WORLD WEEK OF PRAYER
November 13 to 19, 2016
Leaving no one behind
CONTENTS

3 Presidents’ Message
4 Day 1: Leaving no one behind
7 Day 2: Creating Safe Spaces
10 Day 3: Transforming our leadership
13 Day 4: Respect, support and empower
16 Day 5: Because I count – differently abled people
19 Day 6: Into your hands – ending child marriage
22 Day of Worship: All equal in the image of God
26 Bible Reading Plan: November 2016 to October 2017
WE ARE ALL CREATED EQUAL IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENTS OF THE WORLD YWCA AND THE WORLD YMCA

In our world and in our movements, there is beauty in our diversity. We are human beings, representing many different faiths, beliefs, cultures, nationalities, ages, backgrounds, classes, races and ethnicities. The different ideas, traditions and practices that we contribute to our world each and every day are the threads that create the rich tapestry of our society.

We may be different in many ways, yet the vast majority of us can agree on one basic principle, which we find in the Bible, as well as in many other faith-based texts. And this is: “We are all created equal in the image of God.” Equality is both a basic principle of our faith and a fundamental human right.

In a just society, we would accept and include everyone, and all of us would enjoy equal access to education, employment, and everything we need to lead safe, happy and healthy lives filled with dignity and respect.

Unfortunately, our global reality is quite different. Millions of people face discrimination every day based on their race, gender, faith, age, nationality and other factors. Millions of others live in conflict zones, where violence is a normal part of daily life. Still others live in temporary situations as refugees, many of whom lack access to life’s necessities and are not able to exercise their basic human rights.

And this is all exacerbated by political, cultural and even faith-based leaders who use their positions of influence and trust to spread messages of hate and to create deeper divisions in our society. They should instead use their power to contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals for a safer, more just and sustainable future, while ensuring human rights treaties are in place and that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is respected.

The theme of this booklet, “Leaving No One Behind,” is designed to help us reflect on our diversity and to discuss how we can better accept, include and celebrate individuals for their uniqueness. At the same time, it reminds us that just as we are all equal in God’s eyes, we should be equal in each other’s eyes.

We encourage you to adapt this booklet to your own local context. You can use it to spark discussions and address issues that will help bring people together. You can also use it as a source of inspiration - to pray, to reflect, to collaborate - and ultimately to create a more inclusive world. Most importantly, we hope it will inspire you to become a catalyst for change. We call on you to provide the transformative leadership that will promote inclusion, preserve peace, justice and understanding - and ensure we are leaving no one behind.

In peace and faith,

Deborah Thomas-Austin
President, World YWCA

Peter Posner
President, World YMCA
DAY 1:
LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

Luke 10:30b-35: THE GOOD SAMARITAN

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, he passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

Reflection: It takes persistent courage both to be inclusive and to be included

The story of the kind Samaritan is one most of us know very well. Many times have we heard it – in fact, we have heard it often enough for it to become so familiar that there is a danger of forgetting the radical message it actually contains.

Jesus comes from a community that has a long history of rivalry and hatred with the Samaritans. They are not just a people the Jews dislike – it’s the one group of people whom they would not trust with their enemy’s welfare. It’s a feeling that runs strong and deep. Because it is what “people say,” we don’t reflect on their truth anymore and accept the incapability or unacceptability of a whole people or of certain individuals. And when we ourselves become someone who is left behind, life sometimes seems to teach us that we cannot expect otherwise.

That is, however, where we are wrong. Each of us has the potential to be a Samaritan – to be attentive and to listen to the worth of the words of someone unheard. To be there and reach out to those who are not expecting a helping hand anymore. And even more – each of us has the power to keep standing up for ourselves and to make ourselves visible. The beauty of this is not only that someone unexpected, like a Samaritan may surprise us – it’s also that you and I will not stand alone. For courage is contagious, and others will stand with you!

In today’s world, we see many examples of people attempting to exclude others based on race, ethnicity, faith and a variety of other factors - rather than embracing them for the unique gifts they have to offer. As one example, we are currently witnessing an unprecedented refugee crisis. Asylum seekers pursuing refuge, mainly in Europe, have been stopped and denied entrance and basic humanitarian services in various countries, based on security concerns or countries’ desire to preserve their identities.

Regardless of the position of politicians, many of us as individuals, as civil society organisations, as churches and as the YMCAs and YWCAs have stood up for the human dignity of these
refugees. In fact, the worldwide movements of the YMCA and YWCA work globally to help immigrants and refugees, who are often excluded, marginalised and exploited or find themselves vulnerable to violence, rape and xenophobic atrocities.

The Thessaloniki YMCA in Greece, for example, has established a Reception for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in collaboration with other local NGOs. The hosting centre is largely home to families from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq who are still waiting for permanent placement. Most families have arrived through illegal, high-risk crossings by sea. The centre offers them refuge, safety and an integration programme to ensure that they are included and accepted in their new societal home.

A YMCA volunteer described the experience with this centre: “Today, visiting the refugee hosting centre in Diavata, Thessaloniki... was just another day full of smiles, joy, games, fights, and intense feelings. It was the fourth time I visited the centre, and it became quite clear to me that the kids have embraced us and treated us like family.

“As soon as we got off the bus, they welcomed us, they took us by the hand and led us to the place where we usually gather and play. The hours flew by, and the bitter moment when we had to leave arrived. The goodbyes, the hugs, and the weeping gave way to the joy of renewing our meeting for next Tuesday. The children recognise most of us now and the connection we have developed is magic.”

When people are different in any way, they too often find themselves marginalised or even shunned by their community, as CZ, a young women from India, knows all too well.

“As a young HIV-positive single mother, I am naturally drawn to understand the plight and conditions of my fellow HIV-positive women,” said CZ. “I believe in God, the creator, as someone who treats all people equally and is just. It was a calling for me to work in this field.

“At times, I get exhausted physically because of my medical condition, but I always rush to people who need my help. There is always something I can do for them. I find it hard to ignore women who are being misjudged by the society as I am constantly being discriminated against myself. My motivation and inspiration is drawn from my own personal experience, my parents, and children who offer their blessings and support for my work. My passion is to enable other young women to overcome situations of exploitation and abuse.”

Walking together in our faith also means believing in God’s creation. We must not forget that God’s world is broad, and there is a universe in each person God created. For the truth of the matter is that each person has a story. Each community has walked a long way. Each background provides people with unique and valuable abilities that are precious for the life of a family or a community.

God’s creation is wonderful! It is worth it to show the beauty of life in all its forms and colours, and it is worth it to look beyond one’s own experience.

Each day anew – we will make our very best effort to leave no one behind!
Questions for discussion

Let’s ask ourselves:
1. Hearing today’s reflections, what comes to mind?
2. This week, what can I do to reach out to at least one person whom others tend to exclude?
3. As a community, how can we ensure that we are being inclusive and drawing upon the unique skills and experiences that everyone has to offer?

Prayer

Loving God,
We give thanks for the flow of human history, for the events which have shaped us and our societies.
We give thanks for all our sisters and brothers who have questioned that history and struggled for a more equal world.
For those who unearth the stories of the oppressed, the nameless, the unrecorded.
(Hear us when we whisper some names.)
We give thanks and ask for justice.
Amen

Blessing

Sweet God, I praise you!
Blessed are you
When difference becomes richness,
When disagreement produces dialogue,
When the storm breaks,
Blessed are you, for such moments announce a rainbow of hope
And in my life, reconciliation.
DAY 2:

CREATING SAFE SPACES


“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’”

Reflection: Creating places of understanding, hope and healing

What kind of coin is so important, that you’d go to call your neighbours to celebrate with you once you find it, after it had been lost? It must be a special set of silver coins, indeed! Was it money intended for food? Or was it a set of 10 silver coins intended to decorate the wedding veil of the old woman’s grandchild?

Maybe the story speaks of 10 coins, because 10 is a meaningful number in the bible. As with the 10 Commandments or the 10 cities given to the 10 faithful servants in Luke 19 the number 10 can symbolise the responsibility of humankind towards God.

What significance can we gain from a story, in which one of the 10 is lost, and then no effort is spared to make the group of coins whole again? Surely, all of you could tell of a story of wholeness, or completeness lost. And surely all of you have a story, in which you spared no effort, to make what was incomplete whole again. You all know how hard such an effort can be, and you surely can name the people who stood beside you along the way.

Young women in Rwanda who are trained as peer educators on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) say that girls have a need for more information before they face sexual abuse or have their first sexual experience. That’s why the YWCA Safe Spaces are so important. They provide a place to access SRHR information and services and discuss sensitive issues in a non-judgmental, safe and confidential environment.

Delphine, a 15-year old Rwandan girl, told the YWCA: “Girls in primary and secondary schools get pregnant and drop out. Those responsible for the pregnancies are our fellow students. Some of us are even raped or tricked by sugar daddies. But with the awareness we got (from YWCA Rwanda Safe Spaces), it will be difficult for them (to be tricked).”

Likewise, the YMCA Power Spaces are vital in providing young people with safe, fun and inclusive places to set their own youth agenda on issues of importance to them. Around the world, these are youth-led and youth-oriented, with the nature of each PowerSpace specific to the local needs of the youth. Some examples include: innovation (ideas to reality), creative (arts, drama), social vibe (individual to civic action), and Y Bridges (individual counselling to group social issue dialogue and action).

“Often we do not get to the heart of issues. We just deal with the problems,” said Chipo Mellisa Guse, a young exchange participant at the South African YMCA. “So my experience with
the Power Space on Y Bridges was extremely powerful. We talked about the relationships between young men and women, what we want from each other, dating, sex, and sexuality. We felt so empowered and had a completely different view of each other – a deeper understanding. I think this creates respect and also goes a long way to preventing problems around interpersonal relationships.”

God is one with our bodily, human nature in the person of Jesus. This implies that no part of our bodily life is to be unclaimed or is unsanctified by God: no part of our bodily life is to be split off from the self. If someone harms our body, they harm our whole being.

Sometimes, even when we try to protect ourselves and our loved ones to the best of our abilities, we experience tragedy in our lives. And in those moments, we need a place to gather our strength. To connect to God, to ourselves and to our community – because it is in relation to others and to the world that we find the energy and courage to take our entire home apart if necessary, even if we have to clean up everything to find the lost coin, to heal and make life whole again.

It is in those safe spaces that we find the hope needed not to shy away from the effort. It is hard work. It takes persistent courage. But if we know there is a place of understanding and people who will celebrate alongside us for every success along the way, we can find a way forward.

Delphine knows this too. She sees what her sisters have lost, and she takes action to protect girls by educating them. And in doing so, she also creates a safe space for those women and girls who have experienced damaging sexual relations or abuse. She helps them find the ability to step forward, to find help and to start healing.

This is our responsibility. We will create places that can be home, where lost coins can be found again. Know that it is possible! Our faithful God, pictured as an old woman in this parable, will make every effort. She will stand by your side, and walk with you through life. And the day any one lost coin is found again, we will all rejoice together.
Questions for discussion

Let’s ask ourselves:

1. Hearing today’s reflections, what comes to mind?
2. This week, how can I stand alongside someone, to help support them so they can heal and become whole again?
3. As a community, how can we provide safe spaces of understanding, healing and support?

Prayer

(Credo:)

We believe in light beyond our seeing, flowing from the life in God.
We believe in strengthening power of Jesus, the Redeemer.
We believe in the grace of God’s Spirit as we journey on.
We believe that we are invited to celebrate the power of our solidarity with all who stand for love and hope.

We believe.

Amen

Blessing

Blessed are those who bring hope. Transform the chains that imprison the world into a bond of solidarity. Amen
Day 3:

Transforming Our Leadership

1 Corinthians 1: 26ff: God Calls Us

“Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong, God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.”

Reflection: Empowering others through shared power and decision making

The text above, which may seem abstract at first, is one that Paul wrote for a very specific community with a situation that is still relevant today. The still quite new Christian community in Corinth was successfully established around 50 years after Christ, and it was growing when Paul wrote his letter. The more people joined, the more diverse the community became. And in the conviction that they were living in God’s kingdom already, some felt that they were entitled to act however they wished.

Different factions started fighting among one another about how to be a Christian in the RIGHT way, who is in power or who should be in power, which people can make the decisions that will shape their community and how money should be handled. In other words: they started judging each other according to human standards.

In his letter to Corinth, Paul does not play with abstract metaphors. He speaks to their conduct quite literally. Look around you, he says. Who is part of your community? What role do they have in society? Who are the powerful, and who are the vulnerable?

Corinth is a clear example of the fact that God does not work with human standards. God does not choose people according to money, power, age, skin colour or the respect they receive in their community. God’s reign is created out of what is nothing in our eyes. This is God’s power of creation – it’s what will drive us forward into the future.

God’s kingdom will become visible in the most beautiful ways, if we trust in God and in those who seem to be the lowliest – for God lifts them up – lifts us up, you and me, to unknown heights. Jesus did not hold on to power. He shared it with his disciples and empowered those around him. We often forget, but it is the power that Christ did not hold for himself that continues to gives us wings.

There are many empowering examples of this within both the YWCA and YMCA global movements.
The YWCA of Honduras, for example, is using their own Board to obtain a broader view of the world and to empower all women to change the world. With a Board of seven, three of whom are young women between the ages of 18 and 30 and two who are between 30 and 35, the YWCA of Honduras provides a perfect example of intergenerational leadership.

“The YWCA of Honduras actively seeks a balance within the different generations, so we can understand all the different views that women have at different stages of their lives” says Andrea Michelle Gradiz Diaz, a young woman from the Board of the YWCA of Honduras and Vice President of the World YWCA Board.

“We recruit young women to our Board and provide youth with leadership and empowerment skills throughout all our programming.”

Via its strong social media presence, the YWCA of Honduras continues to grow and gain new members every day, creating a firm foundation to advocate for gender equality and to educate youth on SRHR and preventing violence.

The youth development focus of the USA YMCA is on nurturing the potential of every child and teen because the values and skills they learn early on are vital building blocks for life. The Canadian YMCA model involves Values Based Leadership Training (skills such as communication, event organisation, and teaching); Volunteerism (opportunities to take part in service learning projects, learning goals, and group activities) and Self-Government (participants identify their own projects, learning goals, and group activities). In the Latin American context, the development of leadership in the YMCAs is directly associated with strategies of youth participation and construction of social impact. The focus is on responsible and transformational citizenship, which is directly related to the YMCA programmes in each particular local context.

Around the world, YMCAs have also introduced a transformative reverse mentoring model, in which a young person and an elder learn from and guide each other. While the elders share experience and specialised knowledge, the youth gain voice, space and the ability to influence. In addition, as the youth are closer to the future, they can identify trends and innovation.

A young mentee commented: “I have learned that being mentored by an elder who is responsible, creative, and has good knowledge about mentorship, is a beautiful way of thinking and building up opportunities on leadership skills.”

And an elder mentor said: “Picking the mentee’s brain gave me valuable insights on life, which is becoming increasingly relevant for me in this fast-changing world. It’s a leadership tool that benefits the senior mentee, the junior person, and the organisation as well. Junior mentors can help managers understand how to motivate and retain young workers. They can also share first-hand knowledge of a younger customer base.”

It is possible. We can transform our leadership models to share power and decision making. God shines brightly on us and gives us the strength we need in order to share. And in that sharing, God’s creation takes shape and changes everything.
Questions for discussion

Let’s ask ourselves:

1. Hearing today’s reflections, what comes to mind?
2. This week, how can I empower someone else by sharing my power or decision making abilities?
3. As a community, how can we ensure that our leaders reflect the diversity among us and that we are sharing power and decision making?

Prayer

O God, you are gracious.
You bring us together with varied responsibilities and gifts.
You challenge us to respond to your call.
Sustain us and help us to sustain each other.
We offer our thanks and ask mercy as we name those people in our lives whom we admire and to whom we owe gratitude.
(Moment of silence for naming those people)
We give thanks for all that is good.
We give thanks to you, loving Creator.
And we give thanks for Jesus of Nazareth who in living as one of us made your love known to all of us.
We give thanks.
Amen

Blessing

May they who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength.
Amen
Day 4:
Respect, Support and Empower

Exodus 2: 16-22: The Story of the Priest of Midian and His Daughters

Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock. The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and saved them, and watered their flock. When they came home to their father Reuel, he said, “How is it that you have come home so soon today?” They said, “An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds and even drew water for us and watered the flock.” He said to his daughters, “Then where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread.” And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah. She gave birth to a son, and he called his name Gershom, for he said, “I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.”

Reflection: God blesses men who respect and protect women

Violence is prevalent in communities all around the world, and each community has its own response to this violence. For example, in Latin America, “#NiUnaMas (Not one more)” is a motto that’s becoming all too common.

In the spring of 2015, a 14-year old Argentinian girl, Chiara, was beaten to death by her 16-year old boyfriend and buried in the garden. She was pregnant at the time. Chiara was just one of more than 280 femicides (the murder of women) in Argentina that year, in a country where a woman is killed nearly every 30 hours, usually by an intimate partner.

The YWCA of Argentina provides safe spaces where women can discuss gender-based violence, as well as a “home away from home” in Buenos Aires where young people can work, live, study, share and grow in a friendly and secure environment.

Zeina, a mother of three from Lebanon, has also experienced the impact of violence first hand. Her husband is a drug addict who used to violate her physically, emotionally and sexually every single day. As a result, she suffered from mental and physical health problems. Her family refused to shelter her since “a woman should stay with her husband even if it costs her own life”.

Zeina then learned about the National YWCA of Lebanon’s shelter where she received social and psychological support. She regained her dignity and health, and became economically self-sufficient after participating in vocational training at one of the YWCA centres.

It’s important to remember that our health is an integral part of our wholeness. It takes into account our personal experience, but also the creative acceptance of those parts of ourselves which we sometimes hate or which may cause us despair. Being healthy is
something we do not achieve alone, but in relation to God and to those around us. We are healthy when we respect each other, support each other, empower one another to be equals, and build just peace. We empower one another to be free, as we were created to be.

What is our calling? In our biblical passage today, Moses was still in the formative stage of the mission God had given him to deliver the people of Israel from Egypt, the land of captivity, and take them to the Promised Land. Part of his training for this great mission lay in the land of Midian where he took refuge from Pharaoh after he realised that his life might be in danger. We do not know where this land was because the Midianites were a nomadic people. When their animals had grazed on all the available grass, they moved on to other lands that still had pasture.

While wandering around in that land, Moses soon stumbled across some shepherds who were harassing women. The shepherds used their masculinity the wrong way. They wanted their animals to drink the water from the well first and, because they were more powerful, they harassed the women. Perhaps they did this often and got away with it. But not this time. Moses did not sit back and watch. He swung into action and saved the women, helped them with their work, and sent them safely back home.

We do not know how Moses rescued these women. Did he simply rebuke the shepherds or did he actually fight? What we know is that Moses was courageous. He put his life on the line. This is how much he respected the women.

What started as an incidental display of Moses’ godly character ended up with him marrying one of the women. The father of the women, Reuel (later called Jethro in the Bible), upon hearing of Moses and his kind gesture, knew that Moses was the kind of man he wanted his daughters to marry. So, he not only offered him a home to live in, but he also gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses as a wife. Moses now had “the priest of Midian” as his father-in-law.

With this courageous act, Moses went from a wandering and homeless stranger in a foreign land to having a new home, a new wife, and a new family. This is but one example of how God often blesses men who respect and protect women.

Violence like the kind that Chiara, Zeina and the women in today’s Bible reading all experienced or nearly experienced can happen anywhere if we lose our sense of justice, if we fail to show careful consideration to others and do not listen to God. Violence begins with us, our households, and our communities—and then spreads globally. Today God requires us to be peace makers - to respect, empower and support each other and to help prevent violence in all its forms.
Questions for discussion

Let’s ask ourselves:

1. Hearing today’s reflections, what comes to mind?

2. This week, how can I support someone who has experienced violence?

3. As a community, how can we take action to prevent violence, while ensuring we do not become complacent in a world plagued by violence in many forms?

Prayer

Isaiah 32:16-18

The LORD’s justice will dwell in the desert,

his righteousness live in the fertile field.

17 The fruit of that righteousness will be peace;
its effect will be quietness and confidence forever.

18 My people will live in peaceful dwelling places,
in secure homes,
in undisturbed places of rest.

Blessing

May we go into this day with a smile on our faces, with our heads held high,

floating slightly above the ground, because each of us knows “I am loved.”

May this knowledge empower us to turn the world around and share the love we were given.

May God who looks upon us with love and tenderness bless us all.

Amen
DAY 5:  
BECAUSE I COUNT – DIFFERENTLY ABLED PEOPLE

1 Corinthians 12: 4-11

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.”

Reflection: We are all created in God’s image

Today we gather to celebrate the Holy Spirit! Today we gather to celebrate the grand work of our God! Today we gather to celebrate each other and the fullness and diversity we bring into our communities.

What happiness that God the creator of us all has made each of us in God’s image. What happiness that there are those among us who see, others who hear, and others again with the power to put words to those images and sounds. Because, brothers and sisters, God has created each and every one of us uniquely.

Truly, what great gifts there are among you! And what beautiful ways have we found and will we keep finding to use all of those gifts. You may say that’s an exaggeration, or that there are exceptions, but that is definitely not so.

Let me share a story with you. After Diane, a young woman from the Solomon Islands, contracted TB meningitis at age four, she was left with a disability. As a young woman, she joined the YWCA Rise Up! programme where she learned that she had the right to speak out in her community, to stand up in front of people and to say what she wanted to say.

“At first people didn’t really understand me, but I kept on. After a while, people started to realise they must respect me because I speak confidently about community issues and make sense.

In my country, people look down on people with disabilities, but once I knew about human rights, I told them: ‘I know my right, I know my potential, and I have a role to play just like any other human being in my society’. My advice to others is: Do not stop until they listen to you.
Eventually, they will listen to you.”

God can work in mysterious ways. Sitawa is a mental health crusader who uses her journey as a rape survivor living with both epilepsy and bipolar disorder to provide people in Africa with the information and support to deal with daily life and manage mental health conditions. She founded and directs “My Mind, My Funk” (MMMF), a mental health information and support hub, which ran Kenya’s first free mental health support line.

“I do not have any schooling in mental health or psychology or psychiatry, except for advocacy sessions I did with Basic Needs and the trauma informed framework training by Global Trauma Project,” said Sitawa. “I dropped out of actuarial school in my second year due to my illness, but what I offer to the universe is my experience of 14 years living as a rape survivor with a dual diagnosis of epilepsy and bipolar disorder.

“I do this because when I got raped and when I got both my diagnoses, I wished there was a safe space where people had shared their narratives that I could tap into and get the strength to move forward... I definitely hope to see a day where people in Africa (and of African descent) living with mental health conditions and their families will have that space, where they can have access to information and appropriate support.”

Sitawa has managed to show the world an important truth: She is a blessing for many and has demonstrated great abilities that others cannot dream to have.

She has something special. Not despite her experiences or “disorders”, but because of them – she sees and hears what others don’t. She is able to speak to others in similar situations using words they need to hear: words that give hope and strength; words that offer companionship.

This is particularly important at a time when many young people globally identify mental health as a great challenge, according to the World YMCA’s One Million Youth Voices Research. Depression, memory loss and epilepsy are all health issues that the public health systems tend to overlook. And because there is a stigma around these issues, finding information, services and support can be difficult.

This is exacerbated among people living in situations of war or conflict or among people who are experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder after exposure to conflict. Research shows that armed conflict is a contributor to mental illness. In addition, mental illness can also cause people to become perpetrators of violence. This is why YMCAs around the world have begun to incorporate mental health more centrally into their overall health outreach and services.

We are all different. We all have our challenges and our gifts. However, Christ gave the good news to all of us. There are no exceptions. We were ALL made in the image of God. God is good. And God is creative – never will God cease to amaze us with the ways he chooses to bring us hope.

So let us celebrate, let us trust in God and be joyful, and let us let use each other’s gifts, which God has given, to transform ourselves. Together, we will see, hear and speak of it all!
Questions for discussion

Let’s ask ourselves:

1. Hearing today’s reflections, what comes to mind?
2. This week, how can I reach out and support someone who is differently abled?
3. As a community, how can we ensure we are looking at the different abilities among us as gifts and incorporating people who are differently abled into our communities?

Prayer

May the love of the faithful Creator, the peace of the wounded Healer, the joy of the challenging Spirit,
The hope of the Three in One surround and encourage you.
Today and forever,
Amen

Blessing

Through the Spirit we are remade. The Spirit challenges us to live as forgiven, joyful people of God. Go forward in transforming power.
Amen
DAY 6:

INTO YOUR HANDS – ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE


“No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you.”

Let us be the ones who bring light into the body of the community, and name what is dark, and care for the body.

Reflection: Let’s open the gates and let our lights shine

While most young girls were busy playing, five-year old Maria, from Trinidad & Tobago, was meeting her future husband. At age nine, she was married, and by age 11 she was pregnant—the first of 25 pregnancies.

In Trinidad and Tobago, although the legal age for civil marriage is 18, girls as young as 12 are still getting married based on religious exceptions. In fact, it’s a tradition some faith leaders vigorously defend, with one cleric claiming he himself married a child bride years ago.

The YWCA of Trinidad and Tobago is a strong advocate for zero tolerance for violence against women and girls in all its forms, including child marriage. The organisation states:

“Child marriage is an unacceptable violation of the rights of girls and young women, with long-term negative consequences on their health and well-being. It is a form of sexual violence perpetrated on young girls who have not yet achieved sexual maturity.”

In creation, in Jesus, and in all the ways God encounters us during our lives, God brings light to us. We know the Gospels and all the biblical texts telling of encounters with God. We know how far God goes, to give land to the dispossessed, to raise the poor, to lift up the oppressed. We know the worth given to children – daughters and sons are so cherished, that divine rewards are measured by them. And only to the worst of enemies goes punishment that destroys future generations.

Yet why do people, families, and even communities give away their children to experience such misery?

Brothers and sisters, may all of our hearts bleed, call and cry out at the injustice of a fate like
Maria’s from Trinidad. Her light was never given a stand to shine. This is a stain of darkness that we need to name and fight against - not only in Trinidad - for child marriage is a tradition that we can find in every single country in our world.

Poverty leaves little room for dignity. Even worse – it leaves a lot of space in each stomach to try to fill. It is hard for families to care for many children, and the easy way is to have one of those cherished children taken in by another family.

But the price we pay for that kind of relief is too high, and it is the young daughter, the child we should be protecting, who is paying it. We must not let that kind of darkness seep into our lives and our daughter’s lives!

Instead, God calls on us to stand up for one another. Let us build traditions that are life-giving, as God has sent Jesus to us to give us a way that protects life. Let us build communities in which we care for each other’s children as well as for our own. Let us build relationships in which there is space to name wrongdoing, and space to learn from it and grow into better people. Let us look upon one another with kind eyes and hands ready to help.

Do not lose hope, for “hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us (Rom 5:5).”

Let us be the ones who bring light into the body of families and into the community. Let us find a strong voice to name what is dark, so that it may be changed. Let us take each other by the hand and care for the bodies we live in. Let us be gentle to each other and protect our children together. For our hands were created by God, for the world. Our hearts are surrounded by God’s presence. Let us open all gates, so we may be flooded by God’s love.

And may our actions each day show tenderness and grace so that our light may shine brilliantly.
Questions for discussion

Let’s ask ourselves:
1. Hearing today’s reflections, what comes to mind?
2. This week, what can I do to name what is dark and help someone else’s light shine?
3. As a community, how can we protect our children and better care for each other?

Prayer

Loving God, remove from our lives false religion and false confidence
and dependence on things
that do not reach out to the others.
And teach us to abide in your love.
Amen

Blessing

Look at your hands.
See and touch the tenderness.
They are God’s own for the world.

Look at your feet.
See the path and the direction.
They are God’s own for the world.

Listen to your heart.
See the fire and the love.
They are God’s own for the world.

Look at the cross.
See Jesus our saviour.
God’s own for the world.

This is God’s world.
We will serve God in it.
DAY OF WORSHIP:

ALL EQUAL IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

Proposal and guidelines for Celebration - WORSHIP

Please note that you can schedule your day of worship at any point during the week.

I) GATHERING - CALL TO WORSHIP

During the opening music, the Bible or the book of the gospels may be brought forward and placed either on table or altar, together with candles and flowers or other symbols depending on the local custom.

In the words of welcome, the person presiding welcomes everyone attending.

Opening prayer

Everyday courage is all I ask.

We are in charge together. Not as controllers, but as a living process.

We are not there yet, but

I will not let what I think destroy what I believe.

Enthusiasm and aliveness are connected – it is just fine to have both of them.

II) WORD

Reading: Luke 15: 3-7:

One or more people can read this text, repeating the same text. You can also use mime or other forms of theatre. In addition, it may be possible to integrate icons, photos or video relating to the text or to ask people to draw a picture of the story.

The questions at the end of the proposed message are for discussion.

Before and after the sermon/message and credo, you can define time for singing, music and silence.

Luke 15: 3-7 (NIV) Then Jesus told them this parable:

4 “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?

5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders

6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’

7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”
Reflections

God’s world is meant to be one of abundance for all persons, with fundamental rights and dignity for both women and men.

We affirm the promotion of gender equality and justice from a human rights perspective.

We maintain that the contributions and empowerment of women and girls of all ages are fundamental, as even with some notable advancement, the majority of women’s lives are still characterized by economic and political marginalization, poverty, and violence. Although women make significant contributions, society undervalues their full potential and ability as decision-makers.

Many migrants are denied the rights and services guaranteed to citizens, and cannot access legal protection. We affirm the need to motivate all human beings to partner in ending violence and discrimination through positive gender awareness and human rights education. Our movements continue providing clear and relevant responses to radicalization, division and the lack of hope that millions of people experience daily. We are thankful to everyone across our world who helps to build communities, and preserve peace, justice and understanding.

As we encourage you to spend time in reflection, we also encourage you to give voice to vision. The vision of an equal world was an integral part of the recent Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, with the words: “In this Olympic world, we are all equal”.

We are not leaving anyone behind. Or are we?
Questions for discussion

Let’s ask ourselves:

1. Hearing today’s reflections, what comes to mind?
2. This week, what can I do to reach out to someone who is marginalized or undervalued in my community?
3. As a community, how can we ensure that we are including all members of our community and treat everyone with dignity and respect?

Credo

(Reader): We live the Gospel of Jesus Christ and bear witness to it with our words and deeds.

(All): We live the Gospel of Jesus Christ and bear witness to it with our words and deeds.

(Reader): We meet people of different beliefs and faiths with respect, seeking dialogue with them.

(All): We meet people of different beliefs and faiths with respect, seeking dialogue with them.

(Reader): We are committed to building up humanity and peace in the world.

(All): We are committed to building up humanity and peace in the world.

(Reader): We look for a vision for our world being together in a way that is stronger than fear or selfishness.

(All): We look for a vision for our world being together in a way that is stronger than fear or selfishness.

(Reader): We place our trust in the Holy Spirit.

(All): We place our trust in the Holy Spirit.
III) PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

These are inspired by the material prepared for the each day of the week of prayer. They celebrate God in hospitality towards us manifested in Jesus Christ. They are at once prayers of request united by faith and by the common witness.

Help us, dear God, not to become part of the problem by colluding in silence and turning a blind eye.

We pray that our homes may be free of oppression and places where children grow up to become men and women, co-equal, with healthy self-esteem respecting one another.

Dear God, we thank you for blessing us with the gift of life and dignity. Help us to put our faith into action so that it brings healing to the world.

We pray with those suffering from any illness of body and mind. Make us support channels of healing.

Lead us to act justly, to be agents of hope and renewal. God, we put our hope in you and praise you for Jesus’ promise, “See, I am with you always even unto the end of time.”

Amen

Music

IV) SENDING EXPRESSES OUR DESIRE TO ASK FOR GOD’S BLESSING FOR THE PRESENT AND FUTURE

Closing Blessing:

The blessing of God
The eternal goodwill of God
The shalom of God
The wildness and the warmth of God
be among and between us
now and always.
Amen


OR:

The love of the faithful Creator
The peace of the wounded Healer
The joy of the challenging Spirit
The hope of the Three in One
Surround and encourage you
Today, tonight and forever.
Amen
## BIBLE READING PLAN:
November 2016 to October 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>November 2016</th>
<th>December 2016</th>
<th>January 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 2 Corinthians 7:2-16</td>
<td>1. Isaiah 60:15-22</td>
<td>1. Psalms 104</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. 2 Peter 1:12-21</td>
<td>15. Isaiah 66:1-4</td>
<td>15. Psalm 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2017</td>
<td>March 2017</td>
<td>April 2017</td>
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<td><strong>1.</strong> Colossians 3:1-4</td>
<td><strong>1.</strong> Acts 5:12-16</td>
<td><strong>1.</strong> Acts 13:26-43</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>2.</strong> Colossians 3:5-11</td>
<td><strong>2.</strong> Acts 5:17-33</td>
<td><strong>2.</strong> Psalm 12</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>3.</strong> Colossians 3:12-17</td>
<td><strong>3.</strong> Acts 5:34-42</td>
<td><strong>3.</strong> Acts 13:44-52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.</strong> Colossians 3:18-4:1</td>
<td><strong>4.</strong> Psalm 118:1-14</td>
<td><strong>4.</strong> Acts 14:1-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.</strong> Colossians 4:2-6</td>
<td><strong>5.</strong> Psalm 118:15-29</td>
<td><strong>5.</strong> Acts 14:8-20a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6.</strong> Colossians 4:7-18</td>
<td><strong>6.</strong> Acts 6:1-7</td>
<td><strong>6.</strong> Acts 14:20b-28</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>7.</strong> Psalm 19</td>
<td><strong>7.</strong> Acts 6:8-15</td>
<td><strong>7.</strong> Acts 15:1-21</td>
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<td><strong>8.</strong> Joel 1:1-20</td>
<td><strong>8.</strong> Acts 7:1-16</td>
<td><strong>8.</strong> Acts 15:22-35</td>
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<td><strong>9.</strong> Joel 2:1-11</td>
<td><strong>9.</strong> Acts 7:17-29</td>
<td><strong>9.</strong> Psalm 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10.</strong> Joel 2:12-17</td>
<td><strong>10.</strong> Acts 7:30-43</td>
<td><strong>10.</strong> Acts 15:36-16:5</td>
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<td><strong>11.</strong> Joel 2:18-27</td>
<td><strong>11.</strong> Psalm 29</td>
<td><strong>11.</strong> Acts 16:6-15</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>13.</strong> Joel 4:1-21</td>
<td><strong>13.</strong> Acts 7:54-8:3</td>
<td><strong>13.</strong> Acts 16:25-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>14.</strong> Psalm 45</td>
<td><strong>14.</strong> Acts 8:26-40</td>
<td><strong>14.</strong> Philippians 1:1-11</td>
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<td><strong>15.</strong> Acts 1:1-14</td>
<td><strong>15.</strong> Acts 9:1-9</td>
<td><strong>15.</strong> Philippians 1:12-18a</td>
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<td><strong>16.</strong> Acts 1:15-26</td>
<td><strong>16.</strong> Acts 9:10-19a</td>
<td><strong>16.</strong> Psalm 1</td>
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<td><strong>17.</strong> Acts 2:1-13</td>
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<td><strong>17.</strong> Philippians 1:18b-26</td>
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<td><strong>18.</strong> Acts 2:14-28</td>
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<td><strong>20.</strong> Philippians 2:12-18</td>
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<td><strong>21.</strong> Psalm 30</td>
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<td><strong>21.</strong> Philippians 2:19-30</td>
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<td><strong>22.</strong> Acts 2:42-47</td>
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<td><strong>22.</strong> Philippians 3:1-11</td>
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<td><strong>23.</strong> Acts 3:1-10</td>
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<td><strong>23.</strong> Psalm 26</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>24.</strong> Acts 3:11-26</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>24.</strong> Philippians 3:12-16</td>
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<td><strong>25.</strong> Psalm 47</td>
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<td><strong>25.</strong> Philippians 3:17-21</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>26.</strong> Philippians 4:1-9</td>
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<td><strong>27.</strong> Acts 4:13-22</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>27.</strong> Philippians 4:10-23</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>28.</strong> Psalm 27</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>28.</strong> Acts 17:1-15</td>
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<td><strong>29.</strong> Acts 4:23-31</td>
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<td><strong>29.</strong> Acts 17:16-34</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>30.</strong> Acts 4:32-37</td>
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<td><strong>30.</strong> Psalm 21</td>
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<td>August 2017</td>
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