



# **Our Journey**

*40 Days of Reflection  
on the Journey  
that is the Christian Life*

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**A Devotion and Prayer Booklet  
produced by the  
International Council of Community Churches**

**“Our Journey”** was produced by  
Informational Services and Outreach  
of the International Council of Community Churches.  
Bob Fread, Editor  
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We deeply appreciate those who authored devotions for this booklet:

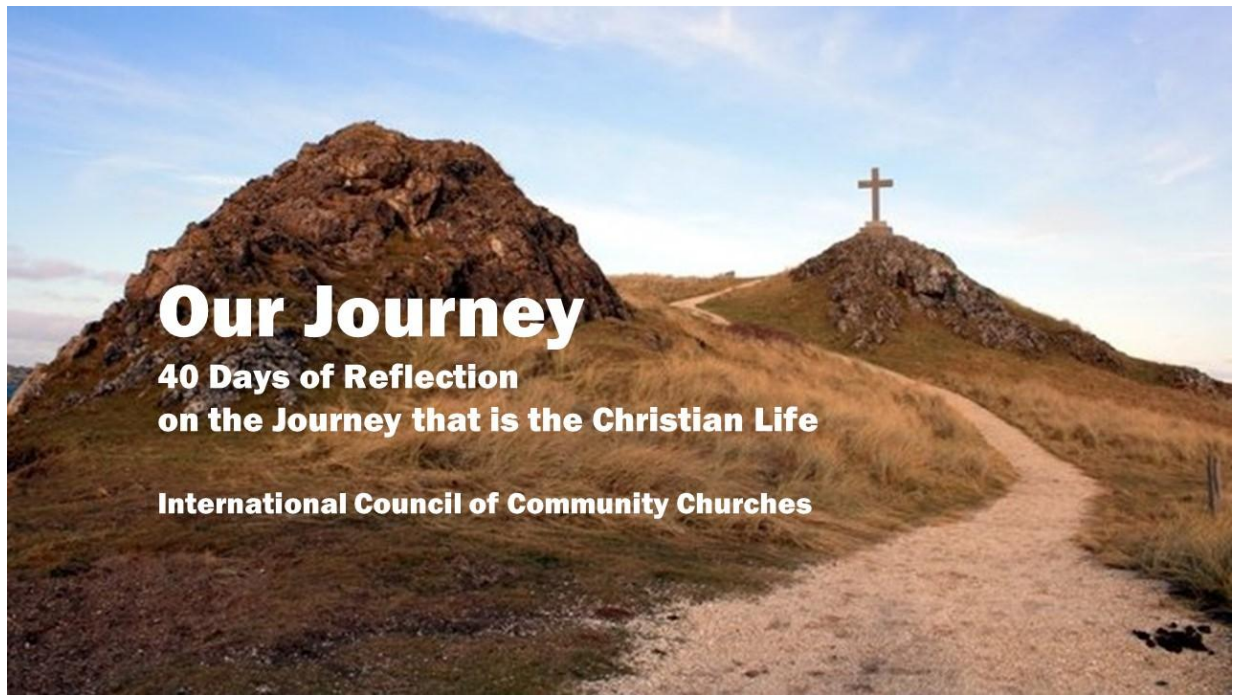
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Included in this booklet is a prayer list given as the **“Prayer for Today”** at the end of each day. We hope that you will remember this church/center/ministry in your prayers that day. Every effort has been made to include all current members of the ICCC. We apologize for any exclusions.



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## *Invitation to a Journey*

The Bible is filled with journeys- some good and some bad. There is the journey of Abram and Sarai from Ur to the land which God promised. The forced journey of Joseph into slavery in Egypt. The liberating journey of Moses and the Israelites to a promised land. A journey into exile for the Hebrews from Jerusalem to Babylon. Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus, then to Egypt to escape infanticide. There are Jesus' journeys, one from Galilee to Jerusalem to face death, then a resurrection journey to Emmaus. Then several journeys by Paul traveling around an earthly empire to proclaim a different empire of God's realm. The Bible has many journeys.

This is your invitation to a journey – a spiritual pilgrimage – as we make our way to Easter Sunday. The Christian life is journey, as Jesus invites disciples like us to “take up their cross daily and follow” (Luke 9:23). This journey is both individual and communal – as we each seek to be faithful disciples of Jesus while doing so in a community called “church”. So this journey, too, will be individual as you read Scripture, reflect and pray at home, but you will be doing this together with others in your local church and with your extended family in the International Council of Community Churches.

The prayer for these 40 days is that this journey, this spiritual pilgrimage, will help you reflect upon the many facets of the Christian life, and how you can best live as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The invitation is simple:

*Come, journey with Christ.*

## ***Roadmap for our Journey***

As we reflect on the Christian life during this journey over the next 40 days, our journey will be based on the Sunday Scriptures from the *Revised Common Lectionary* for Year A. What is unique about this year's lectionary readings is that focus on the long, beautiful, well-crafted stories of John's Gospel. These stories in the lectionary were selected because they give insight into the meaning of Christian life and discipleship.

The original purpose of Lent was as a final period of baptismal preparation for those who would be baptized on Easter. In early Christianity Easter was a great baptismal festival, and baptismal preparation often lasted years, with the final forty days prior to a person's baptism at Easter of special importance. It was during these final 40 days that prayer and Scriptural reflection were quite intense. The stories from John which are found in the *Revised Common Lectionary* for Year A were placed there so that candidates for baptism can reflect more deeply on Christian life. Therefore, we are using these same Scriptures to guide our reflection on the Christian life during our 40-day journey.

Our Journey will consist of **three types of days**:



**Travel Days** – Each travel day will contain a Scripture, a devotional reading written by someone in the ICCC and a “Prayer for Today” so that you can pray for an ICCC church or ministry.



**Turning Days** – Often a trip or journey requires changing roads to get to a destination. Turning days will signal a turn from one path to another. Turning days will be a day to reflect more deeply on a single, Scriptural story and how that story applies to our lives. These days will focus on questions for reflection and a “Prayer for Today” concerning the theme of the new path..



**Rest Days** - Any trip or journey needs time to rest. Since Sundays are not counted in the 40 days in Lent, each Sunday will be a day to rest on our journey and consider various missions of the ICCC. Three of these rest days will focus on our 2023 ICCC Mission Project for Africa.

If you are curious as to what various paths we will take on our 40 day journey, our itinerary looks like this:

Path to the Wilderness  
Path to Transfiguration  
Path to New Birth  
Path to Living Water  
Path to Illumination  
Path to Resurrection  
Path to Servanthood  
Path to a Cross and Tomb



*(Note: For churches which offer these materials daily via website or email, your church may wish to offer the Invitation page and Roadmap page prior to the beginning of Lent so that participants know the structure and flow of the material.)*

# What is the International Council of Community Churches?

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the number of Community, Union, Federated, People's, Independent and Ecumenical churches grew in our country. As these churches sought fellowship and needed resources, they worked to form a couple organizations. In 1923 the Community Church Workers of the USA was formed by mainly Caucasian churches, while the Biennial Council of Community Churches of mainly African-American churches was formed the same year. Financial problems later forced the Community Church Workers out of existence, but in 1946 the National Council of Community Churches was created by many of the same churches.

In 1950, the National Council and the Biennial Council merged to form the current International Council of Community Churches (ICCC), the most racially diverse religious body of its time. Since its inception, the ICCC has worked tirelessly for racial justice and reconciliation, and for Christian unity among churches.

Currently, the Council includes about 50 churches/ministries in the United States plus affiliates in 3 other nations. The ICCC is headquartered in Longmont, Colorado, and maintains a minimal staff of an Executive Director and Office Administrator. The Council is governed throughout the year by a Board of Directors and a Board of Trustees. It maintains relationships with the World Council of Churches, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, Churches Uniting in Christ and Christian Churches Together.

Each year ICCC member churches/centers/ministries are invited to the ICCC Annual Conference. The 2023 ICCC Annual Conference will be July 18-21, 2023, in Charlotte, NC. The conference is not just a business meeting but is a "family reunion" of clergy and laity from our member units around the country. Annual Conference involves times of fellowship, worship, Bible study, workshops, common mission and business, while making new friends and renewing old relationships. ***We hope you will consider joining us this summer!***

For more information on the International Council of Community Churches, please contact P.O. Box 846, Longmont, CO 80502, Phone 815-464-5690, [icccnow@sbcglobal.net](mailto:icccnow@sbcglobal.net).





# 2023 ICCC International Mission Project

## ICCC/World Neighbors Africa Project

For the third year ICCC churches will be working together on an international mission project. In 2021 the ICCC partnered with UNICEF to provide medical equipment for India during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, the ICCC again worked with UNICEF to assist in global COVID-19 vaccination distribution through “the interfaith effort to End the Pandemic”. This year in 2023 the ICCC is excited to work with their long-time mission partner, World Neighbors (WN), to help bring needed famine relief and agricultural development support to Africa through an ICCC/WN Africa Project.

Despite contributing the least to global warming and having the lowest emissions (3.6% of the global total), Africa is the most affected by climate change. World Neighbors (WN) has been working in East Africa for over 25 years, currently in: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Malawi- implementing seven programs reaching over 200,000 beneficiaries. WN is responding to the situation by empowering communities to develop climate change adaptation strategies. This involves working jointly with the communities to develop and implement integrated adaptive mechanisms to enhance resilience and adaptive capacity to climate change in order to increase food security, improve nutrition, increase incomes, and facilitate them to practice sound environmental stewardship. The integrated approach will address the interface between climate change, agriculture and incomes. This will include disaster risk reduction to address the current climate risks and build capacities for longer-term adaptation of the vulnerable communities.

WN is at work, also, in the west region in Burkina Faso. The overall objective of work there is to strengthen the technical capacities of the beneficiaries by popularizing good agricultural practices adapted to climate change (Indigenous Soil and Water Conservation techniques: erosion control, composting, Zai pits, half-moons, Assisted Natural Regeneration), supporting communities engaged in soil restoration actions, supporting communities in the development of dry season crops through market gardening or small-scale irrigation, and promoting the use of improved early or drought-resistant seeds.

More details on World Neighbors work in Africa can be found on three of the “Rest Days” later in this booklet.

Since a part of Lenten observances in many churches is giving, we suggest to our individual supporters and our member churches/centers giving this year to our 2023 ICCC/WN Africa Project. **Contributions may be made payable to the “ICCC” and marked in the memo line “WN Africa Mission Project” and send to ICCC, P.O. Box 846, Longmont, CO 80502.**



## *A Prayer for Our Journey*

Source of All Life,  
our human road is long and hard.  
Hatred, prejudice, division,  
have left us in the shadow of death.

God bring life!

Journey with us as we travel these 40 days together,  
that through our common devotion, reflection, prayer and giving,  
we may be living witnesses,  
not only to the resurrection of Jesus Christ,  
but servants of reconciliation and healing  
that the whole world may know your life and love.

Amen.

Rev. Bob Fread



**Travel Day (1) – Wednesday, February 22**

**Read Psalm 103:8-14**

*“For [the Lord] knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.” Psalm 103:14*

Traditionally many churches refer to today as Ash Wednesday because of the practice of smudging a cross of ashes on the forehead of worshippers with the words, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (from *Genesis 3:19*). These words became more striking for me when just a few weeks ago I stood in a cemetery with my hand on my father’s casket. I offered the traditional committal prayer which goes like this “In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to our gracious God (*name of deceased*), and commit him/her/them to the ground: earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”

As our 40-day journey begins, we start by considering our human beginnings. It is a rather humble beginning as dust of the earth. I have often made the comment on this day, that if not for God, we are just dust, BUT because of the extravagant and creative God we have, we are instead wonderful works of art. I am unsure of the exact translation, but there is a version of Ephesians 2:10 which reads, “We are God’s work of art created in Christ Jesus.” Wow, God can sure transform a pile of dust into an exquisite work of art in you and me.

*(Rev. Bob Fread is Vice President of Informational Services and Outreach of the ICCC and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCC, serving as pastor of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Cedar Falls, Iowa.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Bethel Independent Methodist Church – Birmingham, AL  
Metropolitan Community Church – Birmingham, AL  
Tennessee Valley Community Church – Florence, AL



## Turning Day (2) – Thursday, February 23

Read Matthew 4:1-11

### *“Path to the Wilderness”*

With just one day of our 40-day journey behind us, we turn onto our first main path – the Path to the Wilderness”. Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness. We will just linger there briefly.

The wilderness is an uncertain place. Scary. Uncomfortable. Uncertain. Baren. A place where maybe your mind can race and get the best of you. Fear. Temptation. Loneliness.

*What do you think of when you think of the wilderness?*

*Where are wilderness places in your spiritual life?*

It is in the wilderness that Jesus struggled in the fulness of his humanity. It is in the wilderness that the forces of evil contended with the righteousness of God.

*What are your greatest struggles in life? What are your hardships? What are your temptations?*

**Prayer for Today:** Pray for those around you who help you on your spiritual journey.  
Pray for those facing temptation, addictions and hardships.



## Travel Day (3) – Friday, February 24

Read Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

*“God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” Genesis 3:3*

Thomas Merton once described a vision he had in which he saw a crowd of people, each “shining like the sun.” He said, “It was like waking from a dream of separateness.” Merton realized that he loved each radiant soul, though he didn’t know any of them.

There are myriad ideas about the story of Adam and Eve eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For me, this allegory alludes to the moment when each person falls into a “dream of separateness,” imagining ourselves separated from God and God’s creation. This “dream of separateness” is akin to death—no longer are we whole—our oneness is severed like an astronaut cut off from the life-giving support of the spaceship.

Lest we forget, there’s another tree that appears in Genesis, and again in Revelation—the tree of life. For instance, Revelation 22:2b promises, “On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”

While the tree of the knowledge of good and evil symbolizes separateness, the tree of life represents unity and oneness with God and all of creation. And if the nations can find healing from this tree, maybe each of us can as well.

*(Rev. Dr. Rhonda Blevins is Vice President for Leadership Development and President of the Ministerium of the ICCC and serves as pastor of Chapel-by-the-Sea in Clearwater Beach, FL)*

**Prayer for Today:** Center for Expanding Consciousness – White Springs, FL  
Chapel-By-The-Sea - Clearwater Beach, FL  
Longboat Island Chapel – Longboat Key, FL





## Travel Day (4) – Saturday, February 25

## Read Romans 5:12-19

*“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned.” Romans 5:12*

The book of Romans has profoundly impacted Christians throughout history, especially via the works of thinkers such as Augustine, Martin Luther, the Wesley brothers, Karl Barth, Sarah Heaner Lancaster, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, to name only a few. It is from this chapter in Romans where St. Augustine forms his concept of original sin, but it is the concept of sin in general that many struggle with. We’ve all heard numerous sermons on how sin is, “missing the mark,” but for me, the best definition continues to be from St. Augustine himself, who said that sin is “separation.” He said that we could be separated from God, self, and others, so maybe during this Lenten season, it’s a good time for us to reflect not only on the ways we disconnect ourselves from God (creation, mystery, love, life itself, or whatever word you use for the divine), but also on how we may be distracted from ourselves, and separated from our families, neighbors, communities, or the very earth itself.

So what is it that separates us? I had an Imam friend who once shared that in Islam, people don’t convert and become Muslim, the Islamic Tradition teaches *reversion*. Of course this is also what the Christian life is all about; recovering our whole complete selves, and the memory, however faint, that we are indeed enough.

I am a child of God! What does it look like for us during this Lenten season to recover our wholeness; our authentic selves?

*(Rev. Rock Freemont is Vice President of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCA, serving as pastor of Shepherd of the Hills United Church of Christ in Phoenix, AZ.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Anglican Free Communion International – Goodyear, AZ  
Church at Litchfield Park, Litchfield Park, AZ  
CHI Interfaith Community – Beaverton, OR



## Rest Day – Sunday, February 26

Tanzania is a traditional society, with often rigid gender roles. Yasinta Chacha knows this from experience. She lives in Kyangasaga Ward in Rorya District, a rural farming area. Yasinta is the second wife in a polygamous marriage and has six children. Yasinta took on odd jobs to support them. This allowed her to get by, but it did not provide the income necessary to improve her living conditions, and those of her children.

This changed when Yasinta joined Upendo Kunkenyi, a savings and credit group formed with the assistance of World Neighbors. In a savings and credit group, members deposit small amounts each month. When enough capital is accumulated, members can take out loans at very low interest rates. The interest paid into the group, along with regular monthly contributions, can result in significant amounts of capital. In addition to saving money, members are trained on record keeping, accounting and other basic business skills.

By last year, Yasinta's savings and credit group had 40 members. It lent members \$11,000. Yasinta borrowed \$392. With this money she was able to build a house. "I once told my husband that I will one day build a house where my children will settle in comfortably," said Yasinta. "He laughed and asked where I would get the money. Now he is the one helping me construct the roof of our three bedroom house, which has a corridor and a spacious living room."

It's often said those in low-income countries do not earn enough money to save. Yasinta and the women in her community prove it is possible to save and plan for a better life for themselves and their children.

**To support the 2023 ICCC/WN Africa Project, please send your donation to the ICCC office.**



*(A picture of Yasinta Chacha)*



### **Travel Day (5) – Monday, February 27**

### **Read Matthew 4:1-11**

*"But Jesus answered, 'It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"* Matthew 4:4

Now many of us are familiar with this Bible story. Jesus is baptized by his cousin, John the Baptist, and afterwards he goes into the wilderness and fasts for forty days and forty nights. At the end of the fast Satan comes and tempts Him because that's what Satan does. He waits until we are weak to attack us. He waits until we are vulnerable to attack us. He waits until we are easy targets to attack us. Little did he know that Jesus was not an easy mark. He tries to tempt Jesus three different times by offering Jesus things that did not belong to him. Every time that Satan tempts Jesus, Jesus responds with the word of God. Every time he responds, "It is written!" There is such a powerful message in this story, and I would like to share it with you today. If Jesus needed the word, how much more do we need the word? Let me phrase that a different way. If the word needed the word, don't you think that we need the word as well? John 1:1,2 states, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning." In other words, the word responded with the word to defeat the enemy. Here is the best part. We have access to the same word to defeat the enemy too.

*(Rev. Brian Holland is pastor of Second Community Church in Columbus, OH.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Fellowship of Friends – Oregon House, CA  
Havenscourt Community Church – Oakland, CA  
St. Timothy Community Church – San Bernardino, CA



## Turning Day (6) – Tuesday, February 28

Read Matthew 17:1-9

### *“Path to Transfiguration”*

We are turning off the Path to the Wilderness for a day to walk on the Path to Transfiguration.

Before a journey to Jerusalem to face the cross, Jesus starts on a mountaintop with three disciples and two prophets. While on that mountain Jesus is transfigured – transformed – changed.

It is here that God’s glory shines through Jesus as his face and clothes begin to shine.

***How is God working in your life to transform and transfigure you and to allow you to transform people and situations around you?***

***How does God’s light shine through your life? Can others see that light?***

**Prayer for Today:** Pray for those who feel comfortable with the status-quo and resist God’s change in their lives.

Pray for those seeking transformation and change in their lives but are receiving opposition from others.

*(Note on Today’s Path Change: The ICCC as an ecumenically rich movement has people and churches coming out of both the Reformation traditions and the Roman Catholic tradition. In Catholic tradition the story of Jesus’ transfiguration is read on the Second Sunday in Lent. In churches coming out of Reformation traditions the transfiguration is often celebrated on the Sunday before the beginning of Lent. This is why the Revised Common Lectionary offers two Gospel readings for the Second Sunday in Lent. The main journey of this booklet will follow the path which corresponds to churches with a Reformation heritage, but today we journey briefly on a path more familiar to our Catholic kin.)*



## Turning Day (7) – Wednesday, March 1

Read Psalm 121

*“The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.”*  
*Psalm 121:8*

Psalm 121 is the first of fifteen "Songs of Degrees" (Psa. 121-134). Pilgrims sang responsively as they went to Jerusalem annually to celebrate their major feasts: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Deut. 16:16). The theme is often God's protection over the pilgrim people. The Lenten season is 40 days leading to the celebration of Christ's resurrection, a period of preparation and reflection on our standing with the Lord.

We are all making a pilgrimage in this life. We all wonder what will come next, how we will deal with it, and when we will reach the place God has planned for our lives. The psalmist points out that "my help" comes from the Lord, mighty enough to make the heavens and earth and intimate enough to be called "mine." During this Lent season, we will forever look to You, our source of strength, guidance, and protection. We need not fear life or death, today or tomorrow, time or eternity, for we are in the loving care of the Father watching over us. Let this Lent season help us reflect on our past, God's many provisions, and Jesus' journey to death and resurrection. Schedule intentional walks during Lent. Perhaps walk with your family after dinner or take a solitary walk. The walk is not for exercise or counting our steps; it is for noticing God's creation, the Spirit who dwells in us, and how God provides all our needs. Lastly, reflect on Christ's crucifixion and what it means for you today.

*(Chaplain Hare Varnon is a retired chaplain from the US Army and serves as Chaplain Trustee for the ICCC.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Palisades Community Church – Washington D.C.  
Park Road Community Church – Washington D.C.



## Turning Day (8) – Thursday, March 2

Read John 3:1-15

### *“Path to New Birth”*

Our journey was short on the Path of Transfiguration so today we turn onto the Path of New Birth.

While on this new path we will consider Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus. Central to this conversation is the meaning of new birth. Some translations speak of being “born again” while others “born from above.” Either way the image of birth is key.

***Have there been times in your life when you felt re-born? What changed in your life? What new things happened to you because of this new birth?***

This story also contains a play on words between the Spirit and wind. In Greek the word spirit, wind and breath are the same word.

***How does the wind of God’s Spirit blow through your life?***

***How does the breath of God’s Spirit fill your body?***

**Prayer for Today:** Pray for those who lives need a “breath of fresh air” given by the Spirit.  
Pray in thankfulness for the ways in which God has given you new opportunities to serve and be faithful.



## Travel Day (9) – Friday, March 3

Read Genesis 12:1-4a

*“Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you”” Genesis 12:1*

About eleven years ago I had to convince my parents to leave their “country” named Ohio and go to a “new land” called Iowa. This move was precipitated by the progression of my mother’s Alzheimers, so that I could assist my father in caring for her. But the move was not easy. Both of my parents lived in southwest Ohio all their 70 plus years (except for two years while my dad served in the Army). Surrounding them in Ohio were aging parents, nieces and nephews, friends since elementary and high school, co-workers and church families. Coming to Iowa meant being by their son, daughter-in-law, and two grandkids, plus nothing else but strange roads, strange stores, and no neighbors and friends. It proved to be a good move for both of them and my family, but every time I think of that move, I think of how Abram and Sarai felt about their move away from their family to the land God would show them.

God’s call to new places, new people, new opportunities and new ministries is never easy, but this is where trust in God comes into play. I trust that in the new places, God is not only there before me, but is opening new opportunities for me to be who God is calling me to be.

*(Rev. Bob Fread is Vice President of Informational Services and Outreach of the ICCC and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCC, serving as pastor of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Cedar Falls, Iowa.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Canadian Chapter of the ICCC – Ottawa, Ontario  
Christian Catholic Rite of Community Churches – Ottawa, Ontario  
Spiritual Science Fellowship/International Institute of Integral Human Sciences -  
Montreal, Quebec



## Travel Day (10) – Saturday, March 4

## Read Romans 4:1-5

*“But to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.” Romans 4:5*

My faith knows only in part the truth about God and my faithfulness to the works of God is pitted with unfaithfulness. Even if my efforts to be faithful expressed God's will and my works were accomplishing the work of God's Spirit, I still would have no self-righteousness to boast about; I would only be doing what I ought to do with this precious life God has given me.

It is not my faith or my works that somehow make me acceptable to God. It is God's faithful love of me as son that calls me God's own and assures my salvation. And not only mine. We are all God's beloved offspring, even though we may idolize ourselves and even do the works of evil at times.

Nothing, as far as God's heart is concerned, can separate us from Divine Love. Therein lies our hope, as was expressed in Jesus, as is in the message of resurrection. Let us open our hearts to this good news, beloved ones, and have confidence in the Love with which God loves us.

*(Rev. John Hardman-Zimmerman is President of the Samaritan Men of the ICCC and has ICCC Clergy Special Standing. John co-pastors with his wife, Sue, several United Methodist churches in Vermont.)*

**Prayer for Today:** ABBA Church of Renewed Faith – Chicago, IL  
Bethany Union Church – Chicago, IL



## Rest Day – Sunday, March 5

The International Council of Community Churches has never owned or operated a mission agency, but throughout its history has chosen to partner with existing agencies for the work of national and international missions. You have already read about one of our mission partners, World Neighbors, and our 2023 Africa Project. Two other mission partners of the ICCC are UNICEF USA and Church World Service.

**UNICEF USA** supports UNICEF's global work through fundraising, advocacy and education in the United States. We collaborate with governments and corporations, non-profit groups, churches and other faith-based organizations — anyone willing to help us advocate for the survival and well-being of every child. UNICEF works in the areas of nutrition, health, immunization, disaster relief and safe water. Their work addresses needs such as child trafficking, climate change, aid to children with disabilities, education, child protection and development, and mental health.

Our other mission partner is **Church World Service (CWS)**. CWS is a cooperative ministry of 37 Christian denominations and communions, providing sustainable self-help, development, disaster relief, and refugee assistance around the world. The CWS mission is to eradicate hunger and poverty and to promote peace and justice at the national and international level through collaboration with partners abroad and in the US.

In 2022 ICCC churches contributed over \$ 6,500 to UNICEF USA for global COVID vaccines and Ukraine relief. ICCC churches also contributed to an ICCC Hurricane Relief Offering which saw Church World Service receive over \$ 14,000, and Peace Community Church in Fort Meyers, FL over \$ 18,000.

**Whenever any ICCC individual or church wishes to support and ICCC Mission Partner, donations should be sent through the ICCC Office.**





## Travel Day (11) – Monday, March 6

## Read Romans 4:13-17

*“For this reason the promise depends on faith, in order that it may rest on grace.”  
Romans 4:13-17*

I walked to school with my siblings when I was in the first grade. One day, we got to school and I remembered homework that was due, so I walked back home to get it. I had heard stories from my older siblings and was sure I would be paddled if I didn't turn it in.

Mom was at home when I got back. She was very surprised to see me so she walked me back to school. As we walked, she assured me that all would be well. And it was! My teacher was concerned about me and gave me a hug. I experienced grace that day.

The Apostle Paul tells us that grace trumps the rules – the law. God's promises to Abraham were made long before the Old Testament law was written. Abraham's relationship with God was based on faith, not obedience to a list of rules. Yes, he made some mistakes, but he also trusted God in many situations and our gracious God honored the promises he had made to him.

Salvation through Jesus Christ is God's promise to us. We claim it by faith, resting on God's grace rather than our own efforts to obey the law. If humans can be gracious, as my teacher was, God grace is even greater. In fact, it's "greater than all my sin"

*(Rev. R.C. Fleeman is pastor of Peace Community Church in Fort Meyers, FL.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Peace Community Church - Fort Meyers, FL  
Roser Memorial Community Church – Anna Maria, FL  
Sunshine Cathedral – Fort Lauderdale, FL



## Travel Day (12) – Tuesday, March 7

## Read John 3:1-10

*“What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.” John 3:6*

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, comes in the night to talk to Jesus. The Pharisees were the most devout of Jews. They felt they were “more godly” than others because they followed the law. Did Nicodemus secretly go to Jesus at night because he found something lacking in his spiritual life? Nicodemus was impressed by Jesus' actions and said to Jesus that only one with God could do such things. Jesus responded by saying that the signs and wonders are not that important and that the most crucial thing to do is to be born anew. Nicodemus asks how one can reenter his/her mother's womb and be born again. Nicodemus talks about an earthly birth, but Jesus speaks of a spiritual birth. Jesus tells Nicodemus that the reign of God is entered not by following any particular laws but by a radical and spiritual transformation wrought by God.

Sometimes, we are like the Pharisees. We believe that if we follow the rules, we can get closer to God. We may pray, read our bible, attend worship, and tithe, yet still not feel any closer to God. If we want to experience a spiritual rebirth and communion with God, we must fully surrender ourselves to God. As the saying goes, let go and let God!

*(Rev. Phil Tom is the Executive Director of the International Council of Community Churches.)*

**Prayer for Today:** French Chapter of the ICCG – Aignan Cedex, France



## Travel Day (13) – Wednesday, March 8

Read John 3:11-17

*“whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” John 3: 15*

“Be like Jesus.” My spouse said this years ago when I was wrestling with a passage for a sermon. I’m a lectionary preacher, and sometimes that forces me to encounter Scripture passages I’d rather not deal with. Having served in diaconal roles for most of my professional life in chaplaincies from the hospital and hospice, to correctional and shelter settings, this one passage or idea was at the heart of difficulty for so many people who would come and sit in my office and tell me they just couldn’t believe that Jesus was the only way. They still do! We often make the words of scripture a head trip instead of a heart journey. I remember a seminary professor who would remind us not to ask *if* a story was true, but to ask *how* a story was true.

After years of interfaith engagement, the idea of Jesus being the only way has become a problematic notion even for me, a Christian, to grasp, especially when joined by Buddhists at death penalty vigils and Muslim friends while marching for genocide awareness. “*How* is the story true?” is a much greater question.

It is worth remembering that the Greek for *believe* is only a verb in the Gospel of John. It means trust; it is an action, not a thing. It is also in the present and active tense: the one who trusts...

Believing in Jesus means being more loving, more forgiving, more merciful, and sometimes just showing up. Like Jesus.

*(Rev. Rock Freemont is Vice President of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCC, serving as pastor of Shepherd of the Hills United Church of Christ in Phoenix, AZ.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Metropolitan Community Church – Chicago, IL  
St. Anne Woods Chapel Community Church – Pembroke Township, IL  
The Center – Palos Heights, IL



## Turning Day (14) – Thursday, March 9

Read John 4:5-30

*“Path to Living Water”*

Today we turn onto the Path of Living Water. Scripture begins with water as the wind/spirit of God sweeps over the water (Genesis 1:2). Scripture ends with water as the river of the water of life flows from God’s throne (Revelation 22:1). The earth’s surface is 71% water, while the human body is 55 to 60% water. Lives begin in the water of the womb and Christian lives begin in the baptismal water. Water is key to life and important to our spiritual journey.

Our key story of this path is Jesus and the Samaritan woman. This conversation begins with the most simple request “Give me a drink” (John 4:7)

***What persons in your life need a “drink of water” from you? How is the water you give them “living water”?***

Some observe that this story ends with a Samaritan woman apostle.

***What did Jesus see in this woman that others did not see? What did others see in her that Jesus chooses not to see? What does Jesus see in you?***

**Prayer for Today:** Pray for those who others chose not to see and choose to judge.  
Pray for those who hunger and thirst. Pray for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.



## Travel Day (15) – Friday, March 10

## Read Psalm 95

*“O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!” Psalm 95:6*

I remember growing up in church thinking I had to be a certain age to give God praise. I wanted to lift my hands and shout “hallelujah” so bad, but I was afraid that I would get in trouble for mocking the adults. Little did I know that there are no age requirements for giving God praise. There are no restrictions for worshipping the God of our salvation. The Psalmist says, “Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.” This is why we praise him. This is why we worship him. If you noticed it said nothing about age. When I finally got the nerve to open my mouth and give God praise, the flood gates of my heart were opened. I have been praising Him ever since that day. Glory be to God!

*(Rev. Brian Holland is pastor of Second Community Church in Columbus, OH.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Speed Memorial Community Church – Speed, IN  
St. Timothy Community Church – Gary, IN



## Travel Day (16) – Saturday, March 11      Read Exodus 15:22-25; 17:1-7

*“Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink..” Exodus 17:6b*

We continue our journey with the Hebrews as they make their exodus from bondage to liberty, from stultifying security to vitalizing ventures, from the land of degradation to the place called Promise. It is not simply a journey of miles but a spiritual pilgrimage toward enlightenment, empowerment, and ennoblement. It is God's desire to free people and restore us to our rightful condition and to awaken us to our relationship with and responsibilities to our Creator.

Early in their journey through the desert the Hebrews had to face the issue of water, both the lack of good water and the absence of any water. They stopped to rest at a place called Marah and their thirst was great, but the water was bitter and undrinkable. They did not just whine, they wailed in bitterness and despair. Again, God manifested the eternal goodness through nature, just as had happened earlier with the manna and quails, and instructed Moses to cut a branch and throw it into the spring. The water turned sweet and the people could drink.

Weeks later God's goodness was out of sight and so out of their minds, and when the Hebrews were faced with the absence of water they again wailed, this time against God.

What the Hebrews found was that the places of aridity could be transformed into oases of refreshment... the pools of bitterness could be made sweet...sorrow could become hope... despair could be transformed into faith... through the work of God in their lives. In the faith shaped by desert experiences there is a confidence that in whatever **is** God *can be found*...a conviction that the disturbing events are very points for God's advent into our lives.

*(Taken from Flame on the Mountain, Fire in the Field by Jeffrey R. Newhall. Copyright © 1997 Frankfort: Community Church Press, 1997, p. 71,74. The late Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Newhall, is a former Executive Director of the International Council of Community Churches.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Greendale People's Church – Worcester, MA



## Rest Day – Sunday, March 12

Organic fertilizers and pesticides are usually less expensive than chemical varieties. If used as part of a comprehensive approach, organic inputs can boost volume and contribute to higher profits.

An example is what is happening in Kenya's Murang'a county. This is one of the many areas in Kenya focused on tea crops. Over the years, farmers have used ever-increasing amounts of chemical fertilizers and pesticides to try to boost yields. Over time, these chemicals have caused soil degradation. The result: lower yields and income.

Working with the Organic Agriculture Center of Kenya (OACK), World Neighbors is helping farmers address this through techniques that view soil as a long-term resource to be protected. OACK holds training sessions in which farmers learn to make organic inputs. For example, farmers are trained to use cattle manure as fertilizer and cattle urine mixed with other organic ingredients as pesticides. Along with organic fertilizer, the pesticides help restore soil health.

With organic inputs, crop diversification and other techniques, tea farmers in Marang'a have increased output by as much as 40%. By cutting out chemical fertilizers, they have significantly increased profit margins. Additional profits are invested in savings and credit groups. These are farmer-managed groups in which farmers contribute small monthly amounts and pool their capital. When capital is amassed, farmers take out loans at low interest to invest in farm implements, livestock and other goods to diversify and further increase incomes.

Healthy farming techniques that respect nature are not only good for the environment. These programs help insure better incomes, and in turn create food security in a volatile environment.

**To support the 2023 ICCC/WN Africa Project, please send your donation to the ICCC office.**





## Travel Day (17) – Monday, March 13

## Read Romans 5:1-11

*"But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us."*  
Romans 5:8

During the winter months, I was home after surgery, and my employer sent me a basket of plants. Unfortunately, the delivery driver left the plant outside my garage instead of ringing the doorbell and giving it to my wife.

In the cold weather, most of the plants did not fare well. I looked over the basket and decided what actions to take. I asked my wife if she would go to the store and purchase a bag of soil and several small nursery pots. As I waited, I began placing plastic on the table in preparation for surgery. I carefully separated each plant from the basket. I gently placed the healthy plants on one side and the plants that needed extra love on the other. It seemed like hours before she returned with my list of items.

My wife came in with several bags and noticed my preparation. Then, I took the soil and carefully planted each plant in its nursery pot. I cared for and loved all of my plants. Because of this love, they all lived, and the budding plants provided years of additional beauty.

In the same way, Christ is the horticulturalists of our lives. Although some of us need more love than others, Christ loves us all. Christ's love is proven to us year after year by reconciling what we were with what God knew we could be. In response, we should commit daily to budding for Christ by shouting that love to all we meet.

*(Chaplain Hare Varnon is a retired chaplain from the US Army and serves as Chaplain Trustee for the ICCC.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Craig Memorial Community Church - Capitol Heights, MD  
Seneca Community Church - Germantown, MD



## Travel Day (18) – Tuesday, March 14

## Read John 4:5-15

*"But those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."* John 4:14

Water is a common symbol throughout the scriptures. Some of our favorite stories involve water, like the waters that destroyed the earth in the days of Noah, baby Moses floating on the waters of the Nile, God parting the Red Sea waters, the baptismal waters of the Jordan River, and Jesus turning water into wine (my personal favorite). Water is a common metaphor for divinity or eternal life. In fact, in the Hebrew Scriptures, God refers to Godself as the "fountain of living water" (Jeremiah 2:13).

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Jesus taps into the metaphor of water as divinity in his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. While she attempts to draw Jesus into the hot-button debate about the proper place to worship, Jesus offers something more: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water . . . those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

It seems from this passage, that all we need to do to access this eternal, "living water," is to ask.

*(Rev. Dr. Rhonda Blevins is Vice President for Leadership Development and President of the Ministerium of the ICCC and serves as pastor of Chapel-by-the-Sea in Clearwater Beach, FL)*

**Prayer for Today:** CITI Ministries – Shady Side, MD  
Douglas Memorial Community Church – Baltimore, MD





## Travel Day (19) – Wednesday, March 15

**Read John 4:16-30**

*“Just then Jesus’ disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman.”*  
John 4:27a

Because this story of the Samaritan woman at the well is so familiar to us, we may fail to see what a surprising encounter this is. As someone who has had five husbands and now has a man who is not her husband, she would have been a social outcast, someone to be avoided and someone who was supposed to avoid others. But she didn't. What an unlikely candidate to have a theological conversation with Jesus! Jesus knows her life story, but instead of being silenced by shame, she brings up a theological question that's been on her mind.

Jesus lets her know that the place of worship is not what God is concerned about; God is concerned about our hearts. The woman knows that the Messiah is coming, who will explain everything. Jesus reveals to her that he is the Christ she has been expecting. So, the woman, become an evangelist, leaves her task behind and returns to the town, telling the good news and bringing everyone to meet the Lord.

We see in this story that Jesus knows us and accepts us just as we are. He welcomes our questions and reveals himself to us. When we know this for ourselves, we can hardly help but go, share the good news, and bring others to meet Jesus for themselves. We might be surprised at who is ready to respond.

*(Rev. Sue Hardman-Zimmerman is a United Methodist clergy person and co-pastors with her husband, John, several United Methodist churches in Vermont.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Liberian Chapter of the ICCC – Monrovia, Liberia



## Turning Day (20) – Thursday, March 16

**Read John 9:1-41**

*“Path to Illumination”*

It's time for another direction change as our journey turns onto the Path of Illumination. The key story of this leg of our journey is Jesus healing a blind man, and the key image of this path is light. When our eyes are closed and we open them in a bright place what happens? We struggle to see. The light overwhelms our eyes. But we still seek to open our eyes and let the light in to guide us. As John writes, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.” (John 1:5)

*What areas of shadows in your life need to be illumined by God?*

*There is a traditional hymn that says “Open my eyes that I may see”. Can your heart sing/pray those words?*

**Prayer for Today:** Pray for those who are blind to injustice, discrimination, and hate in our society and to in the church.



## Travel Day (21) – Friday, March 17

## Read Ephesians 5:8-14

*“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness; rather, expose them.” Ephesians 5:11*

As people of faith, advocating for those who are most vulnerable among us is an important aspect of ensuring that their rights and needs are met. If we’re honest, this must include ALL the vulnerable, not just the precious, perfect few. The United States is the highest, globally, in terms of the number of people disproportionately incarcerated, and the state in which I live, Arizona, is one of the states that incarcerates the most people.

My congregation is a founding member of VIP, a broad-based, non-partisan organization committed to building relational power through organizing people for sustainable social and economic improvement, and my own passions include prison reform, which can include working to improve living conditions, providing access to education and job training programs, and fighting for fair treatment and sentencing. Advocates may work directly with inmates and their families, and with legislators and other officials to bring about change. At the height of the COVID-19 lockdown, VIP met virtually with our Governor and the Director of the Department of Corrections to advocate for PPE, testing and, ultimately, vaccinations for those who are incarcerated in Arizona’s prisons; over 40,000 individuals.

To have left our incarcerated population on their own without access to life-saving protections from the pandemic would have been a human catastrophe on an unimaginable scale. In my experience, our criminal legal system is rife with the unfruitful works of darkness and it is only through our advocacy and activism that those works can be exposed and addressed.

*(Rev. Rock Freemont is Vice President of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCC, serving as pastor of Shepherd of the Hills United Church of Christ in Phoenix, AZ.)*

**Prayer for Today:** #C4YOURSELFCHURCH – Port Huron, MI  
Bridgeport Community Church – Bridgeport, MI  
People’s Community Church – Detroit, MI



## Travel Day (22) – Saturday, March 18

## Read Matthew 5:14-16

*“You are the light of the world . . . let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:14a,16*

Like many others, my favorite worship services of the year is the Christmas Eve candlelight service. At the end of the service and before singing “*Silent Night*” all electric lights in the sanctuary are turned off and all candles extinguished except for the one white Christ candle in the center of the Advent wreath. It is an amazing sight to see a completely dark room with only one candle burning. Finally after talking about Jesus who comes as “light of the world” I take the light of that one flame and begin lighting the congregations candles. As you know from your experience of Christmas Eve, the sanctuary is slowly illumined into a beautiful glow. We then re-light the altar and Advent candles and light again the Christmas tree as we sing “*Silent Night*”. What strikes my heart is how the flame of just one, tiny, single candle illumines the room.

Imagine then what happens in our world when each of us take the flame of the Good News of Jesus and share it. The world is illumined and changed. People are illumined and changed. So the challenge is ours- let the light of Jesus shine before others and to everyone. Shine!

*(Rev. Bob Fread is Vice President of Informational Services and Outreach for the ICCC and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCC, serving as pastor of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Cedar Falls, Iowa.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Lake Superior Community Church – Duluth, MN  
Antioch Community Church – Kansas City, MO



## Rest Day – Sunday, March 19

The International Council of Community Churches has never owned or operated any schools or seminaries. Instead we have relied on both denominational and ecumenical seminaries to educate our clergy and provide theological education and formation for our churches.

In 2022, Lexington Theological Seminary became an education partner of the ICCC. Lexington Seminary is an accredited, graduate, theological seminary committed to Christian unity and with its historic ties to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the seminary is intentionally ecumenical.

Lexington offers a wide range of educational opportunities for both clergy and laity, to strengthen the ministry of every local church, with all opportunities offered virtually via the internet. The seminary offers Continuing Education and Life-Long Learning Opportunities with the ability to audit classes, take webinars, or enroll in their School of Theology or Annual Continuing Education Certificate Program. Lexington also offers Certificate in Pastoral Ministry, Certificate in African American Ministry and Certificate in Hispanic Ministries programs. Traditional degree programs, too, are available including: Master of Divinity, Master in Pastoral Studies, Master of Theological Studies, and Doctor of Ministry.

Members of the ICCC qualify for a 30% tuition scholarship on degree programs and the Certificate in Pastoral Ministry from the seminary. The ICCC may also offer grants, scholarships or financial assistance for some programs and continuing education opportunities. For information on this please contact Rev. Bob Fread through the ICCC.

**Whenever any ICCC individual or church wishes to support the ministry of Lexington Theological Seminary, donations should be sent through the ICCC Office.**



## Travel Day (23) – Monday, March 20

**Read John 9:1-12**

*“He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” John 9:3b*

It’s not because you messed up!

There is an old school train of thought that believes that disabilities, sicknesses, diseases, and even deaths happen because of our sin. I do not believe this to be true. Now don’t get the wrong idea, I do believe that there are consequences for our actions. For example, if you smoke cigarettes there is a good chance that you could get cancer. What I don’t believe is that God is sitting up in heaven, waiting for us to mess up so that he can punish us. I don’t know about you, but I do not think that’s the God of love that we serve. And this could not be more evident than in the passage of scripture in today’s devotional. When Jesus came upon a man that was blind from birth his disciples asked, “who sinned the man or his parents?” Jesus responds, “neither the man or his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed.” Then he healed the man of his blindness. The moral of the story is God is not out to get you. God is out to heal you!

*(Rev. Brian Holland is pastor of Second Community Church in Columbus, OH.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Emmanuel Baptist Church – Ridgewood, NJ  
Protestant Community Church – Medford Lakes, NJ  
St. Joseph Mission – Cliffside Park, NJ  
Wilson Memorial Union Church – Watchung, NJ



## Travel Day (24) – Tuesday, March 21

**Read John 9:13-34**

*“He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” John 9:15b*

Where are we blind to truth? Blind to reality? Stuck in the mud? The better questions are, "Are we open to seeing? To reconsidering? To changing our mind? To changing our behavior? This is the internal/spiritual disposition of mind and heart that makes seeing possible, that enables a soul to grow, that allows an ever-expanding capacity to love as God loves.

I don't think Jesus just slapped some spittle-mud on the man born blind so he could show his power or make a point about the Sabbath being made for us, not we for the Sabbath. I can only imagine the compassion with which Jesus spoke to him, asking him respectfully and honoring his freedom to choose. Though born blind, the man was still open to the possibility of healing, not discounting miracles or the power of God, even though his parents and he had probably asked God for sight many times before. His ongoing willingness and faith would now rendezvous with the moment God's healing work would be revealed.

Contrast that with the blindness of the Pharisees, who were boxed into their theology and not open to the work of God, the living God, with whom all things are possible. How resistant we can be to new ways of thinking and to new possibilities. How easily threatened by those who believe and act differently from us. How prone to exclusion, expulsion and even persecution we can be. If only we would be open to the gift we are for each other - bearers of the gift of sight and insight, which make possible healing and reconciliation, and the furthering God's Kingdom of Love.

May our spiritual eyes, the eyes of our hearts and minds, be wide-open to God at work in our world, to greater understanding and appreciation of one another, and to a more inclusive charity toward all.

*(Rev. John Hardman-Zimmerman is President of the Samaritan Men of the ICCC and has ICCC Clergy Special Standing. John co-pastors with his wife, Sue, several United Methodist churches in Vermont.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Open Episcopal Church – Welling, United Kingdom



## Travel Day (25) – Tuesday, March 22

**Read John 9:35-41**

*“Jesus said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?...He said, “Lord, I believe.” John 9:35b,38a*

The opening verse of “Amazing Grace” reads:

Amazing grace how sweet the sound. That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost, but now I'm found. Was blind but now I see.

In John 9, Jesus heals a blind man. The blind man is brought forth to the Pharisees. They ask him who healed him and question whether he had been blind. The Pharisees could not accept that Jesus had healed this man of his blindness, so they cast the man out of the town.

This story is not just about physical healing and blindness but also spiritual healing and seeing God's truth. In regaining his sight, the man confessed that Jesus was the Son of God and told the Pharisees, “If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

God sent Jesus into the world to show us how to live a right and just life with God. Jesus's ministry and teachings confront us like a mirror showing how we fail to live a good and moral life. When we accept Christ in our lives, God will show us our weaknesses and failings, not to punish us but to open our eyes to how we can live a joyful and faithful life with God and our neighbors. As God's people, we no longer walk in darkness but in the light.

*(Rev. Phil Tom is the Executive Director of the International Council of Community Churches.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Catholic Apostolic Church in North America – Oriental, NC  
Imagine Church of the Carolinas – Charlotte, NC



## Turning Day (26) – Thursday, March 23

Read John 11:1-44

### *“Path to Resurrection”*

Many would say that the whole Lenten journey is a Path to Resurrection. This is true, but for the next few days we want to focus in a special way on resurrection, as the story that guides us is the raising of Lazarus.

Jesus waits before going to Lazarus, so that it becomes clear that Lazarus isn't just sick or mistakenly sleeping, but is dead. The Gospel of John begins by saying of Jesus “in him was life” (John 1:4), and now has Jesus announce that he is the very incarnation of “resurrection and life.”

*What are “dead” areas in your life that need resurrection?*

*How are you a comfort to those suffering through hard times. How do you bring life to them?*

**Prayer for Today:** Pray for those who are mourning a death.  
Pray for those who feel that all hope in life is gone.



## Travel Day (27) – Friday, March 24

Read Ezekiel 37:1-14

*“He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” ” Ezekiel 37:3*

No state or situation is too bad or hopeless for the Word of God to affect, change or transform. Who would have thought those dry bones could ever live again? But the Word of God brought them back to life.

Lent is the season of repentance, renewal, and fasting in preparation for Holy Week. But unfortunately, it is hard for us to move towards practice because we are in the valley of dry bones. Dry bones represent people with selective laziness that makes everything else appealing, laziness in prayer, an opponent of perseverance, a muzzling of meditation, ignorance of scriptures, a partaker in sorrow, abandoning the care of others, and giving to the poor.

This condition is not something we are born with and, therefore, destined to have for the rest of our lives. On the contrary, God can and will give life to that which appears to have shriveled up and died. God did not tell Ezekiel to lament, complain, or weep about the hopeless situation in which he found the bones. Instead, God posed a resounding question to Ezekiel, asking us today, can these bones live? Our response is, with God, all things are possible. Create a daily habit of two minutes of silence, and spend time with God, asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate, reveal, and convict us of sin. During this Lent season, spend time in prayer, kneeling to practice humility in repentance. We will move from the valley to the promise of Christ rising from the dead.

*(Chaplain Hare Varnon is a retired chaplain from the US Army and serves as Chaplain Trustee for the ICCC.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Community Church of East Williston – East Williston, NY  
Community Church of Little Neck – Little Neck, NY  
First Church of Evans – Derby, NY





## Travel Day (28) – Saturday, March 25

## Read John 11:1-16

*“After having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.”*  
John 11:6

It must have been excruciating. Mary and Martha watched their brother grow sicker by the minute. It wasn't looking good. But they held out hope—they believed that Jesus could heal Lazarus. So they sent word, letting Jesus know that his dear friend was sick.

It must have been excruciating—the waiting for Jesus to arrive. Why was he taking so long? And when Lazarus died, how must the two sisters have felt? Were they angry with Jesus on top of their grief and sadness upon losing their brother?

This New Testament narrative is the perfect story to consider when we can't understand God's mysterious ways. How could Mary and Martha know what would happen when Jesus arrived? How could they know that Jesus would raise their brother from death into life? How could they imagine the kingdom impact this resurrection story would have?

The season of Lent is a time of waiting and wondering and wishing for resolution. Forty days to sit in “the cloud of unknowing” (to borrow a phrase from the 14<sup>th</sup> Century). Forty days in which we break from our attachments—like the need to know how it's all going to end.

May we, like Mary and Martha, believe and wait—expecting that when Christ comes, all things will be made well.

*(Rev. Dr. Rhonda Blevins is Vice President for Leadership Development and President of the Ministerium of the ICCC and serves as pastor of Chapel-by-the-Sea in Clearwater Beach, FL)*

**Prayer for Today:** New Covenant Community Church – Akron, OH  
People's Community Church – Berea, OH  
Church in Aurora – Aurora, OH



## Rest Day – Sunday, March 26

Like many low-income countries, Burkina Faso's economy is based on agriculture. The only effective way to raise incomes is to increase agricultural output and productivity.

The good news is this can be achieved with low-cost innovations and technical training. World Neighbors is training farmers in the **Kenya Top Bar Beehive, as an innovative way to earn income.** This type of beehive is a trapezoidal hive usually made of wood. It has bars to which the bees attach their combs. The hive is unusually favorable for honey production, which is high in both quantity and quality. The design also makes harvesting easy.

In Burkina Faso, World Neighbors has introduced farmers to a lower-cost clay hive. Clay hives can be produced for \$20, compared to \$72 for wooden hives. Villages purchase the hives with loans from savings and credit groups, in which they deposit very small amounts each month. Loans taken out at low interest are paid back from profits from honey sales.

Given the productivity of the Kenya hives, beekeepers can harvest honey—and other products—every quarter. Farmers harvest on average 66 pounds of raw honey. If sold in this form, farmers earn \$7.68 for each 2.2 pounds, for a total of \$506.

With more investment, farmers can become extractors. This enables them to sell a broader array of products—filtered honey, wax and “waste” that can be used or sold as animal feed. Depending on market prices, this can significantly increase income obtained from selling raw honey.

Efficient Kenya beehives are an easy and low-cost way for farmers in rural Burkina Faso to diversify and increase their income.

**To support the 2023 ICCC/WN Africa Project, please send your donation to the ICCC office.**



*(A beehive in Burkina Faso)*



### **Travel Day (29) – Monday, March 27**

**Read John 11:17-37**

*“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life.”<sup>[1]</sup> Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.” John 11:25*

As I was eating dinner with an aunt a few years ago, she asked, “Would you please clear something up for me? When we die, are we asleep, or are we frolicking around in Heaven?” It was and is a good question.

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul says that those who have died are asleep, waiting for Jesus to return. Most Sunday afternoons I love to take a nap. It doesn't matter how long I sleep because I rarely have anything planned later in the day. Eventually though, I wake up. Is that something like what Lazarus experienced? Maybe! Except that Lazarus was awakened from the slumber of death.

Resurrection is a central tenet of our faith, and our faith is in Jesus who is “the resurrection and the life.” Imagine waking from a nap, realizing that Jesus has come to rouse us and that we are surrounded by our loved ones - just as Lazarus was. According to the Apostle Paul, if we are asleep when Jesus returns, that is how it will be.

Every morning that we wake, every time we rise from a nap, we might take a moment to remember Jesus' promise that even though we die, we will live again. Let that promise fill you with hope this Lenten season.

*(Rev. R.C. Fleeman is pastor of Peace Community Church in Fort Meyers, FL.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Nigerian Chapter of the ICCC – Lagos, Nigeria  
KIHEM Holy Throne of the Most High God on Earth Mission – Akowonja,  
Alimosho, Lagos, Nigeria



## Travel Day (30) – Tuesday, March 28

**Read John 11:38-44**

*“Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” John 11:44b*

I love this story of the raising of Lazarus. One reason is that my grandmother’s name is Martha so I chose this story to read at her funeral. The other reason is the great dramatic climax of this story. I can almost hear Jesus yelling at the top of his lungs “Lazarus, come out of there”. I can see the people looking confused, or thinking Jesus is out of his mind. Then I can see a shadowy figure coming to the tomb door as people look on in utter shock: eyes wide open and jaws dropped. Then another yell from Jesus, “Unwrap him and let him go.” Wow, the Gospel writer sure knows how to tell a story!

I think Jesus is still yelling, “Unbind and let go”. To the forces of evil Jesus says, “Unbind them from hate and let them go.”, “Unbind them from prejudice and let them go”, “Unbind them from self-centeredness and let them go.”, Truly, Jesus liberates and frees. Lord, unbind us and let us go to live in your wholeness!

*(Rev. Bob Fread is Vice President of Informational Services and Outreach for the ICCC and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCC, serving as pastor of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Cedar Falls, Iowa.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Those serving on the ICCC Board of Directors



## Turning Day (31) – Wednesday, March 29

**Read Matthew 20:20-28**

*“Path to Servanthood”*

We are coming close to the end of our journey and to the cross. In the Scripture we reflect on today we hear Jesus speak of serving, saying he “came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28) In coming days as we walk the Path of Servanthood we will consider a series of readings from Isaiah often called the “Servant Songs”. Each speak of some unique characteristics of God’s servant.

***Do you ever refer to yourself as servant? What does being a servant mean to you?***

***Servanthood is not self-centered. How do you place others before yourself?***

***How does humility play a role in servanthood?***

**Prayer for Today:** What are the greatest needs around you? How can you be a servant to these? Pray for these situations and how you and others can be servants.



## Travel Day (32) – Thursday, March 30

## Read Isaiah 42:1-9

*"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth, and the coastlands wait for his teaching." Isaiah 42:1-4*

We think that people or things will satisfy us. But often, they leave us empty and unfulfilled. We must embrace God's gentle servant during this Lenten season. We must rely on the strength God gives His Gentle Servant to set people free from bondage. We must trust in God's power and ability to accomplish our salvation through Jesus Christ, His Son. We cannot save or set ourselves free from the sin that entraps us. We need a substitute, Jesus Christ.

A promising teenager was accidentally killed in a gunfight among gang rivals in a shooting. The teenager's father told the local news report that his son had signed up to attend college on an academic scholarship. His son wanted to become a lawyer and help people who were incarcerated wrongly. "Now he is dead before his life has started and his dreams fulfilled. I wished I could take my his place," said his father.

On the cross, Jesus took our place and paid the damages caused in this world by our sins. We had swerved off the road, gone astray like sheep, or found ourselves in a pig trough. However, God laid our debt to our Substitute by sending him to the place of ultimate damage. What amazing love! During Lent, practice fasting instead of going to another source of comfort. Don't sit in your feelings. Take them to Jesus. We must depend on God's power through Christ to be set free to become all God intends us to be.

*(Chaplain Hare Varnon is a retired chaplain from the US Army and serves as Chaplain Trustee for the ICCC.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Chaplains serving in the ICCC



## Travel Day (33) – Friday, March 31

## Read Isaiah 49:1-7

*"And he said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.'" Isaiah 49:3*

In this section of Isaiah, four times we hear the prophet speak of a "servant". Who is this servant? Today's reading identifies the servant as Israel. Christians often read back into these verses and see Jesus. Sometimes I read them and find a little bit of myself, either who I am or who I am called to be.

Today the servant is one in whom God will be glorified. Is that me? On a good day hopefully "yes". But to be honest on a bad day the answer is probably "no". Some days in my stubbornness, in my self-centeredness, in my rush to meet my needs instead of the needs of others, simply put, God is not glorified in me.

I once had a parishoner who said her goal each day was "a little less of me and a little more of God". Not a bad daily goal. Many years ago I bought an icon that I display in my home office. The icon pictures Jesus standing up and simply holding a cross. Across the bottom is written the words, "Today's Challenge - Live Jesus". On those days I "live Jesus", God is glorified!

*(Rev. Bob Fread is Vice President of Informational Services and Outreach for the ICCC and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCC, serving as pastor of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Cedar Falls, Iowa.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Those serving on the ICCC Board of Trustees



## Travel Day (34) – Saturday, April 1

## Read Isaiah 50:4-9

*“I gave my back to those who struck me and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard.”  
Isaiah 50:6*

Non-violent resistance. Mahatma Gandhi. Nelson Mandela. Rosa Parks. Martin Luther King Jr. Jesus of Nazareth.

When systemic evil persists and when masses of people suffer under the heavy boot of injustice, non-violent resistance can affect great change.

In Isaiah 50:4-9, we are given one of four “suffering servant” songs from Isaiah. The righteous one suffers at the hands of his enemies, yet he does not resist. Instead, he willingly offers his back to the abuser’s whip—he defiantly offers his cheek to those who would pluck his beard.

For those who have little power, non-violent resistance like what we read about in this “suffering servant” passage, shows the abuser that though the outward body be beaten down, there’s an inward power that is unbreakable. Where does inner power come from? The “suffering servant” knows. “It is the Lord GOD who helps me,” he declares in verse 9.

During this season of Lent, remember that when suffering comes knocking (as it inevitably will), God will be your help. God will provide all the power needed to face even the harshest enemy—death itself.

*(Rev. Dr. Rhonda Blevins is Vice President for Leadership Development and President of the Ministerium of the ICCC and serves as pastor of Chapel-by-the-Sea in Clearwater Beach, FL)*

**Prayer for Today:** Community Church at Lake Wylie – Lake Wylie, SC



## Rest Day – Sunday, April 2

ICCC churches not only support international mission projects and relief following a disaster, but the ICCC also stands alongside our local churches as they serve in their communities. Over the last two years the ICCC has offered Local Church Mission Grants. These grants are given to churches who are engaged in ministries such as: food pantry or meal program, after-school learning or recreation program, reading, tutoring or mentorship program, senior citizen meal or activity program, quilt/blanket ministry, local resettlement of a refugee or migrant family, and/or racism or racial justice education program.

In 2022, the ICCC churches received Local Church Mission Grants:

**Second Community Church** in Columbus, Ohio, for their meal and pantry program. The pandemic resulted in the closure of various community resources addressing food insecurity and needs of the homeless. As a result Second Community through their Board of Christian Education began in June, 2022, to partner with Hoge Memorial Presbyterian Church to address these needs in their community. Second Community provides essential items for a weekly hot meal and non-food items such as hygienic products, blankets, and over-the-counter medications for a pantry serving the homeless and families in need.



**People's Community Church** in Detroit, Michigan, and their Monday Feeding Program. For more than eleven years this program has been providing a hot, nutritious lunch every Monday for 60 to 80 families. The program closed during the pandemic, but re-opened with a bag lunch in October, 2021. In October, 2022, hot meals were resumed.

**Church of the Loving Shepherd** in West Chester, Pennsylvania and their Food Ministry. The church has offered this ministry for over 20 years and they annually serve up to 47 West Chester area families. Their ministry fills a void as they are the only food pantry in the county that delivers food in support of those with transportation and mobility issues. This ministry is supported by over 30 volunteers who contribute over 70 volunteer hours each month.

Your church can apply for a 2023 Mission Grant later this year.

Your financial support of the **General Fund of the ICCC** makes this program possible. This is one more reason for churches and individuals to generously support the general ministry of the ICCC throughout the year.



*(Left is People's Community Church, Detroit, and right is Second Community Church, Columbus)*



### **Travel Day (35) – Monday, April 3**

### **Read Isaiah 52:13-53:3**

*"See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up." Isaiah 52:13*

In Isaiah 52:14-15, the prophet Isaiah proclaims that God will exalt his brutally disfigured servant to the dismay of the world's rulers, "As many were astonished at him, his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the sons of men, - so shall he startled many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them they shall see, and that the which they have not heard they shall understand."

Isaiah speaks here of the nation of Israel, who will rise from her suffering and exile, and that God will restore her to her rightful place as God's people. Christians interpret this passage as an allusion to Jesus as the suffering servant who will bring reconciliation and restoration between God and God's people. It is difficult to imagine that someone must suffer to give us life, a life worth living. But that is what God did when God sacrificed God's only Son so that we could be restored to a right relationship with God. So Peter proclaims in I Peter 3:18, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that Christ might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit." Thanks be to God!

*(Rev. Phil Tom is the Executive Director of the International Council of Community Churches.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Clergy with Special Standing in the ICCC



## Turning Day (36) – Tuesday, April 4

Read Matthew 16:21-26

### *“Path to a Cross and Tomb”*

We have already entered Holy Week and today we make a turn onto the final path of our journey. It is the Path of the Cross and Tomb. We do not walk on this path alone. We walk with Jesus. He even invited us on this path as he says “If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24) Walking this path is hard- it contains suffering and death. But on this path we find the ultimate victory. May we walk with great purpose and devotion on this path this week.

**Many things happen to Jesus during his final week: a triumphant palm parade, a final meal with his disciples, betrayal, a scam trial, torture on a cross, resurrection, etc. What event/events are most important to your faith?**

**How do you understand compassion and love? How does Jesus live them? How do you?**

**Prayer for Today:** Pray for those in hospice care and those facing death.  
Pray for those facing great struggles and need resurrection.



## Travel Day (37) – Wednesday, April 5

Read Matthew 26:6-13

*“But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, “Why this waste?” Matthew 26:8*

It is more than what it looks like.

I know we have all heard the saying, “don’t judge a book by its cover.” Sometimes that can be easier said than done. But should it be? I mean we are Christians, we should have no problem being nonjudgmental. That could not be further from the truth. Some of the most judgmental people in the world are Christians, because they think they have this “perfect living” thing down. This was the case in the story of Jesus being anointed in Bethany. Jesus is with his disciples at Simon the Leper’s house when this woman came in with an alabaster jar of expensive perfume. She walked over to Jesus and poured the oil on his head. The disciples were very upset, and expressed that the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus responds, the poor you will always have, but I will only be with you a little while. This woman has anointed me for my burial. The disciples judged the book by its cover. They assumed that she was wasting the oil, but they had no idea that she was anointing her savior for his burial. They thought that she was just wasting oil, but they had no idea, what that oil represented for her. It represented her love, adoration, praise, and worship for her Lord and soon to be savior. It is more than what it looks like.

*(Rev. Brian Holland is pastor of Second Community Church in Columbus, OH.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Second Community Church - Columbus OH  
Federation of Christian Ministries – Cleveland, OH



## Travel Day (38) – Thursday, April 6

## Read Matthew 26:17-30

*“Take, eat; this is my body ... this is my blood of the covenant,” Matthew 26:26,28*

On night before he gave up his life in the supreme act of love for humankind, Jesus was all the more eager to share the Passover with his friends. This commemoration of God's deliverance from slavery and death was a key religious celebration, the observance of which was central to the Jewish faith. Jesus wanted to share this sacred meal with his friends so he could endow it with universal meaning. So it was that even Judas, who Jesus knew was going to betray him, was welcomed at the table. All of us betrayers are welcome at the Lord's table.

While they were eating, Jesus equated the Passover bread and cup, symbols of God's redemption, with his body and blood. This meal, which recalled God's covenant with his chosen people, Jesus was transforming into a new covenant, a covenant of love with all people.

Over two thousand years later, we continue to recount the story of God's redemption from whatever enslaves us and from death itself. When we come to the table of the Lord, we are reminded of the infinite depth of God's love for us expressed in Jesus' self-giving. "Take, eat, this is my body, broken for you. Drink from this, all of you, this is my blood of the new and everlasting covenant." Words of life in the holy mystery of communion through Christ, with Christ, in Christ. Saving grace for everyone.

*(Rev. Sue Hardman-Zimmerman is a United Methodist clergy person and co-pastors with her husband, John, several United Methodist churches in Vermont.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Norris Religious Fellowship – Norris, TN  
Tellico Village Community Church – Loudon, TN  
upRising- a church without walls – Austin, TX



## Travel Day (39) – Friday, April 7

## Read Matthew 27:33-54

*“From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.”  
Matthew 27:45*

I'm old enough to remember the old "Tre Ore" (Latin for "three hours") worship service on Good Friday. It started at Noon and lasted until about 3 P.M. Various pastors in the community led the service which was usually focused on the seven words of Jesus from the cross. As a boy three hours was a LONG time to sit in church. Today I miss that service. Today not only are Tre Ore services almost extinct, many churches have grown so small that they gather only once on either Thursday or Friday evening for a combined Maundy Thursday/Good Friday service. I lament that Good Friday, even for many Christians, has become just another Friday.

I don't know how you will remember Jesus' crucifixion and death today. But wherever you are and whatever you are doing, take time to remember what happened to Jesus. If possible, take a moment of quiet at 9 AM (hour of crucifixion), Noon (hour of darkness) and 3 PM (hour of death) to reflect briefly upon Jesus and the cross. During this Lenten season we have journeyed the long way to the cross, so make sure today to take time to linger there and remember.

*(Rev. Bob Fread is Vice President of Informational Services and Outreach for the ICCC and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCC, serving as pastor of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Cedar Falls, Iowa.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Church of the Loving Shepherd, West Chester, PA



## Travel Day (40) – Saturday, April 8

**Matthew 26:1-5,14-16**

*“What will you give me if I betray him to you?” They paid him thirty pieces of silver.”  
Matthew 26:15*

Over the last several years, my spouse and I have hosted high school exchange students; three of them thus far. The first was from Italy, the second from Switzerland, and the most recent from Bosnia and Herzegovina. We are incredibly proud of these young men who have become part of our global family; our sons. Even their families have adopted us as their own. One of the most common questions we are asked is, “Do you get paid to do that?” After hearing that we are not financially compensated for hosting, the second question is, “What do *you* get out of it?”

How often do we betray our very best selves, betray life, by asking, “What will *I* get out of this?” “What will you give *me*?” “What’s in it for *me*?” Having the opportunity to be a dad, to be a father, has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. It’s giving me the opportunity to reparent myself, and essentially work through some of my own childhood hangups and to, perhaps most astoundingly, understand my own parents a little better! It has also given me the opportunity to share why you might want to do something because it will be good for you in the long run. Remember when our parents told us to do something because it would build character? What can we say yes to today that might actually be good for us?

*(Rev. Rock Freemont is Vice President of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations and has Clergy Special Standing in the ICCC, serving as pastor of Shepherd of the Hills United Church of Christ in Phoenix, AZ.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Retired Clergy in the ICCC



## (Easter) – Sunday, April 9

**Matthew 28:1-10**

*“He is not here, for he has been raised,.” Matthew 28:6*

An angel appears to Mary Magdalene and Mary at the empty tomb in our passage. The angel tells them “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.” When the women encounter the risen Jesus, he tells them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

In the classic book the *Denial of Death*, Ernst Becker says that humans do many foolish things to avoid dealing with death, e.g., cosmetic surgery. When we fear death, we cannot live the fullness of life that God offers us. However, Jesus’ resurrection proclaims that death will not have the last word over us. Paul declares in Romans 8:38-39, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, ..... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Isaiah 41:10 proclaims, “fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.” Have no fear, for Christ is risen!

*(Rev. Phil Tom is the Executive Director of the International Council of Community Churches.)*

**Prayer for Today:** Our ICCC staff of Rev. Phil Tom and DeAnn Bath