



## DIAKONIA Prayer Letter April 2020

### Prayers in a time of COVID-19 pandemic

Around the world we are seeing lockdowns of cities and countries, and extraordinary measures to deal with COVID-19. The number of affected needy people is increasing on a regular - and frightening - basis. Difficult decisions have had to be made. 'Social isolation' is a new term which is changing the way we relate to others (but let us call it 'physical distancing' because we don't need more social isolation from each other). People are being asked to be careful and act selflessly in the interests of the health and welfare of others. In many parts of the world, we are dealing with the reality of churches being asked to close down services, including weddings and funerals. This will impact how Easter is celebrated, when we remember and celebrate the risen life of Jesus.

Much of the growth of the early Church came in times of contagious disease. Where there is suffering, it's an obligation for Christians to do what they can because Christ has placed them in the world to help others. That was a characteristic of the early Christian community. They were the ones willing to care for others, even, sometimes, at risk to themselves. There were several plagues in the Roman empire. The one in the middle of the 3rd century spread to the large cities. Reportedly 5,000 people a day died in Rome because of the plague. There were similar figures for Carthage and for Alexandria, the biggest cities in the Roman empire. And in each of those cities, it was the Christian church that undertook to do what they could because the Romans had no pattern about treating a mass disease. Christians believed all human beings are bearers of God's image and that naturally our compassion for others would be revealed. There was nothing like that in Roman cultural or moral values, and they were overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of suffering. Christians, who had been offering a burial service to their own members, began to bury pagans. They began to take care of those who were sick, first in their own family and then in their own church and finally outside. In the Book of Acts Deacons very quickly took on the ministry of mercy in the early Christian Church, and that became one of the ways in which Christians were recognized.

Helping those in need is as central to our faith as it is to gather together in fellowship and worship. This season requires both wisdom and compassion as we look out for the most vulnerable among us. We would do well to remember the words of Jesus in the last parable he spoke in the Gospel of Matthew: "just as you did it to one of the least of these my sisters or brothers, you did it to me" (Matt 25:40). Of course, you don't help anyone if you become a vector for infection. But you can pray, phone people, Skype those who are shut in, deliver groceries, cook meals, be one who encourages in a time of uncertainty.

Now is the time for which our faith has prepared us.

Now is the moment when all that we believe can be put to work.

Now we can turn to the inner resources we have been developing over these many years to face the challenge of a world in desperate need.

We are not afraid of this crisis for we have been made ready for it.

We have devoted our lives to the belief that something greater than fear or disease guides human history.

We have studied, prayed and grown in the Spirit.

Now we come to the call to use what we believe.

Our people need hope, confidence, courage and compassion: the very things for which we have been trained.

We are the calm in the midst of a storm.

Stand your ground and let your light so shine that others may see it and find their faith as well. (Steve Charleston)

## Two prayers

### Prayer for a pandemic

May we who are merely inconvenienced  
remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors  
remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working from home  
remember those who must choose between preserving their health or making their rent.

May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close  
remember those who have no options.

May we who have to cancel our trips  
remember those that have no place to go.

May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market  
remember those who have no margin at all.

May we who settle in for a quarantine at home  
remember those who have no home.

As fear grips our world, let us choose love.

During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other,  
Let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbours. Amen.

*(Cameron Bellm)*

### A prayer for compassion, wisdom and strength

Loving and compassionate God,

You call us to love our neighbours and to be bearers of your hope and grace in our world.

Expand our hearts and vision to respond with compassion to those around us,  
who are struggling in this time of uncertainty, anxiety, grief and suffering.

Give wisdom and strength to health workers, and government officials who provide leadership in this crisis.

We bring before you and into our hearts and minds:

\* Those whose work and income are uncertain

\* Those who are isolated

\* Those who are fearful of an unknown future

\* Those who live in situations of domestic violence, and whose isolation increases the control of their violent partners

\* Those who are homeless, and all those who offer them support and care

\* Those who are involved in aged care – staff, residents and their loved ones

\* Businesses whose futures are uncertain – their leaders and staff

\* School staff and students

\* Those with health conditions that put them at greater risk

Give wisdom and care-filled discernment to all our church leaders as they seek to creatively live out our worship, witness and service in ways that offer Christ's life-giving love and presence.

Strengthen and sustain us to be your people – shaped by your abundant grace, bearers of your generosity and overflowing love.

Through Christ our Light and Hope, we pray,

Amen.

*(adapted, Dr Deidre Palmer, President, Uniting Church in Australia)*

My brothers and sisters!

May the joy of resurrection

and the hope of Easter

fill your hearts and minds!

God's grace, love and peace be with you.

Rev Sandy Boyce (Deacon) President, DIAKONIA World Federation