

**Call to worship**

We are called to bring a new understanding of God:  
that God so loves the world.  
We are the salt of the earth.  
We are called to bring a new hope in God:  
that God gives us new life.  
We are the light of the world.  
We are called to follow  
the commandments and the law.  
The Law of God is to love God  
and to love one another.  
Come, let us be the salt of the earth,  
the light of the world.  
Come, let us love one another  
with the love of God.  
Let us join together in our love of God  
to worship and follow Jesus.

**Sit down**

Jesus tells us that the greatest commandment is 'You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is part of the *Shema*, the daily prayer of Jews, said morning and evening.

**Listen to the Shema in Hebrew**

Muslims say something similar  
He is Allah [God in Arabic] - One 'and Indivisible';  
Allah the Sustainer 'needed by all'.  
He has never had offspring, nor was He born.  
And there is none comparable to Him **Listen, Arabic**

Jesus adds a second commandment, as important as the first: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' And so we sing -

**Hymn** A new commandment R&S 745 (twice)  
A new commandment I give unto you  
that you love one another as I have loved you;  
that you love one another as I have loved you.  
By this shall all know you are my disciple:  
if you have love one to another;  
by this shall all know you are my disciple:  
if you have love one to another.

**Children's Time / peace activity**

October is the month we collect money for Commitment to Life. The region we support is Israel/Palestine. Today we will be learning more about the region through readings, art, music, sounds, touch, taste and smell. As we know, there is a war going on there at the moment, so we will also be praying for peace. One way to do that is to make doves, or cranes as a symbol of peace. As you walked into church today, you walked through prayers for peace in the form of paper doves. And there are doves hanging in the window at the back. We are going to make some more to either hang up or put on the window ledges. I suggest we leave them up during the season of Remembrance, until the end of November.

The use of a dove, especially with an olive branch, as a symbol of peace started with the early Christians. Noah sent a dove out after the flood, and it came back with an olive branch showing that the waters had gone down. A dove is also a symbol of the Holy Spirit as a dove came down on Jesus as he was baptised.

The famous painter Picasso drew a picture of a dove (**show slide 1**), la colombe in French, a realistic picture of a dove without an olive branch which was chosen as the emblem for the World Peace Council in Paris in April 1949. At the 1950 World Peace Congress in Sheffield, Picasso said that his father had taught him to paint doves, concluding, "I stand for life against death; I stand for peace against war."

(**Slide 2**) In May 2018, a German artist called Michael Pendry, created a piece of art for piece consisting of thousands of origami doves. It was installed at Salisbury Cathedral to signify peace following the nerve agent attack in the city. The installation comprises 2,500 messages folded into bird shapes suspended along the length of the nave. The city's community groups have also been encouraged to contribute their own thoughts and fold their own doves. (**slide 3**) The artist said: "In their unity they stand for a fundamental human right to peace and freedom." He called the piece Les Colombes because he thought that sounded nicer than the name of the bird in German, or the word dove which has become associated with soap.

Origami cranes are a symbol of peace, particularly in Japan. An ancient legend claimed that anyone who folded 1,000 paper cranes would be granted either a lifetime of happiness and good luck, or one wish. The connection between paper cranes and peace can be traced back to a young girl named Sadako Sasaki, who died of leukemia ten years after the atomic bombing. Sadako was two years old when she was exposed to the atomic bomb. She had no apparent injuries and grew into a strong and healthy girl. However, nine years later she suddenly developed signs of an illness. The following year she was diagnosed with leukemia and was admitted to the Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital. Believing that folding paper cranes would help her recover, she kept folding them to the end, but in October 1955, she died. Sadako's death triggered a campaign to build a monument to pray for world peace and the peaceful repose of the many children killed by the atomic bomb. The Children's Peace Monument that stands in Peace Memorial Park was built with funds donated from all over Japan. Later, this story spread to the world, and now, approximately 10 million cranes are offered each year before the Children's Peace Monument. (**Slide 4**)

**Make doves/cranes OR put a prayer in the 'wailing wall' OR draw or write something on the Bethlehem wall OR pray for peace.**

You can also take time to taste or smell some typical food, look at some of the art or information at the back, touch the items made from olive wood from Palestine, light a candle for peace.

**Hymn** Make me a channel of your peace R&S 629

### **Gifts**

God, through your Son you taught us to love our neighbours, all our neighbours.  
You call each one of us to speak and act on Your behalf in our world today.  
Give us courage to step out in faith, to follow where You lead without hesitation or fear,  
trusting that Your presence goes with us, and that You will provide all that we need.  
Holy One, receive our gifts of money and ourselves, and in particular today gifts for  
Commitment for Life. Multiply and use them through the power of the Holy Spirit  
to accomplish Christ's work of love in the world. **Amen.**

**Children leave for Sunday Club**

**Reading: Leviticus 19:2-2, 13-18**

**Opening Prayer:** URC Prayer Handbook p57

### **Background to the conflict in Israel Palestine**

I'm not going to go into any detail of the current hostilities, but I thought it would be helpful to know the background to the situation. Via the Joint Public Issues Team of which the URC is a part, the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel have released 5 actions of

solidarity. One of those is 'understanding the context' and they provided a short video produced by the Jewish Voice for Peace that explains the history very well in simple terms. We are going to watch that now:

[https://youtu.be/Y58njT2oXfE?si=H3Jtz0\\_S8i7xsDWX](https://youtu.be/Y58njT2oXfE?si=H3Jtz0_S8i7xsDWX)

### **Listen to Sounds of Israel/Gaza**

#### **Hymn** For the healing of the nations R&S 620

For the healing of the nations,  
Lord, we pray with one accord;  
for a just and equal sharing  
of the things that earth affords.  
To a life of love in action  
help us rise and pledge our word.

All that kills abundant living,  
let it from the earth be banned:  
pride of status, race or schooling,  
dogmas that obscure your plan.  
In our common quest for justice  
may we hallow life's brief span.

Lead your people into freedom,  
from despair your world release,  
that, redeemed from war and hatred,  
all may come and go in peace.  
Show us how, through care and goodness,  
fear will die and hope increase.

You, Creator-God, have written  
your great name on humankind;  
for our growing in your likeness,  
bring the life of Christ to mind;  
that by our response and service  
earth its destiny may find.

Fred Kaan

**Reading: Revelation 21:1-6**

#### **Reflection**

On Monday I read the following devotion from the United Church of Christ in the USA, based on a verse from Isaiah:

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace..." (Isaiah 52:7)

The writer says: I write this shortly after Hamas launched their deadliest assault on Israel and the IDF responded with airstrikes; now thousands are dead on both sides. Over one hundred and fifty Israeli civilians, of all ages, are hostages. At least a thousand Palestinian children are dead. The suffering is unimaginable.

I am an outsider to this conflict, but it seems to me that until shared suffering inspires an understanding of the other's pain and trauma, instead of driving more violence toward each other, peace will seem like a pipe dream.

Thich Nhat Hahn, [Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist] who has stood between two warring factions, said, "To reconcile conflicting parties, we must have the ability to understand the suffering of both sides. If we take sides, it is impossible to do the work of reconciliation. And humans want to take sides. That is why the situation gets worse and worse.

"Are there people who are still available to both sides? They need not do much. They need do only one thing: Go to one side and tell all about the suffering endured by the other side and go to the other side and tell all about the suffering endured by this side. This is our chance for peace." In recent decades, small groups of Israelis and Palestinians found a way to peaceful reconciliation through shared tears. From what I understand, it takes a deep, resolute commitment to listening with compassion and without reacting. Multiplying such experiences might be the surest way to break the cycle of violence and build lasting peace in the region.

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And not only there. Until we all hear the suffering of 'the other,' how can we hope to hear peace proclaimed from the Holy Land to our own backyards?

"The home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples and God himself will be with them; God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more." Let it be so. Amen.

**We Sing** O Lord hear my prayer, O Lord hear my prayer,  
when I call, answer me.  
O Lord hear my prayer, O Lord hear my prayer  
come and listen to me

### **URC Prayer following the outbreak of hostilities in Israel and Palestine**

O Lord, we hear the news and don't know what to say,  
we see those scenes of violence and don't know how to pray;  
we read of people fighting over the Land and know it was ever thus.  
We see the surprise and shock,  
hear the cries for revenge,  
taste the violence begetting more pain and sorrow,  
and touch the bitterness of oppression and loss breeding yet more violence;  
a vicious circle that destroys life and land leading to despair and hopelessness.  
We hear of international outrage and messages of support,  
but know there's more to this complex story of land, justice, faith, security, and history  
than can be encapsulated in easy sound bites.  
We watch, listen, read, and try to pray but there are no words in us.  
Lord, You told us not to kill;  
a commandment venerated and wrestled with by Jews, Christians, and Muslims;  
a hard commandment:  
one we always want some wiggle room with  
yet today we see Your children killing each other.  
Violence as a weapon of oppression,  
purporting to be a weapon of protest,  
seeking to be a bargaining chip  
disfigures our humanity, distorts our perception, and disables our discipleship.  
In these desperate times, Lord, give strength to those who work for peace:  
diplomats and governments calling for restraint,  
the Red Cross offering to visit all who are detained,  
faith leaders proclaiming Your commandments in a world at war  
and peace lovers praying for justice.  
Bind up the broken hearted, give grace to those seeking to end the spiral of violence,  
grant wisdom to those seeking peaceful ways to resolve age old conflicts;  
and give us the prayers, words, and perseverance needed  
to make our discipleship, our efforts for peace and justice count. Amen.

### **More time with display/prayer stations at the back or watch:**

[https://youtu.be/qpaAPaT\\_BoA?si=JOmo0h\\_ccLv7DfA8](https://youtu.be/qpaAPaT_BoA?si=JOmo0h_ccLv7DfA8)

**Symphony for Palestine** is dedicated to Juliano Mer-Khamis, the murdered director of Jenin's Freedom Theatre, as well as to the eleven-year-old boy Ahmed Khatib, shot dead in 2005 by an Israeli soldier, who mistook his water pistol for an armed weapon. His story went around the world, because his parents donated Ahmed's organs to five Israeli children. Inspired by these tragic events, the Iranian composer Kayhan Kalhor combined classical Persian melodies and elements of Arabic folk music with the sound of a European string orchestra.

**We Sing** O Lord hear my prayer

### **Prayers of intercession**

Gracious God, in love You created us, and in love You sustain us, day after day.  
So it is with confidence that we bring our prayers to You, knowing that You hear us, and will respond.

We pray for the world around us,  
for the many who continue to suffer and call out for help:  
    for those without enough to eat;  
    for those caught up in violence and political uprisings;  
    for those picking up the pieces after a natural disaster;  
    for those desperate to find work to support their families.  
Gracious God, hear our prayer, **and in Your love, answer.**

We also pray for family and friends who are suffering:  
    those struggling physically or emotionally,  
    those working to overcome mental illness;  
    those facing challenges at home or at work;  
    those grieving the death of a loved one.  
Gracious God, hear our prayer, **and in Your love, answer.**

God, You have called us to pray for our enemies;  
to bless, rather than curse those who seek to harm us.  
You call us to not choose sides, to not seek revenge  
We pray especially today for the people of Israel and Palestine,  
for all those living under siege and bombardment in Gaza,  
for those taken hostage and their families,  
for all the families and friends of those who have died needlessly  
In the increasing cycle of violence.  
We pray also, for all the places that stand forgotten while the media focuses on the Middle East –  
for Ukraine, Yemen, Sudan, those suffering due to earthquakes and floods.  
Open our hearts so that we may see all people as You see them,  
and be able to respond to them with Your love.  
Gracious God, hear our prayer, **and in Your love, answer.**

We pray for Your church around the world,  
that it would be a living demonstration of Your coming kingdom:  
    offering hospitality to all,  
    ready to help in times of need,  
    showing love to friends and enemies alike,  
    seeking to live in peace with all.  
Gracious God, hear our prayer, **and in Your love, answer.**

God, we praise You for Your faithful love, and for the mercy You have shown toward us.  
Open our eyes to recognise Your presence in our lives.  
Give us grace to hear Your call, and courage to follow without hesitation,  
knowing that Your way is the only way that leads to life.  
We pray in the name of Jesus, who taught us when we pray to say:

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Hymn** God of freedom, God of justice R&S 625

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God of freedom God of justice  
God whose love is strong as death  
God who saw the dark of prison  
God who knew the price of faith  
touch our world of sad oppression  
with your Spirit's healing breath.

Rid the earth of torture's terror  
God whose hands were nailed to wood  
hear the cries of pain and protest  
God who shed the tears and blood  
move in us the power of pity  
restless for the common good

Make in us a captive conscience  
quick to hear, to act, to plead  
make us truly sisters, brothers  
of whatever race or creed  
teach us to be fully human  
open to each other's needs

Shirley Erena Murray

**Blessing**

May the blessing of God,  
the eternal goodwill of God  
the shalom of God,  
the wildness and the warmth of God  
be among us and between us  
now and always. Amen

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