

**20th August 2023**

**Call to worship**

‘They say that when we have more than we need, instead of
constructing a higher wall, we build a longer table.’ (Gregory
Boyle)
The banquet that God is even now preparing is for all humankind
– you, and you, and you and me.
Let’s make sure everyone gets an invitation!

**A gathering prayer**

Gracious God,
your tender, kind, compassionate love
hugs the whole of your creation.
May we let that love heal us
and, unblocked, within us,
flow out to all we meet. **Amen.**

**A prayer of approach**

As we gather before you today, Lord God,
we remember that you are God of all;
so, we pray for wisdom and sensitivity
in hearing the voices of those on the margins of our experience.
Lead us to hear with your ears and to follow your example,
As we seek to meet needs and foster harmony in your world.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of adoration**

Lord, we thank you that no cry is too small for you to hear.
**You are attuned to the voices of the weak and oppressed.**
Lord, we thank you that no voice is too loud for you to acknowledge.
**You are not offended by those who shout in their need and determination.**
We adore you for being the God whose heart is open to all.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

**A prayer of confession**

Father, we confess that although we are not governed by
purity laws, we still shy away from some fellow human beings,
as if they would taint us. They are not our sort, we say; their
issues are not our concern. But you do not cut yourself off from
anybody. You do not turn your back where there is need.
Forgive us for distancing ourselves from the problems of those
who are different in some way. We commit to hearing the cries
of all your children, and to responding where we are able.
**Amen.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

You forgive us, Lord, when our hearing is selective,
when we choose to whom we shall listen and respond.
Thank you for forgiving our selfishness.
You forgive us, Lord, when our faith is selective,
when we choose the bits that we like and ignore the
difficult things.
Thank you for forgiving our wilful ignorance.
Thank you for being the God of forgiveness,
heart ever open to our penitence and the will to do better.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of thanksgiving**

Almighty God, from ancient times you have reminded your people to listen to the cries of those excluded or marginalised; and through Jesus you have expanded your people Israel to include us, with an invitation to all the world.

Thank you for your generous and caring nature. Help us to mirror it in our lives and actions, as we hear with your ears, see with your eyes, and love with your heart.

We praise you for your arms outstretched to save the lost, to include the excluded, to raise those the world despises. You are God of the outcast and stranger, welcoming all, making friends of foes.
**Amen.**

**Matthew 15.(10-20),21-28**

Jesus has two tricky encounters, first with the Pharisees, then with a Canaanite woman, that seemed to be linked by food. In fact, the link is deeper – faith and membership of God’s people – and the outcome of the encounters is something of a surprise.

This week we explore how Jesus challenges our small notions of who God loves. We are invited to have transformed, enlarged hearts both to receive God’s love from other people and to channel it to them – speaking up to ensure all are included.

Uncleanness cuts people off from God. As the poles of a magnet repel one another, so God’s purity is repelled by uncleanness. That image lies at the heart of the Pharisees’ concern with uncleanness, which provides the context for today’s reading.

The chapter begins with an argument about washing hands before eating that revolves round the potential for uncleanness, not modern thinking about hygiene. Jesus discusses this with his disciples at verses 10-20. As elsewhere in this Gospel (e.g. 5:21-22), he relocates concern for purity from outside to inside the person. It is evil thoughts, leading to evil actions, that corrupt someone. The story that follows (cf. Mark 7:24-30) could be seen as an ‘enacted parable’ revealing the truth of Jesus’ teaching through an opposite example. The setting is north of Israel, in the Gentile area of Tyre and Sidon. Matthew identifies the woman as a Canaanite, a group that was a traditional enemy of Israel (e.g. Deuteronomy 7:1). For that reason and because of her gender, observant Jews would have seen her as likely to be unclean.

From running after Jesus and the disciples (v.23), she then kneels in front of him, physically obstructing him (v.25). The disciples, and even Jesus himself, regard her as a nuisance. Yet the words that come from her lips reveal the purity of her heart. She addresses Jesus like a disciple, calling him ‘Lord’ three times, and using words similar to Peter’s call for help (v.25, cf. 14:30). She is quick to challenge his rejection, perhaps reminding Jesus of God’s promise to Abram that ‘through you, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed’ (Genesis 12:3). Jesus addresses her respectfully (v.28) and heals her daughter. Has he just recognised the truth of what he said earlier? If impure thoughts lead to impure words, then words can also reveal purity of heart – and so the woman receives God’s inclusive blessing.

**George Fielden MacLeod, Baron MacLeod of Fuinary**, [Bt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baronet), [MC](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_Cross) (17 June 1895 – 27 June 1991) was a Scottish soldier and clergyman; he was one of the best known, most influential and unconventional [Church of Scotland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_Scotland) ministers of the 20th century. He was the founder of the [Iona Community](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iona_Community) on the island of Iona and served as [Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moderator_of_the_General_Assembly_of_the_Church_of_Scotland) (1957).

**Early life**

He was born in [Glasgow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glasgow) in 1895. His father (Sir [John MacLeod](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_John_MacLeod%2C_1st_Baronet)) was a successful businessman before entering politics as a [Unionist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unionist_Party_%28Scotland%29) MP; his mother Edith was from a wealthy [Lancastrian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lancashire) family (owning cotton mills). From this background and heir to a baronetcy, George MacLeod was educated at [Winchester College](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winchester_College) and [Oriel College, Oxford](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oriel_College%2C_Oxford).[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_MacLeod#cite_note-1) His paternal grandfather was the highly respected Revd [Norman MacLeod](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_Macleod_%281812%E2%80%931872%29) of the [Barony Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barony_Church), [Glasgow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glasgow), a [Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moderator_of_the_General_Assembly_of_the_Church_of_Scotland) and Chaplain to [Queen Victoria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victoria_of_the_United_Kingdom).

He was brought up with a sense of duty

**First World War service**

Upon the outbreak of the [First World War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_World_War), and having been a cadet in the [Officers Training Corps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Officers_Training_Corps), MacLeod was commissioned in the [Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argyll_and_Sutherland_Highlanders), British Army, as a [temporary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temporary_rank) [second lieutenant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_lieutenant) on 19 September 1914.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_MacLeod#cite_note-LG_22_September_1914-2) He first saw active service in Greece. After falling ill with [dysentery](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dysentery), he was sent back to Scotland to recuperate, after which he was posted to [Flanders](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flanders). On 24 June 1917, he was made an [adjutant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adjutant) and promoted to [acting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acting_rank) [captain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Captain_%28British_Army_and_Royal_Marines%29).[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_MacLeod#cite_note-LG_31_August_1917-3) He saw action at [Ypres](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ypres) and [Passchendaele](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Passchendaele). He was awarded the [Military Cross](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_Cross) (MC) in October 1917,[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_MacLeod#cite_note-LG_16_October_1917-4) and the French [Croix de Guerre with palm](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Croix_de_guerre_1914-1918_%28France%29) for bravery in 1918.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_MacLeod#cite_note-ODNB-5)

*For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty as adjutant, volunteering to go out and do duty in the hastily-organised line of defence when no company officers remained. He carried out his duties as adjutant as well, and was of the greatest assistance in keeping cohesion.*

*— Military Cross citation in The London Gazette*[*[6]*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_MacLeod#cite_note-LG_MC_citation-6)

**Ministry**

His experience of this total war profoundly affected MacLeod, leading him to train for the ministry. One thing he experienced was the camaraderie in the trenches between those of all walks of life. As part of the upper classes he felt a new solidarity with those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

When the war finished he resolved to play his part in making Britain a fairer society.

He studied divinity at the [University of Edinburgh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Edinburgh), followed by a year at [Union Theological Seminary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_Theological_Seminary_%28Manhattan%29), New York City (1921-1922). Upon return to Scotland he was invited to become Assistant at [St Giles' Cathedral](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Giles%27_Cathedral).

During this period he became increasingly concerned over the issue of social inequality in Scotland. In 1924 he was ordained as a [Church of Scotland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_Scotland) minister, to be Padre of [Toc H](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toc_H) (Talbot House) in Scotland. Following a disagreement over who should, be able to preside at communion (MacLeod thought anyone who was ordained should be able to, Toc H only allowed the Anglican clergy to, he resigned from Toc H in 1926, but was invited to become associate minister at [St Cuthbert's Church, Edinburgh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Cuthbert%27s_Church%2C_Edinburgh).

He had a unconventional way of getting young people to church. He saw young lads sitting on the pavement and asked them ‘Why not come to church?’. He made a bargain with them . If you come I’ll give you a tour of St Giles Tower and then buy you fish and chips afterwards. No sooner had the boys turned up in church than an elder told them they can’t sit there this pew belongs to another family. They were made to feel they were trespassing. So they upped and walked out. When Macleod found out he was annoyed that they didn’t stand their ground. But he still bought them fish and chips and gave them a tour of the tower. One of the boys would go on to become a church minster.

Everywhere MacLeod went he was concerned that people committed to Christ and found the life of faith. He carried a great fire of enthusiasm within him which made it easier to believe. Asked on one occasion how he would help a person who wanted to believe in God but could not, he replied, ‘I would tell them ‘to make believe in God – act always as if God were alive. They would, by experience, come to know God.

His wartime experiences, combined with a profound disillusionment by post-World War I political rhetoric of "a land fit for heroes," deeply affected him. Confronted by the realities of the [depression](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Depression_in_the_United_Kingdom) and unemployment faced by those less privileged than he, MacLeod gradually moved towards supporting [socialism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialism) and [pacifism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacifism). From 1937 he became actively involved with the [Peace Pledge Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_Pledge_Union) (PPU), and from 1958 with the [Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campaign_for_Nuclear_Disarmament) (CND).

Meanwhile, in 1930, to considerable surprise, he decided to leave St Cuthbert's Church where he had become a national celebrity due to his radio broadcasts to become minister at [Govan Old Parish Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Govan_Old_Parish_Church)—encountering the considerable social problems caused by poverty in this part of Glasgow. Should he stay at St Cuthberts or go to Govan? Advice given to him was ‘’you will regret it whichever you do. Try to work out which you will regret longest’.

MacLeod asked himself where was the church in all the poverty and hardship of Govan? He gave away lots of his own money to those seeking handouts and kept an account open at the local chemist for those who required medicine but could not pay. One person was dying of cancer and still had to go out to earn a days work. MacLeod took her a glass of champagne at the end of her hard days work to help her get to sleep.

A family who had lost a baby had MacLeod visit them and hardly said a word but carried the little coffin to the chapel and said prayers. Then bought all the family fish and chips supper and then put all the children to bed.

One widow who kept a dairy and had two children had tried to commit suicide. MacLeod visited her to find her dejected in the back room. As they talked a lorry with a crate of milk turned up. MacLeod opened the shop . In a little while the woman came and joined him behind the counter and eventually took over.

He set about reorganizing the church so they had a friendship strategy, pairing people up with one another so that people had sometime to turn to for mutual support. He started job schemes to find work for people.

The pace of work took its toll and in 1932 he suffered a [breakdown](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mental_breakdown). The Great Depression was having an effect on the nation and a feeling of hopelessness was endemic. Further to this MacLeod saw the rise of secularism and godless ideologies like communism and Nazism coupled with the insights of Freud and Marx to explain human behaviour. He saw the writing on the wall for falling levels of church adherence and those who saw the Christian faith as the answer for life.

He spent some time recuperating in [Jerusalem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem) in early 1933. While worshipping in an [Eastern Orthodox Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Orthodox_Church) on [Easter Day](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter_Day) he felt a profound spiritual experience.

When the priest came out with the Resuurection candle symbolizing the light of the Risen Christ he thought here was the answer to modern criticism: Christ had risen! It was the devotional presentation of the New Life. He had discovered worship for the first time beyond lukewarm conventional Presbyterianism. It was a new way of seeing for him. It was a vision of the way of Christ that was personal, political and cosmic all at the same time. Holiness had become wholeness had become holiness. The spiritual and the material fused in a moment of rapturous revelation. He felt a sense of recovery of the Church as the corporate [Body of Christ](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body_of_Christ). This would strongly influence the rest of his life.

He resigned (giving up the financial security of a [parish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parish) minister's [stipend](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stipend)) to become the full-time leader of the [Iona Community](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iona_Community), which he founded in 1938. His efforts started in the early 1930s when he bought Fingleton Mill as a refuge for Glasgow's poor.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_MacLeod#cite_note-7) The idea of rebuilding [Iona Abbey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iona_Abbey) using ministers, students and unemployed labourers working together influenced his thinking; the Iona Community developed as an international [ecumenical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecumenical) community, with offices in [Govan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Govan) and a presence on the island of [Iona](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iona). Underpinning the fellowship of the Community were four emphases: mission, political involvement, a ministry of healing, and worship, by which MacLeod and the Community sought a way to connect the Church with an industrial age.

His deepest desire was to train new missionaries to engage with the modern world the political, the material, the spiritual. If Jesus was good news – how would that good news impact society.

The turning point for him in deciding to go to Iona and rebuild the Abbey was after he had preached to 500 people in Govan. A man came up to him afterwards and asked ‘do you think all this religious stuff will save?’

He wrote:

This man, called Archie Gray, was very down at heel but very clear of eye. Suddenly as he was speaking I realized he was preaching the gospel and not I. Some weeks later I got a message to go and meet him in hospital. He was dying of starvation. He said he was bitter about the church, not because it was preaching falsehoods, but because it was speaking the truth and did not mean what it said.

MacLeod wrote: Archie Gray was the true founder of the Iona Community.

The story of how Iona Abbey was rebuilt is fascinating and MacLeod’s leadership and determination and vision in all that. Obviously, he needed a lot of money. A fair proportion of the money came from Sir James Lithgow who owned the Clydebank shipbuilding firm. As Govan parish minster MacLeod had been asked to bless one of the many battleships that Lithgows had built. MacLeod said that they had not had a blessing service at the launch of the Quenn Mary, built to advance harmony between nations, it seemed odd at this point in history to ask God’s blessing on a battleship and pointed out he was now a pacifist. Lithgow sent MacLeod a short letter that simply said Dear Dr MacLeod, I respect your opinions. Yours sincerely…’

Sir James had sailed to Iona often in his yacht and had often wondered why no one had rebuilt the Abbey. He had placed chocolate drops around a drawing of the abbey to show where workmen’s huts might be placed. George MacLeod arrived at his house with a similar diagram. ‘If you call that a coincidence’, George MacLeod was wont to say, ‘then I wish you a very dull life.’

Using some guilt tactics, MacLeod got tens of thousands of pounds out of Lithgow for the rebuild of Iona Abbey. The pacifist was willing to take the warship builders money. MacLeod said ‘give me tainted money and I’ll untaint it’

Work started in 1938. War broke out the next year and materials became hard to come by. They ran out of wood and thought they would have to suspend rebuilding but then a Swedish cargo boat had to dump it cargo of timber overboard during a storm. The timber floated into the beaches on Iona and was just the right size for the building of the Chapterhouse.

MacLeod went to Norway after the war and at a press conference he told the Norwegians the Vikings had come over and destroyed Iona Abbey three times so it was time the Norwegians helped to rebuild it. Norway sent him free timber as a result of his plea.

He even went to New Zealand where a Scotsman had emigrated and become a wealthy timber merchant. MacLeod targeted him to do something for his home country.

The rebuilding of Iona Abbey stoked controversy during the War. MacLeod as a pacifist was labelled as unpatriotic despite the fact that he had been decorated during the First World War. His socialist tendencies led to accusations that he was training communists.

At one low point of unfaith he stood, filled with self pity in the chancel of the Abbey. He wrote’ the red granite walls reflected the overpowering iridescence of light. The whole place seemed almost ablaze with a reddish hue. And there I stood disconsolate, a thankless brute in all God’s brightness. And it was another stranger to my mood who must have read my thoughts. ‘Cheer up George’ he said, ‘the Church is never lovelier than when it is bleeding.’

What kept him going in the end was his personal faith and the encouragement of those around him.

After the War he was invited to become minster at Govan as a well as lead the Iona Community but jealousy and old scores were settled by the Church of Scotland who didn’t want this trouble making maverick back in the fold and his return to Govan was thwarted at the General Assembly of the Kirk.

Despite a feeling of hurt and rejection over the "Govan Case", MacLeod remained one of the highest-profile figures in the [Church of Scotland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_Scotland). In 1957 he was elected [Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moderator_of_the_General_Assembly_of_the_Church_of_Scotland), following one Commissioner standing up and asking whether it was appropriate that a man who had been described as being "half way to Rome and half way to Moscow" should be Moderator.

On 6 February 1967, MacLeod was awarded a [peerage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peerage), becoming **Baron MacLeod of Fuinary**, He later became the first peer to represent the [Green Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_Party_%28UK%29).[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_MacLeod#cite_note-14)

From 1968 to 1971, he was [Rector of the University of Glasgow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rector_of_the_University_of_Glasgow).[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_MacLeod#cite_note-Story-15)

George MacLeod's influence on the [Church of Scotland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_Scotland) was considerable. His initial emphasis on parish mission was generally welcomed. Although dismissed by some as a maverick, he helped to raise awareness of [pacificism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacificism), [ecumenism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecumenism) and [social justice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_justice) issues, and inspired many to become involved with such questions. Through the creation of the [Iona Community](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iona_Community), he was a pioneer of new forms of ministry (outside more conventional parish or [chaplaincy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaplain) structures).

At last Sundays Communion Service, were I had the honour of presiding at communion, two stalwarts of the Iona Community who knew George MacLeod spoke to me afterwards. I said describe MacLeod in three words. They said ‘Visionary, determined and cantankerous.

I guess he had the foresight to see the challenges facing the church, the deep desire to communicate with the modern person the good news of Jesus that affected the whole of life, and the wit, wisdom, determination and even bloody mindedness to make it happen.

St Columba founded the original Iona Abbey when he set sail from the coast of Ireland in 563 AD in a coracle. He didn’t know where he would end up but trusted himself to the Holy Spirits direction. Ron Ferguson in his biography of George MacLeod likens him to a modern day Columba, an outrageous volatile adventurer, taking God at his word. He was a larger than life being – large in his vision, large in his sympathies, large in his flaws. Not a saint but a hero.

This a is prayer written by MacLeod and sued most days by Iona Community members:

*O Christ, the Master Carpenter, who at the last, through wood and nails, purchased our whole salvation, wield well Your tools in the workshop of your world, so that we , who come rough hewn to your bench, may here be fashioned to a truer beauty of your hand.*

**Prayers of intercession**

The Canaanite woman sought your help. She loved her daughter so much, she was so desperately in need, that she wouldn’t give up till she had her answer.
**We pray in faith.**
**Hear us and answer our cry, blessed Lord.**

Lord, may we learn from this woman, to wait on you expectantly, patiently, persistently, doggedly. Grant us the courage of our convictions when we truly believe we are doing your will.
**We pray in faith.**
**Hear us and answer our cry, blessed Lord.**

We pray today for those who feel excluded, whatever their situation, whatever the reason: for prisoners, refugees, the homeless; for the sick, the mentally unstable; for any who feel that they are outsiders.
**We pray in faith.**
**Hear us and answer our cry, blessed Lord.**

We pray for ourselves when our faith is weak, or we feel that we don’t belong.
**We pray in faith.**
**Hear us and answer our cry, blessed Lord.**
**Amen.**

*This prayer was originally published in 2020.*



Prayers of intercession

Father, we pause to think of all those in our lives who bring your love to us. We thank you for those who first taught us of you; who first nurtured us; for any who, over the years, have encouraged us. We bring them to mind now and thank you for the part they played in making us who we are now.

We pray for those we live with or spend time with regularly. Thank you for the ways they make us better people. And we think of all those for whom we have care and responsibility. Show us how we can bring your love to them in deeper ways. Challenge us to serve them more readily. We remember those who are sick, sorrowful or sad at this time, especially…. Help us all to share the joys and the pains of being human by respecting each other and seeing everyone through your eyes.

Father, help us to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves:

enlarge our hearts to see others as you see them.

Father, we pray for any groups that we belong to. We pause to remember for a moment what it feels like to belong. We try to recall what it felt like at first, when we were new, nervous, unsure of ourselves and those in the group. As we recollect those feelings, we turn now to consider any who may be nervous of us – as individuals, as a church congregation, as a staff team at work, at our places of recreation. Help us to be people and places of welcome; that all who cross our paths may feel the extent of your love and welcome. Forgive us when we have failed to be welcoming, for whatever reason. Show us how to be those who see others through your eyes. Let there always be love between us and among us, whoever we are with.

Father, help us to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves:

enlarge our hearts to see others as you see them.

Father, we pray for all those in our society who cannot stand up for themselves or feel they do not have a voice. We pray for young children, particularly those in care. We think of those who live on the streets of our cities, or those moved from hotel room to hotel room, never able to get a foot on the ladder. We pray for those who have found themselves in gangs, thinking they might be a place of safety but only finding them to be a place of fear and hatred. We pray for the elderly, trapped in isolation and loneliness. We think of refugees and all those trapped in a cycle of human exploitation. For prisoners. For all who live in abusive relationships. For those who have had to flee their homes because of war or natural disasters. Father, the list seems endless. We cry out to you for all these people, and more, who may come to mind now in the stillness. Father, show us how and where we can begin to be the answer to some of these really pressing needs.

Father, help us to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves:

enlarge our hearts to see others as you see them.

Father, we pray for our schools. We pause to bring to mind the schools in our neighbourhood. We know that schools can sometimes be a place of fear and anxiety, where young people are under such pressure to conform. We pray for all who are bullied, or who have few, if any, friends. For those who feel on the edge of everything that is happening. We pray for those excluded from school, for whatever reason, feeling perhaps that their true voices haven’t been heard. We pray for teachers and support staff, asking that every student will have the opportunity to find a listening ear and an encouraging voice, helping them to reach their full potential. We thank you for those who helped us too. We pray for those receiving exam results this week, help them to find the best way forward for the next stage of their education.

Father, help us to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves:

enlarge our hearts to see others as you see them.

Father, we pray for this church community. Help us to be a place of welcome, not just on Sundays but always, even if we cannot have the building open. Help us to be prepared to leave our comfort zones and speak to new people, unfamiliar people, those who don’t seem to be like us. Make us to be a truly inclusive body, a family of the people of God. Show us how to be your hands, feet, ears and eyes in our communities, bringing the refreshment of your all-embracing love to everyone we meet. Encourage us to go out and tell others the good news of your kingdom, that all are loved and worthy of your sacrifice on the cross. May this place and all who worship here, be a beacon of hope in our locality.

Father, help us to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves:

enlarge our hearts to see others as you see them.

Father, as we go forward into a new week, go ahead of us, we pray. We offer you our relationships, our familiar places, our unfamiliar situations, our fears, our joys. We offer you all that we are, knowing that you will never turn us away. We are always welcome in your presence, so remind us to come freely and frequently to spend time with you. We commit our ways to you in the week ahead, offering you our time and our gifts and asking that you would use them for the good of others and for your glory.

Father, help us to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves:

enlarge our hearts to see others as you see them.

Engage our minds to remember that we are your children.

Encourage us in all our relationships, to bring your love to others. Amen.

**A prayer for all ages together**

Father and Mother God, lover of all,
lover of our souls, our bodies, of all that exists:
may we live in and through your love as a reflection of you,
reaching out in love, as you reach out to your whole creation,
restless until all rest in you. **Amen.**



**A sending out prayer**

O God, you open your arms wide to all of us.
Help us trust that you really do love us,
the real deep-down us, warts and all.
Nothing we can do can stop you loving us.
If, like the Canaanite woman, we dare to believe,
may your healing love flow through us to the hurting,
so we may hear singing in heaven!**Amen.**