

## Grace, Gratitude And Grit:

A Worship Resource from the Homeless and Justice Network

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# Introduction

There was nothing special about the bare and poorly lit room of the now closed hospital where Darren lay recuperating from the amputation of several of his frostbitten toes. Still, the room was warm, the food was regularly delivered, and there were local sports on the television that hung from the wall like a monitor watching Darren's every move. The room laid in stark contrast to the place that Darren called home—a spot under the train station bridge behind a cut wire fence and a candle-lit pile of debris. We were in the midst of Lent, and Holy Week was fast approaching. As Darren pulled the sheets away and invited me to bless his swollen and toeless foot, a new liturgy for our Maundy Thursday service was taking shape. This outdoor liturgy would include a blessing of the hands of podiatrists and all who cared for the feet of those living on the street.

Darren's story is just one example of the how the liturgies in this resource, compiled by congregations in the Homeless and Justice Network of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, came about. In the pages that follow, you will see how a street church in South Dakota worships in the round, and how an outdoor church in Massachusetts gathers college students and people experiencing homelessness together. You will hear words of healing from a Pennsylvania community of folks recovering from alcohol and drug addiction, as well as a litany from a congregation in Milwaukee in response to neighborhood gun violence. The congregations that contributed to this resource comprise a diverse range of geographical locations, backgrounds and experiences; yet we are united by our longing to publicly express in community all that we are, all that we have been, and all that we hope to be in the name of the gracious and loving God we know in Jesus.

You'll find that this resource follows the format of Lutheran settings for Holy Communion. Our experience in the Homeless and Justice Network has been that adapting worship for our own personal contexts is often necessary. In this resource we have also included some of our practices and ideas, pieces of artwork, and questions to consider as you create within your own communities the corporate expressions of faith we call liturgy. We invite you to use and adapt the following litanies, blessings, prayers and practices as you will; share this resource freely; and contact any of the ministries who contributed to this work with your thoughts and questions.

For now, we thank you for being a partner in the gospel, and bless you on your liturgical journey!

—Pastor Violet Cucciniello Little  
*ELCA Homeless and Justice Network*



**Gathering**

# Words of Welcome

For most of us in the church, the words “all are welcome” so easily roll off our tongues and onto the pages of our bulletins that we don’t often give a second thought to what these words mean. After all, we are church! But for many of us working together with people on the margins of society, it has been not only helpful but important to be a bit more specific about what the words “all are welcome” mean.

For instance, the first service of Holy Communion at The Welcome Church in Philadelphia, a “church without walls,” was quite impromptu. A group was gathered for Bible study on the sixth chapter of John. After a reading about the “bread from heaven,” one man raised his hand and said, “Can we have some of that bread?” The pastor retrieved a roll and some grape juice, and the group formed a circle. When the pastor asked for two volunteers to help with the sharing of this sacred meal, one person who came forward was an individual who had been severely abused as a child; the other had recently been released from prison for child sexual assault.

This is what God’s radical hospitality can look like. As the two volunteers communed at the end of the meal, the words “given for you” crossed many borders between people and communities.

It is with this kind of radical hospitality in mind that the following “Words of Welcome” are offered. The words that follow are litanies and welcomes used by several of the worship communities in the ELCA Homeless and Justice Ministry Network to begin worship and gatherings with a spirit of hospitality.

## WORDS OF WELCOME

### **A greeting from Hope Lutheran Church in Reading, Pennsylvania:**

This is the perfect church for imperfect people. It doesn't matter where you came from or where you are going; the color of your skin or the content of your heart; whom you love or whom you marry; whether or not you went to Yale or just got out of jail: All are welcome in this place!

### **A litany of welcome from Cathedral in the Night, an outdoor church in Northampton, Massachusetts:**

Welcome to you if you walked here.

**We gather together for worship.**

Welcome to you if you drove.

**We gather together for worship.**

Welcome to you if you sleep in an apartment, in a home, in a shelter, in a tent or on a bench.

**We gather together for worship.**

Welcome to you if you have new shoes, and welcome to you if you have no shoes.

**We gather together for worship.**

Welcome to you if you are struggling, and welcome to you if you are hurting. Welcome to you if you are full of grief or sorrow. Welcome to you if you are lonely, for here you find community and a safe place without threats.

**We gather together for worship.**

Welcome if this is your first time at Cathedral, and welcome to you if you have been here a hundred times.

Welcome to you no matter whom you love. Welcome to you no matter where you are from.

**We gather together for worship.**

Welcome to you if you are Christian, strong in faith and beliefs.

Welcome to you if you are searching, unsure or unsettled about the idea of religion.

**We gather together for worship.**

Welcome to you if you are an ardent nonbeliever, for we all have a place at this table.

**We gather together for worship.**

### **Ascension Table in New York welcomes those gathered with a description of who they are and what they value:**

#### **WHO WE ARE**

We are a sacred community where we can be open about our brokenness without judgment, and at the same time we are free to pursue wholeness together, bringing God's healing love to all of Long Beach and beyond.

#### **WHAT WE VALUE**

We welcome all people.

We are Christian, but embrace people of other faiths or no faith.

We worship using old and new practices.

We are progressive in outlook, but avoid political entanglements.

We nourish the whole person: body, soul, mind and spirit.

We work for a peaceful and just world. We care for God's creation.

We value belonging before believing.

We honor the steps and traditions of 12 step spirituality.

# Call to Worship

With welcome comes also the invitation to worship. In the Homeless and Justice Network, the call to worship takes place in a variety of ways, depending on the worship context. Some gatherings use written and responsive calls; others might read Scripture. Still others have used objects and symbols as ways of gathering folks in and marking a unique sense of time and place.

For many who worship outdoors and use no paper, including those of us who are part of Ecclesia, a network of street churches throughout the United States, Europe and Latin America, the invitation is a simple but very powerful verse from the Gospel of Matthew. This is especially meaningful in the context where people are literally carrying heavy loads—all they own—around all day in shopping carts, broken suitcases and a variety of bags.

As we say over and over, know your context and the words will follow. Still, no two ministries are exactly alike. Some of us gather in a variety of indoor spaces including coffee shops, fellowship halls and even a barn! This can make the transition to worship from whatever else we were doing a bit tricky. The following “Calls to Worship” can be used to help those gathered transition into a time of worship or devotion.

## CALL TO WORSHIP

### **A call to worship from Ecclesia:**

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens  
and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;  
For I am gentle and humble in heart;  
And you will find rest for your souls;  
For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

**Cathedral in the Night uses several different calls to worship depending on the liturgical season. The following is from Iona:**  
*After each section the worship leader raises their hand, and the congregation responds with "Gather us in."*

Gather us in, the lost and the lonely, the broken and breaking, the tired and aching,  
who long for nourishment found at your feast.

**Gather us in.**

Gather us in, the done and the doubting, the wishing and wondering,  
the puzzled and pondering, who long for the company found at your feast.

**Gather us in.**

Gather us in, the proud and pretentious, the sure and superior, the never inferior,  
who long for the leveling found at your feast.

**Gather us in.**

Gather us in, the bright and the bustling, the stirrers, the shakers,  
the kind laughter makers, who long for the deeper joys, found at your feast.

**Gather us in.**

Gather us in, from corner or limelight, from mansion or campsite from fears and obsession,  
from tears and depression, from untold excesses, from treasured successes, to meet, to greet, be offered a seat,  
be joined at the vine, be offered new wine, to become like the least to be found at the feast.

**Gather us in.**

### **Another call to worship used by Cathedral in the Night is combined with its welcome.**

*A refrain is offered as those gathered speak the words "Welcome to this place" after each phrase, signaled by the leader raising their hands:*

Where the homed and the homeless sit side by side...

**Welcome to this place.**

Where heaven and earth embrace in peace...

**Welcome to this place.**

Where God has been, is and always will be...

**Welcome to this place.**

Where we find God's love...

**Welcome to this place.**

Where we hear the forgiving voice of Jesus...

**Welcome to this place.**

Where the Spirit teaches us new songs...

**Welcome to this place.**

Where we bring our hunger and find food;

**Welcome to this place.**

Where we bring our brokenness and find healing;

**Welcome to this place.**

Where we bring our very selves and find acceptance...

**Welcome to this place!**



**The belongings of a person experiencing homelessness wait behind the altar during worship.**



## CALL TO WORSHIP

**At Church on the Street in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, their “Communion in the Round” begins with these words of blessing developed using “Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgement” published by the United States Department of Arts and Culture:**

As we, Church on the Street, gather together, we acknowledge the sacred lands on which we live and gather.

We remember that before the sidewalks, roads, and bridges that led us to this place, indigenous peoples walked and lived on this sacred land. It holds both pain and beauty for indigenous peoples today, and indeed for all of us.

Names matter. Allow me to list the names of the nine sovereign nations who reside in this land we call South Dakota—Cheyenne River Sioux, Crow Creek Sioux of Yankton and Santee Sioux, Flandreau Santee Sioux, Lower Brule Sioux, Oglala Sioux of Pine Ridge, Rosebud Sioux, Sisseton-Wahpeton Santee Sioux, Yankton Sioux, Standing Rock Sioux—along with the many from tribes never formally recognized by the federal government. Let us be grateful to have the opportunity to gather and to work in this community and on this territory. And let us always be mindful of the broken covenants and the need to make right with all our nations.

**At The Welcome Church a candle is lit immediately before weekday services and Bible Study to help folks move from chatter and food to focus and prayer. They begin with these words:**

Who will bring the light?

*A volunteer offers to light the candle. The worship leader then asks:*

Where have you seen the face of God this week?

*Volunteers are invited to share their stories.*

Where have you been the light of God this week?

*Volunteers are again invited to share their stories. The testimonies that follow prepare those gathered to study the word and to share in the Eucharistic meal that closes each Bible study.*

**At Ascension Table gatherings are sometimes opened with a “Blessing Board.” This simple exercise begins by taking a large poster board and writing on it, “I am blessed today because...” People then write their blessings on the board, and the blessings are read aloud by a volunteer participant. Ascension Table also uses a simple responsive call to worship:**

We come as those hungry...

**Hungry for God’s word.**

We come as those thirsty...

**Thirsty for God’s word.**

We come as those broken...

**Seeking the healing that God provides.**

We come as those in need...

**Needing reminders of God’s love.**

We come as those longing...

**Longing for God’s kingdom to come.**

# Confession and Forgiveness

There is something powerful about naming our struggles and wrongdoings before God and one another. In the Lutheran tradition, confession and forgiveness are always linked—we never confess without being forgiven. On the street, confession is offered as a time to reflect upon all that separates us from one another, on the challenges we face, and on anything that weighs us down. For many in the Homeless and Justice Network, confession and forgiveness is a powerful way to proclaim hope and mercy.

Here are examples of how we engage in the rite of Confession and Forgiveness in the network:

## CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

**At the Welcome Church, we imagine God in the middle of our worship circle, standing with open arms to receive our burdens. After a time of silence and the words of forgiveness, we proclaim our assurance in God's mercy by reciting the Serenity Prayer:**

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
the wisdom to change the things I can, and the courage to know the difference.

*(to which some add) God's will, not mine.*

**Confession can come in other forms too. At Hope Lutheran Church, a congregation in Reading, Pennsylvania, in an area of deep economic struggle, one confession is done based on the text in Matthew 16:23.**

**Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.**

**Common Ground is a ministry in Pennsylvania that focuses on people struggling with addiction.**

**Several of their rites of Confession and the Proclamation of Forgiveness follow:**

### COMMON GROUND CONFESSION #1

Forgiving God, we know that we are not perfect and that we are not expected to be perfect in your eyes.

Too often we make excuses for continuing to live in unhealthy ways.

When we believe we are not good enough...

When we think we are not competent enough...

When we make comparisons rather than offer compassion...

When we gossip about others rather than looking at ourselves...

When we offer words of rebuke rather than speak of reconciliation...

Call us back to your ways. Grant us the grace to become more authentic and vulnerable.

Create in us a clean heart and renew a right spirit in us. Amen.

### COMMON GROUND CONFESSION #2

Gracious God, our wrongs are too heavy to carry, too real to hide, and too deep to undo.

Forgive what our lips tremble to name, what our hearts can no longer bear, and the guilt and shame we carry like a shell on our backs.

Set us free from a past that we cannot change, open us to a future in which we can be changed;

and grant us the grace to grow more and more in your likeness and image;

Through Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

### WORDS OF FORGIVENESS #1

Even when we have done wrong, God makes us right. Even when we have messed up, God puts us together. God's love never runs out. God never tires of calling us beloved children. Hear God say to you now: Your sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

### WORDS OF FORGIVENESS #2

God, who is rich in mercy, loves us even when we act out on our character defects. God's love comes to us through Jesus, who died for us, rose again, and brings us new life. In the name of Jesus Christ our wrongs are forgiven. **Amen.**

**Common Ground also offers a service of hope and healing with the following instruction:**

In the next seven minutes, we are invited to turn to someone nearby and share our concerns in need of God's healing. You may also come individually to the pastor. *Prayers are then offered on one another's behalf, with the assurance of God's forgiveness and desire to heal any brokenness.*

**At The Welcome Church, the following activity was used as a means of confession on Reformation Day, but it can be used anytime:**

Read Romans 8:31-38.

Those gathered are asked to name those things that they believed could make God stop loving them. These may include addiction, hatred, lack of forgiveness and self harm. Write these things down on newsprint, or simply repeat them back to the group. Afterward take the newsprint and tear it, repeating verses 38-39, emphasizing that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus!

**From Hope Lutheran Church in Reading, Pennsylvania:**

The pastor uses Jesus' words from Matthew 16:23 or Mark 8:33 to invite people to call to mind those things that hold them back from being the whole people that God created them to be. Some people name their demons out loud, such as "alcohol," "fear," or "anger."

Then together, three times, all shout "Get behind me, Satan!"

**Word and Meal**

# Prayers

The Homeless and Justice Network has strong faith in the power of prayer. Most of our praying is free form and happens spontaneously, representing individual as well as corporate petitions; there are times, however, when we have led activities to shape our prayer as a community. This section includes a number of activities our congregations have used to spark divine conversations in our communities.



## PRAYERS

### Popsicle Prayers

From Church on the Street in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

When a man from the community approached Mission Developer and seminarian Rebel Hurd to express how he was feeling one day, Rebel had him write his feelings on a popsicle stick using the phrase, "I am..."

Soon others joined in the exercise of this "popsicle prayer." The sticks were then collected and formed into the shape of a cross on a piece of wood. The cross, formed by everyone, became part of the altar of their "street" worship.

This prayer has also been used as part of a Bible study on Exodus 3 in which God is revealed to Moses using the phrase, "I am." In this context, participants wrote "I am" phrases on their sticks that referred to God. We offer this as one of many ways to adapt these suggested resources to fit your own needs and context.



"Popsicle Prayers" from Church on the Street in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

### Candle Prayers

From Ascension Table in New York.

In this activity, participants are invited to light prayer candles and say prayers related to a particular theme for the evening. Examples of this might include prayers for people struggling with depression; a prayer for a challenging person in your life; prayer for a disrespectful boss. A suggested prayer would be: "Lord, open my heart and teach me to love."

### Writing A Group Psalm

The Welcome Church in Philadelphia created this simple prayer exercise in which participants write an original psalm.

After studying either psalms of praise or psalms of lament, the group is guided by a number of questions into shaping their own psalm. The questions below can be used to help you write a psalm that follows the format of many psalms of lament in the Bible.

*Begin with an opening cry:* How are you addressing God?

*Next name your lament:* What is the thing with which you are wrestling?

*Then articulate your trust in God:* For what do you hold God accountable?

*Add hope and prayer for deliverance:* Boldly ask for God's intervention and deliverance from the problem.

*End with praise:* End on a note of praise even as you lament. For what are you thankful?

*Here is an example a group from the Homeless and Justice Network wrote when gathered together for a meeting:*

God, help me.

OOO...Lord!

Compassionate God.

Damn it, God!

Breath of Life.

Gracious Holy One.

We are weary.

Choose someone else for awhile.

Enough already!

Your people cannot breathe.

Why must we suffer so?

My heart is breaking.

I'm caught up in the grips;

I'm caught up in the killing—

I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired;

I'm tired of being beaten.

Why are you letting our children die?

I don't feel like going in today;

These feet of mine are tired.

We are your beloved children.

You are so much bigger than us!

*Continued on next page...*

## PRAYERS

I know I am not alone.  
I know it's not up to me.  
You are my hiding place.  
You are my safe place.  
Help me!  
Fix it!  
Bring peace to my heart;  
I turn this over to you.  
Restore us again.  
Free me from my addiction.  
Settle my anxiety.  
Do what you did before.  
We know that you are always with us.

Thank you for listening.  
We give thanks!  
There are no words...  
Thank you for your presence.

When you write as a group, it is important to honor the offerings of each person. Your group's psalm may then be prayed in a variety of settings. For instance, the Psalm of Lament written by The Welcome Church community has been used as a prayer for Homeless Memorial Day in Philadelphia, a day when all who died on the street in the past year are remembered.

### **Prayer with a Refrain**

**Another way to use the group writing of a psalm is to invite folks to choose a repeating line and create an individual prayer. The Reverend David Madsen of Welcome Ministries in El Cajon, California, did just that. Welcome Ministries is a street church that welcomes all but especially anyone experiencing homelessness, including refugees. Pastor Dave wrote the following:**

#### **THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD**

Refrain: Oh how I love your presence, Lord!  
I love to stand in your presence, Lord.  
I love the presence of the Lord.  
When in meditation and communion sweet  
I bow my heart before my Savior's feet.  
Then within the stillness of this blest retreat  
I hear the voice of Jesus in my heart.

Refrain: Oh how I love your presence, Lord!  
I love to stand in your presence, Lord.  
I love the presence of the Lord.

# Offerings

As a forgiven people we have much to offer!

Though we often talk about our “treasure” as including time and talents, weekly offerings in most of our congregations usually focus on money. While money is an absolute necessity to heat buildings and pay salaries, for those of us working with people in economic poverty, collecting an offering can be a sensitive subject. And yet...

We also believe that everyone has something to offer and to share resources is a joy.

## OFFERINGS

### An offering of every day objects from The Welcome Church:

For this activity, the leader prepares a basket filled with things from the earth, such as seashells and rocks, collected from the area where worship is held and where people sleep. During the time of offering, folks are invited to take an object out of the basket and to think about what part of themselves they would like to offer that week. Folks then may either keep their object as a reminder or place it on the altar (The Welcome Church uses a card table), naming either silently or aloud what they would like to give.



At The Welcome Church, worshippers are invited to take a rock from the altar.

### Cathedral in the Night has a similar practice using small wooden coins.

Pastor Stephanie Smith describes the offering as one of her favorite parts of worship:

“At Cathedral we don’t ask for a monetary gift. We feel this would quickly divide the community into the haves and have nots. Instead we ask for something even greater—a piece of yourself. We ask people to think of a gift they have been given that they wish to give back to the community this week. We remind people that this is a gift God has given you, something you are already good at—not something you are working to be better at. We then pass around baskets with wooden pieces on which the community has written different gifts such as kindness, good listener, being sober, etc. There are also rocks and glass pieces in case your gift is not written on a wooden piece. We then take these gifts and place them in a cross filled with sand. It is beautiful to see the cross filled with all the gifts we have to offer. Members of the community have shared that they often feel like takers: They need everything from others, and that creates frustration for them. Our offering reminds us all that we have gifts to offer no matter what we are in need of. This offering was adapted from the offering at Chapel on the Green in New Haven, Connecticut.”



At Cathedral in the Night, the community places their gifts into a wooden cross.

*Once the gifts are collected the cross, the leader says the following blessing:*

There are days when we feel that we have nothing. There are days when we feel that we are not enough. Help us to remember, Lord, that each and every day we have the greatest gift to offer another: ourselves. Bless the offerings placed here, symbolic of the gifts we have been given and we are each able to give. May they be infinitely multiplied and used for Your good work.

## OFFERINGS

### **Church on the Street in Sioux Falls, South Dakota uses a prayer box:**

Folks are invited to drop their written prayer requests into a box where they can also put the talents, gifts and skills that they would like to offer to the wider congregation. During this time folks can also request a private time to meet for pastoral care. Everyone is invited to write something for the prayer box. Once collected, the prayer requests are typed up in a document and sent to the prayer chain, and the praying begins. This prayer chain includes over 2,000 people across the world!

The prayer box started out being a large parmesan cheese container. Later, Church on the Street was gifted with a weatherproof wooden box from a local church's wood shop.



**A prayer is placed in the prayer box at Church on the Street.**

### **At Ascension Table the following “Offering Song” is used:**

There is enough.

There is enough.

There is enough.

O' Enough and some to share.

*This is followed by an offering prayer that may be spoken together:*

**God of grace, it is our delight and our devotion to give these gifts to you. All we are and all we have are yours alone.**

**Accept this joyful offering as a token of our abiding love; use it to bring peace, justice, and comfort to all the world. Amen.**



# Services and Blessings

# Holy Week

As in all of our congregations, the ministries of the Homeless and Justice Network offer special services during Holy Week. The following pages include a number of prayers and activities congregations have used to bring the story of Christ's final days on earth into our own unique contexts.

## HOLY WEEK

**On Maundy Thursday at The Welcome Church, following a traditional footwashing, this special “Blessing of the Hands” is included for podiatrists who offer their services to those living on the street.**

### **BLESSING OF THE PODIATRISTS**

*All who are involved in this ministry are invited to come forward for a blessing.*

From 1 Corinthians: “...the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body.”

Sisters and brothers joined together in one body, this day we seek God’s blessing. As we gather with thankfulness to bless those who are healers of our feet and their ministry of reaching out to our community.

*Taking their hands, the leader blesses each individual with these words:*

God of all that is good and holy, we ask your blessing upon this person that they might be your healing hands, and your travelling feet in our world, healthy and courageous. **Amen.**



**Pastor Violet Cucciniello Little washes the feet of worshippers on Maundy Thursday at The Welcome Church.**

## HOLY WEEK

### Stations of the Cross

Holy Week is especially important to those living on the margins. Knowing that the tears of our suffering flow down the face of the Holy One offers hope even in the deepest pain. A number of ministries in the network follow the ancient tradition of walking the Stations of the Cross with the folks in our communities. This practice of following Jesus as he makes his way to the cross includes a number of stopping points, traditionally 14, along the way.

#### **At Peace Lutheran Church, participants take a prayer walk throughout the Hilltop neighborhood.**

On this walk an intergenerational group walks around the blocks of the “holy ground” representing Hilltop. The people are instructed to see where God is at work in their neighborhood and to ask God to address the needs they see along the way. In the words of Pastor John Stroeh, “As we walk, we keep our eyes open for places of pain and places of hope. We pray for our neighbors, and we listen for God. At each corner, a participant reads a passage from Scripture. Then participants are invited to share a thought or reflection, and we end with prayer.” Here are two examples from Peace Lutheran’s prayer walk.

#### **CORNER OF 23RD AND S. CUSHMAN (NEAR THE FORMER HOME OF A LONG-TIME HILLTOP RESIDENT AND SUPPORTER OF PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH WHO PASSED AWAY).**

**Theme:** Comfort in grief

**Bible reading:** Psalm 23:1-4

**Suggested prayer topic:** Pray for all individuals and families in the Hilltop neighborhood who are grieving the loss of loved ones, past and present.

#### **CORNER OF S. 21ST AND S. AINSWORTH (NEAR THE WATER TOWER AND RESERVOIR, ACROSS THE STREET FROM TWO HOUSES OWNED BY THE CHURCH TO PROVIDE AFFORDABLE HOUSING TO FAMILIES):**

**Theme:** Basic needs and God’s justice

**Bible reading:** Amos 5:24 and Micah 6:8

**Suggested prayer topics:** Pray for those in the Hilltop who struggle to provide for the basic needs of their families.

Pray for justice for all in the Hilltop—for affordable housing, adequate health care, equitable access to education and opportunities, living wage jobs, and more.

#### **In Philadelphia, many people experiencing homelessness sleep in train stations. With this in mind, folks from within The Welcome Church community wrote their own “Stations at the Station” using various spots throughout the train station.**

As participants move toward the stations where Jesus is crucified and dies, they travel through a place known among the homeless community as “the tombs.” At this point, the group gathers to sing some verses of “Were You There?” Although many Stations of the Cross liturgies end with the fourteenth station, the people of The Welcome Church offer an additional Station of Hope because even on Good Friday, God never leaves us. Here are some examples of the stations from The Welcome Church.

#### **THE SECOND STATION: JESUS CARRIES HIS CROSS**

**Location:** Doors to the Comcast Center, where people are coming and going all day long.

**Scripture:** “Then he handed Jesus over to be crucified” (John 19:16).

*To be read aloud:*

Jesus is forced to carry the cross on which he will die. He carries the cross of all that each of us will have to carry—those places of pain and worry that are visible and invisible. Look around. Some folks are carrying bags holding everything they own—bags that have to be carried and watched everywhere throughout the day. Others carry briefcases or shopping bags.

What is the cross that you carry? On this day we remember that Jesus came so that we might never bear any burden alone.

**We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

## HOLY WEEK

### **THE FIFTEENTH STATION: JESUS GIVES US GLIMMERS OF HOPE**

**Location:** The new Hub of Hope, offering services, rest, showers, laundry, meals and welcome to folks experiencing homelessness.

*To read aloud:*

The Hub of Hope, a joint effort between Project HOME, SEPTA, and the City of Philadelphia is a glimmer of what can happen when folks come together. We ask God to bless all who enter its doors.

Even as we reflect on the death of Jesus and enter the lonely tomb, we know we are never without the hope of resurrection.

**Closing Prayer:** Cover Me with the Night  
*(Traditional Prayer from Ghana)*

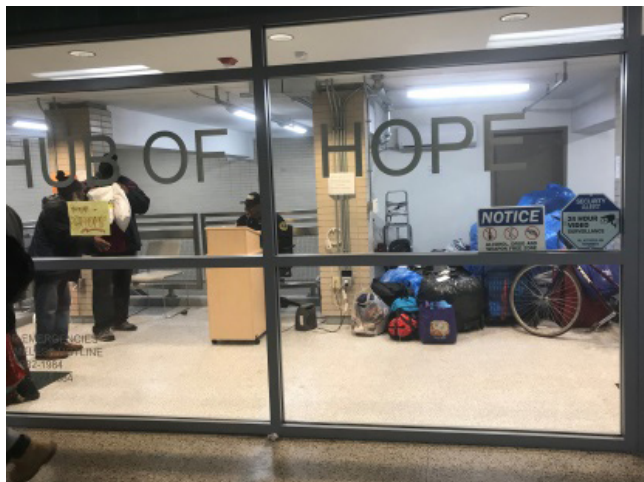
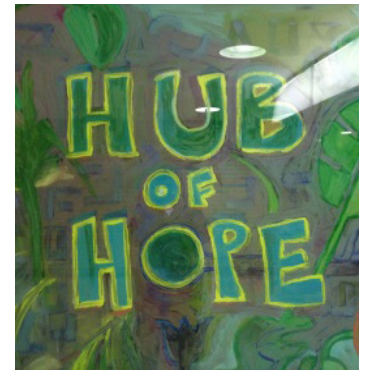
Come, Lord  
and cover us with the night.  
Spread your grace over us  
as you assured us you would.

Your promises are more than  
all the stars in the sky;  
your mercy is deeper than the night.  
Lord, it will be cold.  
The night comes with its breath of death.  
Night comes; the end comes; you come.

Lord we wait for you  
day and night.



**Stations from The Welcome Church's "Stations at the Station" including the Hub of Hope.**





# Special Services

Most of the worship resources used within the Homeless and Justice Network have arisen from the special needs of our communities. The following services and liturgies grew out of the specific contexts in which we worship. We invite you to adapt them as may be useful to you.

## SPECIAL SERVICES

### **At Bridge of Peace Community Church in Camden, New Jersey, Pastor Giselle Coutinho often writes her own contextual liturgies and Bible studies to meet the congregation's unique needs.**

She describes the congregation as multicultural, multiethnic, multiracial and multilingual housed in one of the most financially impoverished and violent cities in the United States. Still, the congregation is a vibrant one with a Peace Center offering 29,000 meals a year as well as crisis intervention, referrals, and healthy eating programs to the wider Camden community. The congregation also offers a bilingual Vacation Bible School with nearby a Presbyterian congregation.

Here are several contextual liturgies Bridge of Peace offers:

#### **CAMDEN PEACE MARCH**

Living up to its name, Bridge of Peace hosts a peace march through the neighborhood. The basic liturgy includes:

- Welcome and safety instructions
- Scripture: Psalm 146
- Prayer
- Blessing the streets with holy water
- The singing of songs along the including:
  - "Lead Me, Guide Me"
  - "I Want Jesus to Walk with Me"
  - "Soon and Very Soon"
- A cross is laid at a particular site and all stop to sing "Holy Ground."
- Gospel reading: John 11:14-44—the raising of Lazarus.
- Sharing of reflections
- Prayers for peace in the community
- Hymn: "Amazing Grace My Chains are Gone"
- Reinhold Niebuhr's serenity prayer
- Hymn: "I'll Fly Away"

#### **QUINCEAÑERA**

At Bridge of Peace, where there is a strong Latinx presence, many members celebrate the rite of passage known as Quinceañera.

This celebration takes place when a girl turns 15 and moves from a child into womanhood. It is often marked by fancy clothes and a big party. At Bridge of Peace, the service acknowledging the Quinceañera includes the following blessing remembering the gift of baptism:

*The congregation stands for the blessing and laying on of hands.*

Let Us Pray... Holy God, we thank you for what you have done and will continue to do with your daughter/son \_\_\_\_\_.

Walk with her/him in this life, keep the evil one from obstructing his/her path. You see all and know where the waters are deep. Keep her/him from danger. Order her/his steps and guide her/his feet. May her/his light always shine before others so others may see her/his good works which glorify our heavenly Father. Holy God remind \_\_\_\_\_ that at the time of her/his baptism she/he was sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

*Laying both hands on the Quinceañeras, the minister prays for each.*

Continue to sustain \_\_\_\_\_ with the gift of your Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever. Amen.

As with most of us in the Homeless and Justice Network, Pastor Giselle often writes her own contextual liturgies and Bible studies, adapting them to the particular situation. A resource she has offered to share is a Bible study entitled "Travel with Paul: Taste and See the Lord is Good." This Bible study, created from a variety of resources, includes eating foods from five different countries from Turkey to Malta. It was originally used at the height of the Syrian Crisis and will now be revamped to discuss issues of asylum and immigration. For a copy of the complete study, you may contact Pastor Giselle directly.

## SPECIAL SERVICES

**Along with honoring the various languages spoken in our congregations, a number of traditions are often woven into our liturgies such as the African tradition of pouring of libations.**

This ritual can be a way to call on the ancestors at the start of some worship (See *This Far by Faith*, p. 12). This is particularly poignant on the Feast of All Saints.

**Common Ground in Pennsylvania offers a service of hope and healing.**

In this service the community comes together around anyone who needs hope or healing in any aspect of their lives. According to Pastor Tom Scornavacchi, "When we honestly share our needs with one another, we create space for God to bring hope and healing through our mutual compassion and prayers." He instructs the congregation, "In the next seven minutes we are invited to turn to someone nearby to share the concerns in need of God's healing or to come individually to the pastor. We offer up prayers on each other's behalf." Though simple and short, those seven minutes can be lifesaving.

**Hephatha Lutheran Church in Milwaukee is a constant source of hope in an area that has seen much trauma. The congregation, which shares leadership with its pastor, Mary Martha Kannass, takes a pledge of non-violence based on one written by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Here is their sacred pledge:**

### **PLEDGE OF NONVIOLENCE**

1. Meditate daily on the teaching and life of Jesus.
2. Remember always that the nonviolent movement in Birmingham (Milwaukee) seeks justice and reconciliation, not victory.
3. Walk and talk in the manner of love, for God is love.
4. Pray daily to be used by God in order that all people might be free.
5. Sacrifice personal wishes in order that all people might be free.
6. Observe with both friend and foe the ordinary rules of courtesy.
7. Seek to perform regular service for others and for the world.
8. Refrain from the violence of fist, tongue, or heart.
9. Strive to be in good spiritual and bodily health.
10. Follow the directions of the movement and of the captain of the demonstration.

Hephatha uses the concept of accountability and peacemaking with young people as well as with adults. Each year the congregation sponsors the Friends of Jesus work ministry where young adults are able to earn back-to-school gifts cards. The focus is on peacemaking, and in their closing service the participants weave in their accomplishments with a refrain from the Prayer of St. Francis:

We shared God's peace this summer and served as ambassadors of the Gospel.

**Lord, make us instruments of your peace.**

We made the church more beautiful by sweeping the floors and wiping the pews.

**Lord, make us instruments of your peace.**

We swam and fished on retreat day.

**Lord, make us instruments of your peace.**

We visited our elderly, and we visited the art museum.

**Lord, make us instruments of your peace.**

We carried loads of food and cooked lunches.

**Lord, make us instruments of your peace.**

*The prayer continues with each young person naming themselves as peacemakers while all join in the refrain.*

**In a twist on an Affirmation of Baptism, some ministries offer a special opportunity where worshippers are asked to "wash away" a resentment, past hurt, addiction, betrayal or other challenge they'd like to lay at God's feet.**

Perhaps a prompt is written or projected on a wall. Folks then come forward and place that into the baptismal font, washing it clean with the waters of baptism. Other times folks write these things on stones, again placing the stones in the font.

# Other Activities

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

### Blessing board

To create a blessing board, take a large poster and write on it, "I am blessed today because..." have people write their blessings. These can be read aloud during worship or another gathering by a volunteer.

### "Hear" I am

Salem Lutheran Church in Toledo, Ohio, is in one of the most economically challenged areas of the city but is rich in many other ways. Pastor Mike Hanck says that "though the area schools are fighting hard to provide quality education to our young people," many students continue to struggle with literacy. To ensure that all are fully included at the table, the congregation has turned to the arts as an important expression of their spiritual life and prayer.

In partnership with a regionally famous artist and devoted Muslim, Yusef Lateef, Salem developed an art program entitled, "Hear I Am," playing on the name of God as well as the need to be heard. With this program, the teens of Salem express their faith through art which is then exhibited and sometimes sold. One person even made a cross out of melted crayons! Expressions of prayer can be contextualized in so many different ways.

When Pastor Mike asked the children in the congregation to write sample prayers on cards for this resource, they decided they would pray for Pastor Violet as the organizer of this resource. The children packed a manila envelope with prayers!

### Art and Prayer

At Oasis Outreach in Akron, Ohio, alternative worship experiences are offered that are focused on creativity and the arts. In each of the following projects a piece of artwork is created to complement a litany.

### Dwelling Places

This project makes use of the plastic houses and hotels used in the game of Monopoly to invite people into the Scripture of John 14:2-3: "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places..." After reflection on the text, participants are invited to imagine how God continually makes room for us to live.

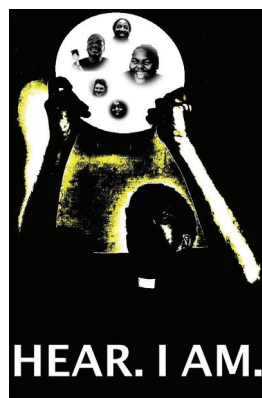
Participants then glue the houses and hotels on a blank canvas to depict where God's dwelling places are. Some houses can portray an openness to God's flowing, transformational energy by being glued upside down or on their sides. Others may be closed off and huddled together to indicate reliance on things like the way things have always been or the status quo.

### New Things

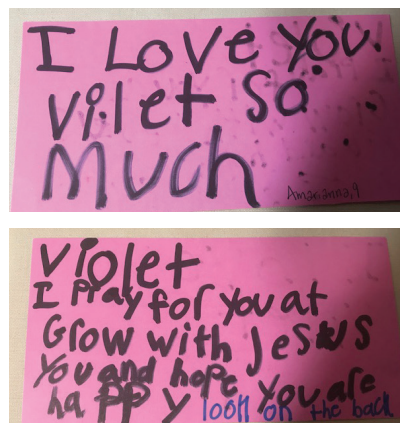
In this project, the text of Jeremiah 31:21-22 is explored using a canvas, cheap white coffee cups, glue and markers. Participants are invited to write things that people see about them on the outside of the cups, and things that people don't see on the inside. Then the cup is placed in a bag and smashed with a hammer. Pieces are used to create the "new thing" that God is doing in our lives.



Crosses made from melted crayons in the "Hear I Am" program.



The name of the "Hear I Am" program plays on the name of God as well as the need to be heard.



Prayer cards sent to Pastor Violet from the children of Salem Lutheran Church.



A participant in the "Hear I Am" program works on a painting.



## OTHER ACTIVITIES

### Waves

This project requires one blank canvas and multiple colors of paint to study the story of Jesus and the storm at sea in Matthew 8:23-27. Paint is used to depict the waves of our past, especially those times of being in the “midst of the storm.” Scripture study and writing are used to show how those waves of our past can be calmed and how healing is possible.

### Melting Light

For this project you need canvas, charcoal, white cylinder candles and matches. These materials will be used to depict all the evil in the world and is based on the text from John 3:17-21, “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” Participants are asked to choose words or phrases that jump out to them from the passage. They can write or draw depictions of evil. Later, hot wax from the candle is dripped onto the canvas. The wax melts the drawings and words together, offering a glimpse of God’s action in our lives.

*Here is one of the poems that emerged from this project.*

#### LOVE DRIPS LIGHT OVER THE DARKNESS

A Litany Poem by Urban Women at Oasis Outreach in Akron, Ohio  
Based on John 3:16-21

Whoever goes into the light shall not perish.

**Love drips light over the darkness.**

This is the verdict the Lord declares.

**Love drips light over the darkness.**

Whoever lives by the truth loves the light.

**Love drips light over the darkness.**

Men loved darkness. Women exposed it.

**Love drips light over the darkness.**

Love drips light over the darkness.

**Everything is done through God.**

We are light creatures.

...So loved.

**Love drips light over the darkness.**



Plastic houses and hotels used in the “Dwelling Places” activity.



A participant at Oasis Outreach splatters paint on a project.



Pieces of broken cups depict the “New Things” God is doing in our lives.



“Waves” of color represent the storm at sea in Matthew 8.

# Our Gift to You

It is with gratitude that we offer this resource to you. It is the gift that has been shaped by the people in our ministries, people whose gifts are often overlooked. One man who is part of The Welcome Church offers us a final message of hope. He is an artist experiencing homelessness but finding the presence of God in everything he does. In each of his drawings, Jibril adds an element of peace, hope or joy. On this last page of our resource, we share with you a drawing done not long ago by Jibril. It depicts an area where he slept on the street in Philadelphia. Look for the secret word on the empty pizza box. It is our wish for you.

—Pastor Violet Cucciniello Little  
*ELCA Homeless and Justice Network*

OUR GIFT TO YOU





**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.