LET US PRAY

A DIGITAL COLLECTION OF PRAYERS

Prayers for the Whole Church Year & Special Occasions

SAMPLE

By Jane Doull

LET US PRAY PROJECT

Let Us Pray: A Digital Collection of Prayers is a compilation of prayers for worship organized into four volumes that cover various seasons in the church year and special occasions. The prayers are written in a simple and accessible language, without abstract theological language.

There will be *at least* 150 prayers in each of the first three volumes, including:

- Gathering Words
- Opening/Centering Prayers
- Prayers of Confession/Searching
- Offering Prayers
- Prayers of the People
- Words of Blessing/Parting

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OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION

Volume #1
Prayers for Creation & Ordinary Time, Advent & Christmas for each Sunday from September to the end of December.

Volume #2
Prayers for Epiphany, Lent & Easter Sunday.

Volume #3
Prayers for Later Easter season, Pentecost & Ordinary Times.

Special Occasions Volume #4
Prayers for Advent candle lighting, Lent gatherings, Communion prayers, Contemplative Prayers for Solstice & other occasions, Graduate Blessings, Prayers for Dedications, Prayers in times of visioning and for justice-making.

SUMMARY OF VOLUME 1

There are more than 175 prayers in Volume 1.

In the **Prayers for Creation and Ordinary Time**, there are:

- 8 Invitations for Gathering
- 20 Opening/Centering Prayers
- 17 Prayers of Confession/Searching
- 22 Offering Prayers
- 14 Prayers of the People
- 17 Words of Blessing & Parting

In the Prayers for **Advent**, there are:

- 9 Invitations for Gathering
- 10 Opening/Centering Prayers
- 7 Prayers of Confession/Searching
- 10 Offering Prayers
- 5 Prayers of the People
- 9 Words of Blessing & Parting

In the Prayers for **Christmas/New Year**, there are:

- 3 Invitations for Gathering
- 6 Opening/Centering Prayers
- 4 Prayers of Confession/Searching
- 4 Offering Prayers
- 3 Prayers of the People
- 6 Words of Blessing & Parting

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SUMMARY OF VOLUME 2

There are more than 180 prayers in Volume 2.

In the **Prayers for Epiphany**, there are:

- 10 Invitations for Gathering
- 8 Opening/Centering Prayers
- 6 Prayers of Confession/Searching
- 9 Offering Prayers
- 12 Prayers of the People
- 13 Prayers of Blessing & Parting

In the Prayers for **Lent**, there are:

- 9 Invitations for Gathering
- 14 Opening/Centering Prayers
- 9 Prayers of Confession/Searching
- 12 Offering Prayers
- 12 Prayers of the People
- 16 Prayers of Blessing & Parting

In the Prayers for **Easter season**, there are:

- 8 Invitations for Gathering
- 14 Opening/Centering Prayers
- 5 Prayers of Confession/Searching
- 10 Offering Prayers
- 6 Prayers of the People
- 10 Words of Blessing & Parting

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SUMMARY OF VOLUME 3

There are more than 190 prayers in Volume 3.

In the first section **Prayers for Easter season**, there are:

- 5 Invitations for Gathering
- 12 Opening/Centering Prayers
- 4 Prayers of Confession/Searching
- 7 Offering Prayers
- 5 Prayers of the People
- 3 Words of Blessing & Parting

In the Prayers for **Pentecost**, there are:

- 4 Invitations for Gathering
- 5 Opening/Centering Prayers
- 2 Prayers of Confession/Searching
- 6 Offering Prayers
- 3 Prayers of the People
- 4 Words of Blessing & Parting

In the Prayers for **Ordinary Time**, there are:

- 22 Invitations for Gathering
- 26 Opening/Centering Prayers
- 19 Prayers of Confession/Searching
- 29 Offering Prayers
- 14 Prayers of the People
- 24 Words of Blessing & Parting

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SUMMARY OF VOLUME 4

Volume 4: Special Occasions has 105 ***pages*** of prayers.

There are:

- 19 **Communion Prayers** with one for every season of the church year and for special occasions like: Church Anniversary, Dedication of Gifts, UCW Memorial Service, Vacation Bible School with Children, New Ministry, Decommissioning, and more.

- There is a long section with many prayers for **Special Occasions** including: 5 Candle Lighting options and for Advent, Prayers for Blue Christmas/Longest Night, Christmas Eve, New Year's, Annual Meetings, Lent, Holy Week, Contemplative Maundy Thursday, Pride Sunday, Truth & Reconciliation, Graduate Recognition, Remembrance Sunday, Hour of Reflection on Dec. 6. And more.

- There are **Prayers and Liturgies for Seasonal Contemplative Gatherings**. This section offers year-round prayer and guidance for leading contemplative gatherings for church and community. There are also multiple prayers and blessings for using a labyrinth.

- There is also a section of **Prayers for Unique and or Occasional Gatherings**. You'll find prayers for historic anniversaries, for dedications of gifts & renovations, for setting up and releasing a search committee, at the ending a ministry, for welcoming a new minister, and more.

- There is a unique section of prayers marking times of **Learning, Discernment and Making Justice.** There are prayers for visioning sessions, for change, for especially difficult times. There are prayers for study sessions on Climate Change, Anti-Bullying for a Children's Sunday, and on Affirming themes.

- Volume 4 ends with a liturgy for a **Celebration of Music**.

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SAMPLE PRAYERS

INVITATIONS FOR GATHERING

These words help settle minds and hearts, that we may become present to this sacred time and place. As the Sufi poet Rumi puts it, we are like fish in the sea, always immersed in the Divine. Personal or community prayer is a way of intentionally becoming aware of this. If we are intentionally present to the sacred in times and places of prayer, we will be more deeply aware elsewhere…

1. Come and rest a while.
Pause from the busyness of this new season.
Breathe in the Love which surrounds you.
Listen for the still small voice speaking to your inmost heart.

2. Today, may we be open to the unexpected,
question the normal
and sit loosely to what we think we know!
As we let go of what we think we know,
let go our attachment to the way things are,
may we make room for Hope to work wonders
in our life and our world.

OPENING & CENTERING PRAYERS

These reflect the context and theme of your worship service, acknowledging something of where we are, where we've come from, what we might be looking for in this worship time. These prayers can help set the tone for the day's readings, suggesting what we might be listening for …

Today and always may we be open to being amazed, seeing visions beyond our understanding, dreaming dreams beyond our doubting. Among us may Spirit work wonders yet untold, opening minds, opening hearts, and opening doors into the fullness of what we can do and be in days to come. May it be so. Amen.

Prayer for Peace Sunday

Compassionate God, we long for a safe and peaceful world for all. We are not there. We do not know how to get there. We gather in search of the wisdom, courage and hope we need. As we reflect and listen and pray, may we draw always on the deep wellspring of your Peace, beyond our speaking, beyond our knowing. May this deep Peace restore and refresh our spirits. May your Light show us our place in the peacemaking, justice-seeking and healing work of your beloved community, here and around the world. May there yet be hope and healing for all beings. Amen.

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PRAYERS OF CONFESSION & SEARCHING

… In these prayers I focus on the various personal and collective struggles which weigh us down and I express our longing to live more deeply, freely, and compassionately. The list of concerns, struggles and regrets could go on and on. I limit how many I name in any one prayer, otherwise it becomes overwhelming. In my experience people are already easily overwhelmed. You might want to include moments of silent reflection in this time- and then people can individually recall any additional concern that's important to them….

Generous God, you give to us abundantly, but we do not always know how to receive. Sometimes we look for what we do not have and miss what is before us. Sometimes we do not use your gifts to the full; we do not let them transform us and our world. Sometimes we cling to what we know and fail to embrace new ways and life-changing possibilities. We seek forgiveness for what we have not noticed, what we have wasted, what we have missed. May your Spirit enliven and encourage us, that our lives may become prayers of thanksgiving and a sign of hope and good news for all. Amen.

Words of Hope
Hear the good news! Today the Holy One does a new thing within you. Today the Spirit fills you with blessing and frees you to become more fully the blessing you can be.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

OFFERING PRAYERS

…. Gifts in these prayers do take many forms, not only monetary. I find thankfulness motivates generosity, as does a sense that all we have is gift.

Creative, ever creating One, we are humbled, knowing how small we are in this vast universe, how short and fleeting our story in the story of all that is. And yet we are made of the same molecules, the same particles as the most ancient, faraway stars, and as countless life forms, past and present. We are not alone but connected to all that is, in body and in spirit. Knowing this we try to make our connection a good one, offering generously our best gifts and our best selves. In our giving and living may we be worthy citizens of this world, this universe, with your strength, your wisdom, your compassion making it so. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

… I write with the following assumptions: I try to pray for "those of us" and "those among us," unless I'm referring to people in another part of the world. If we pray as if those living with particular challenges or marginalized are other people, as if no one in that situation is among our worshipping community, we risk marginalizing some of our worship attendees, be they in person or online. It's very important not to pray as if everyone among us fits a certain norm, a certain life situation, as if we all experience or have experienced life in the same way…..

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Loving Creator, we give you thanks:
for the beauty and richness of our land,
for the sun and warmth which make our harvest possible,
for the peace and safety of our country which makes it possible for us
to live and work on our land,
for the chance to go to school, or send our children to school, and for the teachers and other staff
who work with them,
for all friends and loved ones who have brightened our summer days.

Compassionate God, we remember before you:
those who do not have a crop to harvest, or enough to eat,
those who are displaced from their land,
those whose land has been devastated by war and landmines,
those children who have no schools or who are prevented from attending school.

May we help to mend your world,
working with those who seek peace with justice,
who seek food and independence for the hungry,
who seek a world where all children can grow and thrive and be all they are meant to be.

God who weeps with those who weep and holds close those who are suffering,
we remember before you all who are ill at home or the hospital,
those who grieve the loss of loved ones, all who bear a burden of pain and struggle.
May we be signs of your compassion, as we listen and care as best we can.
In a moment of silence, we hold them in Love and Light.

These and all our prayers we offer in the name of your Beloved *one as we say together the prayer he taught his friends: Our Father/Mother…*

WORDS OF BLESSING & PARTING

… As people leave, they need to know they are loved, that they are surrounded and upheld by the Divine, whatever words they would use. They need to know that their words and deeds and way of living matter, that they play a part in the tending and mending of the world when they live with compassion, care, and respect. They need encouragement to include spiritual practices in their week, whatever connects them deeply with God and creation. They need to know they are part of a sacred web of giving and receiving. Of course, no one blessing can cover everything; there will be other weeks and other words of parting and blessing….

Trinity

3. As you go forth today, know that you do not go alone. Wisdom dwells within you, a light shining always at the depths of your being, the light nourishing and infusing all that lives. The Spirit of truth is given to you, guiding you each step of the way. Listen. Watch. Pray. Live fully each blessing presented to you. Face boldly each challenge, trusting that Spirit will give you strength and Wisdom speak to you wherever you are, wherever you may go. You are not alone! Thanks be to God!

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COMMUNION PRAYER

Advent Communion
God be with you!
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts!
We lift our hearts in prayer.
Let us give thanks to God!
It is right to give God thanks and praise.

God of new beginnings, we lift our eyes to see a new year dawning in hope. We pray for peace in our world. We wait for joy to come, even in the wilderness. We long for love to fill every home, every heart, every community. We join in the Song of Mary and the song of all your beloved through time and space, *[singing or saying together whichever version of the Sanctus /Holy Holy Holy, you wish to use]*

We give thanks especially for the new life born in your beloved Child Jesus. Through Jesus, your Wisdom, your Spirit, your compassion shone bright for all to see. Jesus offered food to the hungry, healing to the sick, friendship to the lonely. Jesus made friends with strangers and outcasts. He learned from children. He preached good news to the poor, liberation to the oppressed, recovery of sight to those who needed to see.

But Jesus' new way of living and being scared people who wanted to keep the world the way it was. He knew they wanted to put an end to him and his words and deeds. The night before his death, he shared food with his friends. He took bread, broke it, and gave it to them, saying "Take this and eat it. This is the bread of new life, broken for you and for all. Eat this in memory of me." He took wine, poured it out, and gave it to his friends, saying, "Drink this. all of you. This is the fruit of the vine, the cup of blessing, poured out for you and for all. Do this, whenever you drink it, in memory of me"

And today we eat and drink together, remembering Jesus' call to be friends, eating and drinking together. We remember the stories of Jesus handed down to us. We hear the invitation to follow the way of new life, to feed those who are hungry in body and soul, to make a welcome table where strangers can become friends. As we eat the bread of life, we are bread of life to one another. As we drink the cup, we are poured out as blessing for all the world. Above all, we share the Spirit of new life who gives birth to us in love, and sends us forth as signs of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love for this world, now, today.
Praise be to God, Creative Power, Light of the World and Breath of Life. Amen.

Prayer after Communion
God, giver of light, may we leave this table nourished in body and imagination and spirit. May we travel the paths opening before us. May we follow your star wherever it leads, May we share ourselves and our lives with glad and generous hearts. May the beauty and wonder of this holy season unfold among us, that we may speak and live newness of life for us and for all. Amen.

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ADVENT OPENINGS & CANDLE LIGHTING LITURGIES

Advent Candle Lighting E

In this litany, we lit one candle per week. Rather than people coming forward to light it, we processed it to a different person each week and had them light it, with help if necessary. This way we involved people who would ordinarily not come forward, much less read in public. The words were written for one voice but could easily be distributed among two or more readers or made more fully responsive. Or you could adapt it if you want to light the traditional four Advent candles.

Advent 1

How does it feel, this beginning?
Is it exciting, exhilarating?
Is it liberating, turning a new page, letting go of old worries and sadnesses and failings?
Is it scary – like a hike in the wilderness, like a drive in a strange place where you can't understand the map, or the GPS doesn't work?
Are you stepping beyond your comfort zone?
Might you have to do things you don't know how to do?
Might you encounter strangers, and not know how to talk with them?
Don't underestimate new beginnings: they take courage, they take nerve, and most of all they take faith. Plenty of faith.
How will we find all the faith we need as we journey
we know not how; we know not where?
We find faith along with the first brave step we take,
One step at a time.
Step out there, one step a time, and I promise -
There is Light, all the Light you need,
And so we light a Candle to remind us: **We do have Light,**
All the Light we need,
For this step and the next step and the step after that. (*Candle is lit)*

PRAYERS & LITURGIES FOR CONTEMPLATIVE GATHERINGS

Generally, we sat in a circle, and we took turns reading anything that wasn't unison. Sometimes we used a modified Taize format, with responsive prayers, readings and one prolonged silence- you have seen this already in the contemplative Maundy Thursday service in Part 2. Sometimes we used our own Journey In / Journey Out format: readings and prayers leading into a silence, then leading out with a reflection, shared if wished, on our sacred intention.

May Day or any Springtime Gathering

Joining the Sacred Circle

The Light within us shines throughout Creation.
And in this season of longer days, of stronger light,
We welcome the new life warmth and light bring forth.
Today we still wait for cold and chill to relax its grip,

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We still wait for the new season which wants to be.
We hover on the threshold between frost and heat, between barren ground and vibrant new growth.
We wait to be ready- both us and the world- for the new life soon to be born, for the seed to burst open, for the nests to be filled, for the greening power to be released all around us.
We wait.
We hope.

Releasing the Circle
We go from here.
We step out into the newness yet to come,
New life around, new life within,
Made ready for the blossoming of whatever wants to be born within us,
Within our land,
Within our world.
And the Light at the centre of this circle goes forth as the Light within our hearts, the Light within the evening dusk and the night sky, the Light within each new morning,
A blessed Light, a holy Light,
For you and me and all the beloved world.
Blessed be!

PRAYERS FOR UNIQUE OR OCCASIONAL GATHERINGS

Opening and Closing for an Evening Studying Climate Change

Opening Words
[*The wise poet quoted was Rilke. I have forgotten who the wise mystic was. The "work of love" recalls an essay by Beverly Wildung Harrison, The Power of Anger as the Work of Love.]*

We gather as those who love this planet-
Especially the earth, the water, the sky, the habitats we call home-
but we know- it's all our home.

We have heard the alarm.
Our house is on fire.
The polar icecap is melting.
Some glaciers are already gone.
The sea levels are rising.
The storms become fiercer and more frequent.
While some lands are hotter and drier and the droughts are more devastating.
Marine life is under stress,
As is all life.

The farmers know it.
The fishing people know it.

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The poor of the world know it, all too well- they get the worst of it,
The creatures of land and sea know it, to their peril.
The scientists know it and have been telling us for decades.
This knowledge weighs on the hearts and minds of our young people-
And they ask:
Have you not heard?
Are you not listening?
What will you do?

We here tonight are listening-
We come with our anxieties, our fears, our questions?
Especially, the big question:
Is it too late?
And another big question:
If we sound the alarm even louder than it's already sounding, will those with the power and the money listen?
And another: what can we ourselves do?
And will it make any difference?

A wise poet said – "love the questions!"
And so, we love these questions-
May they invite us into community with others who love these questions,
And together may we share not just information,
But wisdom,
Imagination,
Courage-
And yes, anger!
As a modern mystic says-" may our anxiety turn into anger"
Not the anger which riots on the street,
But the anger which is the" work of love"
The anger which energizes us to imagine and act,
And refuse to give up,
And refuse to fall silent.

May it be so as we begin our time of conversation,
We, as those who love this place and this planet,
And long to save the world and ourselves.
May it be so.

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INTRODUCTION

JANE DOULL

Jane Doull, a writer, adult educator, and spiritual seeker, has been leading worship mostly within rural prairie and Maritime churches for almost four decades. She lives in the small coastal resort town of St Andrews, New Brunswick, with her two cats. Her passions include creation, languages, literature, music, art, justice-seeking, theology, and good conversation.

Jane says, "I started writing my own prayers when printed resources did not say what I wanted said. I try to write simply, without abstract theological language. I try to open safe space for various life situations and spiritual paths. I try to write from an expansive, creation-centred, justice-seeking perspective. Our words always fall short of expressing the Divine, and so I vary my language and imagery, to allow various points of connection with Divine Presence.

JANE'S WORDS INTRODUCING THE COLLECTION OF PRAYERS

I began writing prayers 40 years ago, for occasional chapel services at St Andrews College, a United Church of Canada seminary in Saskatchewan, and then, for Sunday worship in United Church communities and other community events. I began writing, because the United Church of Canada does not have a set Sunday liturgy, and the printed resources available to me did not always express what I was trying to say.

For me, the words we say and sing convey a spiritual message just as much as the words we put into a sermon or reflection. I have tried to use words and images which resonate with the communities I have served. In so doing I consider the life situations and spiritual needs within these communities, primarily small rural communities in the Canadian prairies and Maritimes, while keeping us mindful of peace and justice and environmental issues in the wider world.

I always ask myself: would these prayers speak to and for someone who had not attended a church service recently or at all? Are they inclusive of people of all ages, family situations, ethnic background, income level, abilities, orientations, and genders? The worship I grew up with and the education I received in my youth were not. Even though my communities are not as diverse as some, I still try to model as much inclusivity as I can, trying myself to learn and evolve beyond my biases.

My understanding of prayer has shifted over four decades, as has my way of speaking of or to the Divine. My prayers, even with revisions, reflect these changes. Some may speak to you more

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than others. Time and space prevent me from exploring my understanding of prayer at length. However, in the introductions to each section, I say more about what each type of prayer is trying to do, at least from my perspective.

I speak to, or of, God/the Holy/the Divine in more varied, expansive language than that I grew up with. Our language can never capture all of the Divine, the I Am, the Great Mystery, and if we use only one or two time-honored names, we risk thinking that that's really who God is. There are many words, and many names, and each expands our awareness of the Holy. In Judeo-Christian tradition, we see ourselves as created in the image of the Divine. For myself, to honour humanity - and all of creation- in its wondrous diversity, I need to imagine a Divinity both infinitely One and infinitely Diverse, as well as infinitely beyond my naming.

In the words and intentions of my prayers, I write within Christian traditions, but I am also shaped by wisdom from other spiritual paths. In my experience, the deeper we go in contemplation, the more we find common ground.

I wrote many of these prayers while using the Revised Common Lectionary for my Sunday readings and reflection. These days however we don't all use the same lectionary or necessarily any lectionary at all. So, I mostly do not specify particular Sundays, except with reference to a particular seasonal event or a high liturgical season. In Volume 4, we move even further away from lectionary, as we offer special worship, such as communion, and extend our reach into other community spiritual gatherings.

Please feel free to adapt as suits your community and context, but please credit these prayers as "by Jane Doull" or "adapted from Jane Doull." Most unison prayers can be made responsive, most responsive ones can be made unison - also you can decide what goes in the bulletin or power point and what is said only by the worship leader. We follow the practice in these prayers of using bold for unison voice.

Since COVID some Sunday worshippers may be joining by Zoom and Facebook or by an emailed order of service. In addition, some of my readers may wish to use these prayers in your own personal prayer and reflection time, along with your other spiritual practices - some of which require no words at all.

SEASONAL INTRODUCTIONS

Jane introduces each season in the circle of the church year and each category of prayer with her understanding and theology and how this shapes the prayers she writes. These are valuable reflections.

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A PRAYER BENCH COLLABORATION

The Prayer Bench, hosted by Janice MacLean, provides online resources for deepening spirituality. Visit the Prayer Bench at www.prayerbench.ca The Prayer Bench is delighted to collaborate with Jane in providing this collection of prayers. We trust the prayers will offer you support and nourishment.

Thank you for downloading and reading this sample. We hope it gives you a sense of Jane's practice, theology and the creativity in her writing. You are welcome to use these prayers with attribution to Jane Doull. We appreciate you pointing to their availability at the Prayer Bench shop.

This Sample shares a few prayers drawn from all four Volumes in the collection.

To purchase the Volumes individually for $25 each, please visit the Prayer Bench Shop at www.prayerbench.ca

You receive both a WORD and PDF file with the prayers.

If you are interested in purchasing all four volumes, please contact Janice and receive them for $75. You also receive access to a password protected webpage where all four volumes are hosted.

If you have questions or need more information, please contact Janice at Janice@prayerbench.ca

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