

## Liturgical Material for International Women's Day

# Our Daily Bread

8 March 2010

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This liturgy is offered as an invitation to churches to celebrate International Women's Day. It can be adapted to the respective contexts.

The United Nations theme for the March 2010 International Women's Day (IWD) is: Equal rights, equal opportunities: Progress for all.

Justice is the criteria for equality. How does this theme challenge us theologically? Today, women do not have equality of rights or opportunities because of the injustice in the world. How do we ensure equality for women in their daily lives so that we can create a just society?

Women are hungry for both bread and justice. The IWD provides an opportunity to celebrate and share good practices. Women's resistance is a sign of hope against the violation of their bodies, the destruction of nature, climate change, poverty, the lack of access to land, seeds and food. Sharing experiences of both pain and empowerment is crucial in overcoming adversity and moving toward gender justice. This is a moment for sharing healing and nurturing experiences in women's daily lives.

[The worship place is adorned with colorful cloths, candles, flowers and fruits. For the symbolic act of sharing empty pots, mugs, cups or bowls, participants are invited to bring a typical one from the respective regions. Different models and sizes can be provided beforehand, with each individual choosing one to share with someone else.]



## Call to Worship

We are gathered in the name of the  
Nurturing God.  
We are called to share our gifts of life, and  
the symbols  
from our different contexts and diverse  
expressions of spirituality.  
**God, our Sustainer, feed our bodies  
with strength and hope.**

These symbols serve to remind us of the presence of our relational God, who takes care of creation.

Let us now reflect on these symbols, as we bring forward various experiences, instruments and tools used by women. These women care for our people, nurture our children and preserve life in our communities, creating healing, hope and wellness, even in the midst of despair.

**God of Wisdom, we thank you for the  
breath of life in us.**

*Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will never forget you. See I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands, your walls are continuously before me. Isaiah 49: 15-16*

**God of Healing, embrace and reconcile us to strengthen our communion in your presence.**

**Prayer:** Let us pray acknowledging the nurturing God through nursing mothers:

We thank you, creating and nurturing God, for sharing the secrets of creating and nurturing with nursing women. As an expectant mother co-exists with her unborn

child, You carry and commune with them in ways that only **You** can. You assure the mother of the certainty of life within her, and the baby of the mystery of life and love.

We want to thank you also for your provision to nursing mothers. We particularly thank you for providing *gaat* (porridge), prepared from barley flour.

**Prayer to acknowledge the nurturing God through nursing mothers:** We are grateful for the action of nurturing when women can take; ½ kg barley flour, ½ liter water per 100 g flour, and butter or margarine, pepper, salt, and yoghurt, to make a meal for three people.

For 10 minutes, they put the water in a pan and add a little salt. They add the barley flour gradually to the cold water and stir it energetically to avoid lumps. Stirring all the while, they leave the mixture to cook over medium heat until it becomes solid. They remove it from the stove and put it in a deep plate. Using a spoon, they make a big hole in the middle of the *gaat* to fill with warm butter (or margarine) pepper, and salt. They mix them together well and put some of the yogurt around the *gaat* and eat it while it is still hot.

As they do all this, they thank you, God, for sharing such birthing secrets with women.

And thank you also for creating barley and other produce that come from your bounty.

Yet, here we are, often so busy creating theologies and embracing spirituality that tends to overemphasize God's power as if it were devoid of love and vulnerability.

(*Gaat* recipe, see LWF cookbook – *Food for Life: Recipes and Stories on the Right to Food*, p.64)

**Response:** Kyrie Eleison (Ukraine tune).

## Call to Repentance

We acknowledge our inability to embrace the nurturing face of God, and we repent. Our daily actions allow the dominant and powerful to flourish, even as God cares for and nourishes the needy. This practice of upholding the powerful over the vulnerable often leads us to become abusive, violent and destructive, either by acting or by failing to act.

Our pride and incapacity to feel for others makes us too full of ourselves, while at the same time, we are like empty bowls.

**Response:** Kyrie Eleison (Ukraine tune).

We are invited to offer some examples of our emptiness.



## Thanksgiving for God's Forgiving Mercy

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*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.*

*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,*

*The LORD works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.*

*The LORD is merciful and gracious; slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*

*He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever.*

*He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.*

*For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.*

*As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.*

*For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.*

Psalm 103: 1-3, 6, 8-14.

## Assurance of God's Mercy and Healing

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Together we commit ourselves to embrace your loving and nurturing qualities as the standard for our relationship with each other as part of your creation. We will embrace diversity as your divine gift to enrich our perspectives and renewal as we journey together toward transformative and restorative justice. Yet, there are still some whose diversity is used as a justification for their marginalization and exploitation. Therefore, rooted in love, we will allow the Holy Spirit to stir us to restlessness until we seek justice together in all its forms. Go with us, loving, nurturing and just God, we pray.

The healing of our community should include physical healing, as part of our assurance of God's mercy.

Learn from how the Meru people in Kenya use the *njahi* (black beans) for the restoration of health for our brothers and sisters who are HIV positive.

The women take a cup full of *njahi*, two medium size onions, three medium size tomatoes, garlic, and a dash of salt (to taste).

With loving care, the beans are washed and put to boil, until tender. Salt is added. The onions are peeled and garlic is crushed, and both are fried, adding in the tomatoes. The cooked *njahi* is added to simmer, until the stew is thick and appetizing. The beans can be served with steamed brown rice or *ugali* (maize meal cake).

We visualize the face of our God in the actions of these nurturing women.

## Scripture readings

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Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: 2 Kings 4: 1-7    New Testament: Matthew 15. 21-28

## Reflection on the Word

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### Intercession Prayers

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#### The Feast of Life

*By Elsa Tamez, Mexico/Costa Rica*

*(Alternately in two groups)*

**Come on; let us celebrate the supper of the Lord**

Let us make a huge loaf of bread

**And let us bring abundant wine**

Like at the wedding at Cana

**Let the women not forget the salt,**

Let the men bring along the yeast.

**Let many guests come,**

The lame, the blind, the cripples, the poor.

**Come quickly,**

Let us follow the recipe of the Lord

**All of us, let us knead the dough together**

With our hands

**Let us see with joy how the bread grows**

Because today

**We celebrate**

The meeting of the Lord.

*(All)* Today we renew our commitment to the Kingdom. Nobody will stay hungry.

**Symbolic act to:** Strengthen equal and just relationships between women and men, encouraging continuing work in groups and/or communities, in partnership.

We bring our empty bowls, vessels, cups and we share these with someone else, sharing words which will fill ears, hands, arms—the whole body—with good wishes, wisdom, courage and motivation. Speak words of encouragement, vision and hope for justice. This will be a symbolic act for our commitment to work for justice and for the right of all to food and land.

**Leader:** We thank you, God, the Source of never ending love and creativity. Fill us with your love and unite us.

*Those who don't eat alone are never hungry*

*Those who share will receive*  
(Haiti saying in LWF cookbook – *Food for Life: Recipes and Stories on the Right to Food*, p. 32)

**Bakerwoman God**

*By Rev. Dr Alla Bozard Campbell*  
(*The Episcopal Church, USA*)

Bakerwoman God, I am your living bread.

Strong, brown, Bakerwoman God,  
I am your low, soft and being-shaped loaf.

I am your rising bread,  
Well-kneaded by some divine and knotty pair of knuckles,

By your warm earth-hands.

I am bread well-kneaded.

Put me in fire, Bakerwoman God,

Put me in your own bright fire.

I am warm, warm as you.

From fire, I am white and gold,  
Soft and hard, brown and round.

I am so warm from fire

Break me, Bakerwoman God.

I am broken under your caring Word.

Drop me in your special juice in pieces.

Drop me in blood.

Drunken me in the great red flood

Self-giving chalice, swallow me.

My skin shines in the divine wine.

My face is cup-covered and I drown.

I fall up in a red pool in a gold world

Where your warm sunskin hand is there to catch and hold me.

Bakerwoman God, remake me.

## Hymn

The Lord's Prayer, each in his or her own language.

**Leader:** Blessing and Sending

We embrace each other in love, reaching out to each other with our hands; left hand with palm up, in an open hand, which receives from the neighbor, and right hand with palm down, expressing our ability to give to the other. As we hold each other's hands, we connect ourselves in the web of creation; we celebrate diversity, which brings out the beauty of God, enhanced much more through diversity than through uniformity.

Let us sing and dance!

May all of you come!

Arranged in a file

May you come and dance!

Arranged in a file

May you come without feeling shame!

Well dressed, having adjusted your *tarachi*,

Having arranged your ornaments,

May you sing and dance!

Grasping one another by the hands

May you dance!

Grasping one another by the hands

May you dance!

Like the swallow which is moving his body to and fro,

Like the hawk, which is making his circles in the air,

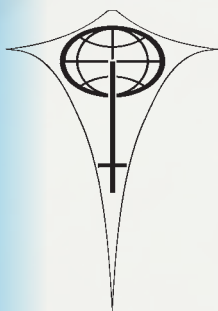
May you sing and dance!

*(From the Head-Hunters of Western Amazonas)*

## Closing Hymn

[At the end of the service, all are invited to enjoy cocktail, refreshments, coffee, tea or a fruit punch, according to the practice in various contexts.]

A group of women from the Geneva-based church organizations—Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, World Council of Churches and the LWF—jointly prepared this liturgy.



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