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Holiday Healing

An Advent Prayer Service for Mental Health

United States
Conference of
Catholic Bishops

AN ADVENT PRAYER SERVICE FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Prepared by the **United States Conference of Catholic Bishops** © 2026
As part of the USCCB National Catholic Mental Health Campaign

The holidays can be overwhelming for many people. While the lead up to Thanksgiving, Advent, Christmas, and New Years can be joyful and memorable, it can also add layers of stress and anxiety for others. Those who live with chronic mental health conditions can find their symptoms compounded at this time of year. With such a strong focus on family in Advent and Christmas, the loss and grief of loved ones who have died can be especially painful.

With this in mind, the USCCB National Catholic Mental Health Campaign has developed this simple prayer service for local communities to use in the Advent or Christmas seasons. Since mental health conditions can affect so many people, it is recommended that an invitation to such a prayer service be as wide as possible, including to those who are not actively practicing the Catholic faith.

Local communities can also make adaptations to the order of service as they see fit. The hymns listed are not prescribed, nor are they specifically endorsed; however, they can offer the organizers some possible ideas for consideration as to the tone/feeling of that moment during the program.

OPENING HYMN

- Prior to the opening hymn, taper candles may be distributed to participants.
- Possible Hymns: "My Soul in Stillness Waits" (Text: Psalm 95 and "O" Antiphons; Marty Haugen, 1980, 2005 © GIA Publications, Inc.) or "O Come O Come Emmauel" (Traditional, text and tune: *Veni, veni Emmanuel*)

INTRODUCTORY PRAYER

We gather here to recall the mystery of our redemption.
In a special way, we keep in prayer all those who struggle with mental and emotional health concerns, in particular during this holiday season.
By journeying with those who walk in darkness in anticipation of great light, we continue to reflect with joy on this wondrous mystery.

We now listen attentively to the Word of God,
to the prophets who told of the coming Messiah.
and to the music which orients our hearts toward God's love for his people.

O Lord, bless our time together this evening,
as we prepare our hearts to welcome your coming.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

CANDLE LIGHTING

- During this time, the candle tapers are lit for all participants.
- Possible Hymn: "Christ, Be Our Light" (Bernadette Farrell, 1993, 2012 © OCP)

FIRST READING
Isaiah 9:1-6

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah:

> The people who walked in darkness
> have seen a great light;
> upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom
> a light has shone.
> You have brought them abundant joy
> and great rejoicing,
> as they rejoice before you as at the harvest,
> as people make merry when dividing spoils.
> For the yoke that burdened them,
> the pole on their shoulder,
> and the rod of their taskmaster
> you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.
> For every boot that tramped in battle,
> every cloak rolled in blood,
> will be burned as fuel for flames.
> For a child is born to us, a son is given us;
> upon his shoulder dominion rests.
> They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero,
> Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.
> His dominion is vast
> and forever peaceful,
> from David's throne, and over his kingdom,
> which he confirms and sustains
> by judgment and justice,
> both now and forever.
> The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this!

The word of the Lord.
R. *Thanks be to God*.

PSALM RESPONSE
Psalm 46

R. (5) *The waters of the river gladden the city of God,*
the holy dwelling of the Most High!

God is our refuge and our strength,
an ever-present help in distress.
Therefore, we fear not, though the earth be shaken
and mountains plunge into the depths of the sea.

R. *The waters of the river gladden the city of God,*
the holy dwelling of the Most High!

There is a stream whose runlets gladden the city of God,
the holy dwelling of the Most High.
God is in its midst; it shall not be disturbed;
God will help it at the break of dawn.

R. *The waters of the river gladden the city of God,*
the holy dwelling of the Most High!

The LORD of hosts is with us;
our stronghold is the God of Jacob.
Come! behold the deeds of the LORD,
the astounding things he has wrought on earth.

R. *The waters of the river gladden the city of God,*
the holy dwelling of the Most High!

SECOND READING
Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11, 31

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah:

Comfort, give comfort to my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her
that her service is at an end,
her guilt is expiated;
indeed, she has received from the hand of the LORD
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:
In the desert prepare the way of the LORD!

Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!
Every valley shall be filled in,
  every mountain and hill shall be made low;
  the rugged land shall be made a plain,
  the rough country, a broad valley.
Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
  and all people shall see it together;
  for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Go up on to a high mountain,
  Zion, herald of glad tidings;
  cry out at the top of your voice,
  Jerusalem, herald of good news!
Fear not to cry out
  and say to the cities of Judah:
Here is your God!
Here comes with power
  the Lord GOD,
  who rules by his strong arm;
  here is his reward with him,
  his recompense before him.

Like a shepherd he feeds his flock;
  in his arms he gathers the lambs,
  carrying them in his bosom,
  and leading the ewes with care.

They that hope in the LORD
  will renew their strength,
  they will soar on eagles' wings;
They will run and not grow weary,
  walk and not grow faint.

The word of the Lord.
R. *Thanks be to God.*

PSALM RESPONSE
Psalm 23

R. *The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.*
or:
R. *Though I walk in the valley of darkness, I fear no evil, for you are with me.*

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
beside restful waters he leads me;
he refreshes my soul.

R. *The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.*
or:
R. *Though I walk in the valley of darkness, I fear no evil, for you are with me.*

He guides me in right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk in the dark valley
I fear no evil; for you are at my side
with your rod and your staff
that give me courage.

R. *The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.*
or:
R. *Though I walk in the valley of darkness, I fear no evil, for you are with me.*

You spread the table before me
in the sight of my foes;
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

R. *The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.*
or:
R. *Though I walk in the valley of darkness, I fear no evil, for you are with me.*

Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for years to come.

R. *The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.*
or:
R. *Though I walk in the valley of darkness, I fear no evil, for you are with me.*

THIRD READING
Micah 5:1-4a

A reading from the book of the prophet Micah:

> Thus says the LORD:
> You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah
> too small to be among the clans of Judah,
> from you shall come forth for me
> one who is to be ruler in Israel;
> whose origin is from of old,
> from ancient times.
> Therefore the Lord will give them up, until the time
> when she who is to give birth has borne,
> and the rest of his kindred shall return
> to the children of Israel.
> He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock
> by the strength of the LORD,
> in the majestic name of the LORD, his God;
> and they shall remain, for now his greatness
> shall reach to the ends of the earth;
> he shall be peace.

The word of the Lord.
R. *Thanks be to God.*

REFLECTION

- A presider or prayer leader may offer a brief spoken reflection (no more than 5 minutes).
- Consider raising issues related to holidays and their connection to loneliness, anxiety, grief, depression, and other mental health concerns, inviting participants to name (in their hearts) that which is causing them anxiety and allowing God to comfort them in hope.
- Some communities may wish to incorporate a ritual act (such as writing mental health concerns and prayers on a piece of paper and bringing them to the front of the church).
- The taper candles lit at the beginning of the service may be extinguished at this time, or at another appropriate time during the service (which can be discerned by local organizers).

CONTEMPLATION

- Pause here for an extended period of quiet contemplation (5 to 15 minutes, depending on local needs); this can either be reflective silence or silence punctuated by music.

- If Music Used, Possible Hymns to Consider: "I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say" (Text: Horatius Bonar, Tune: Kingsfold, CMG; harm. by Ralph Vaughn Williams); or "*Nada Te Turbe*" (Text: St. Teresa of Jesus; Taizé Community; Jacques Berthier, 1986, 1991 © Les Presses de Taizé, GIA Publications, Inc.), or "O Little Town of Bethlehem" (Text: Phillips Brooks, Tune: St. Louis, Lewis H. Redner).

CANTICLE OF MARY (*MAGNIFICAT*)
Luke 1:46-55

Invite the assembly to stand for the Gospel Canticle (and the remainder of the service).

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he remembered his promise of mercy,

the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.

PETITIONS

For the Church and, in a particular way, for the U.S. Bishops' National Catholic Mental Health Campaign, that it may raise awareness of the mental health crisis, reduce stigma, and inspire loving action, we pray to the Lord.

R. *Lord, hear our prayer*.

For the nation and for all individuals across the country impacted by loneliness, anxiety, depression, grief, addiction, and mental illness, in a particular way at the holidays, that God may bless and sustain them with his grace and consolation, we pray to the Lord.

R. *Lord, hear our prayer.*

For caretakers, families, and all those who accompany women and men who experience mental health challenges and mental illness, that they may be strengthened in their ministries of care, we pray to the Lord.

R. *Lord, hear our prayer.*

For our own mental health struggles and mental and spiritual wellness, and for those who are impacted in our local communities and families, that we may find healing and hope in the Lord and in one another, we pray to the Lord.

R. *Lord, hear our prayer.*

For this assembly, that our eyes and ears may be opened to see and hear those who struggle with mental health and mental illness, we pray to the Lord.

R. *Lord, hear our prayer.*

For those who have died, especially those who died by suicide and those whose memory is recalled during this holiday season, that they may know rest and refreshment in the Kingdom, and that the Lord may welcome them home, we pray to the Lord.

R. *Lord, hear our prayer.*

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Invite the assembly to join together for the words the Lord taught us.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, our God,
you sent your Son as a light into the world
to bear our infirmities, endure our sufferings,
and illuminate the darkness.

For all those who wait in uncertainty in this Advent time,
for those who struggle with mental health conditions, often compounded in these days:
with loneliness, anxiety, depression, grief, addiction, and mental illnesses,

We ask that your blessing will give them renewed strength
to journey through these trials and challenges now and in every season,
through the power of patience, comfort, and accompaniment,
and that, with your grace, they may find healing, health, and hope.

Through Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

DISMISSAL

- If this service is presided over by a priest or deacon, he may offer a formal blessing; if this service is led by a non-ordained/lay person, that individual may simply conclude with the Sign of the Cross and an invitation, "Let us go now in the peace of Christ."

- Possible Hymns: "People Look East" (Text: Eleanor Farjeon, © David Higham Assoc. Ltd., Tune: Besancon, Martin Shaw, 1928 © Oxford University Press); or "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" (Traditional, text and tune: *Veni, veni Emmanuel*).

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