

## Improve Maternal Health

February, 2009



Call to Prayer: Psalm 139:14

A Reading from the Gospel of Luke (2: 22-40)

Reflection: The Gift of a Mother

### Intercessions & Closing Prayer

In Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe . . .

We give thanks for mothers everywhere.

When times are hard, in situations of suffering . . .

We give thanks for the sacrifices they make each day for their children.

For their examples of love, caring, and hope . . .

We give thanks for their generosity, their compassion and their hope for the future.

In the Congo, Iraq, Uganda, Palestine, Colombia . . .

We remember mothers in our global community who care for their children as guns of war are heard.

In Zimbabwe, India, Guyana, Belize, Botswana . . .

We remember mothers as sicknesses such as AIDS and malaria ravage their lands.

In Haiti, Burundi, Eritrea, Cambodia, Guatemala . . .

We remember mothers whose access to food and water is scarce.

In Sudan, Sri Lanka, Somalia, Afghanistan . . .

We remember mothers who bundled up their children, fled their homes, and became refugees.



Mary, Mother of God, embrace all mothers, give them strength and courage and mother their spirits so they can continue to heal the wounds of their children and of the world.

Mary, We give thanks for mothers everywhere. Amen.

### Notes for using this prayer:

Please feel free to make adaptations to this prayer to meet the needs of your learning community. You may decide to add music before, during or after the pieces that are outlined here. There is additional information about Goal 5 below that can be incorporated into the call to prayer if it is appropriate for your learning community. The web-site is referenced and additional information can be found there.

The intercessions and closing prayer are from [www.educationforjustice.org](http://www.educationforjustice.org).

You may want to put together, or have students put together, a PowerPoint/Slideshow of pictures of their mothers/people who mother them. It could be played after the Gospel reading, or during the time for reflection, or during the reading of the intercessions.

Other materials needed:

- ✓ A copy of the 1st **AND** last page of this document for each participant (they could be printed on one page, front and back)
- ✓ A leader of the prayer and additional readers if you decide to use them for the various parts.
- ✓ Participants will need writing instruments
- ✓ A copy of the content below for the leader and/or readers.

### **Call to Prayer:**

The LEADER reads the passage from PS 139:14:

*"You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb. I praise you, so wonderfully you made me; wonderful are your works!"* (PS 139:14)

The Leader continues: Pause for a moment to imagine yourself being knit together in your mother's womb.... Take a moment to reflect on how dependent you were — before you were born — on your mother. Think of your mother now...the role she plays in your life, all the ways she has nurtured you from "before you were born" until now.... Think of other women who are, are have been, mother figures in your life: they have nurtured you and helped you become who you are today....

A woman dies from complications in childbirth every minute - about 529,000 each year -- the vast majority of them in developing countries.

A woman in sub-Saharan Africa has a 1 in 16 chance of dying in pregnancy or childbirth, compared to a 1 in 4,000 risk in a developing country - the largest difference between poor and rich countries of any health indicator.

Today we gather to pray for the improved health of mothers, and for efforts in our world to reduce the number of deaths among mothers. Let's take some time to listen to a story of a young mother...and to reflect on our mothers...

### **A Reading from the Gospel of Luke (2:22-40) (read by the Leader or another)**

When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph took Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord,

*Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord,*  
and to offer the sacrifice of *a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,*  
in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord.

He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying:

"Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel."

The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted and you yourself a sword will pierce so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

### **Reflection: *The Gift of a Mother***

Have the prayer leader invite the participants to spend some time reflecting on the questions given. Encourage the participant to write prayers (see the last page content). If it is a small group the leader may invite members to read their prayers at the end of the reflection time.

### **Intercessions and Closing Prayer**

The Leader reads what is in bold print. Invite the participants to read the rest.

## Further information about Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health

The following (from <http://www.unicef.org/mdg/maternal.html>) may be helpful:

### Target by 2015:

Reduce the maternal mortality ratio by three quarters.

### Healthy children need healthy mothers.

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A woman in sub-Saharan Africa has a 1 in 16 chance of dying in pregnancy or childbirth, compared to a 1 in 4,000 risk in a developed country - the largest difference between poor and rich countries of any health indicator.

This glaring disparity is reflected in a number of global declarations and resolutions. In September 2001, 147 heads of states collectively endorsed Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5: To reduce child mortality rate by 2/3 and maternal mortality ratio by 3/4 between 1990 and 2015. Strongly linked to these is Goal 6: To halt or begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

The direct causes of maternal deaths are haemorrhage, infection, obstructed labour, hypertensive disorders in pregnancy, and complications of unsafe abortion. There are birth-related disabilities that affect many more women and go untreated like injuries to pelvic muscles, organs or the spinal cord. At least 20% of the burden of disease in children below the age of 5 is related to poor maternal health and nutrition, as well as quality of care at delivery and during the newborn period. And yearly 8 million babies die before or during delivery or in the first week of life. Further, many children are tragically left motherless each year. These children are 10 times more likely to die within two years of their mothers' death.

Another risk to expectant women is malaria. It can lead to anaemia, which increases the risk for maternal and infant mortality and developmental problems for babies. Nutritional deficiencies contribute to low birth weight and birth defects as well.

HIV infection is an increasing threat. Mother-to-child transmission of HIV in low-resource settings, especially in those countries where infection in adults is continuing to grow or has stabilised at very high levels, continues to be a major problem, with up to 45 per cent of HIV-infected mothers transmitting infection to their children. Further, HIV is becoming a major cause of maternal mortality in highly affected countries in Southern Africa.

A majority of these deaths and disabilities are preventable, being mainly due to insufficient care during pregnancy and delivery. About 15 per cent of pregnancies and childbirths need emergency obstetric care because of complications that are difficult to predict.

Access to skilled care during pregnancy, childbirth and the first month after delivery is key to saving these women's lives - and those of their children.

## *The Gift of a Mother*

Imagine Mary as she listened to Simeon's words...  
What did she feel? What did she think?

Imagine all the ways Mary helped Jesus grow into  
adulthood...

Think of your own experience...

Who are your mother figures? Take time to list them by name....



Write a prayer of thanksgiving for one or all of the people who "mother" you...

Imagine how your life would be different if none the people on your list were  
in your life...

how would your life be harder...

poorer...

impossible...?

Write a prayer for those who do not have mothers....

