



“May Peace Prevail” A Prayer for September 21 International Day of Peace

Call to Prayer

Since its inception, Peace Day has marked our personal and planetary progress toward peace. It has grown to include millions of people in all parts of the world, and each year events are organized to commemorate and celebrate this day. Events range in scale from private gatherings to public concerts and forums where hundreds of thousands of people participate.

Anyone, anywhere can celebrate Peace Day. It can be as simple as lighting a candle at noon, or just sitting in silent meditation. Or it can involve getting your co-workers, schools, organization, community, or government engaged in a large event. The impact if millions of people in all parts of the world, coming together for one day of peace, is immense.

International Day of Peace is also a Day of Ceasefire – personal or political. Take this opportunity to make peace in your own relationships as well as impact the larger conflicts of our time. Imagine what a whole Day of Ceasefire would mean to humankind.

Let us pray for peace as we reflect on the voices of peacemakers in our midst today,

May Peace Prevail On Earth!

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Reader: The genocide in Rwanda cost Nathalie Piraino nearly her entire family.

She lost more than 100 relatives during the bloodshed. Her beloved mother, a farmer who loved to hug people, was among those slaughtered. All but 2 of her 10 siblings were killed, including her brother, who was tortured for hours on end. Nathalie is sure more were killed. But it became too painful to keep counting, she says.

The 1994 conflict took the lives of approximately 800,000 people, according to the United Nations.

Looking back at the Rwanda that once was, Nathalie marvels at the country's shared culture and holds dear friendships that cross ethnic lines. Her love for the land and people is her footing for peace—something that she says requires us to "look into everybody's face and try to see God in that face" regardless of differences.

Let us pray for the people of Rwanda as they strive to make peace prevail.

(Pause for Reflection)

All: Rwanda! May peace prevail!

Reader: “At the beginning I thought, foolishly enough, that I could keep on with normal life. But nothing was normal anymore, and I wasn't the same person anymore,” says Rami Elhanani. But Rami is not your average person. Neither is his speaking partner, Mazen Faraj. Rami is Israeli; Mazen is Palestinian. Like thousands of people in the Holy Land, they have both lost loved ones to violence.

Yet unlike many bereaved Israelis and Palestinians, Rami and Mazen did not let their losses build up the psychological wall that divides the two groups as much as a concrete wall divides them physically. The journey that brought them together has been a slow and painful one, and anything but normal.

When approached by another Israeli about joining the *Parents Circle-Families Forum*, a group for grieving Israelis and Palestinians, Rami was skeptical. For Mazen, who grew up in a Palestinian refugee camp in Bethlehem, the idea of talking to Israelis was utterly foreign. Rami's 14-year-old daughter was killed by a Palestinian suicide bomber. Mazen's 62-year-old father was killed by an Israeli soldier while carrying groceries; the soldier thought the groceries were something else.

Joining the *Families Forum* was a turning point for both men. Rami says, "Meeting the Palestinian bereaved families, I saw Palestinians as human beings, not as caricatures in

newspapers or articles or history items, but real people, coming towards me, shaking my hand for peace, hugging me, crying with me."

When Mazen first heard Rami speak at one of the auditorium events the group holds, he says, "I looked at him and thought, 'What does he know about suffering, about pain, this guy talking about peace?' ""Then he started to talk about his daughter and what's happened in his family. I was so ashamed that I had thought that,"

Mazen and Rami became more active in the forum, attending weekend workshops and traveling to Israeli high schools to discuss the conflict. They also became close friends. Says Mazen, "The very sight of an Israeli and a Palestinian stepping into a classroom, calling each other brother, not fighting each other, not trying to compare the size of the pain, not trying to say who started what and who's to blame, is a shock for the students," says Rami. To date, the Families Forum has arranged over 1,000 visits to high schools.

Let us pray for the people of Israel and Palestine as they strive to make peace prevail.

(Pause for Reflection)

All: Israel and Palestine! May peace prevail!

Reader: In ethnically divided northern Kosovo, teenagers are at risk of buying into extremism. "I must admit there is tension [between ethnic groups]," Milos says. "It's hidden, waiting, but there." Flare-ups of violence following Kosovo's declaration of independence in February 2008 highlight the problem.

But joint projects and social activities funded through Youth Securing the Future help keep those tensions at bay and promote understanding. With funding from small grants, teenagers from Albanian and Serbian communities are able to create school newspapers, run student radio stations, and participate in multiethnic student councils. "Through the organization *Duga* ["Rainbow"], we attended meetings with Albanian students," says Milos. He also attended a Serb-Albanian conference about web design held in Kosovo's capital. "There is a huge desire for peace, but there are [some] young people not interested in being part of this process," Milos admits. He points to sports programs like soccer teams as a "successful peacebuilding method" for students.

In October 2007, Milos visited the United States with three Albanian students after the four of them won a Youth Securing the Future essay contest on tolerance. Being the only Serb on the trip was "a little" difficult, he said, as was the language barrier; Kosovo's Serbs and Albanians sometimes use English as a common language. But Milos enjoyed spending time with his Albanian friends as they visited D.C. museums, New York schools and the United Nations.

One thing that struck Milos about America is that "everybody is busy and in a hurry. Therefore everybody has a job." In Kosovo, up to 60 percent of the population — most of whom are under age 25 — are unemployed. After he finishes high school, Milos hopes to study computer science and counteract the unemployment trend.

Milos also plans to stay active in groups that encourage tolerance between Albanians and Serbs, even as the situation in Kosovo remains shaky. "I have grown up in a strange world," Milos wrote in his winning essay. Now, he says, "I hope that I'll be able to engage more young people to think about peace."

Let us pray for the people of Kosovo as they strive to make peace prevail.

(Pause for Reflection)

All: Kosovo! May peace prevail!

Closing Prayer: Prayer of St. Francis

Reader: O Lord Make me an instrument of your peace

All: Where there is hatred let me bring your love

Reader: Where there is injury-pardon

ALL: Where there is doubt-faith

Reader: Where there is despair-hope

All: Where there is darkness-light

Reader: Where there is sadness-joy

All: O Divine Master grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console.

Reader: To be understood, as to understand

All: To be loved as to love.

Reader: For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

All: May peace prevail on earth!