

## Prayer Service for International Women's Day

*International Women's Day (8 March) is a global day celebrating the economic, political and social achievements of women past, present and future. This prayer service in honor of women poets who give voice to the fullness of life, faith, and justice and peace.*

**Leader:** We give thanks for the wisdom of the many women poets who have helped all humans to reflect deeply and to sing joyfully, to ponder and to praise. Their words are beacons to us as we move forward to co-create the kingdom of God in love and mercy. They are balms in suffering, they mother our souls so we may grow and flourish in grace.

**Reader One:** Psalm 5: 8

But I can enter your house because of your great love. I can worship in your holy temple because of my reverence for you, LORD.

**Reader Two:** Psalm 49: 4-5

My mouth shall speak wisdom, my heart shall offer insight. I will turn my attention to a problem; expound my question to the music of a lyre.

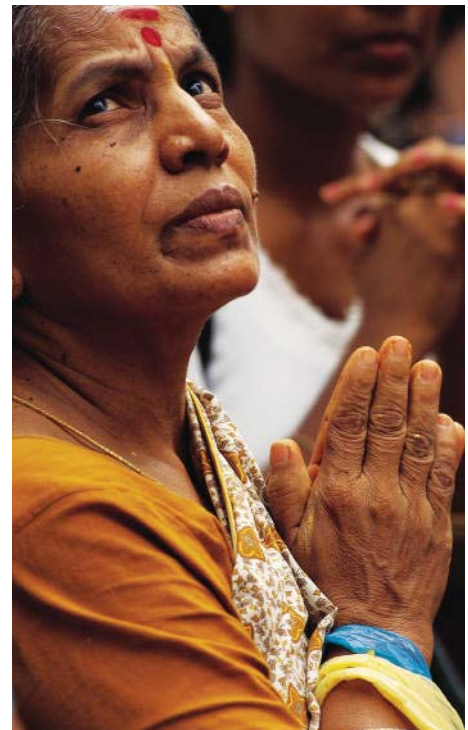
**Leader:** We are grateful for all the women who have offered us wisdom and insight through their love of words and their love of God's world.

**Reader Three:** We are grateful for Lucille Clifton, the recently deceased African-American poet who felt the agony of racism, but who also reminded us of the promise of Easter: "The green of Jesus/ is breaking through the ground/. . .The world is turning/ into the body of Jesus and/ the future is possible."

**All: Her mouth shall speak wisdom, her heart shall offer insight.**

**Reader Four:** We are grateful for Denise Levertov, an American poet born in England with Jewish and Christian ancestors, who prayed through her poetry that, like a swimmer floating on water or a bird resting on an air current, "So would I learn to attain/ freefall, and float/ into Creator Spirit's deep embrace,/ knowing no effort earns/ that all surrounding grace."

**All: Her mouth shall speak wisdom, her heart shall offer insight.**



**Reader Five:** We are grateful for the Native American poet, Linda Hogan, who reminds us of our ultimate spiritual unity as a human family; she reminds us of the Native American belief that in the time of sleep, “Neighbors, the old woman who knows you/ turns over in me/ and I wake up/ another country. There’s no more/ north and south./ Asleep, we pass through one another/ like blowing snow,/ all of us,/ all.”

**All: Her mouth shall speak wisdom, her heart shall offer insight.**

**Reader Six:** We are grateful for the Mexican-American poet and writer, Sandra Cisneros, who has shared with us what she learned from traveling between her home in the U.S. and her relatives in Mexico: “There are no borders/ where love can connect us.”

**All: Her mouth shall speak wisdom, her heart shall offer insight.**

**Reader Seven:** We are grateful for the poet of the natural world, Mary Oliver, who reminds us what we can learn even from a small bird that sings in the night: “Oh Lord, / what a lesson/ you send me/ as I stand/ listening/ to your rattling, swamp-loving chat/ singing/ of his simple, leafy life--/how I would like to sing to You/ all night/ in the dark/ just like that.”

**All: Her mouth shall speak wisdom, her heart shall offer insight.**

**Reader Eight:** From Zechariah 8:16

These then are the things you should do: Speak the truth to one another; let there be honesty and peace in the judgments at your gates.

**Leader:** We are grateful for the poets whose words nurture us. We are also grateful for the all the poets throughout the world who gave voice to the suffering of their people and remind us of the continuing importance of speaking out for justice and peace.

**Reader Nine:** For Nellie Sachs, the German-Jewish poet who wrote about the agony of the Holocaust she witnessed;

**All: She has spoken truth and cried out for justice and peace.**

**Reader Ten:** for Anna Akhmatova, the Russian poet who spoke for all the mothers whose children were imprisoned in the grim decades of Stalin;

**All: She has spoken truth and cried out for justice and peace.**

**Reader Eleven:** for the South African poet, Caroline Ntseliseng Khaketla, who gave voice to her people in Lesotho struggling for their basic human rights;



**All: She has spoken truth and cried out for justice and peace.**

**Reader Twelve:** For the Chilean poet Marjorie Agosin, who has written poetry about the mothers of Argentina's disappeared and about the struggles and sufferings of so many in Latin and South America;

**All: She has spoken truth and cried out for justice and peace.**

**Reader Thirteen:** For Suheir Hammad, a Palestinian-American poet, who reminds us of the humanity of those who still struggle for their human rights in the Mideast and in all countries.

**All: She has spoken truth and cried out for justice and peace.**

**Reader Fourteen:** For all the poets, such as Muriel Rukeyser and Adrienne Rich, who create with words a possible world of peace and dignity for all.

**Leader:** As we celebrate International Women's Day, we remember all these poets and all women who seek to give voice to the desire for the fullness of life and for the common good. May God bless all these voices, and may they be heard and respected.

**All: May the voices of women everywhere be heard and respected. Amen.**

**Poets Mentioned:**

Lucille Clifton - African-American poet  
Denise Levertov - American poet  
Linda Hogan - Native American poet  
Sandra Cisneros - Mexican-American poet  
Mary Oliver - American poet  
Nellie Sachs - German-Jewish poet  
Anna Akhmatova - Russian poet  
Caroline Ntseliseng Khaketla - South African poet  
Suheir Hammad - Palestinian-American poet  
Marjorie Agosin - Chilean poet  
Muriel Rukeyser - American poet  
Adrienne Rich - American poet

**Beginners**

by Denise Levertov

*-Dedicated to the memory of Karen Silkwood and Eliot Gralla*

"From too much love of living,  
Hope and desire set free,  
Even the weariest river  
Winds somewhere to the sea—"

But we have only begun  
To love the earth.

We have only begun  
To imagine the fullness of life.

How could we tire of hope?  
—so much is in bud.

How can desire fail?  
—we have only begun

to imagine justice and mercy,  
only begun to envision

how it might be  
to live as siblings with beast and flower;  
not as oppressors.

Surely our river  
cannot already be hastening  
into the sea of nonbeing?

Surely it cannot  
drag, in the silt,  
all that is innocent?

Not yet, not yet—  
there is too much broken  
that must be mended,

too much hurt we have done to each other  
that cannot yet be forgiven.

We have only begun to know  
the power that is in us if we would join  
our solitudes in the communion of struggle.

So much is unfolding that must  
complete its gesture,

so much is in bud.