

[Prayer Ventures for December 2023]

1 *World AIDS Day* Remember in prayer all who have been and continue to be affected by HIV and AIDS, and pray for the work we do together through the ELCA's HIV and AIDS Ministry — building awareness, serving people who live with HIV and AIDS, advocating for change, and supporting effective, affordable prevention, treatment and care globally.

2 The United Nations estimates that 90% of wartime casualties are suffered by civilians. Pray for an end to the violence, loss of life, suffering and injustice caused by war and conflict in the world, especially in Ukraine and the Middle East.

3 *First Sunday of Advent* Praise God, source of our hope, strength, healing and new life, and Jesus Christ, who lived among us to reveal God's grace.

4 Approximately 15% of the world's population lives with some form of disability, including about 42.5 million people in our country. Pray for the Spirit to sustain our commitment and guide our efforts to welcome, respect and fully include people with disabilities in every aspect of society and the church. Give thanks for the work and resources of ELCA Disability Ministry, the Evangelical Lutheran Deaf Association and the Lutheran Services in America–Disability Network.

5 Pray that we will not lose heart when we read stories of the church in decline or hear fewer people expressing faith in Christ. Ask the Spirit to strengthen our trust in God's unwavering presence and work in the world and to help us bring the gospel to those still yearning for hope, healing and good news. "Your people long to greet you, my hope, my heart's delight" (*ELW* 241).

6 Pray for ELCA missionaries serving alongside our global companions and churches around the world. Give thanks for communities of faith where our mission personnel worship and celebrate their faith with siblings in Christ.

7 *Hanukkah* Pray for our Jewish neighbors around the world who are beginning their eight-day celebration of Hanukkah — the Festival of Lights.

8 Remember in prayer people for whom the Christmas season stirs depression, loneliness and grieving. Promise to welcome these struggling people into our communities of faith and to connect them with new friends and siblings in Christ who will offer care and support during the holidays and throughout the year.

9 Reflect prayerfully on the symbolism of the Advent wreath and candles, which help us anticipate and celebrate God's boundless love and the promise of eternal life fulfilled in the birth of Christ — a light that breaks through the darkness of the world and changes everything.

10 Pray that we will be faithful and enthusiastic witnesses to the good news of Jesus Christ for all people in every circumstance of life.

11 Give thanks for our church's commitment to service, generosity, justice and ending hunger and poverty for the sake of our neighbors in need. Pray that the ELCA Good Gifts catalog and the ministries of the ELCA will help us understand the needs of our neighbors and how we can work together to make a lasting impact in the world.

12 Praise God for the diverse Advent and Christmas traditions of the Christian church around the world, traditions that enrich our faith and understanding of how Christ has impacted communities, cultures and nations.

13 Pause during the busyness of the holidays and pray for our neighbors in need, especially those experiencing suffering, poverty, war, recovery from disasters and displacement from their homes. Pray that they will find relief, hope and renewed strength in the certainty of God's attention and love, evidenced in the gift of Jesus Christ and reflected in our concern, response and advocacy.

14 Give thanks for the seasons of the liturgical year and the Scripture, colors, symbols, prayers, music and rituals of faith that help us live in the rhythm of life as children of God and siblings in Christ.

15 Ask God to help us reflect on those who are not present whenever we gather and to remember that these children of God bring unique voices, gifts and life experiences to the worship, activities and gatherings of our congregations.

16 *Las Posadas* Give thanks for the tradition of Las Posadas, which recalls Mary and Joseph's Nativity journey and is observed in parts of Latin America and in some Latino communities in the United States.

17 Pray that we will have the humility, honesty and boldness of John the Baptist, who did not shy away from expressing his faith in Jesus Christ even when challenged and threatened.

18 *International Migrants Day* Pray for those who, with great risk and uncertainty, have left their home countries and familiar surroundings to seek welcoming communities where they feel safe, respected and free to reestablish their lives and raise their families.

19 Give thanks to God for the assurance of life eternal in the kingdom of heaven and for the Spirit equipping us to embody God's compassion in the world while we await the return of Christ.

20 What stirs joy in you today? Give thanks for the people and experiences that bring joy into your life, even if only briefly. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

21 *Winter solstice* As the days of the Northern Hemisphere grow shorter, pray that we will be guided and reassured by the light of Christ, which illuminates God's love, mercy and truth in our lives and in every corner of the world.

22 Praise God for this time of remembrance, anticipation and celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, a birth that changed the world and our lives in ways that exceed our imagination and comprehension.

23 Give thanks for those who serve our communities during Christmas, including people in health care, elder care, law enforcement, the hospitality industry, emergency services and the military.

24 *Christmas Eve* Shout “Glory to God in the highest!” The good news of the birth of the promised Messiah and Savior for all creation and humankind has been made known to us and is the foundation of our faith and life.

25 *Christmas Day* Lift up shouts of thanksgiving and praise for all to hear! God lives among us in the birth of Jesus Christ and pours hope and joy into our lives to fill their voids and mend our brokenness.

26 *Kwanzaa* Pray for our African-descent neighbors and siblings in Christ who celebrate Kwanzaa, a weeklong observance of African culture and traditions that emphasizes family, community and shared principles. Give thanks for the rich and enduring practices of our African-descent siblings and the global African community.

27 Give thanks that the gift of grace found in Jesus Christ is both deeply personal and for all humankind. “Of what benefit would it be to me if Christ had been born a thousand times, and it would daily be sung into my ears in a most lovely manner, if I were never to hear that he was born for me and was to be my very own?” (Martin Luther, 1522).

28 Christmas may have come and gone, but we carry into every day the joy of Christmas and the birth of the Christ child, the manifestation of God’s love for humanity. Give praise and thanks to God!

29 Lift up prayers of relief and thanksgiving for God’s mercy, which is fair and generous and is never swayed by our actions or words, no matter how good or well-intended.

30 Share with God your hopes, concerns, uncertainties and aspirations for the year ahead. Pray for the Spirit to strengthen our faith in God’s concern for us and in God’s attention to our prayers — spoken and silent.

31 *New Year’s Eve* Our baptism with water, the word of God and the blessings of our siblings in Christ marks us as children of God and followers of Jesus, loved, forgiven and made new every day of our lives. Alleluia!