



'Worship at home'

Moderator's Worship Resource: New Connections

In this strange year, we have needed to adapt and change, and then adapt again to the challenges life brings.

The past few months have been difficult for many, and this worship resource, put together by the Moderator, The Centre for Music, Liturgy and the Arts, and the Moderator's worship team, acknowledges our ongoing uncertainty and vulnerability, our need for rest and restoration, and expresses our hopes for the future of our church.

You might like to **light a candle** and place it in a safe place to remind you of the presence of Christ with you, wherever you are, as we gather separately to worship.



Opening: Acknowledgement of Land

Tarlee Leondaris

Holy Spirit, our Great Creator,

Whether in church or at home we acknowledge our places of worship stand on the traditional lands of First Peoples.

We praise the connection First Peoples have to the land and the wisdom this connection brings.

We give thanks for the many gifts of the earth that nourish us.
For nutritious foods, clean water and fresh air.

May Your blessings be poured out on those living on challenging land; especially in areas damaged by drought, bushfires, floods and pollution.

We grieve that our human relationships on this earth are too often disconnected.

We lament that our care for the earth has too often dwindled.
Great Creator, open our hearts to the cries of the earth.

Holy Spirit, provide us wisdom so that we may be reconciled.
Guide us to work together as First and Second Peoples.

Fill us all with love to be Your disciples;
to care for one another and the earth. Amen.



Over these past few months, while some have felt disconnected, others have come to appreciate their church community in new ways. **Reflect on your engagement with your church community, and how this may have changed over this time.**

Prayer of Thanksgiving for the Church

Ann Phillips

Loving and sustaining God, we thank you for our church. We thank you that while the doors to our buildings have been closed, we have continued to be open and functioning as the church.

We thank and praise you for our church communities who have showed innovative thinking to be able to work through a new and very different style of church.

We thank you for the acceptance to change from our congregations and the boldness and creativity of our leaders.

We thank you for those who have shared their resources and we thank you for those who have been reached each week with the different styles of services offered.

We thank you that the church has still been present in the community, being your hands and feet, reaching out and serving the community.

We thank you for the resilience of communities to keep going when it was hard, and for the willingness to look out for each other and care for those in need.

Loving God we praise and thank you for journeying with us during this time of lockdown. We thank you for the ways you have spoken to your people and carried us through this time.

We give you praise for all you have done and for all you are. Thanks be to you our God, Amen.



Likewise, over this past few months, we may have experienced varying levels of engagement with our social connections and the events in the world around us. **Reflect on how your concerns for the world may have changed over this time.** 2

Prayer of Lament and Prayers for the World

Neryl McCallum

God, we have been sent into a spin of circumstances we were unprepared for. In response we have put our heads down, focussed our vision on what has restricted us and the borders we dare not breach; we have shut ourselves away and closed our doors, we have done this as an act of goodness and kindness.

The rightness of this is without question, sometimes what's in front of us is all consuming and we need all our strength and energy to make it through, but this has narrowed our view.

Through fluke, good planning and the strangeness of our geography, we have been fortunate here and we should not doubt that. But as we begin to lift our gaze to the world we see that our circumstances are not common.

We need not look very far to see the need in our communities. Many have been ill, and continue to be, and people have died. There is massive unemployment, and we are shocked by the images of the lines for our welfare agencies as they edge around several city blocks and the shelves of food banks that are close to bare.

So many find themselves struggling financially.

When we shift our gaze wider we cannot avoid what is happening in our world. A virus that cannot be cured is catastrophic, it sweeps through communities without fear or favour, and there are numbers and statistics that we find hard to comprehend, even with the best graphs. As it travels it doesn't wipe away the other difficulties that communities are facing, it exacerbates them. There is still poverty, there is still war and conflict, there are still refugees, there is still persecution, there is still hunger and inequity. COVID is another thing that adds to struggle and suffering.

God, we are overwhelmed by the enormity of what we see, can't you work some magic here!

Come Spirit, Bringer of comfort and strength. Come Wisdom, Guide and Companion, We need to hear a word of courage that we can carry on the work of justice and love with hope and compassion as we face the unprecedented and despite our unpreparedness.



This time for some has seemed wearying and burdensome. While some have felt isolated with nothing to do, others have found their time, their energy and their resources enormously challenged and stretched in unprecedented ways.

Reflect on how this time has felt for you.

Have there been times when you have found it restful and refreshing, lonely and difficult, or incredibly busy?

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and by burden is light.” (Jesus, Matthew 11:28, NRSV)

“The best prayer is to rest in the goodness of God and to allow that goodness to reach down and touch our deepest point of need.” (Julian of Norwich)

Prayer for Sabbath Rest

*God of love and mercy,
in our yearning hear our prayer.*



Sean Gilbert

In sighs too deep for words we express our weariness – exhaustion even – born of complex, distressing circumstance, unfamiliar schedules, strange new tasks and inflexible technologies, flat-screen gatherings, interrupted and blurred connections, pressures of intruding deadlines, and the nagging uncertainty that even our best efforts may not bear good and lasting fruit...

*God of love and mercy,
in our yearning hear our prayer.*

Help us, then, to come aside. To rest, to recline, to simply be – deeply, freely and securely: to yield to an enfolding of grace that can only be found with you, that is you – at home in disquiet, the surprising presence of shalom-love in the midst of repeated tremors of human fear...

*God of love and mercy,
in our yearning hear our prayer.*

For we long to be a people of trust, not anxiety; fidelity, not an impossible efficiency. Those who find their hope in hidden pearls of great price, and not in the obvious labours of minds and hands.

Lord Jesus Christ, help us to rest wholeheartedly in your gentleness and warmth of humility. And may such a sabbath bearing and 'mood' shape our Christian worship and witness in these Covid-19 days. May it help connect us to the global family in its daily sufferings and reconnect us to the fragile, yet fertile earth from which we all draw our being, our life, our desiring, common soul...

*God of love and mercy,
in our yearning hear our prayer. Amen.*



Matthew 25:34-40

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

New International Version

Message from the Moderator

The first half of 2020 has been a challenging time, for the church and for society as a whole. Many communities entered the year in the grip of sustained drought, or affected by bushfires or floods. Before we had an opportunity to recover from those disasters, we came under the effects of COVID-19.

For the church, this has resulted in a rapid and significant change in the ways we minister and worship as congregations, as well as the ways we conduct pastoral care and emergency relief. We have learned and grown as a church, adapting and responding to our changed circumstances, to continue to be effective in mission and ministry. It brings me joy to see and hear of the many creative ways congregations have connected in times when physical contact has been limited. I am thankful for the stories I have heard from people who, in their physical isolation, feel more connected to their congregation than before. Many congregations report increased connection with their community through responses to letterbox drops and intentional pastoral care, more people engaging with on-line worship and in some congregations, increased financial giving. God has truly worked through the words and actions of congregations and individuals who have ministered to those seeking connection. Many, both within and outside the traditional church, are reflecting in a deeper way on their faith and spirituality, with an increased openness to talk about spiritual matters and even to engage with worship.

This has been a challenging time for church leaders. The initial scramble to adapt church activities away from physical gatherings, the need to take care of the vulnerable in our midst while looking after ourselves and our families has taken its toll. Many feel exhausted, and are uncertain as to how the current situation can be sustainable as we look how we will do things into the future. Some members of congregations may feel like the 99 sheep left behind by the shepherd. There may be a sense of abandonment as regular contacts are more difficult. It is important to remember that the shepherd is not off relaxing; there is much other work to do. The hard work put in to providing on-line worship, recorded services, worship at home printed material and significant pastoral connection, has possibly helped some people feel connected with the flock in new ways. It is now up to all of us to strengthen those relationships and rejoice in the ways we can gather together.



We have continued to live out the principles outlined in Matthew 25, however, some of the things we did as a church have been put on hold for the moment while we increased our efforts in other areas. The stranger, the sick and the hungry have appreciated that the church did not give up on them. We are finding new and different ways to serve.

After four months of these different circumstances, some of us find our social activities beginning to resume in some form, while for others there are still significant restrictions and uncertainty. Many feel tired, emotionally fragile, and unsure of what might be still to come.

Psalm 100 gives us encouragement to continue in our mission.

*Know that the LORD is God. good and his love endures
It is he who made us, and we forever; his faithfulness
are his; we are his people, continues through all
the sheep of his generations.”*
pasture... For the LORD is

New International Version

We continue to praise God for being with us on our journey and for the assurance that God will continue to journey with us.

In South Australia, as restrictions on physical gatherings start to be eased, there are added stresses but new opportunities arising. We have missed the sense of communal spirituality and journeying together that make us God's people in gathered worship. In this may we find new ways of being church together, rather than simply going back to what we had done previously. One thing I am certain of is that our situation will change again, not only as a result of Covid19 but the many other challenges our society faces in today's world. Discerning what to hold on to, and what to let go of, will hold some challenges, alongside some perhaps surprising delights.

We are constantly reminded of the diversity of the Uniting Church and its congregations as we consider our continuing journey as a pilgrim people. My prayer is that we might see this as an opportunity to carefully consider our priorities, to think about what we had once taken for granted, and to be challenged on how we understand and respond to our faith, our world, our relationships, and our church.

Prayer for Ministry Leaders and the Future of the Church

Jennifer Hughes and Cheryl Wilson

Shepherding God, In this year of mixed challenges and blessings we give thanks for ministers, ministry leaders and leaders in the church. We give thanks for their wisdom and guidance, their courage and tenacity in the face of so much change. For their compassion and ability to see those who are most vulnerable, for their heart for your gospel and for their faithfulness in service, we give thanks.

Some leaders have emerged from our communities, and some have discovered new gifts and skills. We give thanks that you continue to call people to witness and service, in every age and every situation. You are always faithful, steadfast God, and in this season, you continue to shape us, call us, and renew us as your people. We lift up our leaders and communities, in gratitude for your gifting and constant presence in our midst.

Closing: Whether we gather together, or separately, to worship, we are reminded that we are a pilgrim people, on our way to the promised goal, and we can trust in God to guide and lead us into the future, whatever that might look like. May God bless you and keep you, always.

Gracious God, as we contemplate what lies before us now, we ask your guidance.

Some of us remain uncertain and vulnerable. Some anticipate with excitement being able to gather together for worship. For some of us, social restrictions are easing and new opportunities lie before us. Help us not to take for granted what we have, nor what we have experienced.

It seems tempting to try to rebuild life as we knew it, however we have changed, our world has changed, and our church has changed. Keep us aware of the ongoing needs around us, and responsive to your call to action.

Help us discern your ways for us, as we seek to follow Christ in mission. Lead us into new opportunities to worship, to witness, and to serve, holding fast to your vision of love, justice and reconciliation for all of creation. Guide us in your Spirit, we pray. Amen