



*In Times Like These ...*

*A Pan-African  
Christian Devotional  
for Public Policy  
Engagement*

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**On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the martyrdom  
of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Poor People's Campaign.**

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Rev. Dr. Angelique Walker-Smith, Editor



# PARTNERS



Community of Faith South Africa



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United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands



Bread for the World is a collective Christian voice urging our nation's decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad. By changing policies, programs, and conditions that allow hunger and poverty to persist, we provide help and opportunity far beyond the communities where we live.

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# FOREWORD

I am pleased to see this book of meditations and devotions centered on the hopes, dreams, aspirations, challenges, and opportunities for the vast international Pan-African community. For four years, I served as the United States Ambassador to the African Union (AU) and concurrently, for three years, as the United States Representative to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). The AU and UNECA represent two of the three major Pan-African organizations designated by policy and function to serve the needs of Africa. The third major Pan-African organization is the African Development Bank (AfDB). It was my privilege to work with and support the strategic partners' dialogue hosted by the joint secretariat of the AU, UNECA, and AfDB.

Working with these three Pan-African organizations gave me a broad appreciation for the opportunities and the challenges Africa faces in terms of continental integration and how African leaders seek to find African-led solutions in the areas of peace and security, economic development, democracy, food security, and the expanding impact of Africa and African people in the global community. One of the great joys I had working with the AU was helping to strengthen the relationship between the African Union Peace and Security Council and the United Nations Security Council. This relationship is essential because Africa has more member nation seats in the United Nations than any other continent. All issues facing Africa have global implications and all global issues have African implications.

Recognizing that Pan-Africanism extends beyond the African continent, the African Union has declared that all persons in the large international African Diaspora represent the sixth geographical region of Africa. The African continent has five geographical regions representing the economic, political, and security interests of the North, South, Central, East, and West. The African Union has invited the international Diaspora to participate in Africa's development. This participation comes in many ways beyond traditional aid and support provided by the Diaspora. It comes in the support the Diaspora provides to encourage greater international recognition of productive investments in Africa's future. Africa has the world's fastest growing population and has the wealthiest deposits of natural resources needed for the future of the world. Africa also has the world's largest land masses for productive agricultural development. It is essential for the future of humanity that the international community works with Africa for the good of Africa and the global community.

This Pan-African devotional guide provides the mindful and intentional focus on how our various faith traditions call us to show appreciation to God by appreciating the birth place of the human family. Our faith calls us to understand that our connected humanity makes us all inextricably bound to each other and to the God who created us. There are no geographical distances, language or faith differences that can lessen God's call for us to have shared responsibility for humanity.

Dr. Michael A. Battle Sr.  
U. S. Ambassador to the African Union (2009-2013)



# INTRODUCTION

*In times like these, you need a Savior,  
In times like these, you need an anchor;  
In times like these, you need the Bible,  
In times like these, O be not idle;  
In times like these, I have a Savior,  
In times like these, I have an anchor;*

*Chorus*

*This Rock is Jesus, Yes He's the One,  
This Rock is Jesus, the only One;  
Be very sure, be very sure,  
Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!*

This hymn, written in 1943 by Ruth Caye Jones and popularized by Mahalia Jackson in 1963 during the height of the civil rights movement, is a favorite hymn in many of our churches. Times of conflict, war, national division, hunger, poverty, or relative peace or prosperity do not diminish the love and power available to us from God. This weekly devotional guide recognizes this while honoring the legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at the time of his martyrdom on April 4, 1968, the Poor People's Campaign, and Tent City/Resurrection City following this. These occasions remind us that our advocacy to end hunger and poverty during this midterm election matters.

Although Pan-African people are disproportionately affected by hunger and poverty, Pan-African people remain resilient and empowered by their faith. This devotional guide invites deepened relationship with and among Pan-African people and elected leaders in the mission to end hunger and poverty. Twenty-three national and global church partners represented through 46 Pan-African church leaders and scholars from across the United States, Canada, Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa have contributed to this devotional guide and invite you to use it to advance this mission.

## **Use of the Devotional Guide:**

1. Use this devotional guide weekly or monthly to explore its themes and sub-themes in and outside of your church. The themes reflect the calendars of the Christian year, the Pan-African church community, and policies that seek to end hunger and poverty.
2. Use this devotional guide as a source for Bible study and worship when engaging the biblical texts, messages, and prayers to empower your advocacy to end hunger and poverty.
3. Use the Pan-African historical highlights to deepen your understanding of the contributions of Pan-African people.
4. Use the suggested songs from the Pan-African church community as an accompaniment to the devotional guide. These songs and related musicians can be found on the internet.
5. Use the questions as a source for advocacy and as an invitation to go to [bread.org](http://bread.org) to learn about our Offering of Letters, Lobby Day, Bread for the World Sunday, prayer and fasting resources, the Hunger Report, legislative updates, and other resources.

Thank you for praying with us as we advocate to end hunger and poverty in times like these.

*Rev. Dr. Angelique Walker-Smith is devotional guide editor and senior associate for Pan-African and Orthodox Church Engagement at Bread for the World.*

January



Joseph Moller/Bread for the World

*In Times Like These ... We Are Called  
to Unity and Freedom*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FIRST SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... Bread Matters!

**Scripture:** *“Then Jesus said to them, ‘suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, Friend, lend me three loaves of bread ... And suppose the one inside answers ... I can’t get up and give you anything.’” (Luke 11:5-7)*

**Devotional Reflection:** When I think of bread, I am reminded of my childhood. I can remember the government-sponsored truck appearing in our neighborhood block. I recall how excited adults were, especially my mother, to receive boxes from the truck. The family benefit to our poor household of four hungry children was cheese to make cheese sandwiches. The cheese contained in those brown boxes was to us what a sandwich from Subway means today to fortunate children. But what good would cheese be without bread?

I remember receiving loaves of bread from neighbors—spreading Skippy Peanut Butter, butter and jelly, apple butter, etc. on the bread. And what about bologna? Thank God for bologna sandwiches with mayonnaise and mustard. I would be remiss if I did not include Big Mamma’s rolls and famous biscuits for dinner and breakfast. I could go further but the point is bread mattered then and bread matters today!

Bread for the World has made a clarion call out to those for whom Bread Matters—not just to us but to others affected by poverty across the globe! There are those who have not tasted what many of us take for granted. Those sandwiches would not have happened without the truck deliveries and the generosity of neighbors who looked beyond their privilege and saw a mother and her children in need. Our advocacy with Congress should ensure that more families receive the “bread” they deserve.

**Prayer:** Father of all, open the hearts of those who are positioned to bring daily bread to those in need of bread. Help all of your creation to understand your heart for all to be fed. May our actions reflect this as we seek to serve all children. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** The Rev. Ralph Abernathy, former leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, led The Poor People’s Campaign in Washington, D.C. following the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. The aim was to raise the nation’s consciousness about hunger and poverty. The campaign led to an expansion of the food stamp program (now called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP) in the United States.

**Meditational Music:** *“Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Where have you witnessed hunger in your life or in your surrounding communities?
2. What changes or actions are needed in order for you to develop a stronger voice for advocacy?

*Rev. Dr. Charles Mock is the pastor of the Community Missionary Baptist Church in Erie, Pa., and the immediate past executive director and chairman of the Home Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR SECOND SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Must Stand with the Oppressed and Marginalized

**Scripture:** *“Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power.” (Exodus 15:6)*

**Devotional Reflection:** The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity began in the early 20th century as a time for Christians to pray, worship, and celebrate together God’s gift of unity. In the Northern hemisphere, it is celebrated Jan. 18-25, while observed around Pentecost in the Southern hemisphere. The churches of the Caribbean offer one of their themes and related materials for this devotional. Exodus 15 honors and celebrates the power of the liberating God who chooses to stand with the oppressed and marginalized. The Caribbean, like the Israelite people, also experienced slavery and oppression as a result of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism. Despite this suffering, Caribbean people, like the Israelites, found ways to offer praise to the God who continues to care and deliver God’s people.

Moses’ and Miriam’s songs of praise to God comes just as the Israelites crossed over into freedom, having just escaped the oppressor’s army by crossing on dry land. Although they were free, they had not reached the promised land at this point. Still, they paused to celebrate God’s faithfulness. New found freedom is reason to celebrate. Moses and Miriam knew this well as did those African Americans who learned of the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared their freedom from slavery. God’s liberating and compassionate actions must always be celebrated.

During this great exodus to freedom and promise, God guided them through many dangers with clouds by day and a pillar of fire by night. Today, we too celebrate the God who guides and provides while still asking the question of question of what more we can do to advocate for justice so that none among us is oppressed and so that all might eat?

**Prayer:** Powerful and loving God, let your right-hand guide us to freedom and justice for the most vulnerable among us. In the name of Christ who prayed that we all be one, Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. understood the interlocking systems of oppression that kept black and brown people trapped in poverty’s bondage. He also understood the power of unity. In a visit to the Caribbean region he said, “Here you have people from many national backgrounds ... I hope that we will see this and we will become one big family of Americans.”

**Meditational Music:** *“The Right Hand of God”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Where do you see the right-hand of God moving and guiding you to take action on behalf of the most vulnerable?
2. In the spirit of Christian unity and collaboration, how might you partner with faith communities different from your own to address issues related to poverty and hunger through advocacy?

*Rev. Dr. Garland Pierce is the executive director of the Department of Christian Education for the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME).*



# DEVOTIONAL FOR THIRD SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Are Called to Share the Good News of Freedom!

**Scripture:** *“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’” (Mark 1:14-15)*

**Devotional Reflection:** I imagine how my great-great-great grandmother, Leah Ballard, must have felt. In South Carolina—the first state to secede from the Union during the Civil War—I imagine Leah standing over the pit next to the kitchen house on the day she learned she was free. She was free after nearly 15 generations of the whip, sale of family members, and sexual violence. When the old folks sang, “Roll, Jordan, Roll,” did any dare to dream of the day when freedom would come for all? I imagine Leah preparing the children’s daily ration of corn when she hears it, “We, free!”

Leah keeps stirring.

“Ma’am, we free,” the stranger on the road cries!

How did it feel for the women and men of Galilee—the area where 2,000 men and boys were crucified in one day and 500 more per day after that in retaliation for attempted insurrection? Blood soaked the roads of Galilee. The message was clear: Attempt insurrection; be crushed.

The text tells us that John the Baptist was arrested for challenging Herod’s complicity with Roman rule. Was freedom from Caesar even possible to dream?

In Mark 1:15, Jesus says the words: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

In other words: You are free! The kingdom of God has come to confront the kingdoms of humankind, which crush the image of God on earth! Turn and bow to the truth. The kingdom is near and freedom has come!

Where is our unity in this week of Christian unity and freedom? We are all made in the image of God. We are part of God’s kitchen table—hungry and in need of food for our bodies and souls—hungry yet created with the capacity to help steward the world. May we dare to dream of the day where hunger dies and everyone flourishes.

**Prayer:** Oh, king of the shalom Kingdom, come. Let the River Jordan roll over all the hungry people of the world. Unite us in the recognition of the image of God in all. And bring your freedom. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** The song “Roll, Jordan, Roll,” featured in the film “12 Years a Slave,” is a spiritual written by Charles Wesley in the 18th century, which became well-known among slaves in the United States during the 19th century.

**Meditational Music:** *“Roll, Jordan, Roll”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. How does your ancestry inform your advocacy?
2. What group or coalition of people, different from you, do you advocate with?

*Lisa Sharon Harper is the founder and principal of Freedom Road, LLC and author of several books, including “The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right.”*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FOURTH SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Are Called to Remember the Struggle for Emancipation

**Scripture:** "... When your children ask their parents in time to come, 'What do these stones mean?' then you shall let your children know, 'Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground ...'" (Joshua 4: 1-7, 19-24)

**Devotional Reflection:** How do we honor a legacy? Africans and Africans in diaspora have unique ways of honoring those who paved the way before us. In Jamaica, an ecumenical group of churches has an annual celebration of the emancipation of enslaved Africans in the British colonial territories on Aug. 1, 1834.

The celebration includes an annual Churches' Emancipation Lecture where observations of where full freedom has not yet been achieved is shared. Tamarind balls are served at the end of the celebration. They serve as a reminder of the sour and sweet of the Emancipation experience—the sour taste of oppression and the sweet knowledge of the power of our ancestors and ourselves to triumph over oppression and adversity. The symbolism behind the tamarind balls reminds us of the progression and struggles of Pan-African communities today.

**Prayer:** Gracious God, we give you thanks for our Ancestors who worked and advocated to end poverty and hunger. We thank you for organizations like Bread for the World and all advocates for freedom, justice, and peace. Keep us reminded of your power to bring life and order out of chaos. Remind us that we hold, within us, the authority to overcome evil with good and that You will never abandon us. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. honored the legacy of ancestors who fought against enslavement of Africans in the United States by challenging segregation and discrimination laws that restricted and deprived many opportunities for black communities.

**Meditational Music:** "Glory"

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. What role can rituals and memorials play in the advocacy work to end international poverty and hunger?
2. What are the spiritual resources that lead to resilience and hope in times when dreams of freedom and justice for all seem to be in danger of being eroded?

*Rev. Dr. Marjorie Lewis is the Gordon Scholar at the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax, Nova Scotia and former president of the United Theological College of the West Indies.*

February



Howard Wilson for Bread for the World

*In Times Like These ... We Are Called to  
Remember Our Sacred Story in the Lenten Season*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FIRST SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Are Called to Stand Before the Throne

**Scripture:** *“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Revelation 7:9-10)*

**Devotional Prayer:** O Lord, when you close all the loftily divisive and distracting worldly windows, bring us to the doors of repentance. By the left door of remorse, let us bring our hearts, broken and humbled. By the right door of resolve, let us bring our minds wholly redirected by your Holy Spirit to the throne of Christ. Bring us to that table where all may find a place. For all the races of humanity can be found in your garden, where each of us is one of your beloved flowers.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** This week, in the Coptic liturgical calendar, we remember Antony the Great (c. 251-356), who was born into a family with exceptional wealth and status. After his parents died, Antony gave away all of his inherited wealth and joined the Evangelical Counsel of Jesus. Through self-renunciation and complete devotion to serving God, Antony became a model of Christian living and piety for all believers throughout time.

The life of Antony the Great illustrates the reality of spiritual warfare for devout Christians. Various stories tell of Antony the Great brawling with the devil in his home. Though some people thought him to be peculiar, others were intrigued and inspired by his spiritual sensitivity and devotion to Jesus Christ. Many thought he would soon be forgotten after his death, but today he is credited with having founded monasticism. The notion of monasticism was developed through the simplicity of living that he emphasized amongst his disciples and amongst isolated or outcast Egyptian communities. He championed a life of love, service, and acceptance of all—and his legacy, devoted to truth, is hymned until this day.

**Meditational Music:** *“Third Canticle from the Coptic Midnight Praises”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. While on earth, how can I work toward the vision of the heavenly unity in Revelation 7?
2. How can I begin to live a heavenly life of praise and glorification, even if I find myself in an earthly fiery furnace (trials)?
3. How can I transform my life and the lives of others in a way that reminds us all to keep the throne of God in the foreground?

*Father Daniel Wafik Habib is an ordained presbyter at St. John Coptic Orthodox Church in Covina, Calif. He was ordained at the hands of His Grace Bishop Serapion and His Eminence Metropolitan Hedra.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR SECOND SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Are Called to Stand in Unity and Reconciliation

**Scripture:** *“For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.” (Ephesians 2:14-16)*

**Devotional Prayer:** Thou, who are the light of those lying in darkness and the salvation of the despairing, O Christ my Savior, I rise early to pray to Thee, O King of Peace. Enlighten me with Thy radiance, for I know no other God beside Thee. Putting behind the mark of Cain, we strive to see past our neighbor’s specks and concentrate on our own remarkably large beams of sin that need unceasing prayer. The consubstantial Trinity in God glorified seeks the restoration by adoption of all mankind. Yet all must come to the throne of grace by free will. How wonderful is our God?

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** The Fast of the Great Lent occurs in February in the Coptic Orthodox Church. It is a fast of repentance, in preparation for the joyous Feast of the Resurrection, when Christ passes over our sins. In this fast of repentance, participants are encouraged to turn inwardly—examining the welfare of the soul and tuning the spiritual senses through the physical deprivations. It is a fast of prayer, in which we ask God for the strength to carry our cross as our Savior continues to be the timeless, shining example in our individual spiritual walks. Included in the fast of prayer are requests, thanksgiving, and other dialogue with God. We intentionally still ourselves to hear what it is that God is saying in this season. It is a fast of action in which we hunger in solidarity with those who are hungry and seek to serve those in need. The action of denying oneself food, goes beyond mere requirements of fasting. It speaks to the Christian mission to fight for the human rights of our impoverished and hungry brothers and sisters across the globe. Through the Fast of the Great Lent, we stand in unity.

**Meditational Music:** *“Our Lord Jesus Christ”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Have I neglected my sister and my brother who are in need? If so, how can I be there for them?
2. God is good and merciful to all who are in need. Can I be more God-like in my day-to-day life by extending goodness and mercy to those whom I know are in need?
3. When I fast, what concrete action can I take to alleviate the hunger of those elsewhere in the world?

*Father Daniel Wafik Habib is an ordained presbyter at St. John Coptic Orthodox Church in Covina, Calif. He was ordained at the hands of His Grace Bishop Serapion and His Eminence Metropolitan Hedra.*



# DEVOTIONAL FOR THIRD SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Are Called to Seek the Kingdom of Heaven

**Scripture:** *“Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.” (Matthew 6:31-33)*

**Devotional Prayer:** From our heart, we offer to you three-fold praise, O Lord, Giver of Life. You visited the soul of the humble and despised not the troubled soul. You accepted the persecuted and helped them, you saved those in difficulty. You thought of the hungry and avenged the victims of sin. You are the friend of the faithful, speaker to the righteous, dwelling-place for the pure; you hear those who call upon you in righteousness, protect the widow, save the orphan, grant right leadership to the Church, which you have made a dwelling-place of the glorious faith, the council of the Spirit, the giver of grace and power. While we praise you without rest, we confess in our hearts your kingdom, which was declared unto us by you and your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus, through whom be glory and dominion to you, unto the ages of ages. (Ethiopic Prayer of the Covenant)

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** St. Josephine Bakhita was a Sudanese slave of the late 19th century. She was forcibly converted to Islam, ill-treated to the extent that she forgot her own name, and nicknamed Bakhita (Lucky). She became a nanny in the family of an Italian diplomat. When he bought a hotel on the Red Sea, he went to live there with his wife while he sent his daughter and Bakhita to stay with Canossian nuns in Venice. Bakhita officially converted on Easter of that year and was baptized as Josephine. When the parents came back, Bakhita did not want to leave the convent, though the diplomat’s wife tried to force her. The mother superior was shocked at this treatment and called in the authorities to ensure Josephine’s continuing freedom. Josephine became a Canossian nun and, as doorkeeper to the convent in Schio, was beloved by the townspeople for her gentleness, calm voice, and smile. As soon as she died in 1947, people began to call for her canonization. She has been officially named the patron saint of Sudan. Her feast day is Feb. 8.

**Meditational Music:** *“O Sing Unto Him Who Was Crucified”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Can I struggle to sacrifice something from my tomorrow in order to help someone today?
2. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” How can I help end local injustices?
3. In the story of St. Josephine Bakhita, her mother superior ensured her freedom. How can you take on that role for someone else?

*Father Daniel Wafik Habib is an ordained presbyter at St. John Coptic Orthodox Church in Covina, Calif. He was ordained at the hands of His Grace Bishop Serapion and His Eminence Metropolitan Hedra.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FOURTH SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Are Called to Pray and Seek the Lord's Face

**Scripture:** *"Your face, Lord, I will seek. Do not hide Your face from me. You have been my help; Do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation."* (Psalm 27:8-10)

**Devotional Prayer:** The brethren asked Abba Agathon, "Amongst all good works, which is the virtue that requires the greatest effort?" He answered, "Forgive me, but I think there is no labor greater than that of prayer to God. For every time men or women want to pray, enemies and demons want to prevent them because our spiritual enemies know that it is only by turning the Christian from prayer that they can hinder the Christian's journey. Whatever good works that the body of Believers undertake, if they persevere in it, they will attain rest. Prayer is warfare to the last breath." (*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers. trans. Benedicta Ward. Kalamazoo, Michigan, Cistercian Publications 1975, revised 1984.*)

Oh Lord, grant us strength as we struggle against the vices of this present age and remember You in all that we do. We understand that we have been called to pray and to seek your face in the midst of spiritual wickedness in high places. We ask that you would help us to keep a spirit of integrity and endurance to do well in this life, despite the fiery darts and words of discouragement from the enemy. We are confident that we will have the victory and that you will never leave nor forsake us in the fight. Through tribulation, we seek solace in you.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** Today, the 18th of Meshir, according to the Coptic liturgical calendar, we remember the temptations presented to our Lord in the wilderness, where he fasted forty days and forty nights. Like humankind, our Lord was tempted. However, Christ is the perfect example of perseverance because he did not falter. In the wilderness, He showed us how to fast, pray, and escape the darts of the enemy. It is also through this examination of our Lord in the wilderness that we are given a blueprint for spiritual growth and for overcoming various plights and temptations in life. This second Sunday of Lent, we are reminded to press on and take courage despite the path to the Cross being a difficult road.

**Meditational Music:** *"The Peace of God"*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Do you know people with whom you can gather and pray?
2. Are you willing to pray regularly for someone who does not have anyone else to remember him or her in prayers?
3. In addition to donating, are you willing to devote time this Lenten season to pray for those without material and/or spiritual food?

*Monica Mikhail is a parishioner at St. John Coptic Orthodox Church in Covina, Calif.*

**March**



Crystalline Randazzo for Bread for the World

*In Times Like These... We Are Called to  
Affirm the Dignity of Women*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FIRST SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... Women Are the Bearers of Change

**Scripture:** *“I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations.” (Isaiah 42:6)*

**Devotional Reflection:** Perhaps God is calling us to worship this morning. Calling us to serve in ways that go beyond the walls of the sanctuary.

Perhaps God is stoking the flames ignited within so that we will be more than a beacon of light in the world—but we will be the blaze that paves the path.

We will be the fire that refines and resurrects the world around us.

We will be the fire on the streets and an uncompromising blaze for all the world to see!

Perhaps God is reaching inward so that we may reach out and touch the untouchables, embrace the outcasts and be a bridge over troubled waters and along borders where walls threaten to further deepen the divides.

Perhaps God is calling us out and calling us out of here to be the change God wants us to be. Perhaps amidst the busyness of political strategizing, campaigning, and our political correctness, God is calling us to look beyond ourselves and to see those around us that thirst, that hunger, that cry out in their lament, and that resist the status quo.

Perhaps God is calling us right now to be the transformation we need to see. Be the song, dance, sermon, protest, resistance, light in the world and the justice and hope we so urgently need today.

Let us then—me and you—be the call to worship and the call in this world, trusting and knowing that God has already gone before us. And yes, God is with us, too.

God, we lift up a prayer of radical hope in radical times when we need a radical savior. We invite your divine presence here with us today. Come now and be the One who is on the side of the oppressed. Amen.

**Prayer:** God of all nations, we thank you for the calling that you have placed on our lives. Fill us with the audacity, relentlessness, and righteousness needed to be bearers of change. We ask that you be at the center of all of our efforts. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** On June 9, 1963, Fannie Lou Hamer, a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, was arrested and assaulted by law enforcement officers at a jail in Winona, Miss. News of this spread across the United States, and Hamer went on to be an influential activist and organizer in the Freedom Summer of 1964 and beyond.

**Meditational Music:** *“A Change is Going to Come”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. What are the areas of advocacy that you feel called to in the fight to end world hunger?
2. How can you bring change to surrounding black and brown communities right now?

*Rev. Waltrina N. Middleton is the associate dean of the historic Andrew Rankin Memorial Chapel at Howard University in Washington, D.C.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR SECOND SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Are Called to Speak with Wisdom and Faith

**Scripture:** *“She is clothed with strength and dignity ... She speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction is on her tongue.” (Proverbs 31:25-26)*

**Devotional Reflection:** “Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.” – Harriet Tubman

Storytelling is how our ancestors shared wisdom with younger generations. Our stories teach important life lessons about overcoming challenges, resolving conflict, and fulfilling traditional standards. One of my favorite childhood books, “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” conveys the incomparable legacy of Harriet Tubman, a woman rooted in faith.

The wisdom within Harriet Tubman’s story reminds me of other women I have known, especially through the black church, which is an historical pinnacle of social justice. The understated leaders of this institution are the “mothers of the church”—women who have grown into the elders we love and respect for their strength and wisdom. We bear witness to the faith they speak so highly of and model in their everyday living.

The most influential mother I have known is my paternal grandmother, affectionately known as Mama Lillie. Despite having no formal education, she is one of the wisest women I have had the honor and privilege to know. Raising six children alongside her husband, in overwhelming poverty, she knew nothing but faith. One of her infamous colloquialisms was this: “A heap see, but a few know.” In other words, many people see the surface of one’s life but few know about the trials. It also means that wisdom comes from learned experiences. Many have lost an appreciation for imparting and receiving wisdom. May we rediscover the value in these virtues.

**Prayer:** Like our mothers, give us the strength to speak the wisdom of our faith in you, God. Allow the words of mouths, the meditations of hearts, and our radiating lights to bring others closer to you. By faith in you, we strive to put an end to hunger and extreme poverty. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** For more than a hundred years, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ) has been the steadfast guardian of the Harriet Tubman Home. This living memory of one of our AMEZ leaders honors the legacy of Harriet Tubman and the freedom movement she so eloquently represented for future generations. For the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church—the Freedom Church—it is another brick in the long highway of justice for its people.

**Meditational Music:** *“Siyahamba”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Who are the maternal women of faith who have impacted your life?
2. Why is wisdom and faith important in advocacy work?

*Nicole Powell is a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, where she serves as missionary supervisor of the Western Episcopal District.*



# DEVOTIONAL FOR THIRD SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... Daughters Are Called to Prophetic Utterance

**Scripture:** *“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy ...” (Acts 2:17)*

**Devotional Reflection:** The daughters of Africa have always provided the prophetic starch to the people’s backbone—from vibrant lands flowing with “milk and honey” to the darker-than-dark bowels of slave ships. From 12-foot-long cotton-picking sacks to the striped garments of leased convicts. From blackface and crushing Jim Crow laws to a mass incarceration system that consumes black and brown bodies—especially black and brown men. Throughout, the Daughters of Africa have represented continuity for marginalized communities.

In light of how far we’ve come as members of the African diaspora—holding the present predicaments at the foreground of our consciousness—it is imperative that we accept and firmly wrap the mantle of prophetic utterance around our heads and shoulders.

Among all of the places that we are now called to reimagine, the criminal justice and prison systems urgently require our voices, crying out for reform. It is our Christian duty to share the divine sentiments and words that have been placed on our hearts. Daughters (and all people) of promise: the fate and the welfare of incarcerated people lies within our hands and our collective voice. Let us write to Congress and speak the Word that is alive and active (Hebrews 4:12). The Word is capable of turning the hearts of our governing officials in favor of bipartisan and nonbiased criminal justice reform.

As Kelly Brown Douglas would say, our inherited obligation to marginalized people calls us to “disrupt the anti-black narratives” upon which the mass incarceration system has been built. These narratives have perpetuated poverty, hunger, and dislocation of black and brown families. Daughters (and all people of conviction), we must share the prophetic vision of justice and freedom.

**Prayer:** God of justice and liberty, we thank you for the prophetic vision, audacity, and drive needed to bring change and reform to the systems that do harm to our black and brown communities. May we see the dreams of hope and freedom—which you’ve placed in our hearts—come to fruition. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** In March of 1827, the first African-American newspaper, Freedom’s Journal, was founded by Peter Williams, Jr. and other free blacks in New York. The newspaper defended the human dignity of African Americans and supported the abolishment of slavery.

**Meditational Music:** *“Letter to the Free”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. In what ways do you think or see the criminal justice and prison systems having an impact on black and brown communities?
2. How do you envision a criminal justice system that safeguards human dignity?
3. How can we bring about an urgent awareness for criminal justice reform?

*Nila Curry is a United Methodist Church student at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. She served as an intern with Bread for the World’s Pan-African Church Engagement work during the summer of 2017.*



## DEVOTIONAL FOR FOURTH SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... Women Lead with Grace and Resilience

**Scripture:** *“And as Hagar sat opposite her son, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy ... Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.” (Genesis 21:16b-19)*

**Devotional Reflection:** God’s grace and response to our needs often comes when we do not expect them. The story of Hagar and Ishmael illustrates God’s grace and provision in times of desperation. In many ways, our impoverished and hungry brothers and sisters can relate to Hagar’s position of abuse, starvation, and rejection.

Hagar was ostracized, along with her infant son, Ishmael, with no resources to take care of him. In this horrifying predicament, it was hard to see hope. Abraham had sent her out into the desert with her son because Abraham’s wife, Sarah, was filled with jealousy. Death for both Hagar and the boy seemed imminent. Hagar had already run away from Sarah once before (Genesis 16). But after being instructed by an angel, Hagar returned in obedience.

Like Hagar, we may also feel that all is lost and hopeless. Like Hagar, we often attempt to be obedient to God’s instructions, yet still find ourselves in trouble. In times like these, we must remember that God will take care of us. As children of God, we can expect a change to our dire circumstances. We may not see how it can happen, but God’s grace is abundant and available to all who trust in Him. We might not know all of the details, but God’s promises will come to pass (Isaiah 55:11). From Hagar—a slave, a servant, a concubine, and a single mother—comes a great nation, just as God promised.

**Prayer:** Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer God, help us to hold fast to your amazing grace. Give us patience; help us to surrender our will and our pride. Grant us eyes to see and ears to hear how you can take our troubles and turn them into opportunities. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** On April 25, 1942, Aretha Franklin was born in Memphis, Tenn. Franklin began her career as a child, singing gospel at her father’s church in Detroit, Mich. Franklin has won numerous music and video awards in soul, pop, gospel, and jazz. Many of her songs affirm the dignity of women.

**Meditational Music:** *“Amazing Grace”*

### Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. What do you do to stay focused on God’s word during your troubles?
2. How can you remind women who feel cast out that God is still present with them?
3. How can the church be an advocate for helpless, afflicted, and otherwise marginalized people?

*Bishop Teresa Jefferson-Snorton is the 59th bishop and the first female bishop in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church since its founding in 1870.*

April



Warren K. Leffler/U.S. News & World Report via Wikimedia Commons

*In Times Like These ... We Remember the Legacy of  
Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.  
and the Poor People's Campaign*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FIRST SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Are Called to Do the Right Thing

**Scripture:** *“The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.” (Proverbs 29:7)*

**Devotional Reflection:** Soon after the presidential election of 2016, I watched President Barack Obama meet in the Oval Office with the newly-elected president, Donald J. Trump. As the camera panned left, I noticed a bust of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. over Trump’s right shoulder. I have often wondered, “What might Dr. King have said to our new president in that moment of American history?”

This week marks the 50th anniversary of the assassination of the civil rights leader. We are also mindful that it is also the 50th anniversary of the Poor People’s Campaign.

How apropos it is that as we celebrate the resurrection of our reigning redeemer, Jesus Christ, we also remember the work of King in the struggle for human dignity and economic freedom. We should not forget that King went to Memphis, Tenn. to fight for equal wages for sanitation workers. After fighting for desegregation and voting rights, King was convinced that those advances would not mean much until blacks and other minorities also won economic equality and security.

It is unfortunate that many people only remember the reconciling theology of King while disregarding his roles as an agitator for change and a prophet for the poor and oppressed. Ultimately, he was assassinated because of his unequivocal stand for truth and justice and because of his uncompromised resistance to the triple evils: materialism, militarism, and racism. As King once stated, “The time is always right to do what is right.”

**Prayer:** Gracious God, we give You thanks for the gift of memory as we recall the genesis of the Poor People’s Campaign. Help us to keep alive the flame of justice and righteousness for the poor, recognizing that a threat to anyone’s economic security is a threat to everyone’s economic security. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** After King’s assassination, the Poor People’s Campaign continued under the direction of King’s widow, Coretta Scott King—fittingly on Mother’s Day in 1968. Her maternal compassion for the poor is an inspiration and example for all of us to speak out against immoral budget cuts that show no concern for poverty and hunger.

**Meditational Music:** *“I Need You To Survive”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. In what ways have you shown unconditional love for the poor?
2. Are you willing to conduct a letter-writing campaign to your U.S. representative and senators demanding that they retain and expand programs for the poor, such as Meals on Wheels and the Women, Infant, and Children program (WIC) in the federal budget?

*Rev. Dr. Timothy Tee Boddie is the general secretary of the Progressive National Baptist Convention.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR SECOND SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Must Examine Our Past to Envision Our Future

**Scripture:** *“When your children ask their fathers in times to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ Then you shall let your children know, ‘Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.’” (Joshua 4:22)*

**Devotional Reflection:** From the middle of the Jordan River, Joshua commands that twelve stones be taken out and carried to Gilgal. He also commands twelve stones be stacked on top of one another, but left in the middle of the river. The twelve stones represent the twelve tribes of Israel. However, there are twenty-four stones—the twelve stones left in the river are stacked one on top of the other. The second set of twelve stones are removed from the river and made into a monument. “What does this mean?” the children will ask in the future.

The stones indicate that a human justice movement took place on both sides of the Jordan River: one side representing an old paradigm and the other, a new paradigm.

In the Pan-African perspective—we can observe the Sankofa bird to better understand these two paradigms. The bird flies forward and looks backward simultaneously. In a similar manner, the first set of stones left in the Jordan River are a memorial to those who were the original dissenters against Pharaoh’s empire. They initiated the human justice movement. Yet neither Moses nor Aaron crossed the Jordan River. The next generation did. By Yahweh’s grace, we have come this far by faith and must remember our ancestors and the efforts they made in paving the road to this point.

The second set of stones is a memorial to the present and future. We have made progress and we have new land to embark upon, but we have not yet arrived. Tell the children what the stones mean, so that they will continue the efforts in our human justice movement.

**Prayer:** God of the past, present, and future: in times like these we turn to you for guidance. Help us to become prophetic storytellers, sharing stories of deliverance and ensuring future leaders of your delivering power. Guide us out of the rivers of poverty and hunger and onto a land overflowing with milk and honey. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** On April 5, 1960, Ella Baker organized a meeting at Shaw University in Raleigh, N.C., after the Greensboro sit-ins. The meeting was designed to develop advocacy skills and to provide resources for young activists, organizers, and advocates in the nonviolence movement. Baker was an essential part of the rise of young minds such as Stokely Carmichael and Diane Nash.

**Meditational Music:** *“We Come This Far By Faith”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. How can you prepare youth and emerging leaders for the work that is at hand?
2. How has storytelling had an impact in your life? How can you use it to advocate for the marginalized, hungry, and impoverished?

*Rev. Dr. Joseph N. Evans is the dean of Morehouse School of Religion in Atlanta, Ga.*



# DEVOTIONAL FOR THIRD SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Must Incline Our Ears to the Cries of Poverty

**Scripture:** *“When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, ‘I cannot watch the boy die.’ And as she sat there, she began to sob. God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, ‘What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there.’” (Genesis 21:15-17)*

**Devotional Reflection:** I attended a conference titled “Seeing the Child Transforming the Church” at Howard University School of Divinity in Washington, D.C. I recall the agenda and the theological roadmap created in order to respond to children in crisis. It helped attendees to develop a child advocacy ministry. The foundation for this was the historical witness of the church’s mission and God’s promise of righteousness and justice.

Today we must see the children and hear their cries. The cry of hunger, the cry of despair, the cry of fear and hopelessness are not the cries that children should utter. Children should be full of laughter and joy, with cries of innocence and glee. In Matthew 19:14, Jesus says, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

The Egyptian bondswoman, Hagar, cried in the desert for her son. God heard the cries of the boy and opened the eyes of Hagar—allowing her to see a well of water. We must hear the cries of the poor and hungry. God sees them and hears their cry. We do this when we advocate for children who are hungry.

**Prayer:** Ever-present and almighty God, you watch over us and see all. Please help us to see the needs of children who are hungry wherever they are. Empower us to respond to their cries and their pleas. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** In her memoir, “My Life, My Love, My Legacy,” Coretta Scott King says about the Poor People’s Campaign, “I led the Mother’s Day Parade beside Ethel Kennedy, the wife of Sen. Bobby Kennedy, an event that brought more than 5,000 welfare mothers to march in Washington, D.C. We highlighted the plight of poor women and children from showing rural Appalachia to the urban ghettos, children who were going to bed hungry ...”

**Meditational Music:** *“Jesus Loves Me”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Where are children suffering from hunger in your geographic area? Can you identify and support programs to assist them?
2. What can you do to advocate for child nutrition in your community (schools, childcare providers, feeding programs)?

*Rev. Toni D. Ross is the pastor at Center Point Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FOURTH SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Are Called to See Others with Compassion

**Scripture:** *“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 40 And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’” (Matthew 25:37-41)*

**Devotional Reflection:** Like many cities, Washington, DC is a place where we see persons affected by hunger and poverty. Many times, I perceive despondency and weariness on the faces of those affected by this. But what I am most struck by are the responses of those who pass by and seem anxious to quickly get out of their view. It is as if they believe that keeping them out of view will excuse their guilt of ‘inaction.’

Righteous indignation is an appropriate response when we see the suffering of persons in need. This response rather than judging such persons and circumstances reflects the response in Matthew 25:37-41. In this text Jesus suggests to the “righteous” of his day that when we are unresponsive and irresponsible towards those who suffer from hunger and poverty, we have denied Jesus. Jesus is calling for our compassion towards one another and to reform social systems that hinder us from being responsive to people who may not be like us and who suffer from hunger and poverty.

We are invited to embrace those who suffer from hunger and poverty and to advocate with them so that God’s love can be evident through us. May we always find renewed ways to be faithful to this calling.

**Prayer:** Abba, Father of Abraham, Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael—We thank you for your spirit that dwells in all of us. Help us oh God, to remember that we are ALL your children created in your likeness and your image. Open our eyes and move us to love our neighbor. Develop in us righteous indignation and response to the injustices of the world. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** The National Urban League had played a pivotal role against economic, social, and political oppression. And also in the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision. Ruth Baldwin, one of the oldest members of the National Urban League, was a stalwart champion of the poor and disadvantaged.

**Meditational Music:** *“He’s Got the Whole World in His Hand”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. What are some personal biases that hinder you from helping those who are hungry in your community?
2. What are community organizations that you can join to improve hunger and poverty in your area?

*Rev. Kenya M. Bell is the pastor of CenterPoint Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FIFTH SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Are Called to Respond With Our Own Faithful Voices

**Scripture:** *“Open your mouth for the speechless, in the cause of all who are appointed to die. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.” (Proverbs 31:8-9)*

**Devotional Reflection:** In his 1964 Nobel Peace Prize speech, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “There is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we have the resources to get rid of it.” The writer of Proverbs points to the resources we have to “get rid of poverty.” Even in the early periods of the Old Testament, the writer points out that our voice is an important resource for promoting just laws of judgement and the passion to plead the cause of the poor and needy. In so doing, we empower the people to be fed and to have what they need.

The Rev. Dr. Prathia Hall was a modern example of what Proverbs is calling us to. She was passionate and courageous in the fight to end poverty and hunger. She said we should fashion “fear into faith, cringing into courage, suffering into survival, despair into defiance and pain into protest.” (SNCC Digital Gateway). In a 2003 PBS “This Far by Faith” segment, she described her “freedom faith” as follows: “... God intends for us to be free, and assists us, and empowers us in the struggle for freedom.”

Hall’s voice was especially heard when racial unrest exploded in the South in the 1960s and at Temple University where she was one of the first women field leaders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Her voice as a Baptist preacher, a pastor, womanist, and African-American church historian led to social change. Hall’s legacy reminds us of the important witness people of faith have as advocates of faith in action.

**Prayer:** Dear God, we pray for your continued leading. Please direct us as we work to end hunger and poverty. Help us not to become victims or overwhelmed by the vastness of the politics of fear. Speak to our hearts as we put our freedom faith into action.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** Prathia Hall is credited with being the key inspiration for Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s use of the phrase, “I have a dream.” She used the phrase in a passionate prayer at Mount Olive Baptist Church in Terrell, Ga., in 1962, after the church was burned down by the Ku Klux Klan.

**Meditational Music:** *“Great Is Thy Faithfulness”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. How can you help? It is easy to become overwhelmed when we hear statistics about world hunger.
2. What other women can you name in the civil rights movement?

*Rev. Dr. Brenda Girton-Mitchell is the minister of stewardship and missions at Metropolitan Baptist Church in Largo, Md.*

May



Joseph Molter/Bread for the World

*In Times Like These ... We Honor Our Mothers*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FIRST SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Are Called to Be a Place of Refuge

**Scripture:** *“When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold your son!’ Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother!’ And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.” (John 19:26-27)*

**Devotional Prayer:** Our Heavenly Father, in Your great love for all of humanity, You came down from heaven to earth and found no place to call a home. However as an infant, You found refuge in your mother, the Theotokos, and took comfort in her love for You. Help us to be a cloak of comfort to the motherless and uncomforted. While you hung on the cross, You also made sure she had comfort and a place of refuge. In Your compassion and Divine wisdom, You gave her a son and gave John a mother. May we learn to operate in the same level of compassion as we navigate the treacherous seas of life. Teach us, oh Lord, to view everyone as images of God and to be places of refuge for the hungry, outcasts, and marginalized people of African diaspora. Fill us with a mother’s compassion so that we can continuously advocate for increased funding for nutrition and health programs of mothers, newborns, and young children.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** On the 21st of Tobe, according to the Coptic liturgical calendar, Our Lady—the Virgin Mary and the Theotokos (Mother of God)—departed from this temporal world. When the day of her departure arrived, the virgins of the Mount of Olives and the apostles surrounded her at her bedside and received the blessing of their spiritual mother. Soon after, she gave up her pure spirit and was united with her beloved Son. The Virgin, who has felt the deepest sorrow and joy, is known to be quick to respond to anyone who calls upon her name. Further, many signs and miracles have been attributed to her. On the 21st of Tobe, we honor Our Lady and raise up her life as an example for us as we continue to be bearers of the truths that the Lord has given us.

**Meditational Music:** *“Rejoice O Mary”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Who are the women in your life and your community who extend their love to others either through a warm embrace, a cooked meal, a few kind words, or by simply being an example?
2. Are there people in your community that you can love a little better, care for a little more, and present yourself to them as a place of comfort and refuge?

*Monica Mikhail is a parishioner at St. John Coptic Orthodox Church in Covina, Calif.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR SECOND SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Need a Mother's Heart

**Scripture:** *“And Mary said: ‘My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.’” (Luke 1: 46-48)*

**Devotional Reflection:** In the Christian church, one of the most recognizable images is of Mary and Jesus, the Madonna and Child. Many images of the Blessed Mother suggest purity and gentleness. Perhaps this promotes the feelings of peace, comfort, and security that many seek from a nurturing, spiritual Mother. However, we cannot fully walk the Christian path without facing the darkness that enfolds our world. It is into this darkness that the Black Madonna invites us to draw near.

Known as Our Lady of Czestochowa among Catholic and Orthodox Christians, the Black Madonna reveals a Blessed Mother who is not immune to the hardship and pain of our world. Her darker skin tone and facial expression assures me that she is a universal mother who cares deeply for ALL of her children. The vivid facial wounds remind me that mothers often bear internal and external scars, from which they are unable to heal. Black Madonna's expression is somber. The hand resting over her heart reflects her ache for impoverished, hungry, and marginalized mothers across the globe who feel the full weight of caring for their children without adequate resources.

Bread for the World is committed to providing mothers with the means to care for themselves and their children. Increased funding for maternal nutrition and health initiatives is a vital investment in the lives of millions of children at risk of death or disability due to malnutrition. May we draw these women and children into our hearts and act to relieve their suffering. May we all embrace the image of the Black Madonna and child as an image that accurately depicts and connects the struggle of the Virgin Mary to the plight of all mothers and children who find themselves under oppressive systems, authorities, and governments that intentionally disregard human dignity and rights.

**Prayer:** Lord, Mary rejoiced because in her “humble state” you chose her to be the Mother of our Savior. Help us to develop hearts that ache for mothers and children worldwide and rekindle in us a desire to provide for their well-being. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** Born May 13, 1925, Carolyn Robertson Payton was the first female and first African-American director of the Peace Corps. From 1979 until her retirement in 1995, she was the dean of counseling and career development at Howard University. In 1997, she received the APA Award for Outstanding Lifetime Contribution to Psychology for her dedication to psychology in cross-culture and social justice affairs.

**Meditational Music:** *“Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. What examples of care from a mother or motherly figure have you experienced in your life?
2. Are you willing to conduct an offering of letters project to support mothers and children who suffer from malnutrition?

*Erin Wiley is a parent, poet, and parishioner at St. Teresa of Avila Catholic Church in Washington D.C.*



# DEVOTIONAL FOR THIRD SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Are Called to Be “Mother” to Those Who Need Compassion and Nourishment

**Scripture:** *“Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.” (Proverbs 31:28)*

**Devotional Reflection:** Mother’s Day is the important holiday during which we express respect and honor for mothers in the Black Church tradition. Judging by attendance, it is second only to the liturgical significance ascribed to Christ in His Advent at Christmas and His resurrection at Easter. Some children honor their living mothers with red flowers and corsages and others honor deceased mothers with white flowers. Honoring mothers in the context of Christian worship underscores the importance of mothers and extended family in African-American tradition and culture.

A mother is the first responder to the hunger and poverty of her newborn baby. If a mother has adequate resources and support, she can feed, clothe and provide a safe and secure environment wherein her baby can thrive. But we’ve all seen a photograph or video clip of a despairing mother holding a malnourished child—an all-too-familiar depiction of extreme hunger. Whether in the global context or in impoverished areas of the United States, mothers and their children seem to bear the greatest impact of hunger and poverty. For this reason, public policies geared toward the alleviation of hunger and poverty should prioritize benefits and opportunities for working mothers—especially subsidies for food, housing, healthcare, and education.

Mother’s Day observances among black families often acknowledge the many hardships and sacrifices that mothers have encountered while raising their children. Episodes of poverty and hunger haunt some of the most triumphant accounts of a mother’s loving perseverance. Yet on Mother’s Day, black congregations can use the occasion to promote a social justice agenda that honors life by giving all mothers and their children the justice, equity, and opportunity they need to succeed.

**Prayer:** Precious Lord, take our hand in this fight to supply mothers, infants, and children with the proper nutrition and support that they deserve. Help us to become “Mother” to the least of these, the disinherited, and the motherless. Fill us with Your radical and unconditional compassion. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** In May 1964, The Mississippi Freedom Summer Project was developed as a result of the sit-ins and freedom rides of the early 1960s. The project promoted voting registration among black communities in Mississippi. By the end of summer of 1964, the program had drawn in more than a thousand volunteers and was an interracial operation.

**Meditational Music:** *“I Remember Mama”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. What resources do you have at your disposal that could be useful in the fight for hungry women, infants, and children?
2. On Mother’s Day, how do you choose to honor your mother? Is that reflective of how we should value life and safeguard human dignity?

*Rev. Dr. Cheryl J. Sanders is the professor of Christian Ethics at the Howard University School of Divinity and pastor of Third Street Church of God in Washington, D.C.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FOURTH SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Honor Our Mothers in Zion

**Scripture:** *“Villagers disappeared; they disappeared in Israel, until you, Deborah, arose, until you arose as a mother in Israel.” (Judges 5:7)*

**Devotional Reflection:** A robust redefinition and expansion of biblical motherhood occurs in the seventh chapter of Judges. A “Mother in Zion”—as the “Mother in Israel” is called in African American Pentecostal circles—reflects a civic and political concept of motherhood. In the fifth chapter of Judges, we are introduced to the foremost Mother in Zion in all of scripture: Deborah.

During Deborah’s tenure as judge, people were being oppressed by a neighboring political power, and they were disappearing from their communities. Deborah, a woman anointed as a prophet by God, assumes the role of Mother in Zion and leads her people to victory and freedom. Deborah takes prophetic motherhood and divine authority into the public arena in order to defeat the people’s oppressors—Jabin and the Canaanite army. The judge takes the Word, placed on her heart, and relays it to Barak and Israelite soldiers, who are able to liberate the people. This unique biblical narrative emphasizes the importance of strong and courageous mother figures in our daily spiritual journeys.

God anoints Mothers in Zion to exercise a civic and political role—to end government policies and change social structures that result in people subjected into positions of joblessness, homelessness, and poverty. Anointed Mothers in Zion, like Deborah the Judge, are called to recruit, organize, mobilize, and lead people to end poverty. These same Mothers of Zion are called to speak out against health care disparities and mass incarceration by working to change federal priorities of our government.

**Prayer:** God, as more people disappear into hunger and poverty, we pray that you will call and anoint Mothers in Zion like Deborah to serve the voiceless, powerless, and the least of these. May women and men alike join in liberating for others. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** Mother Emma Cotton or “Firebrand” was a Church of God in Christ pioneer, actively engaging the public arena, and striving to influence government policies toward improving the lives of poor people. In the 1920s, she endorsed political platforms and candidates that advanced the cause of African Americans, women, and the poor. Mother Cotton worked tirelessly in the political and civic arenas to sanctify the world for the betterment of people and to the glory of God.

**Meditational Music:** *“We’re Marching Up to Zion”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Who are some Mothers in Zion whom you have encountered?
2. What are some ways that you could personally support Mothers in Zion who work for justice and to end world hunger?

*Rev. Dr. David Daniels is a leader in the Church of God of Christ and the Henry Winters Luce Professor of World Christianity at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, Ill.*

June



Dalyce Wilson for Bread for the World

*In Times Like These ... Honoring Fathers,  
Engaging Voices, and Rejecting Injustice*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FIRST SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Engage Our Voices to Help Feed the Hungry and the Poor

**Scripture:** *“I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everlasting stream.” (Amos 5:21,24)*

**Devotional Reflection:** This scripture has informed my advocacy for social justice. The text before Amos 5 focuses on judgments of different nations. Then, unexpectedly, Amos prophecy’s God’s lamentation for God’s people. Why? He is concerned with their treatment toward the poor. Not only did they allow poverty to persist, they created practices and systems that kept people in poverty. Through Amos, God tells the people that God despises their feasts, offerings, and noise—those things that they did in God’s name. God was not telling them that what they were doing was inherently bad. Instead, he tells them that their rituals are absent of justice and righteousness and therefore it is not worship.

To be in right relationship with God, we must be in right relationship with each other. We cannot keep silent in this time as people continue to struggle with hunger around the world. Every year, people get taxed in poverty. Every year, families struggle to put food on the table. Every year, people in power “worship” God but continue to allow people to struggle for their basic needs.

In times like these, we cannot be silent when programs that help feed the hungry and move people out of poverty are under attack. Like Amos, we must speak out against the practices and structures that continue to keep people impoverished and hungry. Because that is our worship.

**Prayer:** God of justice and righteousness, you are the Most Holy One from whom all good things come. Help us to love the poor, change the hearts of those who seek to harm them, and supply us with conviction and boldness to speak against global injustices. Thank you for your mercy as we recognize that we participate in these systems that harm the poor. Thank you for your grace as we attempt to change ourselves and the powers that come against them. In Jesus name, Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** The Poor People’s Campaign was focused on demanding that President Lyndon B. Johnson and Congress help people in poverty to get jobs, health care, and decent homes. Fifty years later, advocates are still fighting for jobs with livable wages, access to health care, and housing.

**Meditational Music:** *“Change is Gonna Come”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. How do we participate in practices that keep people in poverty?
2. Who are the people that have the power to make changes?

*Karyn Bigelow is a project manager and policy analyst in the government relations department at Bread for the World.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR SECOND SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Must Despise Shame and Live Free in Solidarity

**Scripture:** “... Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:1-2)

**Devotional Reflection:** Jesus went to the cross while in the criminal justice system. This unjust system had Jesus arrested, detained, tried, and executed. Still, his victory over death became his vindication, and our hope. In a time when many are affected by crime and mass incarceration, it is important to note that Jesus was no stranger to that system.

Many go to church with heaviness in their heart because a loved one is in this system. We often feel a sense of shame and separation. Guilt and disappointment can cloud our minds because of the hurt of having a loved one incarcerated. But Jesus knows the weight of the system. He endured his sentencing—while scorning its shame. He refused to accept the negativity of the cross, rather saw it as part of his purpose. We, like him, can scorn the shame of the incarcerated, see the joy of knowing their full humanity, affirm that they are loved by God and that there is hope and redemption. The criminal justice system does not have the final say. We can minister to and with the incarcerated in the hope of a new humanity. We can say no to the shame, and yes to the joy of affirming the humanity of all.

**Prayer:** God of Love and Freedom, remember us in our struggles to live lives of love and freedom. Heal our hearts of the shame and stigma we feel about those serving time behind prison walls. Help us to forgive and embrace them, even as you have forgiven and embraced us. Help us to advocate with and for the incarcerated, as your son Jesus advocates on our behalf. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** On June 18, 1865, word reached Texas that the Civil War had ended. The next day, approximately 250,000 slaves in Texas were emancipated, and the next year African Americans in Texas began celebrating Juneteenth to honor their legal freedom. Many have called mass incarceration an extension of slavery. Today, we pray and work for a new Juneteenth on behalf of the unjustly incarcerated in the United States.

**Meditational Music:** “Remember Me”

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Who are the people close to you who have been or are in the criminal justice system?
2. Can you help them overcome the shame and stigma of incarceration by reaching out to them and building solidarity?

*Rev. Dr. Harold Dean Trulear is an associate professor of applied theology at Howard University School of Divinity in Washington, D.C.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR THIRD SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Honor Father's Day and Engage Our Voices

**Scripture:** *"Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, and give attention to know understanding." (Proverbs 4:1)*

**Devotional Reflection:** The presence of a father or father figure in the lives of young people is of utmost importance. We often discuss how only a man can teach a boy how to be a man. But we must also remember how critical it is that girls also have fathers, father figures, and positive male role models in their lives. Just as men teach boys to be men, they also teach girls how a woman should expect to be treated and respected by a man. Both males and females need the wisdom of a father figure to help them avoid the pitfalls and temptations that can lead to grave mistakes from which it may take decades to recover. Fathers help to instill both values and confidence in their children. Fathers help their children to render sound, responsible decisions. Fathers help their children develop the survival skills they will need to make it in a world filled with injustice. We give God thanks and praise for all those fathers, grandfathers, godfathers, uncles, older brothers, older cousins, mentors, teachers, coaches, and other positive male role models who have shared much needed wisdom and instruction with our children. We are truly grateful for another opportunity to honor our fathers.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, we thank you for another Father's Day. We thank you for another opportunity to honor our fathers. We thank you for all fathers and father figures who have helped boys and girls grow into adults. We thank you for those who are still living and for the legacy of those who have gone on to glory. Please help all of us to heed the instruction of our fathers and honor our fathers daily. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** As we honor and celebrate our fathers and positive male role models, we cannot forget the attempted genocide by a racist society that seeks to intentionally destroy males of African descent. Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, one of my favorite authors, has written four volumes of "Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys." Those books and the many others he has written focus on ways to help us avert the genocide.

**Meditational Music:** *"God of Our Fathers"*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. How will you engage your community to stop the pipeline to prison in urban school districts?
2. How will you organize to combat the mass incarceration that author Michelle Alexander describes in her book, "The New Jim Crow"?
3. How will you ensure that we publicize positive male images instead of the negative stereotypes?

*Rev. Kevin J. Agee is presiding elder of the Washington-Virginia District of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME), and also pastor of Williams Chapel CME Church in Front Royal, Va.*



# DEVOTION FOR FOURTH SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Move Beyond Duty to Delight

**Scripture:** *“For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.” (II Corinthians 8:9)*

**Devotional Reflection:** Duty is a good thing. To be dutiful is to be responsible, conscientious, disciplined, obedient, and loyal. A call to duty is one of the most compelling calls that we can receive. Those who respond to this call are to be commended, particularly when it requires great personal sacrifice. We celebrate, admire, applaud and give God thanks for men and fathers who are dutiful. With all the absent fathers, irresponsible husbands, and undutiful men we have had in our lives and families, a dutiful husband, father, and man is a valued treasure indeed. It is the willingness and action of a man—who is operating in duty—that ushers him into delight. God yearns for us to transition from duty to delight but this only takes place by the grace of God.

God gives sacrificially and provides grace to those who walk in duty. What makes the sacrifice of Jesus (II Corinthians 8:9) so endearing is that he didn't have to do it. He willingly gave his life as a ransom for many. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). God is not duty-bound to bless us, God delights in blessing us. Jesus speaks to this when he said, “It is your Father's pleasure, [not his duty, not his obligation, not his job, not his responsibility, not his commitment—but his pleasure] to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). God respects our duty but God rejoices when we move beyond duty to freely and generously give and serve from the heart. God loves the cheerful giver because that kind of giver epitomizes the character of God.

**Prayer:** God, who delights in us, we thank You for your Son's generous acts of Agape love and grace on the cross. We pray for all men in black and brown communities. Compel us to live dutiful lives with the power of the Holy Spirit that guide us into delight with You. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** On June 16, 1966, Stokely Carmichael used the term, “black power” in a speech about the shooting of James Meredith. Throughout the civil rights movement and still today, the term has been used to uplift and liberate marginalized and oppressed communities.

**Meditational Music:** *“Send Me I'll Go”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. How are dutiful men vital assets and critical players in the liberation and reformation of black and brown communities?
2. Moving from duty to delight signifies compassion and commitment. How can men become more passionate and dedicated to advocacy work?

*Rev. Dr. William Watley is the senior pastor of Saint Philip African Methodist Episcopal Church in Atlanta, Ga.*

July



Joseph Molter/Bread for the World

*In Times Like These ... We Envision a Sustainable  
World Without Hunger and Poverty*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FIRST SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Must Respond to the Least of These

**Scripture:** *“Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?” (James 2:15-16)*

**Devotional Reflection:** In the face of dire poverty all over the world, the churches have never been richer. Prosperity has replaced the prophetic in too many pulpits. In many cities across America, sprawling church buildings can be found amid poverty-filled neighborhoods. The church must make up its mind whether it wants to be like the world or whether it is going to be the church that Jesus died for. The church needs to be compassionate, caring, and concerned not only about lost souls, but about physical hunger as well. With reduced resources from government to help support the “least of these,” it is imperative that the church stand in the gap and advocate for their needs.

The Book of James has a concern for social and economic situations. While the book does not treat wealth as being evil, it does give a strong warning of the spiritual dangers of wealth. The book suggests wealth can lead to pride, greed, and inhumanity and thereby become evil. It suggests that the love of wealth can cause the church to forget its purpose. The focus on materialism in church and society may also contribute to a loss of moral responsibility and purpose. The church is invited to be a source of moral conscience for society. In so doing, may we, as the church, prioritize the needs of the “least of these.”

**Prayer:** Oh, Heavenly Father, we thank you for who you are! We pray for blessings for those who hunger and don’t have what they need. We believe it is possible to feed every child by your grace and to provide for every family. Use us Lord to be instruments of your grace so it may be so. In Jesus Christ name, we pray. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** On Dec. 10, 1964, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. accepted the Nobel Peace Prize and said, “A second evil which plagues the modern world is that of poverty.” This still rings true more than 50 years later—despite ample global resources, money, and material possessions. We continue to fight.

**Meditational Music:** *“You Can’t Beat God Giving”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. How can the Church take the lead on the issue of poverty?
2. Are you willing to engage Congress to seriously address the issue of poverty?
3. Would you be willing to work with other groups to face the issue of global poverty?

*The Rev. Dr. Kevin Donalson is the senior pastor of Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church in Herndon, Va., and a leader with the National Baptist Convention of America.*

## DEVOTIONAL FOR SECOND SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Envision a Sustainable World Without Hunger and Poverty

**Scripture:** *“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Come back tomorrow, and I’ll give it to you’—when you already have it with you.” (Proverbs 3:27-28)*

**Devotional Reflection:** Ending hunger by 2030 is possible! The wisdom articulated in Proverbs 3:27-28 inspires us to do our part to reach this goal. It says, “If you have it, give it. If it is within your power to act, then act,” especially where issues of the poor are concerned. The proverb may appear simple but its substance calls us to a radical realigning of institutional and personal priorities. If we have it, we must give it. If it is within our power to act, then we must.

It may be easy to give to personal causes that we value. But our work to end hunger must come forth from our deeper devotion to God and God’s Word. In so doing, we are invited to submit our personal responsibility to community responsibility. If our government and church have it, it must give it. If it is within our government’s and church’s power to act, then it must.

This should include a commitment to eliminate the plight of poor and hungry people across the world. The world has made considerable strides in doing this and we are in the home stretch. Achieving a sustainable world without hunger and poverty by 2030 requires all governments and institutions to commit to this. This mandate requires governments and institutions to act with the purpose of ending hunger and not merely tempering this with temporary solutions and incremental reforms. If ending hunger will come, it will come because we, collectively and personally, reject the tendency to withhold anything good from the poor and to act now.

**Prayer:** God of all things just, give us the courage to give and act in accordance to your Word. Grant us grace to unbind our proclivities for band-aid solutions and temporary fixes. Help to live in harmony with you, our neighbor, creation, and your Spirit. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** In July 1958, the NAACP Youth Council organized and funded sit-ins in Wichita, Kan. at a Dockum Drug Store lunch counter. A month later, all Dockum lunch counters were desegregated due to their efforts. The Council would continue to make a significant impact in the modern civil rights movement.

**Meditational Music:** *“Let us Break Bread Together, On Our Knees”*

### Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. What can you do in this month as a sacrificial offering to God on behalf of the poor?
2. How can you encourage your church to take its advocacy with the poor to the next level?

*Derick Dailey, an attorney, is the convener of Bread for the World’s Pan-African Young Adult Network and a former member of Bread for the World’s Board of Directors.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR THIRD SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Must Give Our Hands to Struggle

**Scripture:** *“See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice.” (Isaiah 32:1)*

**Devotional Reflection:** I have been blessed and privileged to serve as a co-founder and general secretary of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference. Fifteen years ago, we were founded with a vision to re-ignite the fire of the prophetic tradition of witness for justice by African-American Christians. In 2018, we sojourn to Memphis, Tenn. to commemorate our 15th year in the backdrop of the 50th year anniversary of the sanitation workers’ strike and vision for the Poor People’s Campaign.

Lately, I’ve been inspired by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s message the night before his assassination in Memphis, “We’ve got to give ourselves to this struggle until the end.” These words encourage us to remember the legacy of Tent City and the Poor People’s Campaign that exposed dire poverty of African Americans in 1968. King led this movement with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. It was supported by diverse groups of people. People erected 3,000 tents and other structures, such as a city hall, health clinic, and general store on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., starting on May 12. Six weeks later, after the June 5 assassination of Robert Kennedy, Tent City was effectively dismantled by the forces of politics and law enforcement.

Tent City was an example of living out the Biblical mandate for justice to which Isaiah calls us. Anti-poverty campaigns, like Tent City, are consistent with this—as moments in a movement to eradicate economic injustice and to promote human dignity for all people. Today, poor encampments are erected all around the world. Too often people are criminalized for this. The lyrics of Sweet Honey in the Rock encourage us to do otherwise, “If you see me stumble, don’t stand back and look on ... give your hands to struggle.”

**Prayer:** Fatherly Mother and Motherly Father, You have created all that we need. You have entrusted us with the care of Your Creation. Yet we hoard your gifts and turn our backs on your most vulnerable children. Forgive us, O God. Help us to work generously toward the vision of a world where righteousness and justice prevail. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** On Mother’s Day, May 12, 1968, emblematic of women in the civil rights movement, Coretta Scott King led the first group of protesters onto the National Mall to begin the erection of “Resurrection City,” also called “Tent City.”

**Meditational Music:** *“Give Your Hands to Struggle”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. What is your understanding of the difference between charity and justice relative to those who are hungry or living with poverty?
2. How shall we move beyond policies of temporary expediency toward compassion for transformative change?

*Rev. Dr. Iva E. Carruthers is the general secretary of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference and vice chair of the Bread for the World Board of Directors.*



# DEVOTIONAL FOR FOURTH SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Come Forward, No Matter the Cost

**Scripture:** *“Then the daughters of Zelophehad came forward ... Moses brought their case before the LORD. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: The daughters of Zelophehad are right in what they are saying; you shall indeed let them possess an inheritance among their father’s brothers and pass the inheritance of their father on to them.” (Numbers 27:1, 6-7)*

**Devotional Reflection:** The story of Zelophehad’s daughters provides a model for faith-based organizations to do the work of social justice. It exemplifies how we can develop gender-inclusive policies to protect and provide natural and human resources for women, families, and communities. These daughters came forward with one agenda. They came with stated solutions, not just spouted problems. And despite the wilderness in which they were born, they still came forward and God heard their case! God has heard our cries, and now we must ask, “What have WE done to help bring an end to poverty and inequity in our own communities?”

The Women’s Human Rights Advocacy Training of Faith Based Organizations at the United Nations in New York addresses this question. The last training brought 150 people from more than 31 countries, mostly from the Global South. We sang the South African protest song “Senzeni Na?” (“What Have We Done?”), which was a call to action by anti-apartheid activists in the 1960s.

This call inspired us to actions that address income inequality among countries as well as within countries. There is a growing consensus that economic growth is not sufficient to reduce poverty if it is not inclusive and does not involve the three dimensions of sustainable development—economic, social, and environmental. To ensure development that is sustainable and just, we must seek to eliminate inequalities, like the daughters of Zelophehad did.

**Prayer:** Sovereign God, make us instruments of your peace in this world. May we boldly come forward together and work toward the end of poverty and inequality. May we now sing a new song asking, “What can we do?” In your name, Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** Annie Ruth Jiagge (Oct. 7, 1918- June 12, 1996) was a judge and women’s rights activist from Ghana. She was one of the principals who drafted the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and predecessor of the legally binding Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

**Meditational Music:** “Senzeni Na?”

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. What are your stories of courageous women who boldly stepped out in faith and brought about change?
2. How can your church/community embrace the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) toward more faithful action to end poverty and inequity?

*Rev. Dionne P. Boissière is the chaplain of the Church Center for the United Nations.*





## DEVOTIONAL FOR FIFTH SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Can End Hunger and Poverty

**Scripture:** *“There need be no poor people among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today. For the Lord your God will bless you as he has promised ...” (Deuteronomy 15: 4-6a)*

**Devotional Reflection:** The words of Jesus in the three gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John state, “The poor you will always have with you.” This reference often serves as a rationale to ignore and sometimes blame those who live with poverty.

The story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) tells us that there is consequence for not doing our part to end hunger and poverty. Lazarus receives comfort after death, and the rich man receives agony in Hades for not addressing Lazarus’ needs on earth.

This scripture suggests that ending hunger and poverty is possible. The scripture equates the cause of poverty with disobedience to God. Deuteronomy 15:7-9 states, “You shall not harden your heart ..., shut your hand ..., have no base thought in your heart ..., but open your hand to him; lend him sufficient for his need.” Deuteronomy suggests that when we do this, there will be no poor among you.

We are still called to do our part to end hunger and poverty. The Poor People’s Campaign led by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other faith leaders 50 years ago had a goal of eliminating poverty. King put biblical truth into practice. Legislative reforms resulted from this campaign. More recently, the Millennium Development Goals have led to reduced hunger and poverty globally. Today, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), closely aligned with the U.N. Decade in Solidarity with People of African Descent, create a way forward to end hunger by 2030 in partnership with government, the private sector, and civil society.

**Prayer:** God of grace, forgive us for not doing all we can do to end hunger and poverty. Teach us anew how to imagine a world without hunger and poverty and to be advocates of just living and giving so that all are fed. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** The International Decade for People of African Descent was proclaimed by General Assembly Resolution 68/237, to be observed from 2015 through 2024. It provides a solid framework for the United Nations, member states, civil society, and all other relevant actors to join with people of African descent and take effective actions for the implementation of the program of activities in the spirit of recognition, justice and development.

**Meditational Music:** *“Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ’Round”*

### Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. How does Deuteronomy 15 challenge or aid your advocacy to end hunger and poverty?
2. What kinds of changes can you make to strengthen your advocacy to end hunger and poverty?

*Rev. Dr. John Mendez is the pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C.*

August



Laura Elizabeth Poh/Bread for the World

*In Times Like These ... We Honor Our  
Children, Youth, and Young Adults*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FIRST SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Honor Our Children

**Scripture:** *“Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many? Jesus said, ‘Have the people sit down.’ There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there).” (John 6:9-10)*

**Devotional Reflection:** I have warmly received groups of pre-teens who have shared their suggestions on how to improve the church. I have listened attentively and responded enthusiastically to their contributions. Their ideas have led to follow-up actions involving their participation. Adults often attempt to honor children through accolades, awards, and assigned mock roles while not paying sufficient attention to them. Often, we do not value their input and smother their attempts to play positive roles in the world. This dishonors them.

We honor our children when we welcome their contributions and facilitate their participation. This was Jesus’ pattern. In John 6, Jesus models this by accepting a child’s participation to meet critical needs. Still, one disciple questioned the possibility of feeding so many. Did he see the child? Did he simply overlook the child’s contribution? Another disciple saw the child and noted his contribution but saw it as inadequate. In stark contrast, the moment Jesus became aware of the child’s offering, he received and utilized it. As a result, the hungry were fed.

This story is especially encouraging, since in most societies children bear the brunt of poverty and hunger. This boy had a meager lunch, but was willing to share it and sacrifice for the greater good of all—as a resource to Jesus. Like Jesus, we would do well to receive the contributions of children toward the solution of the problems in our world. This will truly honor them.

**Prayer:** Gracious God, you have gifted us with children who have new perspectives of solving the problems of our world. Enable us, like Jesus, to give space for their contributions, together with ours, to be offered for your blessing and meeting the need of those who experience hunger and poverty. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** Just prior to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination in April 1968, he was organizing a march for the Poor People’s Campaign. The framing for this is in his last book, “Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?” It was published the previous year. He completed this book on an inspirational retreat in Jamaica.

**Meditational Music:** *“You Have All My Future in Your Hands”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Do you know children who offer ways to make the world better?
2. Will you participate in a campaign to encourage and empower the involvement of children in policy making, especially towards the elimination of hunger and poverty?

*Rev. Dwight D. Fraser is the pastor of the Eltham/Angels Circuit of Baptist Churches related to the Jamaica Baptist Union.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR SECOND SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... Young People of African Descent Must Dare to Dream

**Scripture:** “Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.” (Joshua 1:6)

**Devotional Reflection:** I dare to resist systemic racism, even as it sits in places of institutional authority.

I dare to be a prophetic truth teller, even in a world of alternative facts.

I dare to love myself; to celebrate my rich, diverse, and diasporic roots; and, thus, to affirm that all black and brown lives do matter.

I dare to reclaim and tell our stories, when normalized acceptance of racism, classism, state-sanctioned violence, and moral injury threaten to dehumanize my character and worth.

I dare to be a healer, lover, giver, and supporter of justice, freedom, and peace.

I dare to speak up for and with the voiceless—to guard anti-hunger programs.

I dare to stand with a starched back and with truth-bearing hips ... to be the Good Samaritan bursting at the seams with compassion and healing wounds with holy balm.

I dare to create a new narrative, a narrative that quenches anti-black and brown sentiments and celebrates our resilient spirits.

I dare to be a healer, lover, giver, and supporter of justice, freedom, and peace.

I dare to be all God created me to be, even when society says that this chocolate-skin, loc-haired, Gullah-speaking girl from the country dirt roads near the swamp shouldn't, couldn't, and wouldn't be anything more than a statistic at best.

I rise nurtured by the very dust intended to bury me and deeply rooted in the soil tilled by my ancestors.

I dare to believe that I am the fruit of their hopes, dreams, and prayers.

I dare to rise ...

rise, resist, reclaim, remember and to *be* the bridge for the generations upon generations to come.

I dare to dream so they can dare to *be* dreamers, too!

**Prayer:** God of the dreamers, we need your courage to carry out the prophetic vision you have given us. We dare to put our entire trust, cares, and worries in you as we speak out for and with our brothers and sisters who experience hunger and poverty. We dare to imagine a world where justice, freedom, and peace are accessible to all people. Help us to bring these dreams to fruition. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** In November 1960, Ruby Bridges was the first African-American child to go to a desegregated and predominantly white elementary school in the South. The courage of this 6-year-old girl changed the education system in the United States.

**Meditational Music:** “*Intentional*”

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. What advocacy actions will you dare to make concerning hunger and poverty “for such a time as this?”
2. Why is it so important to be strong and courageous in the face of opposition?

*Rev. Waltrina N. Middleton is the associate dean of the Andrew Rankin Memorial Chapel at Howard University in Washington, D.C.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR THIRD SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Honor and Support the Advocacy of the Young

**Scripture:** *“Speak out for justice! Stand up for the poor and destitute!” (Proverbs 31:9)*

**Devotional Reflection:** At the heart of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s message during the tent-city campaign in the mid-1960s was a clear affirmation of the connectedness of prejudice and poverty. King believed that poverty and prejudice went hand-in-hand; each breathed life into the other. For him, ending poverty required a confrontation with individual perceptions of others, those things that caused individuals to be prejudiced, such as inherent bias, sexism, and racism. Today, we are experiencing the grave dangers of the interplay of poverty and prejudice. The impact of mass incarceration on black families; the destructive impact of climate change on underdeveloped nations; the wage gap between white people and everyone else, as well as between male and female are all manifestations of poverty’s relationship with prejudice.

Recent movements in the United States such as BYP100, Black Lives Matter, and Dream Defenders are using technology and innovative strategies to mobilize against poverty and prejudice today. Across the world, groups like FEMEN in Tunisia and Grace Foundation in Nigeria are working hard to end global poverty through activism, empowerment, and education. Justice requires radical, transformative and wholesale reforms. Vulnerability and complete surrender to God and to God’s mission are necessary to achieve these reforms.

As we surrender to God and to God’s mission, we must be intentional about supporting youth and young adult movements that advocate for our brothers and sisters who are impoverished, hungry, or otherwise marginalized. We must uplift those youth and young adult movements that aim to be catalysts for radical, transformative, and wholesale reformation. It is through the youthful innovation and strategically steered energy of these movements that we will be able to press forward toward a world in which hunger and poverty no longer exist. Will you honor our youth and young adults by supporting them in the fight today?

**Prayer:** God of justice and grace, help us surrender to a liberating gospel of your Word. Help us escape the chains of religion, doctrine, and dogma, that we might see you clearly, hear you dearly, and follow you more nearly. Give us strength to embrace the truth of our past and the legacy which we wrought. Bless our efforts to speak truth to power. In Your name. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** In August 1963, intergenerational faith leaders organized the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom where Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his “I Have a Dream Speech.”

**Meditational Music:** *“Break Every Chain”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. How do you see race, class, and gender connected in society today?
2. What new prayers may you offer to God to address the entanglement of poverty and prejudice?

*Derick Dailey, an attorney, serves as the covener of Bread for the World’s Pan-African Young Adults and is a former officer of Bread for the World Board of Directors.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FOURTH SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... Black Youth Need Change Now

**Scripture:** *“Blow ye the trumpet in Zion and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand.” (Joel 2:1)*

**Devotional Reflection:** There is a great urgency to transform inequitable systems that perpetuate a culture of poverty, racialized violence, mass incarceration, and disenfranchisement among other issues. These systems disproportionately impact our families and youth of color. How can we transform these systems? How can we see one another—across all generations—as partners committed to justice and liberation? How can we work together to change the world for our black youth?

How long must we wait for change to come?

We can't wait! Shall we remember the words of William Lucy whose words are forever etched in the historical membrane of our civil rights legacy, “I am a man.” Those words became a rallying cry for the historic Memphis sanitation workers' strike, just as Black Lives Matter is our rallying cry today. Both statements speak the same truth—affirming our humanity, our dignity, our rights for equality and justice, and our creative and collective resistance to systems of oppression, hate, and state-sanctioned violence in all of its forms.

“I am a man,” we must proclaim, right now! “Ain't I a woman,” we must pronounce, right now! “We are youth,” we must assert. “Black lives matter,” we must insist—until it is true!

The church has been woven into every civil rights and labor movement in this nation, and it is imperative that faith leaders and organizers unite in this 21st century movement for black lives. It is my prayer that we will not lose hope in the power of collective work and duty. Our proclamations, lament and cry for liberation must be addressed with urgency.

This is not a time to wait!

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for hearing our cries of lament. We have heard the trumpet blown in Zion and we have sounded the alarm in your holy mountain. We know that this is not a season of waiting but a season in which we are being called to move with a sense of urgency. We ask that you would order our steps and guide our hearts as we advocate for our communities and youth of color. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** In January 1969, the Black Panther Party leaders, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, initiated a Free Breakfast for Children program. The program, entirely volunteer-based, was created to provide food on a daily basis for more than 10,000 impoverished black and brown children.

**Meditational Music:** *“Giants”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said that “wait most often means never.” In what ways does his message ring true for us today?
2. What does moving with a sense of urgency look like for you in your fight to end world hunger?

*Rev. Waltrina N. Middleton is the associate dean of the Andrew Rankin Memorial Chapel at Howard University in Washington, D.C.*



September



Joseph Moller/Bread for the World

*In Times Like These ... We Need Dignified Work*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FIRST SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Must Make Hunger and Poverty Visible

**Scripture:** *“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate, lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table ...” (Luke 16: 19-21)*

**Devotional Reflection:** What was the purpose of the Poor People’s Campaign and Resurrection City of tents 50 years ago? According to Marian Wright Edelman, who first proposed the project to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the idea came from Sen. Robert Kennedy, who told her to “tell Dr. King to bring the poor to Washington to make them visible.” Kennedy was following the precedent of President Lyndon B. Johnson, whose War on Poverty had been anchored by Michael Harrington’s landmark study of poverty in the United States, “The Other America.” This book is widely credited with making the poor, and thus the problem of poverty, visible to otherwise affluent Americans, especially, national and urban policymakers. Kennedy believed that a dramatic demonstration in 1968 could spur the reluctant Congress to positive action toward ending hunger, poverty, and unemployment in the United States. King and Kennedy were assassinated before the demonstration officially began. Lacking their voices and influence—and facing intensified resistance in Washington and the nation—the demonstration movement floundered and died in late June 1968 after about six weeks of activity.

Today, hunger and poverty are not central to the nation’s political agenda. The scriptures tell us God has harsh judgment in store for those who ignore the plight of the poor by callous indifference. We have a political duty to make them visible in the public policy process so that we can increase among us the love toward neighbor.

**Prayer:** O God, You have blessed our nation with enough food—enough so that none should go hungry. Open our eyes that we may see the poor among us. Touch our hearts to feel deeply their pangs of hunger; and make our hands strong to reach out with compassion.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** The Poor People’s Campaign sought to expand President Johnson’s 1964 War on Poverty into a broader national commitment that would improve the lives of everyone affected by scarcity.

**Meditational Music:** *“We’ll Understand It Better By and By”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Many choose not to live among those who are visibly poor and hungry. Why should we consider the poor to be our neighbors? (See Luke 10:25-37)
2. What are the implications of this devotion for congressional elections?
3. Are you willing to write your representative and senators to ask them to support Bread for the World’s goal of ending hunger by 2030?

*Rev. Dr. Charles S. Brown is the distinguished professor of Christian Ethics at Payne Theological Seminary and former president of the Ohio Baptist General Convention.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR SECOND SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Are Called to Be a Garment of Unity for Dignified Work

**Scripture:** *“I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother (sister)—especially to me but much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.” (Philemon 6: 15-16)*

**Devotional Reflection:** In the book of Philemon, an aging Apostle Paul sends Onesimus back to his community. He left as a slave and Paul appeals that he be received as a brother, not only spiritually, but concretely in day-to-day interactions. The foundation for the appeal is the common faith they share in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is this same concept of community that God desires for us today—especially when it comes to those who have been disinherited or ostracized in a variety of ways.

We live in a world characterised by binaries: north or south, rich or poor, white or black, haves or have-nots. Today these binaries are being challenged. We are challenged to redefine our relationships and to recognize our common humanity. We share common human aspirations for our basic needs to be met and for peace and harmony to prevail. The ecological influences communicate in a manner that shows our destinies are intertwined. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us that “we are tied in a single garment of destiny.”

We are called to unity so we can show what a “single-garment community” is supposed to look like through our words and deeds. Now is the time to stand together in defending human dignity. As a “single-garment community,” we are only as functional as the most ragged sections of the garment. Let us unite and work toward a worldwide garment that is reflective of God’s love for all of Creation.

**Prayer:** In this 50th year since King’s death, his voice and values are being brought back into our memories, Lord. We recognize your voice in what we now hear and how we are being called upon to redefine our personal and collective relationships that reflect a faith that is effective in manifesting justice and equality.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** On Jan. 6, 1961, U.S. District Court Judge W.A. Bootle ordered the University of Georgia to admit two African-American students. His effort ended a 160-year battle of exclusion and desegregation at the university.

**Meditational Music:** *“The Power of One”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. How can you foster a sense of “single-garment” advocacy in your faith community?
2. In what ways can and will your community work to safeguard human rights?

*Rev. Dr. Lionel Louw is a faith leader in South Africa who also served as the chief of staff for the provincial government of the Western Cape in South Africa.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR THIRD SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Need Health Care to Support Dignified Work

**Scripture:** *“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute proceeds to all, as any had need.” (Acts 2:44)*

**Devotional Reflection:** For six years, I have been a registered healthcare lobbyist, securing medical research funding and patient-centric legislation on behalf of nearly 130 million Americans living with chronic diseases. I have advanced the patient voice into policy and research deliberations through services to Congress, the administration, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Unlike other countries, America’s idea of health management rests on the idea of a profit-driven healthcare system in which the sick are often left behind or burdened with unmanageable debt. This system of disease management is expensive, in part, because insurance companies charge to maintain revenue—and they charge higher prices for the sickest among us.

Our nation must work toward more comprehensive efforts to meet health needs, with an increased focus on inclusive health equity. Substantial cuts to programs like Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance program, which provide health insurance for millions of poor families, aim to benefit only the elite of our society, Republican and Democrat. These cuts will eliminate whatever chance America has at health equity. The health of vulnerable people is further threatened by proposed cuts to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Women, Infants, and Children program (WIC).

The Bible reminds us about those who gather and care for others, focusing on what they have in common and selling their possessions for the greater good. This suggests then that America needs to focus less on profits and market share and should instead protect and strengthen programs that nurture health in all communities. Caring for health means supporting programs that serve America’s vulnerable children and their families. Health care is for the common good and not just the privileged few.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, as we seek to do justice, we remember Mahatmas Gandhi who said that “there are people in the world so hungry that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread.” Therefore, we ask you to be the bread in a world full of hunger and despair. Give us the hunger to be a part of the feeding that all may break bread together.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** On Sept. 20, 1830, the First National Negro Convention convened at Bethel Church Philadelphia, Pa. The group was a gathering of freed men, including Bishop Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), who convened for the sole purpose of abolishing slavery and boycotting any slave-produced goods.

**Meditational Music:** *“Trouble so Hard”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Can you be of service in this educational and advocacy effort?
2. How can you give creative charity to those who suffer from hunger and poverty?

*Rev. Q. Bernard Driskell is the interim pastor at Beulah Baptist Church in Alexandria, Va., and a healthcare lobbyist.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FOURTH SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Make Appeals for Global Economic Restoration

**Scripture:** *“Should you not walk in the fear of our God, to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies? Restore to them, this very day, their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the interest on their money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them.” (Nehemiah 5:9-11)*

**Devotional Reflection:** The 6th century B.C. context for Nehemiah is post-Babylonian exile. As the appointed governor of Judah, he responds to the outcry of the people. He does so on the basis of their common faith, which requires a walk in fear of God. He appeals for acts of restoration that will bridge the unequal divide in Judah. Throughout history, we see continuous examples of servants of God who were passionate and dedicated to the fight for a fair and just global economy that promotes dignified work. For instance, Desmond Tutu—the South African social rights activist and Anglican bishop—fought against apartheid, poverty, racism, and other socio-economic issues for several decades. As a voice for the people, Tutu appealed for acts of restoration that could promote global economic unity. Further, he emphasized the need to protect human dignity and basic human rights. We all have been called to this mission.

Today, colonialism, racial oppression, and exploitation are being perpetuated through institutions in our global economy. Technology empowers, but it also enables the accruing of ever increasing wealth by a minority while destitution and despair grow for a majority of people on planet earth. In a post-Obama, post-Tutu, and post-Mandela world, there is an outcry from an impoverished majority of humanity for acts of restoration. Such restoration is possible on an individual basis as each one of us acts within our own spheres of influence. We can also do so collectively as we mobilize groups of people to demonstrate justice through advocacy action.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, just as you acknowledged Nehemiah’s acts of restoration, help all of the sons and daughters of Abraham in our world today so that we may be moved by Your Spirit. May we engage in acts of global restoration, transforming this world into Your Kingdom, Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** On Sept. 10, 1963, with the help of 17,000 Nationals Guardsmen, President John F. Kennedy integrated Birmingham, Ala., schools. The integration process stirred several riots, but it was a significant milestone in the modern civil rights movement.

**Meditational Music:** *“Heal the World”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Why is it so important to not only attend to the needs of our immediate neighbor, but to also envision and advocate for a transformed global economy?
2. How can you and your faith community strategize, organize, and make appeals to your governing officials and representatives?

*Rev. Dr. Lionel Louw is a faith leader in South Africa who also served as the chief of staff for the provincial government of the Western Cape in South Africa.*



# DEVOTIONAL FOR FIFTH SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... Dignified Work is a Gift From God

**Scripture:** *“I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.” (Ecclesiastes 3: 12-13)*

**Devotional Reflection:** A 17-year-old student recently shared with me that she felt lost. Entering the last year of high school—she didn’t know where to go from there or what kind of work to do. Instead of giving her a cookie cutter answer, I paused and invited her to explore different ideas and identify her God-given gifts and talents. I asked this young lady to go home and think about what brings her alive? What brings her joy? When it comes to dignified work, Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 makes no apologies in encouraging people to be happy, do good, and find satisfaction in their everyday toil.

Every person who has encountered the challenges of being laid off from a job, an unexpected illness, a natural disaster, poverty, knows that finding dignified work does not always come easy. Sometimes, we have to do what we have to do, in order to do what we want to do. Yet, we are invited by the Divine Presence to a different reality. Whether we are living our dream or working toward it through hard toil, dignified work is a gift from God.

As a beloved community, we must create spaces where all people can encounter dignity through education, work, and opportunity. In times of uncertainty, we must continue to tell our young and old to call forth whatever brings them alive! To use their God-given gifts to find, create, and sustain dignified work and education. We must continue to organize, engage and call for justice. Each person deserves this gift from God. Howard Thurman said, “Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

**Prayer:** Dear Creator, encourage those who seek dignified work and educational opportunities. Open new pathways to success, full of equity for those who, for far too long, have been disenfranchised. Show us how to come alive in your Spirit through our gifts, passion, and talents. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** Kwame Nkrumah was born in Ghana in 1909. He became the first president of Ghana in 1957 and one of the most influential Pan-Africans of the 20th century.

**Meditational Music:** *“A Charge to Keep, I Have”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. In times like these, how do we create communities of dignified work?
2. What kind of work brings you joy, and how can that type of work be incorporated within the fight to end hunger and poverty?

*Rev. Evie Landrau is an elder with the Presbyterian Church USA and an educator.*



October



Bread for the World photo

*In Times Like These ... We Give Thanks for  
the Land and the Gift of Food*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FIRST SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Are Called to Be Good Stewards Over Earthly Resources

**Scripture:** *“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.” (1 Corinthians 10:26)*

**Devotional Reflection:** We live in a country with a diverse array of religions and faith traditions. In my Christian tradition, we believe that “The Earth is the Lord’s, and all that is in it.” If all of the earth truly belongs to God, then it should not be exploited in human favor but managed with divine purpose in mind. All of creation is a gift from God. This includes the natural resources and food supplies that are in abundance—contrary to the popular assumption that there’s not enough food to go around. Today, we are being called to continue Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s Poor People’s Campaign—speaking out against the misuse of earthly resources and advocating for the human dignity of black and brown communities suffering from society’s greed-culture.

Our first job as the human race is to “till and keep the Earth” (Genesis 2:15). In light of this, we are called to justly share the gifts of God’s creation for ALL—today and for future generations. When the government and policy makers dictate the flow of food supplies and wealth resources—to benefit the rich—it is the poorest among us who are forced to go without and suffer the most. In the midst of this suffering, we are called to protect the most vulnerable among us (Matthew 25). For example, when those living closest to the sources of methane pollution (i.e., low-income residential areas) get hit first and worst, it is religious communities’ duty to respond with pastoral care, with faith-based sources of health care, and, unfortunately, conduct needless funerals caused by untreated, yet preventable asthma and cancer.

In the face of opposition, let us celebrate King’s efforts and rise to the challenge to be good stewards of God’s resources.

**Prayer:** Lord, we stand with your Word in declaring—blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. We seek your blessings and guidance for all affected by hunger and poverty. Order our steps and be at the center of our fight to end world poverty. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** On April 15, 1960, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was created in Raleigh, N.C. SNCC became instrumental in the non-violence efforts during the civil rights movement.

**Meditational Music:** *“Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. What resources are you able to offer to those who are in need (e.g., time and connections with lawmakers)?
2. How can you plan to protect anti-poverty and anti-hunger programs from harmful budget cuts?

*Rev. Dr. James Blassingame is the assistant secretary of the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., and also pastor of Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Sumter, S.C.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR SECOND SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... When the Manna Doesn't Come

**Scripture:** *“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, ‘If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.’ Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way, I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.’” (Exodus 16: 2-4)*

**Devotional Reflection:** God calls us to feed the hungry. Hunger is seen in the weary faces of seniors and mothers waiting on a bus to take the three-hour journey from their home to the closest grocery store and back. Hunger is found in the eyes of the working mother staring down at the \$5 in her wallet and forced to decide between purchasing a \$4 head of lettuce from the corner store or a full meal from a local fast-food restaurant to feed her children. These narratives are all too common within food desert communities—areas that lack access to full-service grocery stores yet experience a surplus of convenience stores, liquor stores, and fast-food restaurants. They are often located among high populations of people of color with limited modes of transportation.

When people are hungry and malnourished, they cannot live into the fullness of who they are called to be. For the residents of food desert communities, the manna has yet to come. There is enough food to feed everyone but over 1 billion people starve. We are the ones called to provide manna for those living in these deserts. We are the living Bread of Life through Christ.

**Prayer:** God of plenty, give us moral courage to ensure all are fed. Help us to provide the manna needed in these food deserts of suffering.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** In his 1966 essay, “Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom,” Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. expressed concern for the dignity of each human being and the importance of loving one another.

**Meditational Music:** *“Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. How might agape love inform our resistance to the myth of scarcity today?
2. Imagine new and renewed ways your community can provide manna for those living in food deserts? How would these communities feel, look, and sound different?

*Rev. Jennifer C. Bailey is the founding executive director of Faith Matters Network in Nashville, Tenn., a new interfaith community equipping faith leaders to challenge structural inequality in their communities.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR THIRD SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... Your Offering of Letters Matter

**Scripture:** ... *“If it pleases the king, may I have letters ...”* (Nehemiah 2:7-8)

**Devotional Reflection:** Writing a letter is a vital tool of communication. Letters were used throughout the Bible. Nehemiah 2:7 and Acts 9:2 are examples of this. These scriptures show how letters were used to advance the goals of Nehemiah and Saul.

Nehemiah’s goal was to restore the wall, rebuild the city, and advocate for the health and safety of his people. The king’s letter demonstrated that he had the king’s approval and authorization. The letter also gave permission for Nehemiah to obtain timber for restoring the wall. On the other hand, Saul’s goal was to seek cover and protection as he went about killing and threatening the followers of Jesus Christ. His authority was assured by the government letter.

These scriptures tell us how letters can exercise influence by extending one’s presence and making one’s voice heard. Another example of this was Rev. King Jr.’s letter that communicated his concern for unjust laws and strengthened his work with white clergy while imprisoned in a Birmingham jail.

Bread for the World has a legacy writing letters to help end hunger and poverty by 2030. Every year, Congress makes policy decisions that can advance or hinder the agenda of ending hunger and poverty in the United States and globally. As people of faith who know and experienced the love and caring grace of God, we are invited to write letters, especially during Bread for the World Sunday, advocating for and with those affected by hunger and poverty.

**Prayer:** O God, lead me to pray for all people who struggle with hunger. Help me to do my part to create a better life for them. Help Congress to remember those affected by hunger and poverty. Help Congress to remember that protecting the most vulnerable in our world is an important way to advance a moral vision of faith and country. Amen!

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** Following his arrest in Birmingham, Ala., on April 12, 1963, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote his famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” The letter defends the strategy of nonviolent resistance to racism.

**Meditational Music:** *“Break Thou the Bread of Life”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Can you consider writing a letter to the editor or to a major group or business? How about participating in Bread for the World Sunday?
2. How might King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” inform your writing approach?

*The Rev. Tyler C. Millner is the pastor of Morning Star Holy Church in Martinsville, Va.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FOURTH SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... Land Acquisition and Starvation

**Scripture:** *“The earth and all in it belongs to God.” (Psalm 24:1)*

**Devotional Reflection:** *“We who are alive now, we do not inherit the land from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.” – African Proverb*

Across the developing world, mostly in Africa, unsuspecting families and communities have lost their rich fertile lands to big corporations through deceitful practices, resulting also in the loss of homes and source of livelihood for many. Some families who depended on cultivating the earth for livelihood can no longer put food on their tables. Land Matrix Initiative (LMI) reported in 2016 that over 62 million hectares of land deals have been documented; a land size big enough to contain over 500 million single family homes.

Why? Greed. The process is facilitated by greedy local agents and corporations who deceitfully promise communities a better life, increased food production, employment, and children’s education. On the surface, one sees a noble endeavor undertaken to make life better for God’s children. However, these are mostly deceitful tactics. Once corporations sign the deal, some for 99 years, most renege on their promises leaving the communities crying for help with no resources to engage in legal battles to regain their land.

The Africa Faith & Justice Network in Washington, D.C., discovered that land taken from families is used for cash crops for export: rose flowers, palm oil and jathropha for clean energy production, grain for animal feeds. Often, drinking water sources, streams, for these communities are confiscated by the corporations. The adverse impact on families, marriage and children’s upbringing is disconcerting.

Yet, the earth and all in it belongs to God. As servants of God, we must come together against the wickedness of the world and defend the basic rights of the marginalized.

**Prayer:** God of creation, we acknowledge that we are responsible for our sisters and brothers. When any of your children are diminished, all are diminished. Open our eyes to see the injustices and help us tune our spiritual ears to act in your will. Fill us with an unquenchable passion to defend the dignity of every child. We work and walk by faith—believing that you are in control. Amen!

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** On Oct. 19, 1960, the police arrested Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and more than 50 activists, after a sit-in in an Atlanta department store. Events like this helped change the idea of getting arrested—making it a heroic act in many cases.

**Meditational Music:** *“We Are the World”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Why do people hurt each other? How can I advocate for and with the oppressed?
2. Why do we value money more than the lives of people created in God’s image?

*Father Aniedi Okure, OP is a Catholic priest and the executive director of the Africa Faith & Justice Network in Washington, D.C.*



# November



Lacey Johnson for Bread for the World

*In Times Like These ... We Invite All to a  
Table of Thanksgiving Where All Are Fed*



# DEVOTIONAL FOR FIRST SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Lift Our Voices During the Midterm Elections

**Scripture:** *“Thus” says the LORD concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry ‘Peace’ when they have something to eat, but declare war against those who put nothing into their mouths. Hear this, you rulers of the house of Jacob and chiefs of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity ... ” (Micah 3:5, 9)*

**Devotional Reflection:** The right to vote for African Americans came at a costly price. It came as a result of three long and treacherous phases in American history. Before 1865 (first phase), African Americans weren’t considered full citizens and not eligible to vote. In 1865 (second phase), black men were given the right to vote (i.e., in theory) but many were still denied the opportunity when they went to the voting booths. It wasn’t until the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that all African Americans were granted access to the polls after Bloody Sunday on March 7, 1965. This is when hundreds of courageous people, attempted to begin a march from Selma to Montgomery in Alabama in protest for the constitutional right to vote.

Today, some people in our black and brown communities are still denied the opportunity to vote (e.g., incarcerated persons). It is crucial that black and brown communities exercise their right to vote during this week’s midterm elections. The near-sacred privilege of voting is due to every U.S. citizen. It is necessary to elect government leaders and enact legislation to eradicate poverty, hunger, and other unjust practices that adversely affect the lives of millions. Today, we press on to greater degrees of liberation.

**Prayer:** Our loving and liberating Lord Jesus Christ, you are a God of justice who calls us to right relationships with you, ourselves and all others. You lift the least, lowly, lonely, left behind and left out including those who are affected by poverty and hunger. You have taught us to do likewise. Forgive us, Lord, when we have elected leaders who do not follow these teachings. In Jesus Christ’s Name, Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** On Nov. 20, 1959, the state of Alabama passed several laws preventing blacks from voting and thus, perpetuating systemic oppression. It is because of the blood, sweat, and tears of civil rights advocates that we can vote in Alabama today.

**Meditational Music:** *“Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. How will you show God’s love for those affected by poverty and hunger when voting for candidates and issues?
2. How will you demand elected government leaders pass legislation that justly and equitably guarantees the basics for survival above the poverty level?

*Rev. Dr. Warren H. Stewart is the pastor of the First Institutional Baptist Church in Phoenix, Ariz. and former executive secretary of the Home Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc.*

## DEVOTIONAL FOR SECOND SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... The Lord's Table Invites All to be Fed

**Scripture:** *"In those days when there again was a great crowd without anything to eat, he summoned the disciples and said, 'My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat.'" (Mark 8: 1-2)*

**Devotional Reflection:** Each of the four gospels includes at least one account of Jesus ministering to crowds of hungry followers. Miraculously, Jesus takes the meager provisions of a few loaves and fishes, gives thanks to God for the gifts, blesses the meal and feeds the crowd. The disciples assist Jesus. In the end, there are leftovers to spare!

For believers, this gospel story reminds us of the power of the Eucharist, instituted by Christ at the Last Supper. The Eucharistic celebration of word and sacrament in which the people's offering of bread and wine, together with their very selves becomes the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world.

Jesus pays attention to food throughout the gospels—the spiritual food of the word of God and prayer, physical food for human well-being, and heartfelt hospitality that supports community life. Today, in the United States and other countries, families are preparing for the Thanksgiving holiday—a public celebration of gratitude for the gifts of life. However, many struggle to find good news and have no thanksgiving table to share. It is our God-given duty to protect anti-hunger programs from harmful budget cuts so that all may have Thanksgiving tables to sit at and food to share.

At the Lord's Supper, all are invited to eat! We are urged to share our gifts with our neighbors. As a Eucharistic people, justice demands that we work together against the social evils of poverty and hunger that breed disease—physical, spiritual, and emotional—in the Body of Christ.

**Prayer:** Creator God, thank you for providing an abundance of earthly resources to sustain your people. Increase our faith in your love. With generous and righteous hearts, let us be the good news that all are invited to be fed at your table. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** In November 1925, Saint Katherine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament founded Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans. The mission of the Catholic, historically black institution is "to contribute to the promotion of a more just and humane society by preparing its students to assume roles of leadership and service in a global society."

**Meditational Music:** *"Taste and See the Goodness of the Lord"*

### Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Name a hunger—physical, spiritual, or emotional—that you long to satisfy. What will fulfill that longing?
2. Reflect on how food insecurity—the lack of regular, reliable access to nutritional foods—impacts the health, education, and financial well-being of families and neighborhoods.

*Dr. Kathleen Bellow Dorsey is the past convener of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR THIRD SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... The Table Is Inviting and Hospitable

**Scripture:** “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.” (Hebrews 13:2)

**Devotional Reflection:** For most of my life I have been considered an introvert. From an early age, my parents would have to encourage me to have more than polite responses to friends and colleagues they would introduce me to when out shopping or at a restaurant. However, my introversion had exceptions. If there was a stranger who looked like they were sad or lonely, I would approach them and spark a conversation. I was even known to randomly invite people who were dining by themselves to join our table. The first time I did this, I was only 4 years old. The gentleman I invited respectfully declined, however, he did follow me to my family’s table because he wanted to meet the parents “who instilled such kindness in me at such an early age.” I have never forgotten that. It was when I got older that I became familiar with Hebrews 13:2 and really began to understand the importance of being hospitable as a Christian.

There are people in need all around us. People are hungry—not just for food but for care, compassion, hugs, and conversation. Hospitality is not just providing food, clothing, or lodging for them; it is found in comforting, counseling, and directing them in all matters in which they may stand in need thereof.

As Christians, we must promote values that are most conducive to closeness with each other and real communion with our global communities. We should facilitate and promote opportunities for growth that involve the opening of homes, the active service of people inside the church and out, and the donation of our money and time. Showing hospitality allows us to get to know each other in ways that build familiarity, empathy, and intimacy. We should try to exercise the grace that God has shown us in all ways. We may be showing hospitality to angels and not even know it.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for your eternal love and the grace that you give us every day. Help us to be more hospitable. Give us the gift of discernment so that we may know when someone is in need even if they do not tell us. As we stand in solidarity with those who suffer from hunger and poverty, help us to know that hospitality begins at home. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** On Nov. 7, 1955, the Interstate Commerce Commission put an end to segregated interstate bus travel and the Supreme Court stopped the segregation of public areas (e.g., playgrounds and parks).

**Meditational Music:** “*God in Me*”

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Who do you consider strangers in your surrounding communities? How can you express hospitality and compassion?
2. Why is it our Christian duty to promote closeness and authentic community for all people?

*Jennifer B. Campbell is a graduate student at Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Conn.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FOURTH SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Must Combine Action and Faith to Feed the People

**Scripture:** *“And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes he divided among them all. And they did all eat, and were filled.” (Matthew 15:36-37)*

**Devotional Reflection:** I am sure many feel that the issue of world hunger is too challenging for us to face and conquer. In light of rising famines, debates on healthcare, and budget cuts—it is tempting to succumb to the crises of the world and to throw in the towel. However, the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 with just five fishes and two loaves show us that when action and faith are combined, the miraculous can take place and surprise even the biggest unbeliever. In times like these, we must operate in the faith that Jesus had when he saw the hungry masses. We are called to have the type of faith that says, “though our current circumstances do not seem to be in our favor and in the favor of the hungry—we still believe in a God who can do epic things with scarcely allotted resources.”

One of the significant points of this story is that everyone not only ate, but they were able to eat to the point of satisfaction with food left over. This shows us that God not only has the power to step in, but to go above and beyond the need. Today, there’s an abundance of food resources. It is time that we have faith that declares the “food shortage” as solvable. The Bible says in Romans 8:19, “For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.” This scripture shows us that the world is literally waiting for the church to manifest itself in the lives of people and do the things God has instructed us to do.

**Prayer:** Father God in the name of Jesus, we thank You for the opportunity to exhibit life changing faith. We believe not only in the end of global hunger, but look for guidance on how to be a key component. We ask that you give us victory through our faith and actions. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** During the 49th convocation of the United Church of Jesus Christ (Apostolic), the board of bishops and congregants stepped into action by signing and writing letters to our country’s politicians to address the issue of hunger in Congress.

**Meditational Music:** *“Do Something”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. How can the church go about combining faith and action to end world hunger?
2. What steps are you personally going to take to operate in faith and action and create an end to world hunger?

*Brother Sean Gore is the president of the young adult department of the United Church of Jesus Christ (Apostolic) in Baltimore, Md.*

**December**



Joseph Moller/Bread for the World

*In Times Like These ... We Are Called to Prayer  
and the Bearing of Gifts of Just Peace*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FIRST SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Are Called to Prayer and Bearing of the Gift of Wisdom

**Scripture:** *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.’ Then He closed the book and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’” (Luke 4:18-21)*

**Devotional Prayer:** O wisdom of the Father. You, who pitched your tent in Jacob and made Your dwelling amongst men. You, who are beyond time—and yet, in this mystery of Your incarnation entered into time in order to deliver us from our bondage—we are running out of time. Grant us, O true light, to seek You, as the wise men sought the star, and to rejoice with them at the living hope to which we have been begotten through Your incarnation and resurrection.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** Today marks the first Sunday of the Coptic Month of Kiahk in which we commemorate the events that led to the transformation of the world through the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a time to prepare and wait for the Feast of the Incarnation, which commemorates the reality of the coming of the Son of God.

**Meditational Music:** *“The Wisdom Fraction of St. Epiphanius” in the Coptic Rite*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. The Wisdom Fraction of the Coptic Rite speaks of how “wisdom walks in the way of justice and moves in the path of truth” and how “those who seek wisdom find grace.” How can I make my fasting more sincere and edifying? How can I direct my mind, heart, soul, and strength toward seeking the coming of the Son of God, Wisdom Incarnate, in my life and circumstances more truly and earnestly?
2. Both the excerpt from Luke and the exhortations in Isaiah 58 implore us to work to heal the brokenhearted, to share our bread with the hungry, and to liberate the oppressed. Is my heart convicted enough, my will resolved enough, and my mind set enough to work such works? If not, what is hindering me?

*Evrarn Dawd is a parishioner and youth ministry coordinator at St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Cedar Grove, N.J.*



## DEVOTIONAL FOR SECOND SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Are Called to Prayer and the Bearing of Gifts of Just Peace

**Scripture:** *“Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from 2 years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.’”* (Matthew 16:18)

**Devotional Prayer:** He preferred suffering over joy, toil over rest, contempt over glory, and the Cross over the throne which is carried by the cherubim. He consented to be tied by ropes that He may loose us from the bonds of our sins. He humbled Himself that He may lift us up. He hungered to satiate us, and thirsted to quench our thirst. And He ascended upon the Cross naked that He might clothe us with the garment of His righteousness. He died and was buried in the tomb; then He arose that He might raise us from the death of sin, and give us life unto life eternal. (Coptic Liturgical Prayer).

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** “O King of Peace, grant us Your peace. Bestow unto us Your peace, and forgive us our sins.” Such are the opening words of the ancient Coptic Hymn of Peace, Epouro, which will be chanted in its festive tune come the Feast of the Incarnation. Christ’s Kingdom however, is not of this world, and as His ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20), we are meant to spread the message of His Kingdom in our sojourn. We must show forth His peace always and especially in the face of tragedy and pain.

**Meditational Music:** *“O King of Peace”*

### Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Who are the people in my life in pain—those to whom I am called to go and be an ambassador of peace by offering sacrifices of justice and love on the altars of their hearts and on their behalf?
2. Do I esteem others better than myself (Philippians 2:3) and actively push myself to move beyond my own comfort (1 Corinthians 9)? Are there things more important to me than my pleasure and ease?

*Evram Dawd is a parishioner and youth ministry coordinator at St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Cedar Grove, N.J.*

## DEVOTIONAL FOR THIRD SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We are Called to Hope for God's Renewal, Restoration, and Rejoicing Spirit

**Scripture:** *"The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior, who will rejoice over you with gladness and renew you in his love, who will sing joyfully because of you, as on festival days. I will remove disaster from among you, so that no one may recount your disgrace."* (Zephaniah 3:17-18)

**Devotional Reflection:** In the Catholic faith, the third Sunday of Advent is traditionally called "Gaudete Sunday." Gaudete is Latin for "rejoice." Priests on this Sunday change the color of Advent vestments from purple to rose and light a pink candle to summon a festive occasion. Scripture readings with joyful themes are selected. Favorite readings include scriptures from the prophet Zephaniah and Isaiah. Zephaniah 3:14 says, "Shout for joy, daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, daughter Jerusalem!" Isaiah 12:3 says, "With joy, you will draw water from the fountains of salvation." Paul tells us to "rejoice" twice in Philippians 4:4. Luke's Gospel says that "now the people were filled with expectation."

These readings give us great expectation, hope, and excitement in preparing for Mary's baby, the Savior of the world. Similar to our rejoicing when a new baby is born, we hope and rejoice because a mighty Savior will soon be in our midst. When the Savior of the world appears, he will take away our stony hearts and renew us in his love—to feed the hungry and channel our efforts to remove the poverty in this world. O Come, Immanuel, and ransom Israel!

**Prayer:** Loving God, you hear our cries for those who hunger and thirst. Our hearts yearn for plenty for all of your children. Empower us to be your agents of this justice, dignity and honor for all. Glory be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** On Dec. 16, 1859, two African-American enslaved men, Shields Green and John Anthony Copeland, were hung for their participation in John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry in the fight to end slavery. Copeland's belief in God for a better world without slavery, hunger, and poverty are reflected in these words while he faced death, "I am dying for freedom. I could not die for a better cause. I would rather die than be a slave."

**Meditational Music:** *"Oh Freedom, Oh Freedom!"*

### Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. When you say, "Give us this day our daily bread," does your prayer include those who are hungry?
2. Are you willing to conduct an Offering of Letters sent to congressional leaders to advocate for a moral federal budget that supports emergency relief for people made vulnerable by famine, drought, and conflict?

*Evangelist Michael P. Howard is a member of the Roman Catholic Church and founder of Eat The Scroll Ministry.*

# DEVOTIONAL FOR FOURTH SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Must See Christ in Every Child

**Scripture:** *“But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’” (Luke 2:10-12)*

**Devotional Reflection:** “The birth of Jesus reminds us of how precious children are. But why did God choose to send his son to us as a child? I believe God wanted to show us that while children are among the most vulnerable, they are chosen, too. Persons who are hungry, without shelter, or in dire need are also vulnerable, but loved by God.

Jesus’ birth reminds us, that “the least of these” matter. In the popular hymn, “Jesus, Oh What a Wonderful Child,” my favorite line is “New life, new hope, to all he brings, listen to the angel sing, ‘Glory, glory, glory to the new born king.’” Jesus’ birth reminds us that we must value every child. We do this when we ensure that they have food, shelter, and a quality education.

What if Jesus was treated as an immigrant in the United States? What if he was profiled at 12 years of age and crucified by Roman guards for no reason? What if Jesus was forced to attend public school and fell behind in classes because he had to help his father work? Jesus’ birth narrative shows us that caring for children and providing resources for families are part of God’s desire. Children are one of the most vulnerable groups in this world, and they carry in them God’s spark. We must work for a world with no hunger and poverty and where justice for children is a top priority.

**Prayer:** Giver of life, we thank you for children—for their lightheartedness, fearlessness, and kindness. Let us never pass up an opportunity to give of our time and resources to those children experiencing poverty and hunger. Touch the hearts of our local, state, national, and global leaders to be mindful of the children in their purview. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** On Dec. 5, 2013, Nelson Mandela died. Throughout his life, he stressed that “there can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way it treats its children.”

**Meditational Music:** *“Jesus, Oh What a Wonderful Child”*

## Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Are their children in my local community experiencing poverty and hunger whom I can help? If so, how?
2. What are the current policies in my community regarding children experiencing hunger or homelessness? Are these policies adequate?

*Minister Hazel Cherry is a church administrator at Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C.*

## DEVOTIONAL FOR FIFTH SUNDAY

In Times Like These ... We Are Called to Walk with Those Who Are in Perilous Search of a New Home

**Scripture:** *“When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. ‘Get up,’ he said. ‘Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.’ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’” (Matthew 2:13-15)*

**Devotional Reflection:** “Get up. Take the child and his mother and escape.” A few words, both timeless and timely, remind us of the urgency of the current situation of millions of people who have to flee from their homelands to new destinations. Entire families escape with the hope that their children will be able to fulfill their dreams in a more secure environment. While they journey with the hope of being living symbols of change for their loved ones left behind, their journeys are often perilous and tragic. Their stories serve as poignant reminders of the One, whose story began as a migrant, according to the prophetic announcement, “Out of Egypt I called my son.” The call to walk with refugees and migrants is embedded in the story of Jesus, today, tomorrow, and always.

**Prayer:** Loving God, you created all people in your image and likeness. We pray to you to sustain all the migrants and refugees of our times, that you may be their guide on their perilous journey toward more secure lands. We pray for the countries, leaders, and citizens who host them, that they may walk with them in solidarity, understanding, and caring hospitality. Amen.

**Pan-African Calendar/Historical Inspiration:** Yolande Mukagasana Clemence Evariste is a human rights activist and nurse who fled to Belgium at the height of the Rwandan genocide and was granted refugee status in 1995. She began a new life in exile, which she dedicated to writing and campaigning for migrants’ rights as human rights.

**Meditational Music:** *“Refugee’s Christmas Song”*

### Questions to Ponder for Action:

1. Do you know someone in your neighborhood who has escaped war or another hardship? How can you extend hospitality to that person?
2. Are you willing to support refugees?

*Dr. Amélé Adamavi-Aho Ekué is professor of Ecumenical Ethics at the Ecumenical Institute at Château de Bossey in Switzerland.*



# Devotional Writers



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Rev. Jennifer C. Bailey



Ambassador Michael A. Battle Sr.



Minister Kenya M. Bell



Karyn Bigelow



Rev. Dr. James Blassingame



Rev. Dr. Timothy Tee Boddie



Rev. Dionne P. Boissière



Rev. Dr. Charles S. Brown



Jennifer B. Campbell



Dr. Iva Carruthers



Minister Hazel Cherry

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Derick Dailey



Rev. Dr. David Daniels



Evram Dawd



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Dr. Kathleen Bellow Dorsey



Rev. Quadricos Driskell



Dr. Amélé Adamavi-Aho  
Ekué



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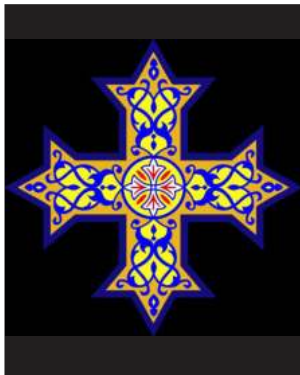
Rev. Dr. Brenda  
Girton-Mitchell



Brother Sean Gore



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Jefferson-Snorton



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Sr.



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Walker-Smith



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Erin Wiley



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