



Pastoral Statement on the Bombings in Lebanon and the Conflict in the Middle East

Rev Charissa Suli, President of the Uniting Church in Australia

24 September 2024

Dear members of the Uniting Church in Australia and our broader community,

It is with a heavy heart that I reach out to you regarding the tragic events unfolding in Lebanon. On 23 September 2024, devastating airstrikes in southern and eastern Lebanon claimed the lives of over 492 people, leaving more than 1600 others injured and displacing many countless families. As violence escalates in the region, the situation has deeply affected the lives of people in Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine. This ongoing conflict continues to cause immense suffering and loss on all sides.

As we grapple with this news, we are reminded of the deep connections we have within our Uniting Church family. In the past 24 hours I have heard from people in the Uniting Church community grieving for their family, friends, and loved ones back in Lebanon. We hold them in our prayers, standing in solidarity as they process pain and uncertainty.

In these troubled times, we turn to the Word of God for peace and hope. These words of Jesus remind us:

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." (Jn 14:27).

This peace, a gift from Christ, transcends the fear and violence that so often consumes our world. Let us hold fast to this promise, even in the darkest moments.

Call to Prayer: Week of Prayer for Peace in the Middle East

I invite every congregation, agency, faith community, school, family, and member within the Uniting Church to join in a Week of Prayer for Peace in the Middle East from 29 September to 5 October 2024.

Let us unite in faith, praying for peace in this region, and for all those affected by the destruction and suffering.

I also extend a warm invitation to leaders of other faiths, Christian churches and ecumenical bodies to join us as we pray for peace. Now is a time when we must come together, transcending the boundaries of faith and tradition, to pray for an end to this violence and to support all who are affected. By standing together in solidarity and compassion, we can weave the threads of love that bind us as one human family.

Each day of this week, I encourage you to lift up specific prayers for those affected and to reach out to communities in the diaspora. Suggestions for each day are below.

President: Rev Charissa Suli **General Secretary:** Lindsay Cullen

I pay respect to the Traditional Custodians of the land, past, present and future.

Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly

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- **Day 1 29 September**

Pray for the families who have lost loved ones

Prayer Starter: Loving God, we lift up those who mourn the sudden loss of family members and friends. May they feel Your comforting embrace in their grief.

- **Day 2 30 September**

Pray for the injured and the medical staff tending to them

Prayer Starter: Gracious Healer, be with those in pain and those caring for them. May Your strength and love flow through the hands of doctors and nurses.

- **Day 3 1 October**

Pray for displaced families seeking refuge and safety

Prayer Starter: Shelter of the Vulnerable, protect those who have been forced from their homes. Provide them with refuge and peace.

- **Day 4 2 October**

Pray for the leaders of Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and the international community

Prayer Starter: God of Wisdom, guide those in power to work towards peace and justice. Give them the courage and conviction to choose non-violence.

- **Day 5 3 October**

Pray for children and young people affected by the violence

Prayer Starter: God of the Innocent, protect the hearts, minds and lives of precious children and young people. Bring them safety in the midst of chaos.

- **Day 6 4 October**

Pray for peace and reconciliation in Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine

Prayer Starter: Prince of Peace, soften hearts hardened by conflict. May Your peace reign over the land and bring reconciliation between all communities.

- **Day 7 5 October**

Pray for other nations and regions affected by this violence

Prayer Starter: Compassionate Lord, as we lift up Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine, we also remember other regions affected by violence. Bring reconciliation and understanding. May violence cease and peace prevail.

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My President's theme for the Uniting Church in Australia this triennium is, *Threads of Love: Weaving Christ's Love Across Cultures and Boundaries*. In this spirit, let us weave threads of love through our prayers, actions, and solidarity with the people of Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine.

I urge us all to be instruments of peace, carrying the love of Christ into a world that so desperately needs it.

Wherever you are during this time, and wherever I will be, I will be praying with you, joining my voice with yours, as we seek God's peace and healing for the Middle East and an end to violence for all who suffer.

May God grant us the strength to be peacemakers, and may we continue to uphold the people of Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine, and all those suffering in the region, in our prayers.

In Christ's love and peace,

Rev Charissa Suli

President of the Uniting Church in Australia

Contact the Assembly Communications Unit: comms@nat.uca.org.au

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