

Restore

Ending Violence Against Women



Collection of Prayers

Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada

wicc.org/restore

When Family Violence Devastates a Community

God of hope, hear our lament.
Since we heard the news of _____
our minds are reeling.
This is violence happening in our own neighbourhood.
Some of us knew the victims,
some know people who knew them.
Our community is grieving.
We pray for family and friends of the victims.
We pray for police officers who responded.
We pray for counsellors called in,
and everyone touched by this crime.
We need your help because this crime is not singular.
Every year women are murdered by their partners,
in their homes, in their own bedrooms,
or even when they try to flee the violence.
Help us do better. Help us believe victims of abuse,
help us protect them when they try to leave.
Help us work on changing a culture that teaches men
that women are property, that women must obey,
and that women who don't, deserve death.
We pray for our local women's shelter,
that right now is sheltering women who have stories
just like the story of the woman who was murdered.
Give those sheltering women
strength and courage to do their work,
and show us how we can best support them.
We pray all this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Carol Penner, www.leadinginworship.com

Leaving Marriage: A Survivor's Prayer

For richer, for poorer, for better, for worse.
I made these vows, God, before you and witnesses.
You know I meant them.
But how worse is worse?
What does faithfulness mean when he hurls his dinner at the wall?
What does honour mean when he throws me to the ground by my hair?
What does love mean when sex is always about what he wants?
You know I'm not perfect.
My words, my thoughts, my actions have been far from loving.
But this situation is impossible.
I lie down in fear, and I wake in fear.
What will I do wrong today that will set him off?
After the explosions, he apologizes; he is sorry and charming.
I've forgiven more than seventy times seven,
and still there are these bruises.
I vowed to be a part of this marriage,
but his violence has broken this partnership,
and I cannot put it back together alone, no matter how hard I try.
Our union now is more about anger and terror
than love and tenderness.
In the despair, in the hopelessness,
in the futility and self-blame,
can I meet you even here?
You are the God who loves me, who cherishes me,
who thinks I'm worth something, who wants the best for me,
who would see good done for me, and not my destruction.
After so many years of praying for my marriage,
and praying for him to change,
today I pray something different.
Help me leave. Help me make it out of here alive.
Give me courage to think of life after marriage.
Help me trust that even if I leave him,
you will never leave him.
Even though he has destroyed the love we had,
your love for him is never ending.
Take care of him,
because I cannot do it anymore.

Carol Penner, www.leadinginworship.com

Prayer Against Patriarchy

God, you see our world.
The girl baby told she is sweet and lovely,
the boy baby praised for strength and power.
The little girl told to be quiet and sit still,
the boy allowed to run and play because boys will be boys.
The adolescent girl not giving the answer in school,
because the boys make fun if she stands out.
The teenage girl crossing her arms over her breasts,
after the boys comment and reach out to touch.
The young woman watching where she walks,
noticing in every room if there is a threat,
gauging when the catcalls become more menacing.
The working woman getting 70% on the dollar
compared to her male colleague.
The mother working a double shift,
working all day and coming home to housework
while her husband rests in the evening.
The woman scared and bruised
after her partner backhands her across the face.
The single mom at the foodbank for her children,
because her partner won't pay child support..
Creator God, you made us,
you know how gender shapes us,
how expectations cramp our dreams.
Hear our prayer for those who cannot see
how gender roles chain us,
how sexism values men over women.
Help us shape our world,
changing laws and attitudes,
challenging churches and political systems,
supporting those who don't conform,
encouraging each one to chart their own course.
Help us create a world where we can live,
valued and cherished for who we are.

Carol Penner, www.leadinginworship.com

Psalm for a Women's Shelter

Lord, you are my rock and my redeemer,
you are my shelter, an ever present help in times of trouble.
You know that violence has been my diet, day and night.
I called to you from the depths, "Lord, save my life."
It is not my enemy that attacks me, but it is my partner,
the one I love who assails me.
My body is black and blue,
my mind is reeling from insults thrown at me.
The love that I gave is thrown back in my teeth.
In this storm of trouble, I looked for help;
you led me to this women's shelter.
When I needed a safe place to protect my children,
they found a space for me.
When my abuser pursued me, they locked the door against him;
they protected my identity.
They saw my wounds and got me medical care.
They heard my torment, and provided counsellors.
Even when I walked in the valley of the shadow of suicide,
they were with me, they held my hand.
They believed that goodness and mercy could come to me,
even when I was sure it wouldn't.
For leading me to this place, where my soul can be restored,
I will be thankful all the days of my life,
till I dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Carol Penner, www.leadinginworship.com

Prayer for a Battered Woman

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
When I think I can change another person,
remind me that I can change only myself.
When I think that being hurt is your will,
remind me of your exodus call to flee from oppression.
When I think I should sacrifice myself unto death,
remind me that you died for our sins, so I don't have to.

O Lord grant that I may not so much seek to endure abuse,
as to escape it entirely;
that I may not so much seek to model victimization,
as to model being a faithful survivor.
For it is in new beginnings that we find your grace,
it is in standing on our own two feet that we find your strength,
it is in leading our family to safety, that we find peace.

Carol Penner, www.leadinginworship.com

Family Prayer

Loving God, thank you for our families.
Thank you for the people who light up our lives,
whose tender presence is dear beyond all words,
people who have enriched our lives beyond all measure.
Give us love for our families,
accepting them as they are,
encouraging them to be all they can be,
appreciating them as we want to be appreciated.
Sometimes the people we love the most
can be the people with whom we have the most conflict,
help us persevere in our love.
You know our relationships inside out,
you know that we have people in our family we love,
but there are also people in our family we only tolerate,
and people in our family we can hardly stand.
Give us patience with our families this week.
When we would keep track of hurtful words,
call to mind the thoughtless words we have spoken.
When we would count the ways we have been neglected,
teach us to remember that we too overlook others.
Jesus, you walked a fine line of love with your own family;
help us know when to stay, and when to walk away,
when to hope, and when to draw a line.
Help us to live in peace while still respecting ourselves;
to refuse to abuse, and not to let others abuse us either.
Be our familiar guide in all we do and say this week. Amen.

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Peace Prayer for Imprisoned Sexual Offenders

Great God, hear my prayer for every person in prison
convicted of a sexual offence.

These are the people I count as enemy,
that our society counts as enemy;
rapists, abusers, child molesters.

Jesus, you are the key of David,
you walk through every locked prison door,
you look with love into the heart of each one.

You know the history of aggression,
and that when the unspeakable is done to us,
blind pain can cause us to lash out.

You see how violence leaves deep scars on the violators.

And so we pray—

for those who have no hope of parole,
show them that you can open the prison of their heart;
for those who are stuck in webs of lies and denial,
open their eyes to the value of repentance;
for those who are in desperate need of therapy,
change our systems that deny treatment;
for those who have been abandoned by friends and family,
bring visitors and helpers to comfort them;
for those who have internalized hateful labels
like “scum of the earth”, and “garbage”,
open their ears to hear you whisper the word “beloved”.

Unsettle us with improbable and unexpected incarnations
as you are born again in the cages we call prisons.

Right in the midst of broken dreams and wasted lives
there you are: Immanuel, Christ the Lord,
God with us. Amen.

Carol Penner, www.leadinginworship.com

Prayer for Male Survivors of Violence

God of Comfort:

We pray today for men and boys
whose lives have been scarred by abuse and violence.

We pray for boys bullied and molested
by people who should be their friends.

We pray for boys sexually abused and exploited
by people they trust who should protect them.

We pray for boys who cry their tears alone
with no one to comfort them.

We pray for men who have suffered physical assault
and have fear as a constant companion.

We pray for men who have been sexually assaulted
and have nowhere to tell their story.

Jesus, teach our church to see your face
in all people, all genders

who suffer from the effects of violence. Amen.

Carol Penner, www.leadinginworship.com

Did I see you?

When I was hungry you broke bread with me.

When I was sick you sat by my bedside.

When I was in prison, you petitioned for my release.

When I was sexually assaulted, you listened to my pain.

When I was afraid to be alone, you stayed with me.

When I felt guilty and ashamed, you told me it was not my fault.

When I had to go to court, you went with me.

When I was filled with anger and hatred, you did not reject me.

When I was filled with sorrow and hopelessness, you held my hand.

When I kept my story secret for years, you understood why.

When I called on God for help, you came and helped me.

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Abusing a Precious gift

When all is not what it seems,
when evil masquerades as good,
when it seems the wrong path is calling us,
Jesus, we need your help.

When sexually explicit images appear before us,
when curiosity and desire urge us to linger,
when it seems innocent just to look,
Jesus, we need your help.

When we make sexual comments in a social setting,
when our words make another uncomfortable,
when it seems funny at the time,
Jesus, we need your help.

When sexual desire sparks inside us,
when we know we are committed to someone else,
when it seems harmless just to imagine,
Jesus, we need your help.

When we touch someone who does not want to be touched,
when we trespass where we should not go,
when it seems that no one could prove it happened,
Jesus, we need your help.

When having sex is all about me,
when we give hardly a thought to our partner,
when it seems normal to live this way,
Jesus, we need your help.

When we want to act on our sexual desires,
when that person is a child,
when it seems that they will never remember,
Jesus, we need your help.

When we use our sexuality carelessly,
when we abuse this precious gift,
when we are confused and broken,
Jesus, your help saves us.

Advent Prayer for People Living with Violence

At this time of year as we sing “Silent night”
with its echoes of calm and heavenly peace,
we say a prayer for all who live in homes
where peace is absent.

We pray for children who live with fear,
whose homes are not a place of safety,
who live with beatings, both physical and verbal.

We pray for seniors and other vulnerable people
whose caregivers do not care
as they are neglected or degraded.

We pray for all who are emotionally abused,
and who are not loved, honoured and cherished.

We pray for women who have had to flee their homes
or are afraid to flee their homes.

We pray for all who have been sexually violated,
and who are haunted by fear of violation.

May love’s pure light this season empower us
to come to the aid of your hurting people.

We join together to sing Alleluia and thank you
for your grace that transforms our world.

In the name of the Holy Infant,
Christ our Saviour, Amen.

Carol Penner, www.leadinginworship.com

God Save the Children

God, save the children tonight.
Save them from empty stomachs and hunger pangs.
Preserve them from beatings and harsh words.
Protect them from bullets and bombs.
Shield them from sexual abuse.
Guard them from pain and disease.
Shelter them from anger and discord.
In their innocence, grant them peace.

God saves the children tonight.
Saves them when someone sends food for body and soul.
Preserves them when a neighbor intervenes.
Protects them with peacemakers who make peace.
Shields them with caregivers who find safe places.
Guards them through workers who provide clean water and vaccinations.
Shelters them through protectors of the rights of the innocent.
The wide scope of God's providence
brings salvation to the children
in the actions of all who work for peace tonight.

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A prayer about terror (on the anniversary of the Montreal Masssacre)

God of the afflicted:

On this anniversary of the Montreal massacre
where a man who declared feminists his enemy
opened fire in a school,
killing fourteen, wounding fourteen,
on this day we turn to you.

We pray for healing for all affected by acts of terror.

Terror from a bomb, or a gun,
or a knife, or a rope, or a body,
terror from any force poised for cruelty.

You know what happened next.

Be with all who are picking up,
with tears, the pieces of their lives,
painstakingly living to see another day,
and another, and another,
becoming survivors.

Be with them in the fear
that haunts them daily
and pursues them in their dreams.

Be with them in their anger,
which fuels their drive for justice,
and their certainty
that this must not happen again.

And yet it happens to another,
and another, and another.

Almighty God, where are you?

Jesus, do you see our suffering?

Holy Spirit, where is your relief?

God of the terror-stricken,

God of the terror-survivors,

God of the terror-fighters,

God of all who work for peace,

we pray to you today:

deliver us from evil.

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A Prayer for When Sexual Abuse is Discovered

My God, my God, where were you?
My innocent child, my beautiful innocent child,
a child of God, your child,
this child has been abused.
First and foremost, protect my child, Lord.
Keep them from further harm.
Heal the hurt.
Mend the memories.
Restore what is lost.
Show me how to help
and how to get them the help they need.
Let there not be lasting, lingering effects
from this deed done.

God of all the dark places in the world,
you know what I am feeling inside.
Such a feeling of guilt:
how could I have missed this?
how could I not have known?
how could I not be there to protect?
These feelings are enough to engulf me,
but they are matched thought by thought
with rage and outrage and anger.
How dare he?
If there was a trigger to pull,
I would pull it.
With every wailing prophet,
I call down judgement and destruction,
never in my life have I longed this much
for a God of wrath.

And yet the next moment
I am filled so much with sadness
for this broken hurting world;
so many little ones abused,
so many warped people hurting others,
probably after being hurt themselves as children.
God of all of us, how can you bear it?
Jesus, thank you that you too felt the outrage,
you too spoke of millstones around necks

and people being drowned in the bottom of the sea.
Yet your actions were all of love;
even in extreme pain, you spoke the word "Forgive".

Holy Spirit, I need your presence with us on this journey.
Lead me in good paths, not bitter ones.
Teach me how to trust again.
Be our companion as we work for justice and accountability,
accompany us as we walk step by step towards healing.
And yes, even touch the heart of the one who offended,
convict, convert and illumine their minds,
so that they can understand the wrong they've done,
and never do it again.

My first and last thought is for my baby, my own,
a child of God, wounded and hurting.
You who sees the littlest sparrow falling,
reach out and catch this one,
mend them inside and out,
and keep them in your loving care forever. Amen.

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A Prayer

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.
My heart is in anguish within me,
the terrors of death have fallen upon me.
Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me.
And I say, "O that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest; truly I would flee far away;
I would lodge in the wilderness;
I would hurry to find a shelter for myself
from the raging wind and tempest."
It is not enemies who taunt me — I could bear that;
it is not adversaries who deal insolently with me —
I could hide from them.
But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend,
with whom I kept pleasant company;
we walked in the house of God with the throng.
My companion laid hands on a friend and violated a covenant with me
with speech smoother than butter, but with a heart set on war;
with words that were softer than oil, but in fact were drawn swords.

*"Understanding sexual abuse by a church leader or caregiver" 2nd edition, Mennonite Central
Committee Canada, p. 11.*

Responsive Prayer

We believe that beyond the violence,
there can be love;
That beyond the despair,
there can be hope;
That beyond the torment,
we will find rest;
That beyond our brokenness,
there can be healing;
That beyond our agony,
we will find joy.
*Oh, God, transform our disbelief
and gently carry us from darkness to light.*

Carolyn Holderread Heggen, *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches*. Herald Press, 1993.