

[Prayer Ventures for December 2018]

1 *World AIDS Day* Today we remember and pray for people who have died from AIDS-related illnesses and people who are living with HIV; we give thanks for the progress made in prevention, treatment and care, and ask for an awareness of what still needs to be done; and we ask God to help our church continue in its work with partners and organizations around the world to eradicate AIDS and support people who live with HIV.

2 *First Sunday of Advent* Give thanks and praise for God's promises fulfilled in the gift of Jesus Christ, a gift for all humanity that changed everything and continues to stir faith, newness of spirit, peace, compassion and justice in the world.

3 Pray for the recovery and well-being of those affected by recent hurricanes, flooding, wildfires and other natural disasters, especially for families, people living in poverty, older adults and communities with scarce resources.

4 Ask for help in knowing and following God's ways and paths – paths that are mercy, love and faithfulness.

5 Give thanks for the generous support of ELCA members and congregations in response to *The Campaign for the ELCA* and its priorities: congregations, leadership, hunger and poverty, and the global church. Pray our commitments and generosity continue for supporting and investing in the future of this church, deepening our relationships, and expanding existing and new ministries that serve our neighbors and communities here and around the world.

6 Give thanks for Lutheran Services in America, an alliance of the ELCA and over 300 health and human services organizations serving the complex, diverse needs of more than 6 million people each year in the United States and the Caribbean.

7 Lighting and reflecting on the glow of candles in Advent wreaths is an enduring tradition for many people around the world that marks our remembrance of Jesus' birth and the gift of eternal life. Give thanks to God for sending the true light and hope of Christ into the world and into our lives.

8 Thank God for the joy, encouragement and strength of faith we receive from one another gathered in our congregations – communities of faith that send us into the world equipped to care for our neighbor and to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

9 Praise God for the good news of Jesus Christ, our savior who comes to us in the wilderness and darkness of the world to bring light, truth and salvation for all.

10 Over 68 million people around the world have been displaced from their homes by war, violence, disasters and persecution. Pray for the safety, care and well-being of people who have fled or been forced from their homes and countries, that they have resources to meet their daily needs and find welcoming, supportive communities and congregations to help them find stability and pursue their hopes and dreams.

11 Remember in prayer ELCA missionaries accompanying our companions in Estonia, Denmark, Norway, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland; pray the Holy Spirit will inspire and sustain their faith and work of sharing the gospel, growing the church and serving our neighbor.

12 In this season of buying and sharing gifts, pray God will help us rethink – for the sake of the world – our traditions, habits and generosity through the influence, opportunities and far-reaching impacts of ELCA World Hunger and ELCA Good Gifts.

13 Pray for neighboring congregations and ministries, pastors, synod staff, ecumenical partners and leaders who work together with us to share the gospel, serve our neighbors and communities and grow the church.

14 Ask God to help us shape and renew our congregations to be life-giving and imaginative places for people of all ages, abilities, backgrounds and circumstances to gather around God’s word and the sacraments, practice hospitality, build relationships and care for the needs of our neighbor – friend or stranger, member or not.

15 Pray for the new Lutheran Men in Mission Disaster Relief Effort, which organizes men to share their skills, experiences and resources to work alongside Lutheran Disaster Response, Lutheran social services, local agencies, communities, individuals and families to repair and rebuild homes damaged by natural disasters.

16 Pray the Holy Spirit will strengthen and embolden us to invite others to have faith in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and to be compelling witnesses to God’s ways, truth, justice and mercy in the world.

17 Remember during the holidays people who are in prisons, jails, correctional facilities and detention centers; pray we are active in connecting them with caring communities of faith, their families and children, and resources for rebuilding their hope and lives; pray our compassion is stirred by the Spirit that we freely share with those who are imprisoned the good news of forgiveness, hope and new life we have in Jesus Christ – the gift of God’s love for all people.

18 Ask that the Holy Spirit guide us in being attentive and supportive of pastors, leaders and church staff during Advent and Christmas, that their faith will be strengthened, their needs cared for, and that they will find time to reflect on the light and joy of Jesus Christ in their own lives.

19 Pray for the safety and protection of all who are traveling during the holidays.

20 Remember in prayer first responders, firefighters, doctors and nurses, military, law enforcement and care providers working the holidays for our safety and well-being; pray for people who serve the public in retail stores, restaurants, and the hospitality and travel industries; and pray they all find opportunities for renewal and time with the family, friends and communities that enrich their lives and faith.

21 During the past year, the ELCA and the Episcopal Church have been committed to prayer, fasting and advocacy addressing cuts to public programs that are vital to hungry people who are living in poverty. Remember to continue praying for these concerns, our leaders and people in need.

22 Pray that during our congregational activities, worship, gift sharing and community meals we remember to reach out and involve individuals and families confined to home or care facilities, without family or friends, homeless or forgotten.

23 God's presence and the ways in which the Holy Spirit works in our lives can catch us by surprise and unprepared just as it did pregnant Elizabeth and Mary. Ask God to open our hearts, minds and senses to the amazing, subtle and life-changing things that God is accomplishing in the world, often through us.

24 *Christmas Eve* Pray we are childlike in our faith and excitement for the birth of Christ – a gift of light that no darkness can overcome, a gift for us that is full of life, grace and truth.

25 *Christmas Day* Glory to God in the highest! Give thanks and praise to God for the birth of Jesus Christ, the son of God, who lived among us full of grace and truth, that God's love for humankind might be clear, tangible and revealed in ways that speak to our human needs and senses – then and now.

26 Pray we exercise daily unbiased generosity with all the gifts, resources and abilities God has entrusted to our care and use.

27 Talk to students who are on break, recognize their presence and affirm the gifts they share with the body of Christ; pray they are renewed during their break and J-term experiences, and assure them they are not forgotten and are remembered in our personal prayers as well as those of the congregation.

28 Just as Mary and Elizabeth gave testimony to what God was doing in their lives for the sake of the world, pray that we, too, are articulate about what we trust God is doing in our lives and the world – during the ups, downs and times that puzzle us.

29 Ask that the Holy Spirit guide and inspire our church as it reflects on and makes plans for the present and future, seeking to be ever faithful, centered in the gospel, wise and nimble in doing God's work in the world as it shifts and changes.

30 We gather in congregations to worship God, learn, grow in faith and care for and equip one another for living as followers of Christ in the world. Pray we each contribute to the vitality of our faith community, strive for unity, and help each other move beyond the walls of our buildings and into our communities and world with a fervor to serve our neighbor and share the gospel.

31 A new year is at hand! Pray we are not swept into it with anger, vindictiveness, division, apathy or fear, but rather with hearts open to the word of Christ dwelling in us and lives that

shine brightly with compassion, kindness, humility, forgiveness, patience and an eagerness to work together for unity.