

Opening Prayer

All-powerful yet deeply loving God, as we sit here in this beautiful sanctuary or in the comfortable sanctuary of our homes, we remind ourselves that we are in the presence of both the real living God and a group of people whom this God really loves with a very full heart.

We have ahead of us about an hour in which we have opportunity to engage actively with carefully crafted words, creative song, millennia-old scripture and to reflect more deeply on what these words may mean for us today.

From the very beginning, you have known that we, with our tendency to get caught up in the many cares of the world, need a cycle of living that draws us regularly back to rest and renewal in you and your ways. We, therefore, along with countless other members of our family, especially across Africa and Europe at this time, respond to this divine design by focusing wholeheartedly on you and your ways, deliberately choosing to rest for a while from the activities of the week that have occupied our minds and actions.

As we look at you now and allow you to look at us, we, like Peter, acknowledge that we have fallen short of your ideal in many ways in this week and would perhaps even prefer you to focus your loving attention elsewhere. However, as we feel your penetrating, yet deeply loving gaze that knows our deepest thoughts, let alone the numbers of hairs on our heads, we know that there is no better place to go than to stay here, much loved and held by one from whom absolutely nothing can separate us.

We ease off our shoulders the weight of our failings and our anxieties, knowing that, not only do you love a contrite heart but that you are the one to whom the weary and heavy-laden can come to find rest for their souls. We ask you to receive who we are, as we are right now, knowing that such a request gives you joy to respond to. We ask you, Holy Spirit, to be the empowering of our turning, of our receiving, of our cleansing and of our rest

And as we do this, we know that you are true to your word and your nature, in giving to us forgiveness, acceptance and rest. We receive these wonderful gifts with huge thanks as we recalibrate our week and ready our hearts to engage more fully with you.

As we do, we join together to declare aloud that all-encompassing expression of trust of and devotion to you

Our Father and Mother in heaven

Hallowed be your name