

Call for Repentance, Fasting and Prayer for the Global Financial Crisis

PASTORAL LETTER

“For a time like this”

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Some time ago a friend of mine, who is a pastor, was telling me about the many challenges and difficult situations he was facing in the church he was pastoring. I told him that this was a sign of a good church. A church who embraces the weak and the sick, the troubled ones and those who are experiencing times of hardship is a church that has not forgotten God’s call to her. I thought about this fact as we look into our call “in a time like this”.

The biblical passage with which I am greeting you comes from the book of Esther and reflects a time of severe difficulties for the people of Israel. Esther was right in the middle of it and Mordecai, who was her mentor, reminded her that it might be for “a time like this” that she was called to be. And she was in a position to help her people even though it put herself a risk. She then calls back to Mordecai and invites him and their people to prepare, in fasting, for a key intercessory encounter with the King. It is also significant to see that when Mordecai challenges Esther he reminds her that God is in charge and he can go about finding help for his people from different and even unexpected sources. He says: “For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish”(Esther 4: 12-17).

We all know and feel us going through “stormy days”. Hurricanes, famine, wars, financial systems melting down, food crises and we tend to become tense and preoccupied. While we don’t know exactly how this present time and crisis will impact us we do know that it will. It will impact our field commitments and our marketing efforts. But we are called to much more than develop our own contingency plans. We are called to rise up to our mission and recommit ourselves to work with the children, the poor and their communities. We are called to jump into the heart of the crises in order to advocate for the poor and their communities.

In times like this the poor, especially the children and the women, are those who are affected first and suffer most. Less money goes to the poor and food starts to cost more for them, as a very simple example. We exist for a time like this. Not to be, at the first place, concerned about ourselves but to identify with the poor, be willing and committed to find ways of providing the basics of life to them and call not only for a continuous help to them but also for a revision of priorities in a world where money values so much and where so few have so much and so many have so little. God has given us a foundational call and to that call we need to rise up. In fact, it’s a privilege to be called by God for a time like this.

Are we ready for it? To fix our eyes on God, the Lord of history and provider of all things? To revise our own priorities and convert ourselves into service, simplicity and servanthood? To recommit ourselves to the children, the poor and their communities? God is a God of opportunities and entrusts the shaping of those possibilities also to us. Together we can and together we need to walk this path.

Today, 24 November, 2008 is not a day when we will close our doors in order to pray but a day when we will work and pray and pray while we are working. As Esther calls for fasting while she does her advocacy work for her people so are we calling for a special time of prayer and fasting while we do our work, advocating for the children, their families and their poor communities.

The Lord is good, he is good indeed. Soli Deo Gloria.

CALL TO REPENTANCE

Repentance is a turning. It is a way of turning ourselves and what we have deemed important back over to God. Repenting shifts the focus from ourselves to a loving and redeeming God. It allows us to view reality through God's eyes, not our own. Repentance, therefore, leads to restoration and transformation.

Below are suggested ideas that can be prayed on any or all of the following levels- individual, household, community, organisational, national, regional, global.

- We ask forgiveness for placing our trust in money and its solutions above God.
- We repent of ways that our greed and self-indulgence have contributed to greater hardship for those in poverty.
- We repent of living beyond our means.
- We repent of selling our children's future into slavery to pay off our debts- both our indebtedness to financial markets as well as to nature, the horrific costs of our ravaging the earth for short-term gain without paying for long-term consequences.
- We repent of pursuing for ourselves comforts and pleasures that are unimaginable for the majority of the world's people, while they struggle in daily desperation. If we didn't know how most live maybe it would be excusable. But no one is ignorant. No one can honestly say, "but I didn't know". We all suffer from a partial hardening of our hearts.

Other Suggested Prayer :

Forgive me, most gracious Lord and Father,
If this day I have done or said anything to increase the pain of the world.
Pardon the unkind word, the impatient gesture, the hard and selfish deed,
the failure to show sympathy and kindly help where I had the opportunity
but missed it;
and enable me so to live that I may daily do something
to lessen the tide of human sorrow, and to add the sum of human happiness.
F.B. Meyer, *Little book of Prayers*



PRAYER POINTS

Pray and intercede with others:

- for discernment for what God is saying to us at such a time like this.
- on behalf of the poor, marginalised, forgotten, voiceless and oppressed. Food and commodity prices continue to rise while foreign assistance funding is expected to decline. Those who are already struggling to survive now have a tougher time doing so, and they need to be remembered and provided for.
- for those who support us and partner with us. Lift up our donors and partners as they face uncertain economic times. Praise God for their continued faithfulness and generosity.
- that World Vision would remain true to our core identity and remember our mission: “to follow our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in working with the poor and oppressed to promote human transformation, seek justice and bear witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God” (WVI Mission Statement). Ask God to strengthen our commitment to the poor, and increase our impact.
- that God will help us become better stewards of the resources entrusted us.
- for wisdom and discernment for global leaders as they address this financial crisis. Pray also for governments to keep their commitments to provide foreign aid assistance to countries in need.
- for governments to prioritise the needs of the poor and to honour their commitments to the Millennium Development Goals



CORPORATE CALL TO PRAYER, REPENTANCE, FASTING and ACTION

Prepared by World Vision Philippines

Let us join as an organisation with one voice and pray together the following:

O, Sovereign God, creator of heaven and earth, we are Your people. We are called by Your name. You have told us that if we humble ourselves and pray, and seek Your face, and turn from our wicked ways, You will hear us, forgive us and heal our land.

As children created in Your image and likeness, we have not followed Your ways. We have sinned against You, our brethren, and your created order.

Your beautiful plan for the entire creation has been destroyed because of our greed, selfishness, and corruption. We have become indifferent to poverty, injustice, environmental degradation, violence, and human rights abuses in our midst.

Lord, hear us, forgive us, and heal our land.

We pray for the world

O God, Your whole creation is groaning as in the pains of childbirth.

We are in the midst of a global economic crisis that increases poverty, injustice and inequality in poor and developing countries.

We are experiencing the impact of global warming that affects millions of people displaced by natural disasters, extreme weather disturbances, and food shortage.

We are horrified by the effects of war especially on children and women who were killed and abused.

We see the disintegration of families and erosion of moral values that aggravate social problems.

All of these, Lord, break Your heart as they contradict Your purpose of fullness of life for everyone.

Lord, hear us, forgive us and heal our land.

Our Call To Action:

Lord, You love us and care for us. Nothing can separate us from Your love.

Lord, You are the refiner's fire. You test our faith and our motives. You want to make us pure like gold and silver.

Lord, we affirm that we are stewards of all creation. We commit to partner with You in restoring right relationships with You, with others, and with the environment.



We commit ourselves to pray and to fast. Under the guidance of Your Holy Spirit, we will hold a Day of Prayer in all of our teams and offices.



We commit to make children as our highest priority. Help us, Lord, to ensure that funds will be maximised to bring about lasting change in the lives of poor children, their families and communities.

We commit to reach out and inspire more partners, sponsors and donors who will support and enable us to continue our ministry despite the economic crisis.

We commit to implement effective fund management and cost saving measures in pursuit of better stewardship of resources that You have entrusted to World Vision.

We commit to advocate to our respective governments to prioritise the needs of the poor, and to honour their commitments to the Millennium Development Goals.

Lord, hear us, forgive us, and heal our land.

O God, we believe You are able to do more than we would ever dare to ask or hope. Guide and empower us to remain faithful to You, and be steadfast in all our commitments.

We fervently ask this prayer in the mighty name of Your Son, Jesus, Amen.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

As you go about your day, consider reflecting on these questions. Please feel free to share any thoughts or feedback you may have with Nathan Ritzau (nathan_ritzau@wvi.org) in the Office of Prayer Ministries.

- What is God saying to you during this crisis?
- The senior leaders of WVI have recently called us to an organisational lifestyle that is characterised by the following: spirituality, simplicity, service and stewardship. What does God want to do through you, your office, or the World Vision Partnership at this time in response to this call?
- Are the poor in your community despairing or hopeless? Is there anything you or your office can do to encourage or uplift them?
- How have these materials helped?

Notes on Fasting

Throughout Scripture, fasting refers to abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. It is not a hunger strike or a form of dieting. It is a form of worship and of focusing our attention on God. *It must be God-initiated and God-ordained.* Biblical fasting always centers on spiritual purposes.

There are benefits associated with fasting (spiritual insight, successful prayers, renewed energy) but these should never replace God as the center of our fasting. Jesus warns us to not twist the practice of fasting for our own ends within Matthew 6:16-18. We must seek God's face before seeking God's hand. If we are able to do that, fasting can reveal the things that control us (Excerpts taken from Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 47-61).

We invite you (if able) to fast today to deepen your experience and understanding of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is our hope that you would feel no pressure or obligation to participate. Please remember- fasting is all about connecting with God.

Some helpful guidelines for fasting:

- *Progression should be observed.* If this is your first time fasting, try skipping one meal to begin with such as lunch. Do not try to run before you can walk.
- *Ask yourself why you are fasting.* Try to discern your motives with the Holy Spirit's help.
- *Prepare yourself spiritually.* Seek forgiveness from God and others. Ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit. Think about the character of God- love, power, sovereignty, faithfulness, compassion, wisdom. Pray for protection and focus.
- *Prepare yourself physically.* Eat smaller meals before beginning a fast. Avoid high-fat and sugary foods. Try and eat more raw fruits and vegetables before starting a fast. *You should not fast if your health will suffer as a result.* If this is the case, consider fasting from something other than food.