

[Prayer Ventures for February 2019]

1 *Black History Month* Give thanks for our sisters and brothers of African descent, who have both suffered much and contributed much to our nation and the ongoing work of building a multicultural church and restoring and reconciling communities in the name of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

2 Give thanks for children and youth in our lives and congregations, for the gifts they bring to the body of Christ and for the leaders, teachers and members who nurture and encourage them.

3 The good news of Jesus Christ, God's love and the promise of eternal life bring us joy, but we sometimes find ourselves troubled and irritated by God's desire for us to exercise justice and peace and immerse ourselves in serving our neighbors in need – without hesitation or prejudice. Pray the Holy Spirit will work in our hearts to change our attitudes, bias and self-centeredness, setting us free to be willing, committed disciples and servants in the world.

4 Remember in prayer regions of the world embroiled in conflict and turmoil, that leaders of nations and people involved and impacted will work together for peaceful, just and lasting resolution and reconciliation; pray especially for the safety and well-being of people who have and continue to suffer loss, disrupted lives and displacement from their homes, communities or nations as a result of violence, persecution or economic collapse in these areas.

5 Remember in prayer ELCA missionaries serving in collaboration with the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church, especially in ministries of evangelism and education. Give thanks and pray for the 18 international leaders who have received ELCA educational scholarships to further develop their skills for service in the church in Japan.

6 What is love? Where is it scarce or misguided in our relationships and how we live out our faith? Ask God to deepen and mature our understanding of love and center us in the love we, as baptized children of God, are called to share generously with others.

7 Thank God for the special relationship we have with the Episcopal Church, a full communion partner with the ELCA since 1999; pray for the church, its members and leaders, and that together we find strength and new resources for the work of sharing the gospel and serving our neighbor.

8 The Lord is our refuge, rock, protection, hope and trust throughout life. Give thanks and praise!

9 Give thanks for the work and impact of ELCA World Hunger. Pray we all seek ways of being working, generous partners in breaking the cycle of hunger and poverty, providing immediate and long-term assistance, and bringing hope to individuals, communities and regions of the world that suffer from hunger and poverty.

10 Consider what stirred you to follow Jesus and grow in faith. Pray for the Holy Spirit to fill you with courage and confidence to invite others to believe and follow.

11 Pray for our seven ELCA seminaries, that their faculty and staff are strengthened, inspired and sustained in their work of preparing men and women for public ministry in a multitude of contexts and communities here and around the world.

12 Give thanks for entrepreneurs of all ages in our congregations, and pray we value their energy, ideas, skills, curiosity and creative perspectives as assets that can be used for ministry and serving our neighbor.

13 Called by God to serve as a prophet, Isaiah felt ill-equipped, reluctant and that he was a poor choice for the task – until God’s spirit moved him to reply, “Here I am; send me!” Pray we are open to the work God is calling us to do in our congregations, communities and the world, and, in spite of our hesitations and insecurities, are able to trust God’s forgiveness and empowering love by responding, “Here I am; send me!”

14 ELCA gifts and offerings support leadership development, education and collaboration in China. We partner with the local church and organizations to respond to health, hunger and leadership development needs; 10 international leaders have received scholarships to further develop their skills for service in the church in China. Give thanks to God for what we are able to accomplish through working together.

15 Give thanks for the good news of Jesus Christ that we have received through faith, and pray we eagerly and unashamedly work to proclaim the gospel in the world with all who will listen – with friends and strangers alike.

16 Continue to pray for and support parents, families, friends and communities that have suffered the tragic loss of loved ones as a result of gun violence. Pray we are filled with empathy and care for the long and difficult healing they may go through, and that the Holy Spirit will help us be bold, wise agents and advocates of change to prevent and end the violence across our nation.

17 Jesus compels us to serve our neighbor and be a blessing to others – friends, strangers, enemies, outcasts, hungry and poor alike. Thank God for inviting us to join in God’s work in the world and ask for the Holy Spirit’s guidance and help with the service and challenges to which we have been called.

18 *Martin Luther, died 1546* Give thanks for the life, faith and teachings of Martin Luther, who worked with tenacity and courage to serve Christ while also confessing his personal struggles, questions and human weaknesses; pray we, too, are faithful in our baptismal journeys and not easily discouraged by the complexities of life, risks and our self-doubts.

19 Lift up thanks and praise for our life with God, a life filled with promise, hope and blessings that nourish us each and every day; a life and relationship that God desires for all people.

20 Pray members and leaders of our congregations are bold yet humble servants of Christ who embrace ongoing self-reflection, study of Scripture, evaluation, prayerful conversation and creative planning for the purpose of doing God’s work in the world and growing the church.

21 Pray we find joy, wisdom and nourishment in following the word and paths of God in the midst of everything else competing for attention and influence in our lives.

22 Praise God for revealing to the world the risen Christ who is not bound by the consequences of human sin and death, but instead gifts us – through faith – with the truth and certainty of God’s love, forgiveness and eternal life.

23 Give thanks for the energetic participation in “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday each fall and for the resulting partnerships and community service that stretch throughout the year.

24 Ask God to help us listen to and wrap our lives around the straightforward teachings of Jesus that implore us to be merciful, generous, love our enemies, do good to those who hate us and not judge others – attitudes and actions that may not come easily to us.

25 Give thanks for the Deaconess Community, a Christ-centered community of women who devote their lives to proclaiming the gospel through ministries of mercy and servant leadership in diverse community and ministry contexts.

26 Remember God’s love and forgiveness, and pray we are moved to demonstrate the same grace and forgiveness – as Joseph did with his brothers who sold him into slavery – with people with whom we have experienced offense, conflict or broken relationships.

27 Give thanks for the Research and Evaluation services of our church, which assist congregations and synods in exploring their communities, demographics and trends, ministry opportunities and challenges, and provide resources and insights for planning and renewing ministries.

28 What have you been worrying about lately? Share your concerns with God; trust in the Lord, be still, don’t fret and go about doing good in the world.