

**ACT PALESTINE FORUM (APF)
PRAYER VIGIL FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

Every day in the month of April 2018, and particularly on the 24th, we continue to pray with and for our sisters and brothers in Palestine and Israel who have called for an ecumenical prayer vigil across the globe.

A special thanks to DSPR and LWF for contributing to this month's prayers.

APRIL 2018

Prayer Focus: Access to Health Care

This month the APF focus is on the access to humanitarian health services throughout Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Restrictions on movement and limited resources resulting from the occupation of the Palestinian territories mean that many cannot get the care that they need.

BACKGROUND:

Palestinians continue to need humanitarian health services across the oPt, particularly in Gaza, where needs have substantially increased in the past year, but also in vulnerable locations and communities in the West Bank. In Gaza, due to the deterioration of the electricity supply over the course of 2017, elective surgeries are being delayed to reserve energy for emergency cases, diagnostic services are put on hold, and Ministry of Health (MoH) primary healthcare (PHC) facilities are at risk of closure. Compounding the electricity crisis is the shortage in medical supplies and continuing access restrictions on the referral of patients in need of life-saving healthcare outside Gaza. Gaza's already overburdened and under-resourced health sector is now on the brink of collapse as essential medicines run out and there is a continuous loss of healthcare staff.

Access to treatment for patients referred outside of Gaza and the West Bank is becoming increasingly restricted. The number of patients seeking permits to access healthcare outside the Gaza Strip has more than doubled since 2012, but approval rates through the Israeli-controlled Erez crossing are dramatically declining, from 92.5% in 2012 to 62.1% in 2016¹, to 55% in August 2017². The impact of these restrictions can be life-threatening. In the first half of 2017, 12 deaths were reported as a direct result of permit denials. Every year, 20,000 patients from Gaza are affected by the restrictive permit process³. West Bank patients also face restrictions in accessing healthcare and must apply for permits to travel, whether to East Jerusalem, within the oPt, or to Israel⁴.

¹ WHO monthly reports on referral of patients from the Gaza Strip <http://www.emro.who.int/pse/publications-who/monthly-referral-reports.html>

² WHO, Right to Health: Crossing barriers to access health in the occupied Palestinian territory, 2016

³ WHO infographic: Timeline for Gaza Patient Referral 2016 http://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/palestine/documents/WHO_infographic_final-TIMELINE_FOR_GAZA_PATIENT_REFERRALS-13July017.pdf?ua=1

⁴ WHO, Right to Health: Crossing barriers to access health in the occupied Palestinian territory, 2016. WHO, WHO, Right to Health: Crossing barriers to access health in the occupied Palestinian territory, 2014-15

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

Luke 5:17-26

John 5:1-15

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION:

In the texts chosen for the vigil this month, we read of the challenge of access that was present for the sick even in the days of Jesus. The man at the pool of Bethesda was repeatedly ignored and pushed aside by others and did not have someone to assist him. John 5:6-7 reads, “When Jesus saw him lying there, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well? The sick man answered Him, ‘Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another man steps down before me.’”

The paralyzed man mentioned in Luke 5:17-26 also needed the help of his friends, who went so far as to lower him through the roof, to access the healing that Jesus provided. When Jesus saw the faith of the paralyzed man and his friends, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.”

Today, financial burdens, movement restrictions, and limited resources all impede access to health care for those who need it most in Gaza and the West Bank. The readings selected for the vigil this month prompt us to reflect on our responsibilities toward those who do not have access to the care that they need. We are called to help, to serve and to advocate for those who are vulnerable, especially the sick. Access to health care is a right and the work of helping all to gain access is not a charity, but a duty.

PRAYERS:

(Adapted from prayers of the Saint Mary Magdalene Orthodox Church)

Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, You became man and died on the cross for our salvation. You healed people of sickness and affliction through Your love and compassion.

Almighty God, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, come to my help and deliver me from this difficulty that besets me. I believe Lord, that all trials of life are under Your care and that all things work for the good of those who love You. Take away from me fear, anxiety and distress. Help me to face and endure my difficulty with faith, courage and wisdom. Grant that this trial may bring me closer to You for You are my rock and refuge, my comfort and hope, my delight and joy. I trust in Your love and compassion.

O God, our help in time of need, you are just and merciful, and you incline to the supplications of your people. Look down upon me and have mercy on me and deliver me from the trouble that now besets me. Deal with us not according to our iniquities, but according to Your manifold mercies, for we are the works of Your hands, and You know our weaknesses. I pray to you to grant me Your divine helping grace and endow me with patience and strength to endure my hardships with complete submission to Your Will. Only You know our misery and sufferings, and to You, our only hope and refuge, I flee for relief and comfort, trusting in Your infinite love and compassion, that in due time, when You know best, You will deliver me from this trouble, and turn my distress into comfort. We then shall rejoice in Your mercy, and exalt and praise Your Holy Name, O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, both now and forever and to the ages of ages.

Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE(S):

7 April 2018 marks the World Health Organization's (WHO) World Health Day. This year, the WHO is calling world leaders to live up to the pledges they made and commit to concrete steps to advance the health of all. Everyone, everywhere should be able to access essential quality health services without facing financial hardship.

Read more here: <http://www.who.int/campaigns/world-health-day/2018/campaign-essentials/en/>

And here: http://www.who.int/campaigns/world-health-day/2018/whd-2018_policy-advocacy-toolkit.pdf?ua=1

Read more about the health and humanitarian crisis in Gaza here:
<http://www.who.int/hac/crises/international/wbgs/appeal/who-donor-alert-gaza20-2-2018.pdf>