

Lent 2020: A Call to Prayer, Fasting, and Repentance Leading to Action

An Invitation from Presiding Bishop Curry to Turn and Pray on Behalf our Nation

[February 11, 2020] As the season of Lent approaches, Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Michael Curry invites Episcopalians and people of faith to turn and pray on behalf of our nation:

“In times of great national concern and urgency, people of faith have returned to ancient practices of repentance, prayer and fasting as ways of interceding with God on behalf of their nation and the world. This is such a moment for us in the United States.

“On Ash Wednesday I will join with other Christian leaders observing this Lent as a season of prayer, fasting and repentance on behalf of our nation, with continued fasting each Wednesday until the Wednesday before Advent begins.

“Our appeal comes during a time of profound division and genuine crisis of national character. This is not a matter of party or partisanship, but of deep concern for the soul of America.

“The group of religious “Elders” who share this commitment – the same group that over a year ago published the “Reclaiming Jesus” statement – includes Evangelical, Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant leaders. While we hold diverse political affiliations and positions on many issues facing our country, we find common ground in two shared convictions:

- First and foremost, we are committed to Jesus Christ as Lord, and his way of love as our primary loyalty.
- Second, because we love our country, we are concerned about its moral and spiritual health and well-being.

“For me, this call is rooted in my personal commitment to practice Jesus’s Way of Love, by which I turn, learn, pray, worship, bless, go and rest in the way of our savior. Especially now, drawn together by love, hope and concern, and recalling the wisdom of our ancient traditions, I am grateful to join others in the spiritual practice of prayer, fasting and repentance for our nation. If you feel called to join us in this practice, the invitation is attached. The full text, together with the “Reclaiming Jesus” document can be found on the [Reclaiming Jesus website](#).”

Let us pray.

Almighty God ... We humbly pray that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of your favor and glad to do your will. Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure manners. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom in your Name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to your law, we may show forth your praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in you to fail; all which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

Your brother,

The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry
Presiding Bishop and Primate
The Episcopal Church

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[Answer the call by adding your name here.](#)

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. — Romans 12:21 NRSV

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. —Ephesians 6:12 KJV

We can no longer pretend otherwise: The United States is in the midst of a struggle for its very soul. Are we merely collections of self-interest and partisan identities or are we “one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all?”

This is a moment of spiritual peril and decision. Nothing less than the soul of our nation is at stake.

On one level, the outward and visible form of the divisions and tensions among us as a nation are political, social, and even ideological. Yet, the deeper and invisible causes are spiritual and moral. When selfishness is exalted above sacrifice for the good of each other, the soul of the nation is at stake. When falsehood is exalted and truth is slain in the public square, the soul of the nation is at stake. When toxic politics manipulates public faith, the soul of the nation is at stake. When fear, hate, and violence shape our politics and anger governs our speech, the soul of the nation is at stake.

In another time of national spiritual crisis, President Abraham Lincoln issued an appeal to leaders and people of the nation to summon “the better angels of our nature.” As elders in the churches, we believe that we are in a spiritual battle between our better angels and worst demons.

Now is not a time for playing the superficial politics of the right or the left. Now is a time for the deeper spiritual engagement with the realities that are beneath our conflicts in order that God might help and heal the “soul of the nation and the integrity of our faith,” as our [Reclaiming Jesus declaration](#) called for.

The season of Lent is traditionally a time for deeper soul searching, reflection, and repentance that leads to renewed action and commitment to living out the teachings and the way of Jesus of Nazareth.

As elders who have called the church to reclaim Jesus, we now issue “Lent 2020: A Call for Prayer, Fasting, and Repentance that Leads to Action.”

We invite individuals, clergy, national churches, and local congregations into a Lenten season of prayer, fasting, and repentance built around practices of daily prayer, weekly fasting, and reflection with spiritual discernment that can lead to more faithful action.

We covenant together to repent from both our personal and social sins, to pray for our nation and all nations, and to fast as a reminder to discipline self-interest, idolatry, and division for the good of living God’s love in the world.

Prayer

Prayer calls us to give up control.

We pray to return to God's two commandments on which hang all the law — to love God and love our neighbor.

“Love God with your whole heart, whole soul, and whole mind” — which means to repent and remove any national, racial, or political ideologies and idolatries that have replaced loving God with our whole selves.

“And love your neighbor as yourself” — which means to love all our neighbors that we have forgotten to love (no exceptions), including those who are different from us, who disagree with us, and, especially, those of another race or nationality whom we are directly instructed to love by the words and example of Jesus.

And we should also reach out, in particular, to those who are different from us or disagree with us politically, even in our same congregations and local communities.

Fasting

Fasting calls us to redirect our attention.

We will fast in ways commensurate with our health, situation, and communities on one day per week — on Wednesdays beginning with Ash Wednesday.

Fasting weekly can help us to stop, pay attention, wake up, interrupt our schedules, go deeper, and listen for God and the Holy Spirit in ways that might lead us to new places in our hearts and minds. This weekly fast will begin in Lent and could continue until the Wednesday before Thanksgiving.

Repentance

Repentance calls us to change our hearts.

Repentance in all of our traditions means much more than shame or guilt and feeling sorry; it means to stop, turn around, and go in a whole new direction. These spiritual disciplines could help take us out of our strategies and control —by admitting that we don't have all the answers — and to go deeper together to hear the voice of God, often in the still, small whispers of the Spirit, leading us to better places.

These spiritual practices can help us to answer questions like: What are we called from and what are we called to? Who are we called from and who are we called to? Spiritual disciplines can even be targeted: Who and what are we praying and fasting for, and what might our praying and fasting open us to do?

Action

We confess that as church elders who have often engaged in action, we are not fully sure what to do in the growing national crisis in which we now find ourselves. We therefore hope that the disciplines of daily prayer and weekly fasting will clarify and draw all of us to the decisive, prophetic, and reconciling actions required in this time of great crisis. Because, as the New Testament teaches us, “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:26).

Through praying and fasting together, particularly with people who disagree politically, we hope to find actions that might bring more people together — even across the margins of previous voting blocs — so that we can find and pursue what is best for the country.

Regular spiritual disciplines can deepen our faith, inform our citizenship decisions, and lead us to find the courage to stand up for the most vulnerable and, if need be, to protect our very democracy.

We see this Lenten call to fast, pray, and repent as a time of purification for ourselves and as a time of preparation and expectation for the kinds of action that can lead us forward instead of backward. How can we anchor ourselves in the kind of love that is not safe, but saving?

Going to God

Going to God means tuning out the constant tumult crowding our heads in order to tune our hearts to quieter voices revealing God's holy intentions for this time.

As U.S. church elders, we confess that we don't consult with God seriously and frequently enough. This Lenten call and these spiritual disciplines are meant to take us to God with regularity during this time of national and faith crisis. Regular conversation with God can be transforming in any culture and especially those in crisis — and it can lead to better conversation with each other. We must go to God with choices and decisions that are political, social, racial, and economic — these are not just personal decisions.

We offer a summary of our [Reclaiming Jesus declaration here](#). More than at the time since it was released in 2018, it is time to renew it now. In 2020, it is time to reclaim Jesus.

In a time of moral, political, and theological crisis, let us go to God.

Signatories,

Bishop Carroll Baltimore Bishop Global Alliance Interfaith Networks

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Dr. Walter Brueggemann, Professor Emeritus, Columbia Theological Seminary

Rev. Dr. Iva Carruthers, General Secretary, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference

The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Episcopal Church

Marie Dennis, Senior Advisor/Co-President (2007-2019), Pax Christi International

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Rev. Dr. Cynthia Hale, Senior Pastor, Ray of Hope Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Rev. Dr. Richard Hamm, Retired General Minister and President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Dr. Otis Moss Jr., Pastor Emeritus, Olivet Institutional Baptist Church

Senior Bishop Lawrence Reddick, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

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Rev. Jim Wallis, President and Founder, Sojourners

Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, Minister, Bethany Memorial Church (Disciples of Christ)

Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, Co-Convener, National African American Clergy Network

Rev. Dr. Tony Campolo, Co-Founder, Red Letter Christians

Dr. Will Willimon, Professor, Duke Divinity School and Bishop (retired), United Methodist Church

Rev. Dr. James Forbes, President & Founder, Healing of the Nations Foundation and Preaching Professor, Union Theological Seminary