

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that the land where we gather for worship belongs to God, as does all of creation. We also acknowledge that the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – have lived on this land since before settlers of European descent claimed ownership and displaced those for whom it was home. As we pursue our goals to dismantle racism and attend to growing diversity, we lament this injustice in our history and commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships within our congregation and our neighborhood.

May we live with respect on this land and live in peace and friendship with its people.

➤ ***Dance with the Spirit***

MV 156 (repeat)

Call to Worship

Let us bless the Lord at all times.

We will praise God's holy name continually.

Look to God, and be radiant.

We will never be ashamed for God has delivered us from all our fears.

Jesus has promised whoever comes to him will never be hungry –
those who believe in him will never thirst.

Let us taste the *Bread of Life* in scripture and song. Let us worship God!

† Prayer

Living God, you are the source of all good things. In Christ you give us the *Bread of Life* and we know your care for us is beyond measure. Through the Holy Spirit, you are present in all situations. Your love reaches wider than the expanding universe and your kindness embraces even the tiny sparrow. We gather in worship to offer you our praise – our love and loyalty – the best of ourselves.

Forgiving God, in Christ you promise us new life, but we confess that we are in love with our old ways. We nourish bitterness over disappointments. We find it easy to say one thing to someone's face and something else behind their back. Forgive us for falling short of your hopes for us. Free us from the captivity of old habits and resentments, and by your grace, renew us to live for love's sake as we pray together in Jesus' name... ***Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***

Words of Hope

God is tender-hearted and gracious to all and has forgiven you in Christ Jesus. Trust in God's grace and be kind to one another, forgiving others as God has forgiven you.

A PCC Story of Mission *Hope in the Midst of a Pandemic*

In Kenya, a sign on a water barrel says, “Please wash your hands with soap and water before visiting our offices.” In Malawi, socially distanced cooking demonstrations are conducted. In a refugee camp in Bangladesh, food and hygiene kits are distributed. These are just a few of the actions that PWS&D international partners are taking to help fight the pandemic and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on their communities. COVID-19 has been devastating to many people in developing countries where health, social and economic effects are severe. Many developing countries lack the resources needed to fight the disease. Health care systems are fragile, or in some cases, almost nonexistent. These systems are already overburdened trying to help those seeking maternal and child health care or HIV and AIDS treatment. COVID-19 could completely overwhelm their ability to provide even basic care.

People struggle to wash their hands as often as needed where there is little access to proper sanitation and hygiene facilities. Social distancing can be very difficult when living space is restricted in communities where large, extended families share one small home. Lockdowns mean countless families have lost their livelihoods. Women are at greater risk of gender based violence as they may isolate with their abusers, without access to help or support. Children have been out of school for months. The longer they are unable to attend school, girls are at risk of leaving school permanently due to early and forced marriage or unintended pregnancy.

PWS&D is working with partners overseas to help minimize these repercussions. By adapting program methodologies and providing funds to help with COVID-19 concerns, important development work is able to continue. Vital services such as mobile nutrition clinics, hospital facilities and trainings are able to operate by introducing precautionary measures. Teachers are being supported so they can conduct distance education, learning kits are being provided for students, and families are receiving food assistance and hygiene kits.

PWS&D is also responding in Bangladesh, Somalia, South Sudan and Palestine through the ACT Alliance. In these countries, conflict and economic disruption have created large numbers of refugees, displaced people, and people living in extreme poverty. Longer-term relief projects are ensuring families have access to hygiene and sanitation facilities, as well as providing livelihoods support and psychosocial care to people struggling to cope with the effects of the pandemic.

The United Nations World Food Programme estimates 265 million people could face food insecurity due to COVID-19, and the World Bank estimates that the consequences of COVID-19 will push at least 49 million more people into extreme poverty—undoing many of the advances made in recent years. Through PWS&D, our church is providing vital support to alleviate some of the damaging effects and help families and communities recover.

Scripture Jeremiah 32: 1-23

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him. Zedekiah had said, "Why do you prophesy and say: *Thus says the Lord: I am going to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it; King Zedekiah of Judah shall not escape out of the hands of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him face to face and see him eye to eye; and he shall take Zedekiah to Babylon, and there he shall remain until I attend to him, says the Lord; though you fight against the Chaldeans, you shall not succeed?*"

Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came to me: *Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours."* Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the Lord, and said to me, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself." Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord.

And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: *Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.*

After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah, I prayed to the Lord, saying: Ah Lord God! It is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you. You show steadfast love to the thousandth generation, but repay the guilt of parents into the laps of their children after them, O great and mighty God whose name is the Lord of hosts, great in counsel and mighty in deed; whose eyes are open to all the ways of mortals, rewarding all according to their ways and according to the fruit of their doings. You showed signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, and to this day in Israel and among all humankind, and have made yourself a name that continues to this very day. You brought your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with a strong hand and outstretched arm, and with great terror; and you gave them this land, which you swore to their ancestors to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey; and they entered and took possession of it. But they did not obey your voice or follow your law; of all you commanded them to do, they did nothing. Therefore you have made all these disasters come upon them.

Reflection

I am always amazed and encouraged by the very strange thing Jeremiah does in this text. He invests in property during a siege while under house arrest. Probably not a good time to buy a field but that is exactly what Jeremiah does, because he believes in God's future. He believes that even though the current situation is barren and precarious, things are going to change. Jeremiah understands that God has a plan that transcends the present moment.

COVID-19 has left no place untouched. People all around the world have lost their jobs and livelihoods, face food insecurity and are anxious about their future. When catastrophic events like a pandemic occur, many people in developing countries don't have access to government support to help mitigate the effects and provide the resources needed to recover. With the generous support of Presbyterians across Canada, PWS&D is responding through ACT Alliance and Canadian Foodgrains Bank. We are helping families receive food assistance, access water and sanitation services, and receive counselling to ease anxiety caused by the pandemic.

Like Jeremiah, we are investing in the future, based on a belief that God has new things in store for God's people.

I wonder if there are people in our own community who continue to feel the impact of COVID-19.

I wonder what support they need.

In some ways, we are in a situation like Jeremiah. Everything feels uncertain and precarious. How do we as individuals and as a church confidently invest in God's future?

Many people around the world are very concerned about their future due to the pandemic. How have you coped with increased anxiety? I am anxious about what lasting effects the pandemic will have on our congregation and on churches in general. I also wonder what "normal" will look like.

The thoughtful and consistent work of PWS&D and the hope for the future expressed in Jeremiah's purchase of the field at Anathoth give me confidence and make me want to be participate in the new things God has in store for all of us.

➤ *Brother, sister let me serve you*

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† Prayer

God of mercy, we ask for your calming presence to surround us as we maneuver through anxiety and uncertainty. We pray for strength and reassurance for those who have lost their jobs and face food insecurity due to COVID-19. We pray for those whom COVID-19 has touched. As they slowly recover, we pray that they may find tranquility and comfort in your presence. Our work is an investment in your future, Lord, believing that you have a different plan for us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

➤ *May the God of hope go with us every day (repeat)*

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A PCC Story of Mission **A Ray of Hope**

Presbyterians Sharing supports Blantyre Synod's prison ministry in many ways. It is one of the programs supported by the Rev. Joel Sherbino in his role as the PCC's mission liaison to Malawi. In late 2019 Steve McInnis and Nora Martin were appointed to teach English, chemistry and mathematics at Chichiri Prison. As the first international volunteers to teach in the prison, they provided encouragement to the prisoners, ministry staff and volunteers, before returning to Canada at the start of the pandemic. Here is Nora's account of this experience...

Samuel is an elderly man, perhaps seventy years old. He is an inmate in Chichiri Prison in Blantyre, a southern city of Malawi, and a student of English, mathematics and chemistry at about a Grade 9 level. We don't know what Samuel's offense was, but it could have been something as minor as stealing a bicycle or a \$25 cell phone—both crimes that can result in two years in prison. Samuel typically sits at the back of the classroom, listening attentively, taking notes and doing the exercises we assign him. He seldom says anything, but it is clear that he is engaged. One day at the end of a math class he said in tones of wonder, "I have never seen that before!" Another time, after struggling with several examples in English class, he said, with great satisfaction, "I get it now!" His delight in learning something new is one of the reasons we found teaching at Chichiri prison so rewarding.

We are retired. Steve is a chemical engineer by training, and I am a professional high school English teacher of thirty years. Together we decided that we wanted to volunteer overseas. So, when an opportunity to teach at Chichiri prison in Malawi became available through International Ministries, we jumped at the chance.

Like many prisons in Malawi, Chichiri is overcrowded and unsanitary. Inmates suffer from a poor diet. Prisoners are generally shunned by society, families and friends, both while in prison and once released. However, there are glimmers of hope in this dark and hopeless place. The prison's reformatory school, which offers both primary and secondary classes to the inmates, is a ray of hope. Most of the 30 teachers, approximately a third of whom are qualified, are inmates. We, the only foreign teachers, taught math, science and English in the high school section. Every day, during our three hours at the prison, we were each given at least one class to teach. The classes were pretty informal, and attendance was spotty, but we were told that the students enjoyed our classes, and that they were happy we had come all the way from Canada to teach them.

Weekly visits from "Friends of Prison" volunteers, Rammy Zuwayo, Lyca Mhone and Hastings Phale, offered additional hope. Through weekly Bible studies, they brought the good news of God's unconditional love and forgiveness. They would also bring Bibles, soap, medicine, soya pieces for extra protein, mats, clothes and shoes purchased with donations from Canadian Presbyterians. These dedicated volunteers regularly visit 13 prisons, travelling many hours on crowded minibuses, motorbikes, bike taxis, or on foot to stay connected and encourage the prisoners. To us, they embodied the concept of prison ministry.

When we had to return to Canada suddenly because of COVID-19, the students asked us to pray for them. This request reminds us how deep their faith is, even while in prison. We will surely pray for them. Prayer will keep us connected spiritually.

Scripture Matthew 25: 31-46

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Reflection

Matthew writes about caring for one another, especially those who are vulnerable, poor or disadvantaged. We demonstrate the love of Christ by ministering to people who may have no one to care for them. Jesus specifically mentions visiting people who are in prison. In his time, it was often the responsibility of loved ones to provide basic provisions to those who were imprisoned.

The Friends of Prisons in Malawi is a ministry set up for exactly that. In addition to bringing soap, medicine and sleeping mats, when Rammy, Lyca and Hastings visit inmates and lead Bible studies, they are living out Jesus' words in this passage from Matthew's gospel. The fact that many prisoners have not finished high school may have contributed to the circumstances that led to them being in prison in the first place. Giving them the opportunity to finish their studies is part of the effort to prevent them from ending up in prison again. Steve and Nora are glad they could participate in this life-giving ministry, and that they had a chance to help the prisoners improve their lives. It is humbling to think that, when they were teaching those eager students, they were ministering to Christ.

I wonder if any of you have ever visited a prison – I haven't but wonder if I might have an opportunity now that my friend and colleague Reid Chudley is serving as chaplain in a local prison.

I wonder what that kind of ministry is like.

I know we support the work of Our Place and Cool Aid to feed and clothe the hungry. In so doing I wonder if we also help to prevent people from ending up in prison.

I wonder about the situation of prisoners around the world – some have done wrong, some are innocent. What do you think this scripture says about the way that prisoners should be treated?

➤ *Called as partners in Christ's service*

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† Prayer Focus

Please pray for Rammy, Lyca and Hastings as they continue to visit the inmates in the prisons. Pray for Chichiri's chaplain, Samson Makoro, and other prison chaplains like Reid Chudley as they provide spiritual support to prisoners. Pray for the inmates as they try to better their lives against all odds. Pray for Malawi, one of the poorest countries in the world.

† Offering and Prayer

Through Presbyterians Sharing and Presbyterian World Service & Development, The Presbyterian Church in Canada is sharing Christ's love in 25 countries. Gifts to Presbyterians Sharing – which Knox includes as part of our yearly budget – provide grants and mission staff to encourage, equip and accompany our mission partners in areas such as Bible translation, leadership development, evangelism, outreach and Christian service. PWS&D supports development work and provides relief in times of emergency. Inspired by God's promise of abundant life, PWS&D envisions a sustainable, compassionate and just world. Thank you for your generosity to Knox and the work of our church.

Lord Jesus, we bring our gifts to you, knowing that you have given yourself for us, so that we have life in abundance. Bless these gifts. May they become the source of such abundance in lives we touch through mission and ministry for your sake. Amen

Blessing

➤ *Go now in peace, never be afraid*