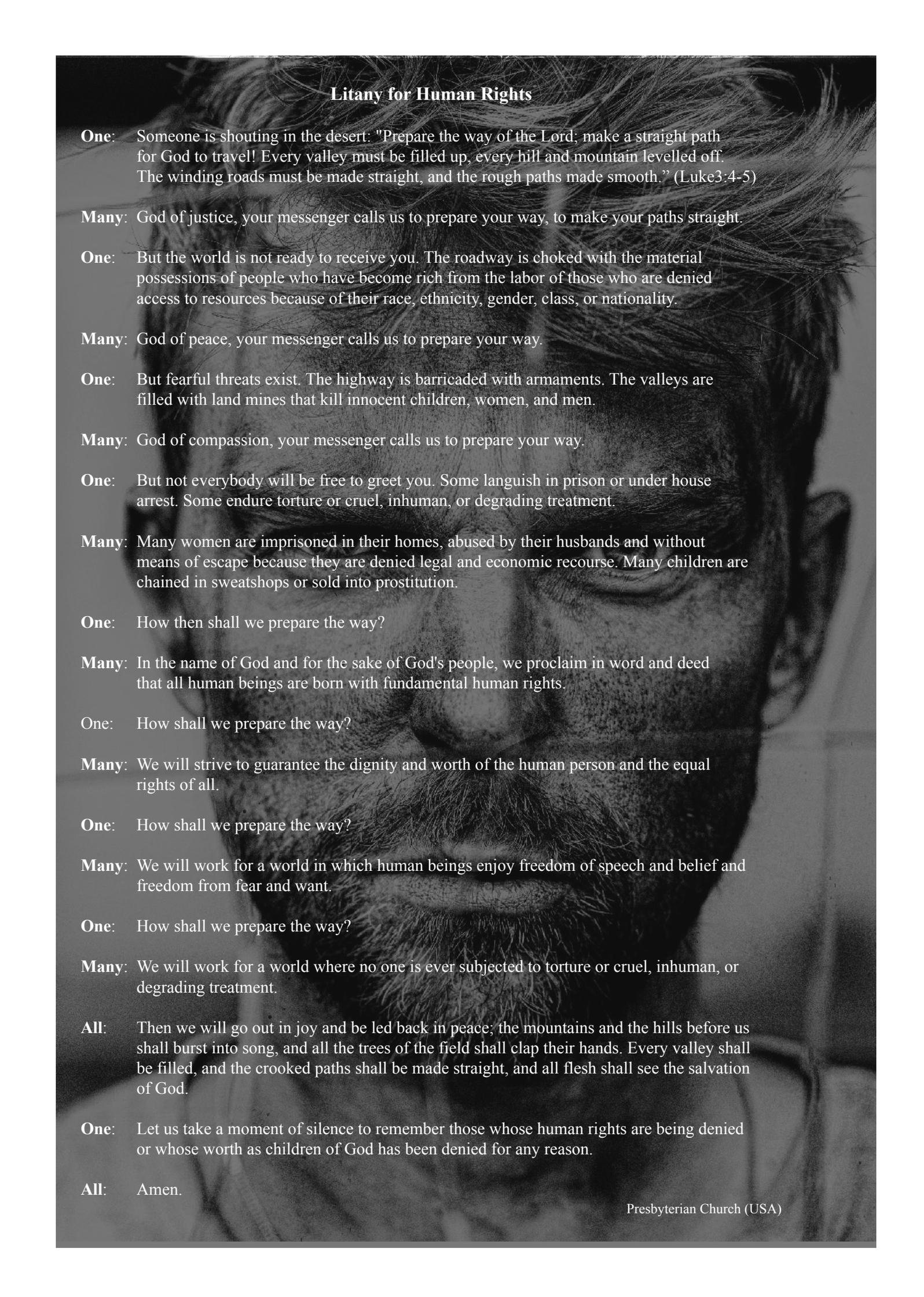
## A reflection

We have all experienced rights and freedoms being curtailed in the various responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. For most this will have been a largely voluntary, or at least accepted, surrender of certain rights and freedom in order to contribute to what we deemed a greater benefit – freedom from disease and the right to a healthy future (either as individuals or for our communities). But we have also had an, admittedly faint, taste of what it is like for many whose daily bread for most of their lives is to have such rights and freedoms denied. Take the fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief. I recall a sense of satisfaction when, as England went into lock-down, the government classified ministers of religion amongst the essential workers. It was short-lived as the Archbishop of Canterbury announced that churches would close and needed to set an example in prioritising public health. We entered into a protracted period where the right to practice the established norms of many religions was simply withdrawn. Even now, the absence of congregational singing or being able to receive communion from the ‘common cup’ rankles, but what of those for whom the requirements of their religion means a choice between defying either state or religious law?

Christians have, in common with other religions, adapted to the new circumstances and combined modern technology with a creative use of our heritage and a deeper understanding of what it means for us all to be one in Christ Jesus. Indeed, the loss of one freedom, attending our local church, has opened up the possibility of another – connecting with the worship of different Christian traditions in this country and further afield. We have had the opportunity to pray in solidarity with others, to experience being part of the body of Christ in a new way – especially with those who are oppressed or facing dire challenges. Regrettably in many parts of the world where religious minorities already suffer unjust levels of intolerance, hate crimes or government-sponsored persecution, the inevitable constraints COVID-19 has imposed on freedoms and rights have been used to target and deliberately undermine religious freedom. We have lived some of those challenges here too, perhaps more subtly. Remember headlines “Muslims cause Leicester’s COVID-19 outbreak”? If such scapegoating could happen here, imagine what it is like where it suits a government or dominant group to blame a minority for the pandemic – whether to avoid their own responsibility or to advance another agenda. Some of what expressions of solidarity offer to those who experience such abuses is knowing that they are not forgotten, that they are in our prayers, that our faith is challenged and strengthened by their witness.

In his report on Christian persecution The Bishop of Truro reminded us that the right to freedom of religion or belief was like the canary in a mine – where it is denied we are likely to see many other basic rights ignored too. You are likely to be a supporter of or at least know something of the work of a charity that works with the disposed, marginalised or voiceless in this country or overseas. The rights and freedoms of their beneficiaries will have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. As we rejoice in the inner freedom our faith offers us, and as we use the extra time current restrictions give us for prayer and reflection let us ask, is there anything we can do so that the end of COVID-19 may see them enjoy the kind of freedoms and rights that will be restored to us? Now that we know what it is like not to be able to choose whether or not to go to church, whether or not to visit a friend or loved one who is dying, whether or not to meet with friends and socialise openly, or even to be able to exercise as we wish and if we have experienced anxiety about job or financial security or have been prevented from accessing medical care we have previously taken for granted ... if we have been there, can the experience inspire us to use our freedoms and rights to promote the flourishing of sisters and brothers? We are all one in Christ, so let us be instruments of the abundant life for which Christ came.

Canon Anthony Ball, Westminster Abbey



## Litany for Human Rights

**One:** Someone is shouting in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make a straight path for God to travel! Every valley must be filled up, every hill and mountain levelled off. The winding roads must be made straight, and the rough paths made smooth." (Luke 3:4-5)

**Many:** God of justice, your messenger calls us to prepare your way, to make your paths straight.

**One:** But the world is not ready to receive you. The roadway is choked with the material possessions of people who have become rich from the labor of those who are denied access to resources because of their race, ethnicity, gender, class, or nationality.

**Many:** God of peace, your messenger calls us to prepare your way.

**One:** But fearful threats exist. The highway is barricaded with armaments. The valleys are filled with land mines that kill innocent children, women, and men.

**Many:** God of compassion, your messenger calls us to prepare your way.

**One:** But not everybody will be free to greet you. Some languish in prison or under house arrest. Some endure torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

**Many:** Many women are imprisoned in their homes, abused by their husbands and without means of escape because they are denied legal and economic recourse. Many children are chained in sweatshops or sold into prostitution.

**One:** How then shall we prepare the way?

**Many:** In the name of God and for the sake of God's people, we proclaim in word and deed that all human beings are born with fundamental human rights.

**One:** How shall we prepare the way?

**Many:** We will strive to guarantee the dignity and worth of the human person and the equal rights of all.

**One:** How shall we prepare the way?

**Many:** We will work for a world in which human beings enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want.

**One:** How shall we prepare the way?

**Many:** We will work for a world where no one is ever subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

**All:** Then we will go out in joy and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before us shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Every valley shall be filled, and the crooked paths shall be made straight, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

**One:** Let us take a moment of silence to remember those whose human rights are being denied or whose worth as children of God has been denied for any reason.

**All:** Amen.

## Day 8 COVID AND IMPACT ON PEACE PROCESSES AND CONFLICT

COVID-19 poses an urgent threat to fragile societies where the bonds between citizens and government are frayed or broken. In these places, the virus threatens to exacerbate conflict, trigger severe humanitarian crises, and disrupt peace processes. We are seeing tensions rising in places like Uganda, where security services are resorting to excessive violence against protesters, which is fuelling grievances. Across the Sahel, armed groups and violent extremists may be seizing on the crisis to help bolster their legitimacy. In Armenia, a hard won ceasefire has ended and a violent conflict broken out again. Many governments in fragile states and around the world are usurping power and using the crisis as an excuse to govern with a stronger hand, all of which could make these countries more fragile and susceptible to rising instability.

Evidence suggests local peace-building groups are not being listened to or allowed to participate or mediate, or have seen a reduction in funding during the pandemic. Some examples from the front line:

"The international organisations, embassies and some UN urgencies delayed disbursements and redirected funds. Coupled with other COVID restrictions, the organisations have failed to reach out to the communities for various peace initiatives. COVID resulted in increased violence and hence more interventions were needed on the ground.

Online interventions were welcome given the environment. However, they were not enough and would not reach the grassroots who are challenged in online access and IT Literacy."

*Ronika Mumbire, Zimbabwe Women's Bureau*

"Our organisation is currently implementing a peace project in Kashmir, but because of the pandemic some of the project funds were redirected to COVID-19 response. We expect funding for peace-building efforts will further decrease given the focus is completely on COVID. In Kashmir, the funding has already seen a declining trend since 2005 and COVID is adding to the trend."

*Nazia Nabi, Indo-Global Social Service Society*



Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:17-21

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which, no one will see the Lord.

Hebrews 12:14

## A Reflection

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

(Matthew 5.9)

When, in a festive spirit of munificence, Peter Kennard and Neville Brody collaborated to produce a new artwork for our troubled times entitled 'Peace on Earth', they reached for Christian imagery. Based on a painting from the National Gallery of the Virgin Mary praying, 'Peace on Earth' replaced the Virgin's halo with the CND Peace symbol and her face with planet Earth.

A New Year gift in 2016, the image was made available as a free download, the idea being to give something back at that time of year, and as a designer; with that something being an image to make people think, that wasn't too horrific for them to put on a wall.

Kennard said: *"At the heart of mobilising positive, peaceful activism is a radical, subversive generosity on the part of artists and designers, which runs counter to any social structure that privileges the 'I' over the 'we', and refutes the unfestive – but nonetheless accurate – observation that we may no longer know how to give without counting the cost.*



*Giving breaks the cycle of greed, and encourages people to be generous, community-minded and constructive. It's about doing something for the sake of change, for the common good – which is what the original peace symbol was about. There's a refreshing positivity to giving freely, which runs counter to one's normal transactions in the world.*

*Anyone who's been involved in the best bits of peaceful activism knows that mobilising positive human energy is life affirming. Like singing in a Christmas choir, one of the reasons to go on a march is to be there in a group of people who believe the human race isn't doomed after all."*

As artist Jimmy Durham says, *"Humanity is not a completed project"*, meaning both that we are still here and that we need to try harder. Artists and designers have a long tradition of bending the tools of their trade to that cause, beating swords into aesthetic ploughshares."<sup>1</sup>

In these thoughts and in this image, Kennard draws deeply on scripture and Christian imagery to describe the prayerful, generous, incarnational, transformational (instruments of war into implements of peace), community-building and environmentally-focused peace-making which Jesus said can be named as characteristic of God's children. Our dual challenge is to become involved in such peace-making ourselves - particularly in this time of increasing nationalism - and also to name such peace-making and the peacemakers themselves as being part of God's peaceable kingdom yet to come in full; on earth as it is in heaven.

Jonathan Evens. St Martin-in-the-Fields, London.

1. [www.rca.ac.uk/news-and-events/rca-stories/peace-on-earth](http://www.rca.ac.uk/news-and-events/rca-stories/peace-on-earth)

Ever loving God,

In these anxious days, where all normality has been lost, we pray for those who are most often sidelined and forgotten.

We especially remember all those around the world whose lives have been lived in fear and jeopardy far beyond the timeline of this pandemic.

We pray for people living in places where conflict is a daily reality. We pray for those without the ability to keep themselves and their families safe.

God, protect them from harm, and lift them to safety.

We pray for an end to conflict, extremism, and corruption, and ask that you breathe wisdom, dignity, and grace into all of our world leaders. God, build in them hearts dedicated to the service of their people.

We pray for all refugees uprooted from their homes, who now face the threat of this virus whilst also escaping the horrors of poverty, famine, and war. God, hold them close to you and give them a peaceful place to call home. Feed the hungry, give rest to the weary, and find the lost.

We pray for all governments, that they might confidently meet the threat of the coronavirus, and work diligently to keep their citizens from harm. We pray for an end to the politics of denial and deflection, and the beginning of an earnest admission of reality for those countries struggling to control the virus.

We pray that those leaders who can, act generously and share resources, technologies, and medicines with those who are most in need of aid.

God, we ask that you heal the sick, comfort the mourning, and give strength to those who are caring for the suffering.

And God, we pray for a swift end to the uncertainty. Pour your light into the dark places, and release those bound in fear with your ever lasting grace and love.

Amen.



Ben Bloom, St. James's Church Piccadilly

## APPENDIX: CHRISTIAN ORGANISATIONS WORKING OVERSEAS

WHO AMONGST THE CHRISTIAN CHARITIES IS DOING WHAT TO HELP?

There are a number of Christian charities working with partners overseas. Here is a selection of some of them. Please consider supporting the critical work of these and other organisations. You can learn about each them and the work they are doing by going to their link.

### **BAPTIST WORLD MISSION**

<https://www.bmsworldmission.org/appeal/covid-19-coronavirus-appeal/>

### **CAFOD Catholic Agency for Overseas Development**

<https://cafod.org.uk/News/International-news/Fighting-coronavirus>

### **CHRISTIAN AID**

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/emergencies/coronavirus-emergency-appeal>

### **METHODIST CHURCH**

<https://www.allwecan.org.uk/give/current-appeals/emergencycoronavirusappeal/>

### **SAMARITAN'S PURSE UK**

<https://www.samaritans-purse.org.uk/what-we-do/international-disaster-relief/>

### **TEARFUND**

[https://www.tearfund.org/en/latest/coronavirus\\_response/](https://www.tearfund.org/en/latest/coronavirus_response/)

### **USPG: PARTNERS IN MISSION: Support the local church in action**

<https://www.uspg.org.uk/worldwide/covid19/>

### **WORLD VISION**

<https://www.worldvision.org.uk/ways-give/make-donation/coronavirus/>

**AID TO CHURCHES IN NEED** and the **MOSAIC MIDDLE EAST** both have specific missions to help persecuted and marginalised Christians. Cut off in many cases from all state or international humanitarian assistance, the Christians are among the most vulnerable.

<https://mosaicmiddleeast.org/what-we-do/emergency-relief>

[acnuk.org](http://acnuk.org)

