



CALL TO ACTION

Inspire Catholics, Transform Church

2024 Liturgy of Affirmation

Bienvenidos a Todos! (Welcome to All!)

January 7, 2024

Gathering

Before we begin, we want to let you know this liturgy is being recorded for those who are not available to attend today. A copy of the liturgy will be available through the CTA website. The breakout room sharing will NOT be recorded.

Greeting

Welcome to this Liturgy of Affirmation and Celebration, honoring all of us whoever we are. Remember that Jesus welcomed all, especially the outcasts of society.

Opening Prayer

A prayer for unity

One in the Spirit and one in worship — we pray!

Loving, accepting, welcoming God, your people come before you in gratitude for the things you have done and in awesome wonder of the things we are capable of doing with you.

We come before you, humbly asking for your Spirit to shower us with the love you have for all humanity.

We come before you, ready to follow Jesus' steps in proclaiming liberation, joy, reconciliation, and love to all.

We come as one body, yet many members; we are people of many colors, of many genders, of many sexual orientations, of many economic situations, of different kinds of families, yet we are one in you. Be with us as we continue proclaiming your grace for the entire world to see through our actions and lives. Amen.

By the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists. Used with permission.

downloaded at ManyVoices.org.

Gathering Song: [All Are Welcome verses 1 & 2 and chorus](#)

<https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=all+are+welcome+song+lyrics>

Litany of Community Celebration and Solidarity

May the Spirit of God prompt us to live, love and act in ways that more completely embraces the gift of each other.

God of Creation, let your light shine on all the inhabitants of this earth that we may know and celebrate that you have formed and created us in life-giving and life-receiving oneness and harmony;

All: Source of our being, hear our prayer and bless us with your gift of creation.

God of Grace, grant us the gift of inward joy and the serenity that comes from being in relationship with you and your creation;

All: Source of our being, hear our prayer and bless us with your gift of grace.

God of Life, open our eyes that we may see the handiwork of your hands and good things in unexpected places that inspire us to celebrate our lives and the sacred ties of kindred spirits, friendship, and love;

All: Source of our being, hear our prayer and bless us with your gift of life.

God of Love, fill our hearts with light and grace and hope that cast out the spirits of fear, anxiety, and division and inspire in each of us a spirit of community, compassion, and selflessness;

All: Source of our being, hear our prayer and bless us with your gift of love.

God of Justice, endow each of us with a spirit that recognizes the worth, dignity, and equality of all human beings and inspires us to always stand on the side of the poor, the hungry, and the oppressed;

All: Source of our being, hear our prayer and bless us with your gift of justice.

God of Peace, prompt us always to pursue community and reconciliation as we affirm one another in our different religious, cultural, and social beliefs and expressions;

All: Source of our being, hear our prayer and bless us with the gift of peace.

God of Mercy, rescue and restore your creation from neglect, violence, and persecution and bring healing and wholeness wherever there is pain and darkness;

All: Source of our being, hear our prayer and bless us with the gift of mercy.

God of Hope, bless us with brave hearts and steady nerves as we speak truth to power and challenge the scourge of hatred, prejudice, and discrimination, and give us the strength to meet the days to come with steadfastness and patience;

All: Source of our being, hear our prayer and bless us with your gift of hope.

May we seek always to be united as one family under God committed to being reconciled and standing together in the belief that love and compassion have greater power than hatred and division. In all of your many and holy names we pray. **Amen.**

From *The One World Book of Prayer: A Treasury of Prayers from Around the World*, compiled by Juliet Mabey, Oneworld Publications, 1999. downloaded at ManyVoices.org.

Liturgy of Story

We need to share our stories of how we have found joy and affirmation in communities that are open and welcoming so others can find hope. While all of us will have the chance to share later in a breakout room, four individuals have agreed to share their stories in this Liturgy of Story.

Story #1: Ericka's Story

Matthew 10:40

Those who welcome you also welcome me, and those who welcome me also welcome the One who sent me.

Story #2: Jonathon's Story *(read the full story at the end of this document)*

Music - All Are Welcome verses 3 & 4 and chorus

<https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=all+are+welcome+song+lyrics>

Colossians 3:14-15

Above all else, put on love, which binds the rest together and makes them perfect. Let Christ's peace reign in your hearts since, as members of one body, you have been called to that peace. Dedicate yourselves to that thankfulness.

Story #3: Teresa's Story *(read the full story at the end of this document)*

1 Corinthians 12:12-14

The body is one, even though it has many parts – many though they are -comprise a single body. And so it is with Christ. It was by one Spirit that all of us, whether we are Jews or Greeks, slaves or citizens were baptized into one body. All of us have been given to drink of the one Spirit. And that Body is not one part but many.

Story #4: Dora's Story

Music - All Are Welcome verse 5 and chorus

<https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=all+are+welcome+song+lyrics>

Breakout Rooms:

Agenda for Break out Rooms

We will be breaking out into Break Out Room for about 12 minutes. During this time, you are

- 1) invited to share a brief 15-30 second introduction about yourself providing your name, what city you are Zooming from, and your pronoun (she, her; he/him; their); and then share, if you are comfortable, your response to the prompts
 - Have you found a place of affirmation / celebration?
 - Where do you find joy?
 - Why or how is your community essential to your spirituality? How does it shape or inform your spirituality?
- 2) Please make sure that everyone who wishes to share is given an opportunity to share.
- 3) A message will be broadcast at the 6-minute mark so that you know you have 6 minutes left for the breakout group sharing.

Return from breakouts:

Feedback from breakout rooms if there's time.

Prayer of Gratitude

Ever faithful Lord, Ever giving Son, Ever present Spirit,
For the many gifts you grant us and the opportunity to enjoy these things;
For your daily provision and for the constant signs of your healing love;
For the hope amidst despair and the light which always shines;
For all these things, 'thank you' is just so inadequate
but it's all we have: ... to show our gratitude in word, in thought and in action.

So, thank you, Lord and may our thanks move beyond words
to transform us into thankful folk, faithful folk, seeing folk,
folk who see need and see the need to act,
folk who love to live and live to love,
folk who serve you by serving others.

Help us to be amongst those who include the excluded
and bring in those who are marginalized,
that when the opportunities come our way to be healers of division and hurt,
to be peacemakers and restorers, we won't be found wanting.

Loving, personal Creator, we bring before you those people and issues that are closest to us
and that occupy our minds at this time ... *I invite you to*
(personal and local intercessions) add to chat

Mighty, wonderful Creator, we bring before you people and issues from around our world,
including those we'll never know personally but who remain family in you ... *I invite you to*
(national and global intercessions) add to chat

Transforming, healing Creator, help us to make the light shine in dark places,
to make peace known in violent places, and to bring hope to despondent places.
Our prayers, spoken and silent are brought to you now
in the name of your Son, Jesus, the healer, includer and redeemer, forever.
Amen.

~ written by Rev Iain MacDonald. Posted on the Church of Scotland's Starters for Sunday website.
<http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>

Music – Shepherd Me O God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3swMABkKGI>

Blessing

May God bless you with Discomfort... at Easy Answers, Half Truths, and Superficial Relationships,
So that you may live Deep within your Heart.

May God bless you with Anger... at Injustice, Oppression, and Exploitation of People.
So that you may work for Justice, Freedom, and Peace.

May God bless you with Tears...
to shed for those who suffer from Pain, Rejection, Starvation, and War,
So that you may reach out your Hand to Comfort them and to turn their Pain into Joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness...
To Believe that You can Make a Difference in this World,
So that You can Do what others claim cannot be Done.
Amen

Commissioning

Let us carry the light of God into the world; let us rebuild love and justice in
the creative power of God.

May today be embraced with gifts from God, the One who celebrates all
creation and gathers all people together in love.

May Christ walk beside us all, adding to our lives the courage to believe that
we are called to be beloved people of God, facing each day with hope and
grace.

And may the Holy Spirit, the source of wisdom amid the flames of true life,
lift our hearts with joy and the wonder of divine inspiration for our future.

God go with us in all that is gentle, Christ go with us in all that is brave, and
Spirit go with us in all that is free and true.
Amen.

This liturgy was prepared by members of the CTA Alternatives Working Group.
The group has been meeting since June 2020 with the goal of helping people share stories, find
alternative groups for worship, and assist in helping communities form new groups.
If you are interested in learning more about this and other CTA groups, go to
<https://www.cta-usa.org/workinggroups>
or send an email to cta@cta-usa.org.

Sending Forth and Closing: **Music How Can I Keep from Singing**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLPP3XmYxXg>

Jonathan's Story

I am a third-year missionary with Saint Paul's Outreach. We build Catholic communities on college campuses where people can encounter Christ while in college and be formed in their faith to live out and share the Gospel, the love of Christ, with the world.

Our goal is to build a community where everyone is welcome. The way we do that best is through our formation program, which helps students form their missional hearts. This includes being a part of small groups, a formation community, and having a disciple. The community is built upon mission and sharing God's love that we have been so blessed to experience in community. We even say "community on mission" is one of our charism values within Saint Paul's Outreach. After all, Jesus gives us a missional call at the end of the Gospel as he tells us to go make disciples of all nations. When students are formed as missional disciples, they live out the call to build inclusive Christian communities.

The Christian life is such a joy when done with others. I find so much joy in the men I live with. It's just special to be living with others who know Christ and are striving to live out the faith well. For example, 15 of us are doing Exodus 90, an intense ascetic type of course to break free from attachments to the world. I get to live with men who are pursuing sainthood. We live in community together, all 22 of us (between two houses). We pray together, we eat together. We do morning prayer and praise and worship at 6:30 a.m. every weekday. We cook two family dinners a week and we do chores on Saturday morning. In between, we work, study, and spend time together (the youngins say "boolin" nowadays). We build a way of life together—and it is such a joy.

Community is essential to my faith because I forget how good God is sometimes. These people, my fellow disciples, remind me that the Lord is real and working among us. The Lord is faithful and SO good!

Teresa's Story

In 2023, I gratefully accepted an invitation to become a provisional board member of the **Call To Action Metro New York Chapter**. I initially surprised myself with this decision because, in many ways, my fellow board members and I are very different from one another. Could I really belong here? Yes, there are a few sons of Ireland present and a fellow caribeño representing, and, of course, what ties us together foundationally is our Catholic faith. And although, at the age of 34, I no longer consider myself young, I am definitely still “Catholic young.” This is illustrated by the reality that my fellow board members are more or less twice my age.

What difference lies in a generation? The substance of a lifetime. I've read books and watched movies about Vatican II, the Bronx burning, and the AIDS crisis. Now, I sit alongside people who lived these events in real-time. I only have a few memories of life before the internet, and I became digitally literate at a young age out of necessity. On the other hand, some of my fellow board members are better reached by snail mail than by text. Some came of age during a time when they were able to pay their way through college with a part-time job and used that as a stepping stone to the kind of financial security that is useful for starting a family or buying a home. My spouse and I received our education in a different reality, one that left us with student loans we could not pay and renting in a city we could barely afford. There are even generational differences between me and the other lesbian women on the board. I don't know what it's like to keep my identity secret at work or hide my relationship from my employer. I live a life where I don't think about sexism every moment of the day only because in the decades before I was born, women like them persistently demanded to be seen by society as their whole selves, as more than the labor and value that women provide for children and men.

Love is patient; love is kind. Relating is easy; empathizing is hard. This is not a tale of older white people befriending a young brown woman or a millennial teaching the Greatest Generation or Baby Boomers proper Zoom etiquette. This is not a flattened story of us realizing that deep down, we're really the same. Love is dynamic. An affirming space is one where we love one another in and through difference—all saints, all sinners, all humanity, all joy. Any space like that is full of my kind of people; any space like that is a space I need to be. What makes working on the CTA Metro NY Board beautiful is the vast array of views, skills, and experiences we bring in service to one another, borne out of who we each are and the lives each of us have lived. It's all welcome, it's all needed—and it's all offered to God.

Dora's Story

You have now heard stories from two different speakers. Jonathan's and Theresa's stories all share their roots in love, community, acceptance of differences, and the valuing of other's stories different from our own.

Now we come to the story of each and every one of us who seeks to "build a house where love can dwell/ And all can safely live....and a place where "hearts learn to forgive."

How do we build this place? During this Feast of the Epiphany, a time when we celebrate a revelation that changed the world, let us look at our own "houses," our own hearts, our own souls. To be a welcoming community, we need to be open to being changed by others. *

Let me give you examples of epiphanies I have had that have made me more open, accepting, and loving of folks who are different from me and the ethnic and religious cultures in which I was reared.

Epiphany #1: I learned much in February 1997 and have continued learning in the ensuing years after my son came out to me. My son asked me: "Mama, do you think I would choose to be a 'leper' in our society?" That statement changed my world, and it added a new dimension to my life's mission. I wanted to make the world safe for him and for others. I wanted my LGBTQ+ students, friends, and family to know they would be safe, valued, celebrated, and honored for their gifts and their presence in our lives.

Epiphany #2: During the debates leading up to DACA**, I became more aware of undocumented students in my classes who trusted me enough to tell me their status. They were hungry for education, often working multiple part-time jobs and full-time summer jobs to pay their academic tuition and college costs. They needed—and still need—encouragement that there will be a future for them in this country.

Epiphany #3: During the Border Experience hosted by the CTA Immigration Work Group in 2018, I learned more about the asylum seekers who are full of hopes and dreams for a better life away from violence, extreme poverty, and lack of resources to earn a living. This led to supporting *The Angry Tias and Abuelas**** and Catholic Charities who help the asylum seekers.

Epiphany #4:

I also had an epiphany about my own Imposter Syndrome issues. I was born in 1953 and grew up during a time when Mexican Americans swatted with a yardstick for speaking Spanish in school. I needed to realize that we had been programmed to internalize our "inferiority." I needed to free myself of those shackles. I needed to work to gently but firmly confront racism, ethnocentrism, misogyny, sexism, and other "isms" that are still prevalent in our workplaces and places of learning.

Prayer for Epiphanies:

Let us pray that each of our lives be filled with more epiphany experiences for all of us. Although we are each unique, we all fundamentally share the same need to belong, to love and be loved, to be valued, to have a sense of purpose, and to make our days on this earth meaningful and fruitful.

Alternative communities that CELEBRATE differences and EMBRACE them bring us personal growth, humble and challenge us in good ways, and support us as we work to be the hands and feet of Jesus on this one, fragile, yet resilient planet. Let us bring joy to others by truly welcoming them into our hearts and our lives. If we do that, we fulfill the Lord's prayer: Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.

Therefore, let us find or build alternative spaces for all to feel safe and loved, and comforted, and supported and where there is peace instead of hatred. For this we pray to the Lord.....May it be so...Amen.

**Statement attributed to retired Fr. Paul Feela (formerly of Lumen Christi Catholic Community), St Paul, MN.*

*** Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals*

****Translation: "Angry Aunts and Grandmothers" is a group that started with about 9 women who formed a network to provide for the needs of asylum seekers at the border communities of Matamoros and Reynosa, Mexico. They are now a non-profit. <https://www.angrytiasandabuelas.com/>*