



PRESBYTERIANS AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE NETWORK

A Network of the Presbyterian Health, Education & Welfare Association (PHEWA)

Hope and Restoration

Worship Resources

“What language shall I borrow to thank Thee, dearest Friend?”¹ These worship resources for this year’s Domestic Violence Awareness month have been developed with the long-standing concern and attention to language of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). In the PC(USA) *Definitions and Guidelines on Inclusive Language*, it states that “our language about God should be as intentionally diverse and varied as is that of the Bible and our theological tradition. This diversity should be reflected in the language and life of the church.”² While recognizing that using feminine pronouns for God raises theological issues for some and still can be a matter of debate within churches, perhaps this month’s worship resources will provide an opportunity to encourage expanding sensitivity and balance in way that has not been considered.

The main concern of these worship resources is pastoral. In a month focused on domestic violence, in which the majority of violence is against women and at the hands of men, many women find it impossible to draw close to God when only imaged as a father and male. Likewise, there are others whose relationships with mothers and women make it difficult to speak of God in the feminine. Therefore, both images are important to offer an opportunity to let God be God – a mystery of Love – ultimately beyond all language and comprehension. We encourage you to use these resources to broaden your expressions of God and to perhaps, in fresh new ways, continue to bring much-needed healing and wholeness for humanity and all creation through intentionality to words. Hopefully, feminine language and pronouns will add to, not subtract from, the worship experience. By tending to our language, we open ourselves more fully to God’s transforming grace and are empowered to participate more fully in God’s will for hope and restoration....“on earth as it is in heaven.”

Grace and Peace,

Dr. Deborah Blades

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¹ *O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*, Presbyterian Hymnal.

² PCUSA Inclusive Language PDF Resource, Well Spoken Words, available at www.pcusa.org/language-gender

The following Psalms are designed to be imagined as prayers of particular women who might have encountered very contemporary situations. By providing feminine language and using them as prayers of lament, hope, and pleas for God's restoration, it opens new ways of drawing meaning and insight into particular struggles and sorrows victims and survivors experience. Hopefully, this fresh voice to the Psalms will be used to inspire and enrich the worship experience for the whole body of Christ.

Call to Worship (Adapted from Psalm 99)³

Leader: God reigns! Let the people who ignore God tremble.

People: Let all people praise God's great and glorious name

Leader: God is a strong judge and a passionate lover of justice

People: Let all people praise God's great and glorious name

Leader: God alone is Holy

People: Let all people worship in God's Holy presence.

Psalm 11⁴

(This might be the prayer of an abused woman against her inner enemies – despair, fear, a sense of worthlessness.)

How can you say to my soul, “Fly away, like a bird, to the mountains”?

There is no easy escape from the inner attacks of darkness.

The arrows of fear pierce my heart.

The foundation of my self-esteem is destroyed.

How can I be upright, or do what I need to do? Yet God is within my body, which is Her holy temple.

She also dwells in the heavens and sees us, tests us all.

Though She lets those with integrity endure many trials,

Her soul hates those who love violence.

³ Rienstra, Marchiene Vroon. *Swallow's Nest: A Feminine Reading of the Psalms*. (Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1992.)

⁴ *Ibid.* 28.



She will send fire and brimstone and a scorching wind
To destroy the despair that attacks me.
For God is loving and just, and always does what is right.
Those who act with integrity shall surely behold Her face.

Psalm 6⁵

(This might be the prayer of a woman who was raped.)

Have mercy on me, O God, for I am very weak.
Heal me, El Shaddai, for my bones ache with anguish
and my soul is filled with turmoil.

O God, when will You deliver me from my despair?
For mercy's sake, come soon to me and save me!
If I die, how can I gratefully remember You?
If I stay in this dreadful pit, how can I praise You?

I am sick with sighing, and every night I soak my sheets with tears.
My face is wet with weeping, and my eyes are hollow with grief.
The attack on me has made me grow old.

Depart from me, all you who would do me evil!
For God has heard the sound of my sorrow.
She has heard my pleas, and accepts me as I am.
All who have hurt me shall know shame and trouble.
Dishonor will fall on their heads.



Psalm 84: 1–7, 10–12⁶

(This might be the prayer of women in ministry.)

How lovely are all the places of Your dwelling, El Shaddai!

My soul faints with longing for the beauty of Your presence.

My whole being shouts for joy to You, O living God!

Even the sparrow finds a home in Your presence,

and the swallow finds a place to build a nest for herself,

where she may also lay her young – on Your very altars, El Shaddai!

And blessed are all the women who find their strength in You,

Whose hearts are Your houses of worship.

As they go through the valley of weeping,

they turn it into a place of wellsprings.

Blessings shower on them like the spring rain.

Because they are able to see Your Holiness everywhere,

they go onward from strength to strength.

A day in Your presence, O God, is better than a thousand far from You.

I would rather serve You in small and humble ways

than live in luxury and power among the wicked.

You are a God of grace and glory, shielding and enlightening us.

You withhold nothing good from those who act justly.

El Shaddai, blessed is the woman who relies completely on You!

⁶ Ibid. 9.



Prayer of the Faithful (Byzantine liturgy)⁷

O God, holy and incomprehensible, You bid light to shine out of darkness.

You have raised us up to glorify You and petition Your goodness.

Receive us who now worship You and render You what thanks we can. Grant all our requests that will advance our salvation.

Make us children of light and heirs of Your eternal good things.

O God, in your great mercy, be mindful of all here present praying with us, as well as all our sisters and brothers in need of Your love and help – and grant them Your great mercy.

Thus, saved in soul and body, we may use the free speech of friends to glory forever in Your wondrous and blessed Name.

Benediction

1. May the God of mercy, who is well acquainted with grief, bless us with gentle comfort and healing for our sorrows. Amen.⁸
2. May the God whose will is our portion and delight bless us with the wisdom to walk and rest in that will, day and night. Amen⁹
3. May the blessing of God who has saved us from death and given us new life remain with us through the week to come and throughout our lives. Amen¹⁰

Confession

Compassionate and Gracious God, forgive what our lips tremble to name. Free us from a past we cannot change. Break the chains that bind us. We admit that though You have called us to love others as ourselves, we often ignore cries for help, sit in judgment of others, and wait for someone else to do justice. Be merciful to us, O God; open our ears to your Holy Spirit, stir us to action, and awaken us from complacency. Help us to reflect the Spirit of Jesus, who brought hope to the anguished and restoration to all he touched. Amen

⁷ 181.

⁸ 209.

⁹ 76.

¹⁰ 176.



Prayers of the People

Amazing and Gracious God, you created this earth and all that draws breath from the abundance of your Love. You revealed the mystery of your unconditional Love through our brother, Jesus Christ, in whom we have the assurance that nothing past, present or yet to come can separate us from your love. You have given us the precious gift of prayer, by which you work in, through, and among us, to bring healing to a broken and hurting world. In gratitude and desperate to know you more fully, with confidence that you hear us, accept our prayers. We pray for...

the thousands of women who are victims and survivors of domestic violence, bowed down by the shame and pain of abuse. For the thousands of women who are trafficked, exploited, rejected because of what has been done to them and for what they must do to survive, those whom Jesus welcomed and dined with. Oh God of Hope, lift each head and heart, Restore them.

Hold in Your loving care, all who have died at the hands of others. Comfort those who mourn them with the knowledge that you will bring justice and healing to all who have been wronged. Oh God of Hope, we wait for Restoration.

We pray for Your Church throughout the world. Break down the barriers that disrupt and threaten to divide it. Grant us courage to proclaim your healing Gospel to a broken world. May we sit together at one table, united in Jesus Christ. Oh God of Hope, we pray for Restoration.

We pray for leaders of all nations. May Your Spirit move them to strive for peace and justice, to abandon greed and vain ambitions that create misery for your children. May every country be a promised land for its people. Oh God of Hope, we pray for Restoration.

We pray for an end to this world's warring madness. Protect and sustain soldiers who serve and protect, women/men/children who seek shelter in the midst of battle, those who cannot return home, refugees unwanted or crowded into camps. God of Hope, we long for Restoration.

We pray for those most at risk in our world, our country, our communities. For children who are robbed of their innocence, unloved, abused, or exploited. For people with differing abilities, for the aged, many alone, forgotten, talents and gifts unused or unwanted; for men and women infected and affected by HIV and AIDS, often shunned out of ignorance and fear; for women vilified for reproductive decisions, many denied the right to choose. Help us to see the imprint of your image on ALL people; worthy, not by our own artificial standards, but worthy because you have breathed life into them. Oh God of Hope, we ache for Restoration.

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We pray for those who live behind bars, incarcerated men and women forgotten and dehumanized. For those living behind prison walls we no longer see: Men and women shackled to grinding poverty who lack the basic necessities we take for granted, those who are homeless, jobless, those struggling with addiction or mental illness. Redeemer of All, set the captives free. Help us to turn empty religious ritual into Christ's transforming and healing power. Oh God of Hope, may we do our part in bringing Restoration.

We pray for courageous women and men who speak to the world of so much pain, who refuse to make peace with or give in to despair or cynicism, who reach out and meet the world's deep need, who continue to dream, envision, and struggle for a more just world. God of Hope, we pray for Restoration.

We pray for our nation. May we truly be a nation of liberty and justice for all. Regardless of party, ethnicity, color, gender, sexual orientation, or creed, may we stand united in the diversity in which we were formed, remembering that a house divided cannot stand. Oh God of Hope, we long for Restoration.

For all Your beloved who suffer with illness, sickness, or pain; return them to wholeness and remember all who care for them. We especially lift up the men and women in our church family and in our own families. May your Healing Spirit comfort and strengthen each one. Oh God of hope, we pray for Restoration.

Divine Breath of Life, You gave us this earth to be our home. Bring an end to selfish desires that ravage its air, land and water. Help us see all creation as an anthem of praise to your glorious name. Oh God of Hope, we long for Restoration.

Redeemer of All, may we be people who know your love so abundantly we burst with passion to love and serve others. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, with Jesus as our example, help us to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you, O God, our hope and our salvation.

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Resources Used

Rienstra, Marchiene Vroon. *Swallow's Nest: A Feminine Reading of the Psalms*. (Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1992).

Schmitt, Mary Kathleen Schmitt. *Seasons of the Feminine Divine, Cycle A*. (Crossroads, New York, 1995).

Women's Uncommon Prayers: Our Lives Revealed, Nurtured, Celebrated. (Moorehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, Penn, 2000).

Theological Vision Statement: Presbyterian Hymnal Project. A Statement on Language

<http://www.presbyterianhymnal.org/PCOCS%20statements%20HO.pdf>

Well Chosen Words, a guide to understanding and using inclusive language, developed by the Racial Ethnic and Women's Ministries/Presbyterian Women ministry area in consultation with the Advocacy Committee on Women's Concerns, Presbyterian Mission Agency, PC(USA)

<http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/pw/pdfs/wellchosenwords.pdf>