**Climate Intercessors**

**Group Prayer (March 12, 2024)**

**[Slide 1]**

**1. Welcome, Introduction, and Liturgy (15 min)**

* Note: be profuse in your welcome.
* Ground rules: stay muted until you are ready to pray; we will have an opportunity for you to type local and personal prayer requests in the chat; we’ll be praying together for these in break-out rooms later; let’s avoid overtly partisan prayers.

**[Slide 2]**

* Type in your location: city, state, region, or nation.  How can we pray for YOUR local situation?  (and/or)
* What else is on your “climate change heart” this month?  Type in one prayer request.

**[Slide 3]**

We’ve got three announcements to begin this month. One is about one of our founding leaders of Climate Intercessors: Laura Young. She’s been named “Scottish Influencer of the Year” in the Inspiration category. Her social media handle is @lesswastelaura. Congratulations to Laura. We are very proud of her. Let’s keep her in our prayers as she uses her voice for good in Scotland, the UK and beyond!

**[Slide 4]**

And here’s another young leader in our midst, Tobias Adam, who is a seminary student in Zurich, Switzerland. For his thesis, Tobias is researching prayer and climate change. He would like to interview some of us about our experience of praying about climate change. If you would be willing to volunteer and help him out, please type your full name and your e-mail address into the chat line now, and Tobias will get back in touch with you. He has offered to keep his interviews anonymous, if you prefer. He’s also offered to share his research results with us when he’s done, which is exciting.

**[Slide 5]**

Our final announcement has to do with what we call “Scripts”—the written content of our prayer meetings. We know some of you have been asking about this for a couple years, but we are going to start posting the scripts on the website. If you want to revisit some content, use the liturgy again, or track down some links, they will all be in the scripts and we’ll make sure they are posted by the end of the day of our prayer meetings. Sorry, we won’t be posting the slides. And we do want to avoid the recording of our meetings, including by AI transcribing services, please—especially the prayers that people are praying publicly and vulnerably.

**[Slide 6]**

Our liturgy this month, during the season of Lent, has plenty of lament and confession in it. It is taken from *Worshipping Ecumenically* by WCC Publications

Giver of Life,
in the midst of a plundered earth we groan with creation:

**Have mercy on us.**

**[Slide 7]**

Giver of Life,
in the midst of poisoned water we groan with creation:
**Have mercy on us.**

**[Slide 8]**

Giver of Life,
in the midst of polluted air we groan with creation:
**Have mercy on us.**

**[Slide 9]**

Giver of Life,
in the midst of mountains of waste we groan with creation:
**Have mercy on us.**

**[Slide 10]**

Giver of Life,
we who are made in the image of God have gone astray,
and creation groans with us:
**Have mercy on us.**

**[Slide 11]**

Giver of Life,

By your Spirit we call out to you, “Abba, Father.”

We ask you to make of us, your children, worthy heirs

Who ease the groaning of creation through faithful stewardship.

**Lord, hear our prayer. Amen.**

**[Slide 12]**

**Headline Prayers (15 minutes): Gaza**

Our main headline prayer this month is for Gaza. If you want to find a connection to climate change, you can easily find one: wars are devastating not only to the environment but also to the international good will between nations required to address a crisis like climate change. But sometimes all Intercessors, regardless of what issue we might primarily focus on, are compelled to stop and cry out for mercy for a horrific situation like what continues to unfold in Palestine and Israel.

* The Israeli government believes that there are still 99 hostages held by Hamas in Gaza. This includes one-year-old Kfir Bibas and his 4 year old brother Ariel, and their mother Shiri, though there are reports they may be dead already.
* In the retaliatory air strikes and ground offenses, over 30,000 Palestinians have been killed, about 70 percent of them women and children. This is according to reports from the Palestinian Health Ministry.
* The UN reports that an additional 70,000 people have been wounded, and 1.7 million (or 80% of the population) has been displaced.
* The World Bank reports that 60% of all residential buildings in Gaza have been damaged and 45% destroyed altogether.
* The Palestinian Ministry of Health reported this week that at least 17 children have now died due to starvation, including a ten-year-old-boy Yazan Kafarneh who also had cerebral palsy and could not get treatment. The threat of malnutrition and starvation is critical.
* Some governments which have been slow to call for an “immediate ceasefire”—most notably the US—have changed course. Ramadan started on Sunday and for Netanyahu to pursue an offensive on Rafah during this time seems particularly barbaric.

Politics, security, statehood, and peace negotiations have ALWAYS been complicated. We can imagine that praying for Palestine would also be complicated. Lowell’s wife Robynn is a certified spiritual director, and she says that prayer is simply an act of “bringing people under the loving gaze of Jesus.” She often uses that scene from Matthew 19 where Jesus tells his disciples, “Let the little children come to me.” Let’s pray in such a way now that children like Kfir and Yazan, their mothers and fathers, their sisters and brothers are placed up on the lap of Jesus who is more than capable of addressing negotiations, ceasefires, humanitarian crises, and the fears and griefs and injustices associated with all violence.

Let’s pray.

**[Slide 13] Headline Prayers: Just Transition Work Program**

Last month, we mentioned the Just Transition Work Program (JTWP) without really explaining it. This month, we want to pray about this important initiative. Think of a “work program” as a subset set of the Paris Agreement, a chance for a task force to focus on a specific issue related to the overall work of climate action. The JTWP was established at COP27 in 2022 and its modalities were adopted last year at COP28. It recognizes that while movement to a green economy will likely result in a net-increase in jobs, nonetheless, 80 million existing jobs could be lost. Those 80 million jobs represent actual men and women, laborers and their families and their local economies. We want to care for them.

The World Resources Institute describes it this way: “To ensure that vulnerable people are not left behind, all climate action must be underpinned by principles of a *just transition*. Broadly, this means moving toward a greener world in ways that won’t create or exacerbate inequalities or cause other unintended social and economic harms. It also means taking action to mitigate such harms, creating opportunities that benefit all people and communities and promoting sustainable development.”

The JTWP is often summarized as “a human rights-based approach to climate change.” One valuable component of the JTWP is the way it can help draw labour unions and whole countries, e.g. like Poland, whose workers are heavily employed in fossil fuel jobs into climate action.

The JTWP hopes to see each party to the Paris Agreement include just transition planning into, for instance, their emission reduction targets, and they are seeing some progress. The number of nationally determined contributions (NDCs) that explicitly mention “just transition” is low but growing. It jumped from 17% (33 NDCs covering 59 countries) in 2022 to 23% (45 NDCs covering 71 countries) in 2023.

Let’s pray for the success of the JTWP, and pray for those workers and their families who will experience dislocation in the transition to clean energy.

**[Slide 14]**

Our theme prayers this month focus on the role that plastics—their entire lifecycle—play in climate change, which is significant and growing rapidly. Currently plastics account for around 3.4% of global emissions and their production has quadrupled in the last 30 years and is predicted to keep growing rapidly.

Today we will add our prayers to a forthcoming treaty that will be historic in how the world addresses plastic production and waste management. 175 nations decided back in 2022 to take up this treaty negotiation and next month in Ottawa Canada will be the Fourth (and second-to-last) round of negotiations.

**[Slide 15] children swimming in plastic**

We are all familiar with the pollution and maybe health impacts of plastic, especially single use plastic. This horrendous photo was from a pacific island and much of the waste had arrived from within the ocean and is what we call single use plastic.

But plastics industry also has a huge carbon footprint – and the plastics industry is the fastest growing source of industrial greenhouse gases in the world (OECD)

**[Slide 16] OECD graphic how to plastics and climate intersect**

More than 99% of plastic is made from fossil fuels, and its effect on climate change is so pervasive because it affects climate change at EVERY stage of its lifecycle. For example, the actual incineration of waste plastic is expected to grow.

Apart from the very concerning impacts of waste plastics on health and wildlife they are also affecting the ability of oceans to absorb CO2 - studies report that microplastics are affecting the ability of phytoplankton and zooplankton to help the world cope with the excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

*[ might miss out this extra detail?*

*When it comes to refining and manufacture: “Plastic refining is among the most greenhouse- gas-intensive industries in the manufacturing sector—and the fastest growing. In 2015 just 24 ethylene facilities in the US alone produced as much CO2 as 3.8 million passenger vehicles on the road. Globally in 2015, the initial process of refining--what is called the “cracking” of alkanes into olefin—emits as much CO2 as 45 million passenger vehicles driven for one year. ]*

**[Slide 17] Global plastics production**

Suggest you read off the slide where the data is superimposed on the overall growth curve of plastic production

 *[following details probably not worth reading out*

*In 1950, the world produced just two million tonnes. It now produces over* 450 *million tonnes (Our World in Data)*

*Plastic production has quadrupled in the past 30 years and accounts for 3.4% of global greenhouse gas emissions. (OECD)*

*About half that plastic is single-use plastic.*

*Producers keep developing and promoting new uses for plastic. ]*

**[Slide 18]**

Prior to the Plastics negotiations at the UN Environmental Assembly, the Center for International Environmental Law and their partners released a report entitled Plastic & Climate: The Hidden Costs of a Plastic Planet

<https://www.ciel.org/reports/plastic-health-the-hidden-costs-of-a-plastic-planet-may-2019/>

On this slide you’ll see one of their findings with projections: “In 2019, the production and incineration of plastic produced greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to 189 coal-fired power plants.”

**[Slide 19]**

Honestly, the UN has fast-tracked these negotiations so that is possible we will have a final treaty by December of this year, but it’s not plain sailing.

When the plastics treaty process started in 2022, a group of 20 countries led by Norway and Rawanda, calling themselves the “high Ambition coalition to end plastic pollution” came together to push for a strong agreement - it currently has 64 nations including the UK as members.

But, to quote the Tear Fund’s February 2024 update: “However, the bad news is that the High Ambition Coalition have gone quiet. Despite their name, they are failing to speak up collectively for an ‘ambitious’ plastics treaty.”

And we have heard this from a number of other commentators on the process.

Tear fund and other partners noticed:

“At INC-3 in Nairobi, we saw **a a well coordinated attempt to block progress** towards a strong, legally binding plastics treaty. A new coalition of fossil fuel- and plastic-producing countries were able to prevent an updated draft treaty being prepared, and to block plans for further formal work to take place before the next round of talks. Without this work, the chances of a strong plastics treaty grow slimmer.”

Obviously, some uses of plastic are hugely beneficial, but the arguments for increasing the production and use of plastic by the fossil fuel and plastic producing countries feels very familiar to us as we have prayed into climate negotiations – devoid of recognition of the harm many plastics cause, including carbon emissions.

**[slide 20]**

A good UN agreement can help cut total use of plastics, especially single use plastics, and find ways to produce, use, recycle and dispose of them much more safely – it seems possible that these steps would allow a significant reduction in production of new plastics. All this would mean less greenhouse gas emissions.

A “bad” agreement would mean the opposite- bad news for the poor, for those working on recycling and replacement of plastic and bad for air quality and greenhouse gases - and good news for producing companies.

And when negotiating, its always the details and the working parts which raise the most dispute and are so often used to delay sensible ways forwards.

Let’s pray for negotiators when they meet next month in Ottawa, Canada for their fourth round of negotiations. They will be working on finalizing the text that will set the 5th round in Busan up for success, later this year. Meanwhile, NGOs and activists are calling for a treaty that is based on:

* legally binding global rules
* comprehensive circular economy measures, with a focus on upstream action
* prioritizing plastic packaging
* fairness.

So let’s pray for the Plastics Treaty, and for what else you know—globally or locally—about the role of plastic pollution in climate change and other environmental devastations.

<https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/un-plastics-treaty/overview>

**4. Breakout Rooms and Conclusion (15 minutes)**

**[Slide 18]**

* Announcements: next meeting (second Tuesday of April) April 9.
* Look for newsletters and new Bible reflections on the first of each month.
* Go to the website for a means of making a donation to Climate Intercessors
* Profuse thanks for coming and praying with us.