

**WORLD AIDS DAY: LET COMMUNITIES LEAD!  
Morning Prayer in the context of  
'16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence'  
Friday, 01 December 2023**

*With the Ecumenical Prayer Cycle, we pray today for the people and churches in Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore*

**Introduction:**

*According to the latest UNAIDS report on HIV, 39 million people globally were living with HIV in 2022, 1.3 million people have newly acquired HIV and 630,000 people died from AIDS-related illnesses. 29.8 million people were accessing antiretroviral therapy in 2022, but one in 4 persons living with HIV is yet to get treated.*

*While globally, 46% of all new HIV infections were among women and girls, in sub-Saharan Africa, adolescent girls and young women accounted for more than 77% of new infections among young people aged 15-24 years and were more than three times as likely to acquire HIV than their male peers. Communities who are vulnerable have a much higher chance of acquiring.*

*This World AIDS Day we are reminded that the world can end AIDS, with communities leading the way. Organisations of communities living with, at risk of, or affected by HIV are the frontline of progress in the HIV response. It is a call to action to enable and support communities in their leadership roles.*

**Opening Prayer**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
**the gift available to everyone without exception,**  
the love of God,  
**whom claims each person equally as a child in the image of the divine,**  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,  
**through whom we breathe in life, and connect to all others breathing,**  
is with us as we gather  
**honouring the compassion of the Blessed Trinity, one God, now and forever. Amen**

**Hymn/Song**

**Prayer**

God of the forsaken and forgotten, who seeks out the lost, and gathers the fearful into welcoming arms, remove from us the pride that refuses to see others as our equals.  
**Take away the distinctions by which we claim some are worthy and others can be ignored. Defeat the selfishness that demands we, and those like us, get better choices, while others are left behind.**

Give us new eyes for seeing the injustice you see, new ears for hearing the cries arising for help, new energy for doing your will, so that no one living with HIV remains forsaken, and no one, regardless of their origin or status, stays forgotten by those who have what they need.

**God of life; You have given us the tools to end HIV. Fill us with the energy to find the means to use them, So that this disease, which has killed and hurt for over forty years, might finally end.**

The crosses once adorned with red ribbons, might no longer mark the dread of this disease. But be released to proclaim unencumbered the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, through whom we are set free, now and to eternity.

**Amen.**

**Scripture reading: John 4: 3-30, 39-42**

### **Jesus and the Woman of Samaria**

... he left Judea and started back to Galilee. **4** But he had to go through Samaria. **5** So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. **6** Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. **7** A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. **8** (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) **9** The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) **10** Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' **11** The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?' **12** Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' **13** Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, **14** but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' **15** The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.' **16** Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' **17** The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; **18** for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' **19** The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. **20** Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' **21** Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. **22** You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. **23** But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. **24** God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' **25** The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' **26** Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.' **27** Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' **28** Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, **29** 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' **30** They left the city and were on their way to him.

**39** Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' **40** So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. **41** And many more believed because of his

word. 42 They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.'

*Word of God, word of life.*

**Thanks be to God.**

**Reflection: LET COMMUNITIES LEAD!**

Those affected by HIV and communities who are most vulnerable to acquiring the infection are in the best position to provide leadership and show the way to overcome the HIV pandemic.

In many ways, the Samaritan Woman was a marginalised person. She was a member of the Samaritan community, which Jewish communities at that time considered inferior and discriminated against. She lived in a context when women were considered inferior to men. She was even marginalised in her own community, forcing her to come to draw water alone from the Jacob's well, when few people collected water.

Before we make moral judgements, it is important to realize that in first century Palestine, a woman could not initiate divorce except under extremely rare circumstances. Therefore, the Samaritan woman's five former husbands must have either divorced her or died. This would have spelt disaster for her since women relied on the patriarchal household to survive. We should also remember that Roman marriage laws stipulated only the freeborn could marry, and then only to another freeborn person. This excluded from legal marriage the millions of freed persons (former slaves) who populated the empire. Living as a concubine could have been the Samaritan woman's only option if she and her "husband" were both freed persons, or if one was freeborn and the other freed. While we will probably never know the exact historical circumstances underpinning the Samaritan woman's domestic situation, it is clear that Jesus paid no attention whatsoever to social mores that diminished women. Jesus acknowledges her agency and respects her as a person. Jesus inspires her and she is convinced that true worshippers, whom God seeks, worship God in spirit and truth, and not limited to any particular location, be it Mount Gerizim or Jerusalem, which depended on the religious identity of the person. (V20-23).

As soon as she is convinced of Jesus's message, she leaves her vessel of water, and rushes to her community, to share the good news with them who excluded her. She was quick to spread the news of her meeting with Jesus, and through this many came to believe in him. Jesus stayed on for two more days in the village, to preach and to teach. The marginalised Samaritan woman is an inspired missionary leader.

In Eastern Orthodox, Catholic and Anglican traditions, she is venerated as *Saint Photine*, meaning 'luminous one'. Her continuing witness brought so many to the Christian faith that she is described as "equal to the apostles". Eventually, having drawn the attention of Emperor Nero, she was brought before him to answer for her faith, suffered many tortures and died a martyr.

- Those who have been pushed to the margins of society and are most vulnerable live through challenges daily. Their lived experience of facing these realities makes them the best persons to provide solutions to prevent more vulnerability.
- Members of affected communities are trusted by those in a similar situation. Hence, they are in the best position to reach out to other members to ensure that the most needy have access to prevention, care and treatment.
- It is only members of affected communities who have the credibility to represent and speak for and advocate on behalf of the sections of the populations that HIV most burdens. The Denver Principles manifesto, written in June 1983, launched the self-empowerment

movement for people living with HIV, asserting that those who have HIV have a fundamental and inalienable right to participate in decision-making that significantly impacts their lives and survival. 'Nothing about us without us'!

In our congregations and our faith communities, what role do we give communities who are affected and are vulnerable to acquire HIV? Is their role in overcoming HIV acknowledged, affirmed and supported? What role are our religious leaders taking in responding to HIV stigma? How are we consistently addressing the inequalities that drive the epidemic? Are we striving to increasing access to services for all, especially those who are most vulnerable, unconditionally? Let these questions continue to challenge us and may God help to transform us.

### **Hymn/Song**

### **Prayers of Intercession**

O Lord, gender inequalities and unequal power dynamics between men and women and harmful gender norms are making women and girls vulnerable to HIV. It is depriving them of the voice and the ability to make decisions regarding their lives, and reducing their ability to access services, including for HIV. Help us to be contrite and humble and transform harmful gender and masculinity norms among men and boys to help reduce vulnerabilities to HIV among women and adolescent girls. Help us strive for justice and righteousness so that the love of God is experienced unhindered by every woman and girl child.

Lord in your mercy,

**Hear our prayers**

O Lord, communities who are most vulnerable to being affected by HIV, continue to carry the greatest burden of the disease. Discrimination against, stigmatization and criminalization of key populations are costing lives and preventing the world from achieving agreed AIDS targets. Help us to accompany, protectors and companions of those facing continued discrimination. Help us to ensure that those affected by HIV and communities who are most vulnerable to acquiring the infection are equipped to provide leadership and show the way to overcome the HIV pandemic.

Lord in your mercy,

**Hear our prayers**

With those locked in poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and violence who each day feel their dignity undermined, with those exposed to abusive partners, or enslaved in sex work, with those struggling to affirm their sexuality as they sort through the conflicting counsels of culture, church, school, and sometimes even the community they are trying to join, we cry out,

Lord in your mercy,

**Hear our prayers**

We pray for our world, your whole creation, to be renewed and transformed.

Stand by your children! Especially we pray today for the churches and people in Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore.

Lord in your mercy,

**Hear our prayers**

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving and Commitment**

For all the progress,

**We thank you, God of life.**

Because of the testing that allows people living with HIV to get treatment,  
because of the prevention and treatment defeating HIV,  
bringing down its level to the point that it is now longer transmitted,  
because people living with HIV can live healthy and full lives,

**We rejoice, gracious God, that you set us free from fear.**

For the doctors, nurses and health workers taking care,  
the policymakers and implementers figuring out how to get resources where it is most needed,  
for Community leaders who lead by example challenging inequity and injustice,  
for teachers with open hearts and minds that allow for honest exploration  
and at the same time point to patterns that protect and give worth,

**We celebrate, loving God, those doing good work.**

God of the forgotten, God of the forsaken,  
encourage our voices to cry out, so that no one is left out.  
Teach us to live simply, so that others can simply live  
following the example of your Beloved, Jesus Christ.  
To strive and to make our resources life-giving for others,  
so your love becomes real to those who feel forsaken, forgotten,  
and no one is left with crumbs, but all are healed, and HIV becomes no more.

### **The Lord's Prayer (in our own languages)**

#### **Benediction**

**May the blessings of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit –  
in the mystery of the Holy Trinity – Make us whole in every way now and for evermore.  
Amen.**