



Readings (Most Recent at Top)

Introduction

Introduction by Cameron Helwege, Communications Coordinator, Methodist Federation for Social Action

Liturgy written by Rev. Dr. Donna Claycomb Sokol, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington DC unless otherwise noted

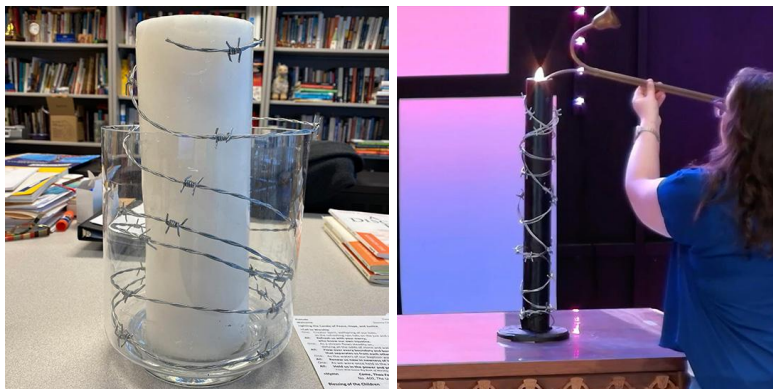
As we navigate the realities of this new administration, justice-seeking congregations across the country are standing in solidarity with those targeted by oppressive policies. We've seen churches respond by incorporating the **Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice** into their worship services, lifting up prayers and commitments to resist injustice.

Inspired by the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg, which lit a candle encircled in barbed wire during the struggle against apartheid and named those suffering under policies of cruelty and exclusion.

Now, more than **55 congregations** are beginning a new ritual of lighting the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice at the start of worship each week. Each time the candle is lit, congregations proclaim that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never overcome the light. Each week, we pray for Jesus' peace, hope, and justice to come to those who are being squeezed by our government's barbed-wire policies and actions.

At this moment, faith communities must recommit to **resisting evil, injustice, and oppression** in all its forms. Together, we will continue to bear witness, proclaim justice, and keep the light shining.

This document will be updated weekly, with liturgy uplifting a new group targeted by this administration. Readings for previous weeks can be found further down in this document.



We are seeking to gain a more solid understanding of how many congregations are lighting the candle each week. If you **light it each week as part of your weekly worship or a small group**, please [complete this form](#). If you have already completed this form, there is no need to do so more than once.

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

On the Eve of World AIDS Day

November 30, 2025

Prayer written by Donna Claycomb Sokol, Pastor, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington

On the eve of World AIDS Day, we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for the 38 million people living with HIV and the 35 million who have died from HIV or AIDS related illnesses over the past four decades.

For all who know the weight of stigma and misunderstanding.

For all who have been rejected—at work, in school, or by those called to care for them.

For all whose health has been endangered by our government's sudden halt of foreign assistance this year—a decision that left thousands of people without the antiretrovirals their lives depend on.

O God, open the eyes of our nation's leaders to the peril faced by so many because we have clung to a myth of scarcity rather than remembering your abundance.

Let research funding flow to the labs seeking new treatments, to diagnostic centers where pregnant women and children seek life-saving answers, and to rural clinics whose supplies have vanished with no relief in sight.

Strengthen every effort to prevent the spread of this virus.

And make your church a refuge of care, welcome, and hope for all who have known what it is to be turned away.

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

**All: Empower us, Jesus, to boldly use
the freedom and power given to us
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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For All Who Are Struggling to Feel Grateful

November 23, 2025

Prayer written by Grace Rogers, Ministry Intern and Wesley MDiv Student
Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington, DC

Today we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for those who are struggling to feel grateful.

For those who gathered around a table with an empty seat—one that should have been filled by a loved one who has been detained by ICE, is estranged because of differences of opinion, deployed, or no longer here to hug and enjoy.

For those who feel bitter about the injustices and suffering in our country and world, those who feel consumed by all that is wrong, those who no matter how hard they try, cannot muster gratitude this year.

For those whose life work has been devoted to a career or vocation they deeply care about but who now feel tossed around like a political pawn, uncertain of their ability or willingness to continue in their role.

For those who feel empty: physically, emotionally, spiritually.

With-us-God, we ask you to meet us in this moment, amid all the complicated emotions of this time, and renew us. Show us the ways you are at work in this time and place, and help us to join in. Fill us with the assurance that even now, darkness and despair do not have the final say.

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For The People of the Congo and All God's Children

November 16, 2025

Prayer written by Cesar Lodiha¹, MDiv Student, Wesley Theological Seminary

This morning we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for the people of the Congo and for all God's children: for those who are not able to speak freely without fear, for children who crave classrooms, for mothers who carry tomorrow, for fathers seeking honest work, for elders whose wisdom anchors us, and for the earth herself—the river, the forest, and every creature that sings beneath them.

God of life, teach us the patience of the river that finds a way, the courage of the tree that stands through storms. Heal wounds of war; mend broken trust; turn the drumbeat of guns into the drums of celebration. Give us tongues for truth, hands for healing, and feet that walk the road of reconciliation. Strengthen those who protect the vulnerable—farmers and miners, nurses and teachers, artisans and journalists, as well as peacemakers seen and unseen. Guide leaders to seek the common good. Let our many languages—Lingála, Kiswahili, Tshiluba, Kikongo—become a choir and not a wall.

May your peace settle over our neighborhoods, your justice roll down like waters, and your hope take root like cassava in good soil. As this candle is lit, light us also, that we may become candles for others.

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¹This Sunday's liturgy has been crafted by Cesar Lodiha, an MDiv student at Wesley Theological Seminary from the Congo who is also interning at Dumbarton UMC in Washington. As you pray his words, we also invite you as faith leaders to silently pray for him and all international students who are in a very different environment than they might have ever imagined when they first applied for their program.

Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For All Who Fear What the Courts May Undo

November 9, 2025

Prayer written by Lee Schriber Aber, Minister of Engagement & Discipleship,
Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington DC

This morning, we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for all who are afraid of what the courts may undo.

*For every couple who wonders if their marriage will be erased,
for every family uncertain whether the home they built will be protected by law,
for every person whose love, vows, and dreams have been placed under scrutiny and are being made to stand trial.*

*We light this candle for those holding hands under the weight of headlines,
for every person who has had faith weaponized against them,
and for every child still learning to hide who they are to stay safe in their own home.*

We remember that marriage is more than a legal status—it is a covenant of dignity and devotion. It is the joining of hearts that God has already blessed, long before any court or clerk could.

*And we pray for those with power,
for justices and judges, clerks and legislators, pastors and presidents.
Call them to remember the faces behind the filings,
the hearts behind the headlines,
and the image of God that cannot be legislated away.
Grant them the courage to do justice,
the humility to listen deeply,
and the wisdom to protect what love has already made whole.*

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For All Who Are Losing SNAP Benefits

November 2, 2025

By Rev. Donna Claycomb Sokol, Pastor, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington

This morning, we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for the 42 million Americans—nearly 13 percent of our nation—who are losing vital nutrition assistance as our government remains at a standstill.

*We remember that SNAP is more than a program—it is a lifeline.
It feeds children, sustains seniors, supports workers, and steadies families.*

*We light this candle for them— for every person whose dignity is threatened by indifference,
and whose strength is tested by systems that have failed them.
For every household where the refrigerator is empty and cupboards are growing bare.
For parents who will skip meals this week so their little ones may eat.
For seniors forced to choose between food and medicine.*

*We pray for every Member of Congress, our President, and all who serve alongside them.
Open their ears to hear your command to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.
Call them back to the table— to listen with humility, to speak with wisdom,
and to act with courage and conviction—
until legislation is passed that protects the most vulnerable among us.*

*And we pray for ourselves—your church.
Do not allow us to believe scarcity is someone else's problem.
Prevent us from turning away because our shelves are full.
And grant us courage to speak truth to power, compassionate hearts to share what we have,
and conviction to believe we not only can, but must, feed empty stomachs and heal weary souls.*

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For All Who Are Feeling Completely Overwhelmed

October 26, 2025

By Rev. Donna Claycomb Sokol, Pastor, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington

Today we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for all who are feeling completely overwhelmed—

For federal employees working without knowing when their next paycheck will come, for those still being paid but aware their agency's reserves will soon be depleted, and for those who are furloughed and wrestling with complex emotions that accompany unplanned free time.

For people who have seen images of the White House being demolished and are struggling to wrap their heads around how someone could tear down something that feels almost as sacred as a sanctuary without following any of the required protocols.

For individuals, small business owners, and nonprofit leaders who are unsure how they will afford the rising costs of healthcare.

For all who feel anxiety creeping in as they wonder how they will put food on the Thanksgiving table or sit beside loved ones whose vocal support of a policy or person is hard to stomach.

Come, Lord Jesus, and infuse us with a peace that passes all understanding. Fill us with a tangible awareness of how you are working for good all day long. And carry us through whatever storms we are facing.

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For Those Impacted by the Government Shutdown

October 19, 2025

Prayer written by Grace Rogers, Ministry Intern, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington

When we hear what it was like among the earliest believers after the Holy Spirit came to them, we are told they were together and had all things in common. They would sell their possessions and share the proceeds amongst themselves so no one had any need.

From the beginning of the Christian movement, care for the entire community has been a central commitment, and as the government shutdown continues, the reality that people will go without their government assistance becomes more prevalent.

Today we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice

For mothers on WIC, who may not receive the support they need to provide food for their families,

For high school seniors trying to discern their ability to attend college who are unable to have their FAFSA processed,

For Medicare recipients, living away from their home state, who rely on telehealth services that are no longer available,

For small business owners, who are unable to receive their loans.

And for federal employees who continue to work or be furloughed without pay.

Lord in your mercy, soften the heart of every elected leader until they view every constituent as a beloved individual who is part of their community, and convict them to always value the good of the whole over political or economic gain.

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For Federal Workers

October 12, 2025

By Rev. Donna Claycomb Sokol, Pastor, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington

From the beginning—when God took man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to till and keep it—work has been part of God's good design and gift. Through labor, people not only put food on their tables and clothing on their backs but also make a profound impact on the lives of others.

In our government, federal employees ensure the safe takeoff and landing of flights, provide healthcare to veterans, maintain hazard-free workplaces, protect the safety of our food, and uphold a vast infrastructure of roads, bridges, and dams—labor on which we all depend.

Today, we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice

for federal employees who continue performing critical duties without knowing when their next paycheck will come;

for workers deemed “nonessential” and sidelined without pay;

for employees who logged off only to find their out-of-office messages altered to include partisan blame—a Hatch Act violation they neither authorized nor support;

for those filled with anxiety as threats loom over the permanent elimination of their positions;

and for individuals forced to go into debt or drain their savings—not due to personal failure, but because of political gridlock.

May provision come for every person affected by the shutdown. And may a resolution be reached that prioritizes the good of all—and not one party or a select few.

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For All Struggling to Find Enough at the Table

October 5, 2025

By Rev. Donna Claycomb Sokol, Pastor, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington

Jesus sat at the table with his disciples and spoke plainly, "I have eagerly desired to eat this meal with you."

He lifted a cup and said, "Share this among yourselves."

Then he broke a single loaf of bread, giving each one an equal piece—no more, no less.

This act echoed an ancient art of distribution—when God provided manna in the wilderness and told the people, "Take only what you need for today and trust that tomorrow, I will provide again."

Today, we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice

for those staring down empty plates, not knowing where their next meal will come from;

for people forced to choose between groceries and medicine;

for children whose stomachs tighten when school kitchens close for the day or academic year;

for workers watching food prices rise while their paychecks stand still;

for everyone already hurt—or soon to be—by cuts to vital programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP.

We pray for those who have been tempted to believe the lie that there isn't enough food to go around—for all perpetuating a myth of scarcity instead of singing a lyric of abundance.

Teach us again the truth told at your table: that there is enough when we choose to share.

Grant us faith to not only pray, "Give us this day our daily bread,"

but to redefine what is "enough"—and to give freely from our excess.

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For Freedom of Speech

September 28, 2025

By Rev. Donna Claycomb Sokol, Pastor, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington

What do you think? What do you believe? Do you agree or disagree?

These are not casual questions—but rather soul-shaping, world-defining inquiries that we answer in childhood classrooms and college study groups, living rooms and boardrooms, protests and pulpits.

From the beginning, this nation has promised the right to speak freely— to challenge power, question policies, mock corruption, and defend the truth.

Freedom of speech is stitched into our identity, a right many assumed would never unravel.

And yet today, truth-tellers are being punished. Critics are being threatened with retaliation. Comedians are being canceled with some reinstated only after facing economic or political consequences for their silencing.

So today, we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for every voice that has spoken truth only to be harmed for doing so.

For those who dare to expose the lie, name injustice, and bring relief through laughter.

We light this candle for the poets and prophets, artists and academics, wise men and young women who refuse to be silent even when those with worldly power demand it.

We pray for courage and conviction of those who, like Paul commanded Timothy, “persist—whether the time is favorable or not” to convince, rebuke, and encourage.²

May God raise up a people who will not trade truth for power or popularity.

May God strengthen us to resist the temptation to chase after teachers who echo our desires.

And may God equip those in power to do all they can to protect this gift while we promise to never again take it for granted.

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² 2 Timothy 4:2-4.

For the Church

September 21, 2025

By Rev. Donna Claycomb Sokol, Pastor, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington

This morning, we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for the church.

We've heard it said:

"This is a turning point."

"A watershed moment that will shape our shared life for generations."

But could this moment—marked by reckless rhetoric and the relentless pursuit of power—be a turning point for the church?

*Could this be the moment when the church is heard proclaiming more hope than judgment?
When we are caught singing Mary song—the one she sang while Jesus was forming in her womb—about God lifting up the lowly, filling the hungry with good things, and sending the rich away empty?*

*Could this be the point when the church stops waiting on elected officials to mend our nation's brokenness or weave a society strong enough to hold everyone—
but instead recognizes how we can—and must—do this work—
by remembering how every person is created in the image of God—including our enemies;
by grieving each death as Jesus does—especially when one of God's children kills another by gun, knife, or force;
by choosing each word with care, knowing how easily our tongues can spark destruction.*

*Almighty God, please use this moment to help the church become the church
so that the world knows it is the world—
as you fill us with peace that is not passive,
hope that is not silent,
and justice that does not wait
for a temporary turning point ushered in by a political party or platform,
but rather a complete turning point modeled after the life, death, and resurrection
of one who brought good news to the poor,
release to the captives,
recovery of sight to the blind,
and freedom for the oppressed,
before calling and equipping us to do the same.*

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For the NIH, CDC and Scientific Truth

September 14, 2025

By Rev. Scott Foster, Pastor, Fairmont UMC, Raleigh NC

Jesus is often called the Great Physician, as he healed countless people throughout the gospels, including the blind, the deaf, the lame, and the sick, awakening the faith of others who witnessed his compassion, mercy, and grace.

For centuries, physicians have been inspired by Jesus' healing ministry and have labored to be a part of it. Scientific researchers have participated in Jesus' healing ministry by dedicating their lives to alleviating suffering and disease through their work in labs and classrooms, regularly lengthening the quality of life for billions of people through rigorous research, experimentation, and study. In the United States, government agencies like the National Institutes of Health and the Center for Disease Control have arisen out of this movement, becoming the "crown jewel" of our scientific community.

Today we light the Candle for Peace, Hope, and Justice, for employees of these organizations who are seeing their work end or face harsh budget cuts; for doctors and nurses who are still dedicating their lives to heal others and follow scientific truth; for researchers who have lost their jobs due to the defunding of research at universities throughout the country; and for children, teenagers and adults who are no longer eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

We light this candle in hope that our healthcare system will continue to follow the wisdom of trained scientists and researchers and that medical professionals will continue to faithfully fulfill their call despite limitations placed upon them.

We light this candle in peace that understands how Jesus' healing ministry will carry on in and through the church all over the world.

And we light this candle in belief that justice will come that enables all people to have access to the physical and mental healthcare needed to live whole lives.

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For Those Detained at “Alligator Alcatraz”

September 7, 2025

By Rev. Andy Oliver, Pastor, Allendale UMC, St. Petersburg, FL

*Jesus said being a disciple is costly;
to stand with those the world locks away,
to bear witness when empire builds cages.*

*Today we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for those detained at Alligator Alcatraz,
whose cries rise to heaven,
whose lives bear the weight of our nation's sin.*

*Inside this camp, food is scarce, water floods,
fungus spreads, lawyers are denied, toilets are public,
mosquitoes swarm, AC is insufficient, and despair stalks every corner.
There is no peace in these cages—only cruelty.*

*And we remember: Jesus himself was lynched by the state.
A public execution meant to terrorize the oppressed into silence.
In our own day, immigrants are “lynched” in different ways—
their dignity stolen, their lives placed at risk, their humanity crucified by unjust laws.*

*We light this candle for peace—not the false peace of silence and control,
but the peace of every family restored.*

*We light this candle for hope—hope that God's love cannot be chained,
hope that liberation will come.*

*We light this candle for justice—justice that calls for solidarity,
justice that will not rest until every cage is empty.*

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For Trans People Losing Access to Gender-Affirming Care

August 31, 2025

By Rev. Rachel Cornwell, Pastor, Dumbarton United Methodist Church, Washington, D.C.
and the parent of a trans teen.

Two years ago, when the state of Tennessee passed a law banning all gender affirming healthcare for minors, Samantha and Brian Williams' transgender daughter said, "I don't even want to think about having to go back to the dark place I was in before I was able to come out and access the care that my doctors have prescribed for me. I want this law to be struck down so that I can continue to receive the care I need, in conversation with my parents and my doctors, and have the freedom to live my life and do the things I enjoy."

But on June 18, the Supreme Court, by a vote of 6-3, allowed the Tennessee law to remain in effect. There are now 27 states that have enacted laws or policies restricting access to gender affirming care for youth ages 13-17. 40% of transgender youth live in a state where they cannot access gender affirming healthcare.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, less than 2% of adolescents in the United States identify as transgender. Yet, these youth suffer mental health disparities that include higher rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidality, due to a combination of dysphoria toward their bodies and minority stress. In a large study of transgender adults in the United States, 40% said they have attempted or considered suicide. But numerous studies have shown that gender affirming healthcare can dramatically reduce these outcomes and help trans youth become healthy, thriving adults.

On July 25th, the White House released a statement entitled "President Trump Promised to End Child Sexual Mutilation — and He Delivered," which listed 16 hospitals and clinics, including in states where gender affirming care for minors is still legal, that have stopped providing care. Hospitals in Chicago, Seattle, Los Angeles, New York, Denver, and Washington, DC, have shuttered their gender clinics, forced to choose between federal funding and providing gender affirming care to teenagers. And last week, the federal Office of Personnel Management announced that beginning in 2026, federal employee health benefits will no longer cover gender affirming care, regardless of age.

So today we pray for all youth and kids who are struggling with their gender identity and unable to access healthcare that could ease their anxiety.

We pray for families of transgender children who want to support their kids but are unable to travel great distances or move to places where gender affirming care is available.

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

We pray for doctors whose patient records are being subpoenaed by the Department of Justice, or who find themselves being targeted for trying to help their young patients.

We pray for researchers whose studies to determine what treatments are most effective for gender dysphoria in youth have been defunded.

We pray for parents being called "child abusers" by this Administration simply for supporting their children and trying to help them live as their authentic selves.

We pray for those very few young people for whom gender affirming care did not have a positive outcome and whose trauma is being exploited by politicians.

We pray for transgender adults who fear that their access to gender affirming healthcare will also be taken away. We pray for federal employees whose insurance will no longer cover gender affirming care for them or their families.

As we light this Candle for Peace, Hope, and Justice, we pray that all transgender youth and adults will be able to live their lives as their full, authentic selves and that this political scapegoating of trans people will come to an end.

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

**All: Empower us, Jesus, to boldly use
the freedom and power given to us
to resist evil, injustice, and oppression
in whatever forms they present themselves.**

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For Teachers, Administrators and Students at the Start of a School Year

August 24, 2025

By Sara Doughton, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington DC

The most common name for Jesus in the New Testament is “teacher.” Through his parables, Jesus opened his disciples’ minds and hearts. Through his actions, he modeled a life rooted in compassion, community, and justice. And through his miracles, he cared for those around him in body, mind, and spirit.

Today, educators are expected to perform their own kind of miracles. In these past weeks we have prayed for those experiencing job loss, food insecurity, homelessness, discrimination or lack of accommodations due to disabilities, mental and physical health challenges, violence, and threats to immigrant families. Our teachers, staff, and administrators are on the front lines of these multiple, overlapping crises every single day. They are praised for doing the impossible and blamed for not doing enough.

And so, today we Light the Candle of Peace Hope and Justice for teachers and staff welcoming young people at the start of this new school year.

We pray for those struggling to provide students with the supports they need during a national mental health crisis, and with the lingering effects of the pandemic still undermining academic success and wellbeing. And we pray for teachers who yearn for autonomy and respect amidst increasing polarization and hostility towards educators. We give thanks for the dedicated educators with us today, and all those who serve our community’s children.

We pray as well for education leaders unsure of how to plan or lead as they wait for the next crisis to emerge. In July the federal administration suddenly withheld \$6.2 billion already appropriated to support summer and afterschool programs, migrant children and English learners, and effective instruction. While the government has since released these funds, much remains unclear about the future of the Department of Education and federal funding. God, we pray for wisdom, discernment, and courage as administrators seek to provide equitable, high-quality education that meets students’ diverse needs.

And, of course, we pray for families and children beginning the year. Be with them through their many emotions—anxiety, excitement, inspiration, apathy, and everything in between. May they experience their schools as places of welcome, inclusion, safety, and joy, where they can grow in knowledge and truth.

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

And finally, God our Teacher, in the words of St. Thomas More, we ask that you grant us the grace to labor for the things we pray for.

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

**All: Empower us, Jesus, to boldly use
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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For Our Nation's Capital

August 17, 2025

By Rev. Donna Claycomb Sokol, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington DC

This morning we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for the city of Washington and all who are feeling afraid, anxious, confused or concerned about our President's aggressive ordering of a massive mobilization of the military and federal police while threatening a complete takeover of the city.

We bring before God the 700,000 residents who heard the President describe the Capital city as a place in need of rescue from "crime, bloodshed, bedlam and squalor" when, in fact, statistics from the Department of Justice reveal that violent crime was at a 30-year low in 2024.

We pray for children who could see a soldier strapped with an assault rifle while walking to school, and for the people who may soon share the road with military vehicles while driving to work—some of whom still carry the trauma from January 6, 2021 when a violent mob marched up Pennsylvania Avenue and pushed past whatever barricade was before them with no backup called to stop the destruction.

We ask for provision to come for individuals who work in hotels, serve in restaurants, and organize conventions as they brace themselves for cancellations and decreased reservations as potential guests ponder whether Washington is a safe place to visit or gather.

We ask God to protect people experiencing homelessness in Washington—individuals who the President has written must "move out immediately" before adding how they would be relocated far from the Capital. Wrap your arms around these beloved children of yours, O God, and grant us the tools and resources needed to shield our unhoused neighbors from harm as we work for the day when all of your children will have a place to call home, access to physical and mental healthcare, and opportunities for meaningful, livable wages.

And we pray for our President, your son, Donald, and those who stand silently by his side while denying reality and spreading untruths. If there is a way for you to reach him as you did Saul before he came Paul, blinding him until the scales were removed that prevented him from seeing the unnecessary harm he was causing, then please intervene, O God. For we long for this nation to remain a democracy that seeks liberty, justice, and peace for all.

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

**All: Empower us, Jesus, to boldly use
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For Gaza

August 10, 2025

By Rev. Rachel Cornwell, Pastor, Dumbarton United Methodist Church, Washington, D.C.

Lord, Gaza is starving. Pregnant women and children. The elderly. The sick. The Gaza Ministry of Health has reported more than 40 hunger-related deaths this month, including 16 children, and 111 since the beginning of the war, 81 of them children. Lord, Gaza is being starved.

Lord, in your mercy.

Do not let us turn away from the images of the hollow-eyed, skeletal children languishing in hospital beds, their limbs as thin and brittle as sticks.

Do not allow us to scroll past the photos of grieving parents holding a tiny bundle for burial without our hearts breaking along with them.

Keep us from forgetting the Israeli hostages who are also being starved and forced to dig their own graves.

Help us remember those being trampled or shot while trying to access limited food.

It no longer matters who is to blame. It only matters what we do now.

That we say out loud that starvation is not a weapon of war.

That this hunger crisis is the result of human failings, with each of the involved parties blaming someone else for the suffering.

We pray for Siwar Barbaq, who was born healthy and now, at 11 months old, should weigh about 20 pounds but is under nine pounds.

We pray for the family of Yahia al-Najjar who was just 4 months old when he died of severe malnutrition on Tuesday at the American Hospital in Khan Younis.

We pray for doctors and nurses like Mohammad Saqr, head of the nursing department at Nasser Medical Complex, where the hospital's limited supply of IV solution cannot meet the growing demand. "The team is exhausted from hunger," he said. "Yesterday, some staff members ate just 10 spoons of plain white rice."

We pray for all the children who will suffer a lifetime of physical and mental health issues as doctors warn that malnutrition in early childhood can have long-term effects, disrupting growth, cognitive ability, and emotional development.

We pray for our elected leaders who refuse to believe the facts of this mass starvation and instead continue to support the blockade of life-saving food from entering Gaza.

(continued on next page)

Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

Jesus, in your sermon on the mount, you promised,

*"Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.*

*Blessed are you who hunger now,
for you will be satisfied.*

*Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh. (Luke 6:20-21)*

*As we light this Candle for Peace, Hope, and Justice,
We pray that your blessing would be with all those who are suffering
and that those with the power to end this mass starvation will act now.*

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

**All: Empower us, Jesus, to boldly use
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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For Those Who Have Never Felt This Way Before

August 3, 2025

By Rev. Cathy Christman, Pastor, St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Stevens Point, WI

The writer of today's prayer is three weeks into her new appointment and recently had an opportunity to meet with the worship team for the first time. When she asked what they wanted to hear from the pulpit, the first words she heard after some silence were, "more about what is happening in DC." This prayer reflects the stirrings of her heart following that conversation.

"We want to be a relevant church."

What are followers of Jesus to do when the name "Christian" has become synonymous with hate, bigotry, secrecy, silencing, and fear? What are we to do as those who love the gospel and proclaim hope—when others are using their version of the gospel to divide and conquer? What are we to do with the feeling that politics is dictating more of our lives than we think?

Many of us hearing these words have never had to face this crisis before in our faith lives. "Jesus loves you" has always been a song from Sunday school. "He's got the Whole World in His Hands" has regularly been on repeat in our heads. The gospel invites us to write these words on our hearts and live them out in our daily lives.

"Jesus Loves You" is a call to action. "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" is a promise for all for a new tomorrow in God's kin-dom. This, today, now, is a call to accountability to our faith lives. This is our "strangely warmed" moment. Just as John Wesley was changed one day at Aldersgate, we come in prayer this day feeling something new; something some of us have never felt before.

On May 24, 1738, John Wesley wrote in his journal, "I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitely used me and persecuted me... After my return home, I was much buffeted with temptations, but I cried out, and they fled away. They returned again and again. I as often lifted up my eyes, and He 'sent me help from his holy place.' And herein I found the difference between this and my former state chiefly consisted. I was striving, yea, fighting with all my might under the law, as well as under grace. But then I was sometimes, if not often, conquered; now, I was always conqueror."

Today, we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for all who feel things that they have never felt before. We light the candle joining God's spirit as it moves in us, through us and in God's world. We light this candle feeling a bit warm ourselves—seeking authentic peace, hope and justice; the faith many of us learned in our Sunday school years.

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

**All: Empower us, Jesus, to boldly use
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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For Those Who are Being Asked to Carefully Select What History is Told

July 27, 2025

By Rev. Donna Claycomb Sokol, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington DC

Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free." As followers of Jesus, we understand that it is impossible to live fully into who we are called to be while hiding our sins or pretending we have done no wrong, especially when our words or actions have harmed others.

This morning, we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for the employees of the National Park Service who are being asked to reconsider how much truth is told while removing materials that "inappropriately disparage Americans." We pray for those in North Carolina who are carefully reviewing signs at the Cape Hatteras National Seashore that educate visitors about the impact of climate change on rising sea levels, for employees in Philadelphia who are discerning whether to remove exhibits that highlight the brutality of slavery, and for those in Florida who are reevaluating language used to describe how Native Americans were treated at the Castillo de San Marcos National Monument—all in response to a Presidential directive to "emphasize the 'progress of the American people' and the 'grandeur of the American landscape.'"

While America has made great progress over the years, with a landscape that is breathtakingly beautiful, true liberation comes only when we name our truth and turn from our harmful ways of scarcity and supremacy—and towards God's ways of justice and generosity.

May God strengthen us to resist efforts to whitewash the truth, and equip us with the courage and capacity to tell our full, unvarnished truth—both as individuals and as a nation. Let us do so, not to disparage anyone, but because we deeply desire for tomorrow to be different from yesterday, for all of God's children.

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For People Living with Disabilities on the 35th Anniversary of the Passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act

July 20, 2025

By Sarah Malaier, Member, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington DC

One of the authors of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Congressman Tony Coelho, aspired to become a priest but was denied this opportunity because of a 1600-year-old church law that proclaimed that people with epilepsy were possessed by demons. Outside the church, he was rejected by employers, health insurance providers, and even his own parents.

He struggled with his exclusion, resorting to alcohol and considering suicide. Yet, he had heard his call. One of his mentors would tell him that people can be in ministry not only in the church—but in entertainment, business, and everyday life. Tony Coelho soon discovered his unique call was to serve in politics.

In Congress, he used his power to turn his experiences into hope and justice for the one in six people who have a disability. He was joined by numerous advocates who also had been excluded and who were willing to put their bodies at risk to pass the ADA - people who chained themselves to buses that they could not ride, and wheelchair users who crawled up the steps of the Capitol building.

As we light this Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice, we give thanks for the passage of this legislation 35 years ago this week and the trailblazers who put their lives on the line, transforming opportunities and enabling inclusion for people living with disabilities.

And we remember the work is not done. Many people are still excluded, institutionalized, or degraded. Even the gains we have made in building more accessible communities and in growing diversity are seen by some in power as wasteful rather than life-giving.

In 1 John, it is written: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are."

Forgive us, God, for leaving people behind and diminishing their belovedness as children of God. Have mercy on us for making it harder to access healthcare and for weakening rules that enable everyone to have the opportunity to choose where and how, and with whom they will live.

Forgive us for fighting to have churches exempted from disability rights laws. Forgive us for locking people in nursing homes instead of allocating resources to let them live freely in the community. Forgive us for complaining that it is too expensive to make our workplaces, businesses, schools, and technology accessible to all your children.

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

Remind us that a disability or medical condition does not make us less beloved. Allow us to see the whole being of each person we meet and to acknowledge their hopes and dreams as our own.

And give those of us with a disability the courage to continue to speak up, and those of us without a disability the humility to listen as you inspire in all of us the creativity to reshape our communities in ways that fit all people, adapt and bend, and prioritize humanity over money.

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

**All: Empower us, Jesus, to boldly use
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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For the Immigrant Children Blocked from Finding Life Abundant in the USA

July 13, 2025

By Caroline Barrow, Member, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington DC

We read in Matthew about a time when children were taken to Jesus so he might lay hands on them and pray. The disciples responded by speaking sternly to those who brought the children, trying to keep them at bay. But Jesus said “Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.”³

Today, we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for immigrant kids in our nation. We acknowledge the ways our immigration policies, focused on exclusion, are not all that different than the disciples who sought to focus on the limited resources and time of Jesus before Jesus responded out of abundance, welcoming the children to be embraced and ushered into a more abundant life.

We pray for immigrant kids who live with the fear of returning home to an empty house. We pray for courageous parents to be given the words to share about what will happen if mom or dad is arrested by ICE. We pray for neighbors, churches, and communities to step up and support these families, particularly when they are victims of a push to meet a quota of 3,000 arrests a day.⁴

We pray for immigrant kids who find themselves clothed in jumpsuits and sleeping in spaces where the lights are kept on through the night in so-called “family detention centers.” We pray for abundance to be found when kids and adults are forced to fight over water when ICE officers refuse to provide enough to keep a person hydrated during the summer heat.⁵

We pray for immigrant kids in Texas, Indiana, Florida, Tennessee and New Jersey—states where lawmakers have introduced policies to expel undocumented kids from public schools.⁶ May a path be found where every child can receive access to the gift of education that many of us take for granted in our own families.

And we pray for immigrant kids who will be hurt by the recent budget bill passed by Congress. May all children receive access to the nutrition required to grow into healthy adults. May families not be penalized for reunifying, and may provision come that enables families to pay the heavy fees required to apply for protection in the United States.⁷

Jesus, please help us to become more like you as we actively seek to bless children, welcome strangers, and play a role in providing the abundant life that you have promised to all people.

³ Matthew 19:13-15.

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/may/29/trump-ice-arrest-quota>

⁵ <https://www.texasstandard.org/stories/texas-migrant-detention-centers-conditions-karnes-dilley-flores-agreement/>

⁶ <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/the-fight-for-immigrant-students/>

⁷

<https://immigrantjustice.org/research/explainer-what-are-the-most-dangerous-anti-immigrant-provisions-in-the-senate-passed-reconciliation-bill/>

Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

One: The light shines in the darkness.

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For Those Who Stand to Lose Their Medicaid and SNAP Benefits

July 6, 2025

By Donna Claycomb Sokol, Pastor, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington, DC

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus teaches about the final judgment, portraying the Son of Man as a shepherd separating people into sheep on his right and goats on his left. The Son of Man continues to commend the sheep for offering food, water, hospitality, clothing, and care to those who need these gifts. He then sentences the goats to the “eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels,” before telling them, “I was hungry and you gave me no food. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” The goats ask, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” Jesus responds, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.”

This morning we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for all who are hungry and are poised to not be fed and for all who are sick and are projected to lose access to the care they need because of legislation passed by the Senate earlier this week. We specifically pray for the 238,028 individuals in the District of Columbia, 34% of our city's population, who are expected to lose Medicaid, and the 141,742 people who are enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and are now at risk of losing some of their SNAP benefits—one out of every five persons in this city.⁸

May God have mercy upon every Member of Congress who actively chose to increase military spending and provide tax cuts to the wealthiest people in our nation while limiting a child's access to food or an ill person's capacity to receive medical treatment that could save their life. And may we be empowered to work tirelessly for a different tomorrow on which our elected officials will sing a lyric of abundance instead of furthering the myth of scarcity.

One: The light shines in the darkness.

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⁸Please see [linked document from Repairers of the Breach](#) for statistics for your state.

Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For All People Impacted by War

June 29, 2025

By Donna Claycomb Sokol, Pastor, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington, DC

This morning we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for all who have been impacted by war:

for those living or working near Fordo, Natanz, and Isfahan;

for those who breathed a sigh of relief when their B-2 bomber touched down in Missouri, only to now wrestle with the weight of knowing they played a role in dropping 30,000-pound bombs;

for families whose homes have been destroyed in Tel Aviv;

for those who dare to imagine a future rebuilt from rubble in Gaza;

for doctors, nurses, and patients in North Darfur who should be protected but instead know the devastation of war;

for parents whose children were taken while sitting in a classroom in Myanmar;

for Ukrainians who have accepted that even a church sanctuary is not safe from harm;

for all who know the path to the nearest bomb shelter by heart but fear they won't reach it in time;

for anyone filled with anxiety when stepping onto a subway train or into a crowded city square, newly told to stay on high alert;

and for all who continue, against all odds, to work for the day when swords will be beaten into plowshares, when spears will be transformed into pruning hooks, and war will be no more.

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One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For An End to Political Violence and Rhetoric

June 22, 2025

By Donna Claycomb Sokol, Pastor, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington, DC

The letter of James describes the tongue as a fire—capable of setting an entire forest ablaze; a restless evil, full of deadly poison, that no one can tame; a tool with the power both to bless the Lord and to curse those made in God's image.

The writer of Proverbs tells us that death and life are in the power of the tongue—a truth we know all too well in this country, where words have been used to incite violence in Congressional offices and the Oval Office, by media voices and government officials alike, and even by us—when we are tempted to confuse the Prince of Peace with the gods of empire.

Forgive us, O God, for allowing our society to be frayed by violent speech, our relationships torn apart by polarization, and our churches to find more pride in being red, blue, or purple than in being disciples of Jesus Christ—whose words and ways transcend every political label and party.

As we light this Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice, we pray for all who grieve the loss of Minnesota lawmakers killed in their homes; for a father of five who once preached in the name of Jesus only to later create a list of targets whose lives he also planned to end; and for every elected official who lives in fear of becoming a similar victim.

Merciful God, grant us wisdom as we labor for an end to political violence. Give us courage to confront a culture that treats deadly weapons as sacred rights. And lead us to identify and name the gifts of future leaders who will use their words to speak truth rather than lies, build up rather than tear down, and disagree with integrity rather than demonizing their opponents.

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For the Wounded Places Between Us

June 15, 2025

Prayer by Andy Oliver, Pastor, Allendale United Methodist Church, St. Petersburg, FL

*O God, whose covenant of love includes every people and every land,
we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice
with hearts that are heavy with grief and longing.*

*We grieve the deep sin of antisemitism—
ancient and modern, whispered and shouted,
violent in word, in policy, in bullet, and in bomb.*

*We name it as evil,
a denial of your sacred image in our Jewish siblings,
a betrayal of your dream for humanity.
And we cry out against the twisting of this sacred grief—
against accusations of antisemitism
used to silence prophets, vilify peacemakers,
and obscure the cries of Palestinians suffering
beneath siege and rubble in Gaza.*

*O God, grant us courage—
courage to boldly proclaim:
"No more hate against Jews."
"No more bombs on Gaza."
"No more criminalizing solidarity with the oppressed."
"No more equating moral clarity with bigotry."
"No more using antisemitism as a shield for state violence."
"No more using people or rhetoric as shields."*

*Give us wisdom to walk the line of compassion and clarity,
not in false balance, but in fierce love and embodied generosity.
Christ, you who wept over Jerusalem,
we weep now over Jerusalem, Rafah, and every wounded place
where fear is weaponized
and suffering justified by more suffering.*

*We mourn relationships broken,
sanctuaries filled with fear,
children who are starving,
mothers who are desperate to find food,
and souls lying awake, unsure if they belong.* (continued on next page)

Permission is granted to use this liturgy in your worship services.

You may use the exact wording offered or adapt/adjust for your context.

This liturgy is inspired by the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg, which lit a candle encircled in barbed wire during the struggle against apartheid and named those suffering under policies of cruelty and exclusion.

Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

*As we kindle this flame, O God,
let it inspire us to love more boldly than we fear,
to mend more fiercely than we break,
to generously give more than we selfishly withhold,
and to dream more vividly than we despair.*

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

**All: Empower us, Jesus, to boldly use
the freedom and power given to us
to resist evil, injustice, and oppression
in whatever forms they present themselves.**

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For All Struggling to Be Heard

June 8, 2025

Prayer by Donna Claycomb Sokol, Pastor, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington, DC

On the day of Pentecost, there came from heaven a sound like the rush of a violent wind. It filled the entire house where the faithful had gathered. Then it filled each person until all could speak in ways that others could hear and understand.

This morning, we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for all who are struggling to hear—and for all who are struggling to be heard.

For those who rely on Medicaid to cover life-sustaining prescriptions, and who need lawmakers to hear: “My health—and my life—depend on access to this medication.”

For parents working full-time jobs who still cannot afford groceries, and who need legislators to hear: “Shifting responsibility for SNAP to the states risks my child going hungry.”

For immigrants who are in this country legally, and who need ICE officials to hear: “I have the proper documents. Please do not take me from my children.”

For members of the LGBTQ+ community who need their families and faith communities to hear: “I am still the same person you once called precious and beloved. I need your love and acceptance, not your judgement and rejection.”

May the same Spirit that stirred the wind in Jerusalem stir our hearts today, so we might be as quick to listen as we are to speak, to unite as we are to divide, and to embody courage instead of fear.

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus’ ways of justice.

**All: Empower us, Jesus, to boldly use
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For AmeriCorps Staff and Volunteers

June 1, 2025

This morning, we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for AmeriCorps, the federal government's program for national service—for staff who have been placed on administrative leave, young adults whose volunteer placements have been halted, and countless schoolchildren, veterans, survivors of natural disasters, and older adults who are being impacted as a result.

We give thanks for every person who has found provision, community, and healing through the more than 3,400 disaster response projects supported by AmeriCorps volunteers since 1999. We give thanks for the young adults who have discovered a calling to direct service or gained vocational clarity through their volunteer experience. And we give thanks for the communities that have been strengthened through the weaving together of multigenerational relationships formed in service.

May God have mercy on those in leadership who have been led to believe that 20-year-olds earning \$200 a week—simply for showing up with compassion to tutor children, feed families, and walk alongside communities recovering from disaster—are a source of inefficiency or waste. And may all who have experienced the transformative power of shared service be granted fresh vision and bold resolve to address the systemic underfunding of education, food security, housing, environmental healing, and essential care—so that no gap remains unfilled.

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

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To learn more visit: <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2025/05/18/iiru-m18.html>
<https://voicesforservice.org/news/doge-orders-major-cuts-to-ameri-corps-funding-imperiling-agencys-work/>

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For Words and Stories, Libraries and Librarians

May 25, 2025

Prayer by Kimberly Burge, member, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington, DC

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

That's how John's Gospel begins. Even before reminding us that darkness will not overtake light, God comes to us as Word itself.

We call this a Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice. Three simple words. Three powerful ideas. When practiced, they become action verbs that can tear away barbed wire and bring us closer to the light.

So today as we light this candle, we pray for words and stories, and for libraries and librarians, which help us discover ideas that can change lives, change hearts, change the world.

We give thanks for reading, for a chance to recognize ourselves in someone else's words and to encounter a life entirely different from our own. For the ways stories can teach us how to see through another person's eyes.

But we've come to a moment when some people view knowledge and empathy as worthless, or dangerous. They fear words and the power they hold.

God, we pray for libraries across the nation whose budgets are being slashed and staff laid off because an executive order began to dismantle the only federal agency that funds libraries, calling the agency "unnecessary."

We pray that moments like this lead us all to ask questions, such as, Unnecessary for whom?

Sometimes people want to control what others can read.

In April, the U.S. Naval Academy removed nearly 400 books from its library, to comply with the president's directives to remove content featuring diversity, equity, or inclusion.

God, in the face of censorship, we pray for your guidance as we ask, What's being hidden from us? What makes ideas like diversity, equity, or inclusion so dangerous?

We pray for librarians who speak out for the right to read despite threats to their own safety. Dr. Carla Hayden said, "Librarians have been called 'feisty fighters for freedom': the freedom for everyone to have the opportunity to get knowledge."

We pray for Dr. Hayden, who served as Librarian of Congress from 2016 until the president fired her on May 8. She was the first woman and the first African American to lead our nation's—and the world's—largest library.

God, may we all seek to be feisty fighters for freedom.

May we remember that darkness may descend, but you always give us enough light so we can learn.

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

**All: Empower us, Jesus, to boldly use
the freedom and power given to us
to resist evil, injustice, and oppression
in whatever forms they present themselves.**

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For Those Living in a World of Barbed Wire With Only a Tiny Flame

May 18, 2025

Prayer by Rev. Andy Oliver, Allendale UMC, St. Petersburg, FL

*We come to this candle today carrying a world tangled in barbed wire—
barbed wire of betrayal, greed, nationalism, and division.*

So much fear. So much loss. So much betrayal.

And yet—here is this tiny flame.

*On Easter morning, Peter Storey lit his candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice from South Africa
saying that even in the darkest days of apartheid,
there was hope—buoyed by the prayers of the world,
by the conviction that God was on the side of the oppressed
and that freedom would come.*

But lately, he confessed, that hope has flickered.

*The betrayals have multiplied—
in South Africa's burned-out Parliament,
in Ukraine's bleeding struggle,
in Gaza's devastation,
and in every place where power silences the cries for justice.*

He called it a dark night of the soul.

A moment when faith felt too fragile for such a brutal world.

*And yet, as he walked with Jesus toward the cross this Lent,
he heard a whisper from God:*

*"I've done this before. I've wept over all you're weeping over—and worse.
And I shall have the last word."*

That is what this candle means.

That even in a world of barbed wire,

God lights a flame.

Even when the tomb is sealed,

God moves the stone.

We may have built the crosses,

but resurrection belongs to God.

So we light this candle today for anyone who feels overwhelmed.

For anyone teetering between despair and hope.

For anyone ready to believe again—

even in the smallest flicker of light.

Because Christ is still risen.

And that has always been enough.

And it always will be.

(continued on next page)

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For International Students Going Home for the Summer

May 11, 2025 *Note: This week's liturgy is motivated by two international students at Mount Vernon Place UMC who have made space to say "goodbye" not knowing if they will be able to return to complete their studies in the fall.

We are seeking to gain a more solid understanding of how many congregations are lighting the candle each week. If you are lighting it each week as part of weekly worship or a small group, will you please kindly [complete this form](#).

This morning, we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice—for international students who are nearing the end of the semester—a milestone traditionally marked by relief and anticipation, as the demands of research, writing, classes, and exams give way to time with family and friends in one's home country. But this year, for many, that hope is overshadowed by anxiety sparked by a surge in visa revocations and sudden changes in legal status.

We light the candle for those who fear they may not be able to finish their academic programs. For those who are choosing not to travel, sacrificing reunions with family for the potential of being denied reentry at summer's close. For those rethinking their futures in the United States. And for all who wonder whether they can flourish when free speech and academic freedom are under threat.

May every student standing at the crossroad of fear and uncertainty be granted a path to continue their journey with courage and support. May hearts and minds closed by authoritarian voices be opened to see the harm caused whenever someone chooses to believe God favors those born on one land more than another. And may we work tirelessly for the day when every person is honored as your beloved child, made in your image—people whose gifts are needed for the flourishing of humanity wherever they are.

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

**All: Empower us, Jesus, to boldly use
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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For People Living with HIV AIDS

May 4, 2025 *Note: This liturgy was originally intended for April 27 but was rescheduled to May 4 when an unfolding event prompted a new prayer for April 27. If your church has already used this prayer, you may use the replacement April 27 prayer, *For People Listening In*, found on the next page.

This morning, we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice—for all people impacted by the gutting of the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief or PEPFAR, the largest funder of HIV prevention in the world, one that is known for saving over 25 million lives, preventing millions of additional HIV infections, and helping several countries achieve HIV epidemic control.⁹ We pray for the families of the estimated 30,000 adults and 3,000 children who have died since the funding freeze,¹⁰ for people who have showed up at their clinic to receive desperately needed care only to find the doors bolted, for individuals whose lives depend upon antiretroviral drugs that transformed what was once a death sentence into a survivable condition—medicines that are now out of stock, for health workers whose jobs have been eliminated across sub Saharan Africa, and for all who will be infected as a result of these decisions.

God, please transform hearts of stone into hearts of flesh that deeply feel the pain and suffering we are causing. Show us again the abundance that exists in this nation and hasten our President and Members of Congress to remember how Jesus taught that to whom much is given, much is owed. May we please do all we can to help people experience life abundant, especially when the cost for doing so is something we can easily afford.

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
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One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

**All: Empower us, Jesus, to boldly use
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⁹ hiv.gov

¹⁰ Katherine Wu, "Trump's Revenge on Public Health," *The Atlantic*, April 11, 2025.

For People Listening In

April 27, 2025

Prayer by Rev. Andy Oliver, Allendale UMC, St. Petersburg, FL

This morning we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice—for those needing an invitation.

And if you're listening in—not because you planned to, but because an algorithm dragged you here—I want you to know this light is for you, too. Perhaps somewhere along the way, you were taught to fear people like us.

Taught that love had limits, that justice was a zero-sum game, that empathy was weakness.

Maybe you heard words like “deplorable,” and they landed like stones. Maybe those stones hardened your heart, made you dig in deeper, until it felt safer to dehumanize others than to admit the world had gotten too complicated.

And yet... maybe something inside you is stirring—a quiet ache, a recognition that in losing sight of others' humanity, you've lost hold of your own. The algorithms thrive on fear. They don't want you to hear this. They want us to keep hating each other. Some talk about taking a break from the algorithms, but what if we shattered them instead?

Jesus had this habit—of walking right up to people who thought it was too late to change.

Zacchaeus. The woman at the well. The thief on the cross.

Over and over, he made it clear: it's never too late to come home. But let's be honest—leaving behind a community, even one built on fear and falsehood, is hard. Especially when you've spent so long believing people like us were the enemy. And when maybe, just maybe, we've treated you like one too.

As Paulo Freire taught, dehumanization is not only suffered by the oppressed—it is also a distortion of the humanity of the oppressor. True liberation restores humanity to us all.

bell hooks taught us that the systems that wound the marginalized also imprison the powerful—and that love is the act that sets us all free.

Desmond Tutu reminded us that “we can only be human together.” Liberation is never one-sided—it is the restoration of our shared humanity.

So we light this candle today not as a weapon, but as a guidepost—for anyone searching for peace, for anyone daring to hope, for anyone hungry for justice. You don't have to agree with everything I say. You don't have to get it all right. We just have to be willing to move toward the light, together.

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

**All: Empower us, Jesus, to boldly use
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For Prisoners in El Salvador and for the Truth to be Told

April 20, 2025

This morning, we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice—for all who are being labeled “alien enemies” and deported, shackled by fear that they will be next, or waiting for news that their loved one is okay. We continue to pray for Kilmar Abrego Garcia, whom the Supreme Court has ordered must be returned home after our government unlawfully deported him to El Salvador. We lift up Arturo Suárez Trejo, who was denied the chance to meet his newborn daughter and instead sent from a Texas detention center to El Salvador. And we remember the 236 other men living in cage-like conditions at the Terrorism Confinement Center—despite only 32 of them having been convicted of any serious crime.¹¹

Scripture tells us that on Good Friday, Jesus promised a thief hanging beside him that they would be together in paradise. While we do not expect paradise from our government, we do expect due process. While we do not need our leaders to emulate the grace of Jesus, we yearn for any official who wears a cross to speak words that mirror Jesus’ mercy and compassion instead of Pontius Pilate’s fear and contempt.

Jesus declared, “The truth will set you free.” So, God, make every government official tell the truth: that these detention centers have more in common with concentration camps than with prisons. Because a prison, by definition, operates within a judicial system. A person is arrested, charged, tried, and—if found guilty—sentenced. A concentration camp, on the other hand, functions outside the law. People are detained without trial, without conviction, and held indefinitely—not for what they’ve done, but for who they are: for their religion, their ethnicity, their politics, or their identity as part of a group deemed a threat.¹²

We pray not only for justice, but for truth.

We hope not only for mercy, but for a complete transformation of our government’s barbed-wire ways.

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¹¹ Julie Turkewitz, Jazmine Ulloa, Isayen Herrera, Hamed Aleaziz and Zolan Kanno-Youngs, “‘Alien Enemies’ or Innocent Men? Inside Trump’s Rushed Effort to Deport 238 Migrants, *The New York Times*, April 15, 2025.

¹² <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/concentration-camps-1933-39>

Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For Kilmar Abrego Garcia and Others Detained in El Salvador

April 13, 2025

On this Sunday, we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for Kilmar Abrego Garcia who our government admitted was mistakenly deported since he is an immigrant with protected status. For Jennifer Vasquez Sura, Abrego Garcia's wife, and their five-year-old autistic son, who wait for news that their beloved spouse and father can come home. For the hundreds of Venezuelan and Salvadoran siblings who were sent alongside Abrego Garcia to a maximum-security prison in El Salvador where their heads were shaved, ankles shackled, and bodies bent as cameras recorded the inhumane treatment. For those wrongly accused of being a violent member of the MS-13 gang because of the color of their skin, chosen tattoo, or country of birth. For Erez Reuveni, a Justice Department attorney who was placed on leave after naming in court how Abrego Garcia "should not have been removed" since "The absence of evidence speaks for itself."

We pray for hearts of stone to be softened within those who are more concerned about setting a precedent of overstepping executive power than setting victims of injustice free. We pray for Attorney General Pamela Bondi to be filled with the compassion of Christ and justice of Jesus, one she professes to follow through the cross we often see her wearing. We pray for judges who sit on benches in federal courts to stand firm as they seek to uphold the law of the land. And we pray for an immediate halt to any person being deported without a hearing or review.

Forgive us for any time we have failed to welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and care for the sick and imprisoned. Forgive us for choosing to be silent in the face of oppression instead of remembering how you have been asking people of faith to welcome the alien, foreigner, and stranger in our midst with mercy and compassion for thousands of years. Jesus, please break open our hearts of stone until they beat in sync with your heart alone.

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
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One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For Transgender Persons

April 6, 2025

By Minister Lee Schriber Aber, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington, DC

On this Sunday, we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for all transgender and non-binary persons who face prejudice, violence, and discrimination in a world that too often denies their intrinsic belovedness and dignity. We pray for those who have courageously made the choice to live in truth and authenticity, knowing that their identity is a sacred gift from God.

For transgender athletes of all ages, denied the opportunity to participate in the sports they love, and which offer them joy, belonging, and purpose. For those who feel acute pain every time the letter "T" is removed from LGBTQ. For targets of misgendering, harassment, and humiliation at their workplaces and schools, in the halls of Congress, and in other public spaces by those emboldened by executive orders which narrowly define biological sex and gender. For those who live with limited access to restrooms and delayed receipt of essential federal identity documents aligned with their identity. For youth who need gender-affirming care that is now being threatened or deemed illegal.

Holy God, three-in-one, the original they/them, may you help us remember that you are neither male nor female and that you have always left space for beautiful creation outside of binaries—for there are beaches between water and land, and there is dawn and there is dusk between day and night. God help us to embrace, love, and protect our transgender and non-binary siblings and always proclaim them as your beloved children.

One: The light shines in the darkness.

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knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For People Experiencing Homelessness

March 30, 2025

Prayer by Rev. Andy Oliver, Allendale UMC, St. Petersburg, FL

On this Sunday, we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for people experiencing homelessness—our neighbors who are too often treated as disposable by those in power. For those swept from encampments in Washington, D.C., under threat of federal takeover, as if their existence were an offense. For people unhoused in cities where mayors and governors have spoken the language of justice while sending in bulldozers and police to destroy makeshift shelters. For those who have had their few belongings confiscated and tossed away in sweeps carried out in the name of "cleaning up" public spaces rather than addressing the root causes of poverty. For every person who has been displaced, dehumanized, and treated as a problem to be solved rather than a person to be seen, welcomed, and loved.

For people who are transgender or undocumented who are turned away from shelters. For families on the brink of stability, only to have housing assistance gutted, eviction protections erased, and wages suppressed by policies favoring the wealthy over the working poor. For those criminalized simply for existing—for sleeping on benches, for resting in their cars, for asking for help in places where asking is no longer allowed. For every person who has been evicted—not because of poverty, but into poverty. For we know that eviction is not just a consequence of financial hardship, but often the very thing that causes it, stripping people of stability, community, and a chance to recover. For service providers forced to watch suffering grow as funding freezes and barbed wired policies leave them with empty hands and breaking hearts.

And we confess. We confess our own apathy, our own willingness to look away. We confess the times we have accepted comforting narratives that blame those who are unhoused rather than holding accountable those who create and maintain the conditions that lead to homelessness. We confess that too often, we have been content with charity when justice is what you require. Forgive us, God, and move us from complacency to action.

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
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For Our Judicial Branch

March 23, 2025

On this Sunday we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for the judicial branch of government as it faces unlawful threats intended to diminish its power to protect every person created in the image of God. For Judge James Boasberg who was stonewalled by the Department of Justice when seeking answers about whether his order had been violated through the use of an obscure wartime law crafted more than 200 years ago. For federal courts who are seeking to curb some of the executive orders to ensure the rule of law is followed. For judges working to hold their ground in the face of administration officials claiming they will carry out their plans despite a judge's ruling. For Chief Justice John Roberts and every justice of the Supreme Court as they discern how to use the power entrusted to them to defend our nation from actions that could unravel much of what we hold to be good and true. And for individuals caught in the center of these confrontations. May every judge wielding a gavel and each person challenging their authority be confronted with the words of Micah who prophesized long ago: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

One: The light shines in the darkness.

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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For the Institutions of Higher Education and Students

March 16, 2025

On this Sunday we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for institutions of higher education and students who are increasingly becoming targets of a coordinated campaign against them—for Mahmoud Khalil, a graduate of Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs who has a green card and a wife who is an American citizen but was detained by ICE and transported one thousand miles to a Louisiana detention center with a record for speaking in support of Palestinians; for students, faculty, and staff at his alma mater where research has stopped and scholarship support withdrawn after \$400 million in government grants and contracts were pulled for reportedly failing to shield their community members from antisemitism; for prospective students at the University of Pennsylvania who received an offer of admission for a coveted spot in a PhD program that was later revoked when funding was rescinded; for people who feel called to continue their education but are postponing plans because of the looming threat of canceled loan forgiveness programs; and for administrators who are seeking to lead with integrity amid threats that their funding will be halted if students on their campus engage in the First Amendment right to peaceful protest.

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

**All: Empower us, Jesus, to boldly use
the freedom and power given to us
to resist evil, injustice, and oppression
in whatever forms they present themselves.**

Permission is granted to use this liturgy in your worship services.

You may use the exact wording offered or adapt/adjust for your context.

This liturgy is inspired by the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg, which lit a candle encircled in barbed wire during the struggle against apartheid and named those suffering under policies of cruelty and exclusion.

Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For the Conflict in Ukraine

March 9, 2025

Prayer by Kimberly Burge, Member, Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington

On this Sunday we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for all who continue to suffer in Ukraine, the largest conflict in Europe since World War II. We pray for Ukrainians who have had to grow accustomed to the death and disruptions that war brings yet still must find a way to get up and live their lives each day. For Russians who have found the courage to risk their own freedom to protest their government's aggression. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." May those in leadership—President Zelensky, President Putin, President Trump, and leaders throughout the European Union—seek to be children of God by understanding how peace is brought about: not through intimidation or coercion, but when we can recognize the humanity in one another.

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

**All: Empower us, Jesus, to boldly use
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Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For National Institutes of Health

March 2, 2025

On this Sunday we light the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for all who stand to be squeezed by barbed-wire actions aimed at crippling the work of the National Institutes of Health: for patients who are enrolled in a clinical trial on which they have placed their hope for being healed; for adults and children whose wellbeing depends on groundbreaking research that has led to lifesaving vaccines, innovative immunotherapies, and the chemotherapy that can lead to a cure; for universities where groundbreaking research could come to a screeching halt along with the breakthrough advances ascertained in their labs; for all employees whose positions have been or are in line to be eliminated; and for all who will be impacted by these actions in ways that they cannot currently imagine.

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

**All: Empower us, Jesus, to boldly use
the freedom and power given to us
to resist evil, injustice, and oppression
in whatever forms they present themselves.**

Permission is granted to use this liturgy in your worship services.

You may use the exact wording offered or adapt/adjust for your context.

This liturgy is inspired by the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg, which lit a candle encircled in barbed wire during the struggle against apartheid and named those suffering under policies of cruelty and exclusion.

Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice

For Government Employees and Contractors

February 23, 2025

We now continue our new ritual of lighting a Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice at the start of worship alongside some 30 other congregations across the nation, as we together pray for those who are being squeezed by our government's barbed-wire policies and actions.

On this Sunday we light the candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for federal workers—for those whose jobs have been eliminated through an agency or bureau being unlawfully closed, those who have been told not to return to work after recently moving to the nation's capital to begin what was considered a solid job, those who have been purged from the payroll as an act of revenge or retaliation, those who feel a wave of anxiety envelop them every time an email comes with the words "fork in the road," and those who are struggling to maintain hope when the ground beneath them seems to shift each day.

One: The light shines in the darkness.

**All: We stand in this light, unshaken,
knowing that the darkness has never overcome the light.**

One: Let us recommit ourselves to walking in Jesus' ways of justice.

**All: Empower us, Jesus, to boldly use
the freedom and power given to us
to resist evil, injustice, and oppression
in whatever forms they present themselves.**

Permission is granted to use this liturgy in your worship services.

You may use the exact wording offered or adapt/adjust for your context.

This liturgy is inspired by the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg, which lit a candle encircled in barbed wire during the struggle against apartheid and named those suffering under policies of cruelty and exclusion.

For Migrants

February 16, 2025

During the latter years of apartheid rule in South Africa, the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg created a candle encircled in barbed wire, modeled after the symbol for the global human rights organization, Amnesty International. Each week, during worship, church members would light the candle and list the names of people who had been harassed, wounded, imprisoned, tortured or killed the previous week for protesting their nation's policy of racial separation. As they lit the candle, they would read John 1:5 – “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome the light.” As the names were listed, church members would rededicate themselves to following Jesus and his ways of justice, an action that later led then government leader P.W. Botha to block the church's services from being broadcast on the radio and television.¹³

Today we continue our new ritual of lighting a Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice at the start of worship each week. We do so alongside 25 other congregations across the country who are choosing to light a similar candle and focus their prayers on the same individuals or communities that we are. Each week, we will together pray for Jesus' peace, hope and justice to come to those who are being squeezed by our government's barbed-wire policies and actions.

On this Sunday, we light the candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for migrants—for asylum seekers who are now being told they need to return to a place of violence or destruction, for children and youth who were born in this country and are now living with the fear of being forced from the only place they have known as home, for families who are sheltering in place because they know they risk arrest the moment they step out their front door, for individuals locked inside a cell at Guantanamo Bay while loved ones frantically wonder about their location and wellbeing, for workers who have paid their taxes and performed labor we depend on only to be called criminals, and for faith leaders who are doing everything they can to ensure that their houses of worship are always places where people can experience sanctuary from the world's cruelty and injustice.

We light this candle proclaiming how the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never overcome the light. And we ask for Jesus to please strengthen us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.

¹³ https://www.kairoscomotion.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/The_Peace-_Candle.pdf

For USAID

February 9, 2025

During the latter years of apartheid rule in South Africa, the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg created a candle encircled in barbed wire, modeled after the symbol for the global human rights organization, Amnesty International. Each week, during worship, church members would light the candle and list the names of people who had been harassed, wounded, imprisoned, tortured or killed the previous week for protesting their nation's policy of racial separation. As they lit the candle, they would read John 1:5 – “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome the light.” As the names were listed, church members would rededicate themselves to following Jesus and his ways of justice.

This is called the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice. “You cannot have peace and hope without also having justice.” Today we begin a new ritual of lighting the Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice at the start of worship each week. We will then pray for Jesus’ peace, hope, and justice to come to those who are being squeezed by our government’s barbed-wire policies and actions.

On this Sunday, we light the candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice for every single community that is impacted by the new administration’s decision to halt the funding of USAID. We pray for millions of people around God’s great big world, including children whose swollen bellies will no longer be filled at soup kitchens in Sudan, women who will no longer get the healthcare they need in Haiti, farmers in Brazil who are implementing critical conservation efforts, farmers in Kansas and Missouri who are now forced to find alternative buyers for their grain, and we pray for those whose work is tied to these desperately needed humanitarian efforts.

We light this candle, proclaiming that the light shines in the darkness and that the darkness has never overcome the light. We ask Jesus to please strengthen us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.