



WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

A women-led, global, ecumenical movement



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An Introduction to the 2022 Service

Dear Sisters,

As the joint coordinators of the writing process, we are proud to introduce to you the World Day of Prayer service for 2022, prepared by Christian women from England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The preparation of the service and related materials began in November 2018 and was entrusted to a group of 31 women selected by the National Committee, using guidelines provided by the International Office. The team ranged in age from early 20s to early 80s but the majority were under 50. They were from different denominations and backgrounds and a significant proportion of them had not had much involvement with WDP previously. The writing process was long, slow, and quite structured. Having watched this group from the sidelines through the whole process, we can assure you that they undertook their task very seriously and prayerfully.

The service was then reviewed and revised by the International Committee of World Day of Prayer, a group of women of different denominations from different countries and cultures. So, this service has been thought, talked, and prayed over by a total of about 50 women over a period of more than two years.

The overarching theme of the service is HOPE – very appropriate for this time when the world is coming to terms with the ongoing risks of a pandemic and the looming climate crisis.

HOPE is depicted through the lighting of candles, the distribution of seeds and the exchange of message worldwide via social media using hashtag #WDP hope.

This service also offers us all an opportunity to appreciate more clearly the enormity of God.

God is totally beyond the limits of our mere human thought and understanding.

We do not have adequate language to describe God nor sufficient artistic skills to depict God without words. Our human words are images, models, metaphors and analogies, all speaking of the richness of God but never capturing God's fullness. And yet, so often, we continue to try to put limits on him, to try and shut him up in a box: by calling him 'him' for starters!

Much of the Bible was written at a time when women were chattels – just like sheep or donkeys. There are passages in the Bible that include accounts of abuse, seem to support discrimination, particularly against women, and have been used to justify abuse. Also, for much of its history, the Church's theology has been developed, decided, and informed by the experiences of men, and thus reflects men's experiences and knowledge of God and ways of being in the world. The continuing use of predominantly masculine words and imagery when addressing or speaking of God reinforces the idea that the male is normative and the female in some way or other inferior.

This is certainly not what Jesus taught!

One of the most important and distinctive characteristics of World Day of Prayer is that it is women-led. We must not forget, in some countries, WDP still offers the only opportunity for women to express their concerns and to ask for prayer for the issues that are most relevant to them and to their families. This is something that we must cherish.

In this service, the phrase “God our Mother and our Father” is used not to be provocative but only to draw attention to the wider imagery of God and to try and take a small step towards an understanding of God beyond gender. It is also for this reason that both male and female pronouns have been avoided in all the prayers.

The Executive Director of WDPIC reports that the responses to our use of gender-neutral language in the prayers and of the phrase ‘God, our Mother and our Father’ from the rest of the world have been positive. She said that people seem glad that God is being seen as above and beyond traditional ways of understanding. She feels that this is helping to take our movement forward in a good way.

Please read the introduction to this service carefully and prayerfully and consider how we can enable all those who take part in or attend our services to come away with their experience of God deepened and enriched.

We hope that you will enjoy arranging and taking part in this very special WDP service and that you will be able to use it as an opportunity to introduce the Day of Prayer and our movement to more Christians of all ages in your area and further afield.

Elizabeth Burroughs) Joint
Margaret Pickford) Coordinators