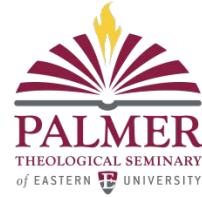




Monday, September 14, 2020
A Call to Prayer
In These Difficult and Uncertain Times



American Baptist Churches of New Jersey and Palmer Theological Seminary

As we and our churches are making our ways in the midst of the pandemic, racial strife, and economic hardship, we feel uncertain, pulled in many directions, and subject to many concerns and fears. We have been struggling and divided over whether and how to open our churches; in fear and sorrow over catching the virus and loved ones lost to it; in despair over the loss of jobs and how to make ends meet; in the sorrow and lament over the things that we were expecting and looking forward to that have been lost; and in anger mixed with hope and ambivalence at the continuing manifestation of deadly racism and the strength of multi-racial protests and anti-racist efforts marred by violence by a handful. In the midst of all of this, we tend to forget to be intentional about deepening our connection with God, listening to the Spirit, and focusing on what God would have us do as followers of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Hope of the World.

In the coming months, as the scourge of the pandemic continues, as the divisive rhetoric of the election heats up, and as anti-racism efforts, God-willing, grow in strength, these uncertainties, fears, sorrows, and laments will continue and if anything be heightened. It will be even more important, therefore, to make sure that as Christians we are centered and focused on what God is revealing to us, the hope that God has for us, and how God is calling us as witnesses to redouble our efforts to share the Gospel and love our neighbors in thought, word, and deed.

It is for this reason that we are issuing this Call to Prayer to our churches, institutions, students, faculty, staff, and alumni, to take place for four months on each Monday, at 8:00 pm EST, starting on September 14 through December 28, and to come together the last Monday of each month by Zoom for prayer together.

We call you and ourselves to set aside that time each Monday to pray either individually or corporately, and then the last Monday of each month we will facilitate all of us gathering to pray together virtually. Below you will find a chart of suggested themes, verses, and focuses for prayer each week so that we can be lifting up unified voices to the Lord, and knowing that we are part of one, focused body as we do so. And, when we come together virtually on that last Monday of each month at 8:00 am EST, we will do so in such a way that it will be even more visible and encouraging to us and to all.

We believe that it is our duty as Christians to employ every means in the power that God has given us to renew ourselves, share the knowledge of the Gospel with others, walk with those who are hurting and oppressed, and be used to bring about social and spiritual transformation. Prayer is perhaps the most powerful thing that God has given us to enable us do so, and we are commanded to use it constantly (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We hope and pray that you will join us in this Call to Prayer and share it with others, as together we seek to return to God in the midst of all that is happening, to center and pay attention to where God is calling us, to help us see what is next for the church, and to find and create hope in the midst of the many difficulties and laments of today.

Dr. David Bronkema, Dean, Palmer Theological Seminary

Rev. Miriam Méndez, Executive Minister/Senior Regional Pastor, ABCNJ

Rev. Dr. George Hancock-Stefan, President, ABCNJ Council and Associate Professor of Church History, Palmer Theological Seminary

Call to Prayer Guide



American Baptist Churches of New Jersey and Palmer Theological Seminary
Mondays at 8 pm



September 14-December 28, 2020

Zoom Prayer Session Last Monday of Each Month

Monthly Themes: Identity, Brokenness, Racial Reconciliation, A Call to the Church to be a Holy People

September

Day	Theme	Verses	Prayer
September 14	Identity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Peter 2:9 - <i>But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praise of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.</i> Psalm 100:3 <i>Know that the Lord made us and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Reflect on who we are in our creation and redemption. Meditate on these words, or one of these words. End your prayer with Psalm 100:4-5: <i>Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.</i>
September 21	Brokenness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Psalm 124:1,5 - <i>If the Lord had not been on our side - let Israel say -... the raging waters would have swept us away.</i> 2 Cor. 1:8-10 - <i>...We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril and he will deliver us again...</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Reflect on the perils that you, your family, our society has encountered in the last nine months of this year. Reflect on our fear of death and then reflect on the fact that we serve a God who is able to deliver us in this life and also from death. Conclude with 2 Cor. 1:10b-11: <i>On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us with your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.</i>
September 28 (Zoom time together)	Racial Reconciliation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Genesis 1:26-27 - <i>Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness..."; So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them...</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Reflect on what it means to be created in the image of God. Our relationship with God is defined by our relationship with one another. Reflect on how you can make a difference by opening up your eyes and mind to see value in all of God's creation. Pray for an open heart and mind to recognize how God is calling us to be a bridge of racial reconciliation, thus relating with the God whose image abides in the other.

October

Day	Theme	Verses	Reflection and Prayer
Monday, October 5	Identity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>John 7:38-39 – “Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. ...</i> 2. <i>1 Cor. 15:10 - But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If we could have done anything in our strength, the Father and the Son would not have had to send the Holy Spirit. The fact that we cannot do the Kingdom work without the Holy Spirit, we have to allow the Holy Spirit to flood our surroundings. While it may sound that Paul was boasting about his work, the emphasis is not on him, but on the grace of God that empowered him to do all the things that he did. 2. Are you beginning each day asking God to overflow your surroundings? When people talk about how effective/strategic/wise/kind you are, do you take the compliment, or do you magnify God who is mightily working in your life? Is your identity as a child of God empowered by God in this time?
Monday, October 12	Brokenness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Acts 27:42-44 - The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely.</i> 2. <i>2 Cor. 11:24-26,30 - Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move... If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We have heard people say, and perhaps we have said it ourselves that these are the most difficult times in our lives, our families and our churches. We are not encountering one problem, but many problems. The certainties in our lives are not as sturdy as they were in the past. 2. How many times do you think that you will have a ship voyage but you reach the shore on a broken piece because you have encountered highly destructive storms? How many times do you experience one weakness after weakness that you feel totally exhausted? How many of us are willing to talk about our difficulties, failures and weaknesses?
Monday, October 19	Racial Reconciliation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Romans 13:9-10 - “...Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.”</i> 2. <i>Mark 12:29-31 - “...The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your minds and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reflect on the command to love God and love others. Before things can change nationally or locally, things have to change personally. 2. Reflect on the command to truly love our neighbor. Where are you? Ask God to search your heart, then evaluate what you find. 3. Pray for an open heart and mind to recognize how God is calling us to be a bridge of racial reconciliation.

<p>Monday, October 26</p> <p>(Zoom time together)</p>	<p>A Call to the Church to be a Holy People</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>1 Peter 1:15-16 - But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."</i> 2. <i>Hebrews 12:14 - Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy: without holiness no one will see the Lord.</i> 3. <i>John 17:17 - Sanctify them by your truth; your word is truth.</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reflect on your definition and practice of holiness in your life, the life of the church. Holiness is one of the requirements that God has for us before he can use us mightily in his work. 2. Pray for peace and holiness as you look to the major events in our country and the world.
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November

Day	Theme	Verses	Prayer
Monday, November 2	Identity	1. <i>Ephesians 2:19-21 - Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reflect on this unity that God is doing in the church from the time Christ has promised to build the church. 2. Reflect on the identity that we have as fellow citizens of the Kingdom present and the Kingdom coming. 3. Pray so that within the church we will experience brotherhood and sisterhood versus considering others foreigners, strangers and latecomers.
Monday, November 9	Brokenness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Romans 3:23 - for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,</i> 2. <i>Ephesians 4:31-32 - Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We are all in need of God's grace "<i>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.</i>" (Romans 3:23). We forgive because we ourselves have been forgiven. 2. As you reflect on Eph. 4:31-32, what gets in the way for you - rage, anger, harsh words, slander, evil behavior? 3. Where is God calling you to be tenderhearted and kind? With whom do you need to be kind and tenderhearted? 4. Reflect and consider how Christ has given you grace and mercy and how God wants you to extend those gifts to others. With whom do you need to practice forgiveness?
Monday, November 16	Racial Reconciliation	1. <i>1 John 4:20-21 - Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reflect on the command to love God and love others. The greatest biblical value is love, and love is defined as sharing with the other. Are you a liar, or are you seeking to love God by loving the other? 2. Reflect on how you are loving God and loving others. 3. Reflect on how you are loving God and <i>not</i> loving others. 4. What steps are you taking to be a bridge of love, thus relating with the God whose image abides in the other?
Monday, November 23	A call to the church to be a holy people	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>1 Cor. 6:11 - And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.</i> 2. <i>Rev. 21:27 - Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reflect on the work of redemption that God is doing in you. Are there areas that God is working in you now? 2. Reflect on the fact that in the midst of difficulties, the plan of the universe returning to holiness is going on. 3. Pray so that you will not be a stumbling block for yourselves and others in God's work of sanctification

<p>Monday, November 30</p> <p>(Zoom time together)</p>	<p>Our Time Together</p>	<p>1. <i>1 Cor. 14:26 - ...When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.</i></p>	<p>1. N.T. Wright wrote the book, <i>God and the Pandemic - A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and Its Aftermath</i>. In five chapters he invites the church to consider the reality of lament in the Old Testament, in Jesus, and in the New Testament. He tells us that we should lament because death has sneaked in everywhere; because lament is a part of love; and because in lamenting we share in the groaning of the Holy Spirit.</p> <p>2. Reflect on “Why Must We Lament?”</p>
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December

Day	Theme	Verses	Prayer
Monday, December 7	Identity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Zech. 2:8b - -for whoever touches you, touches the apple of his eye-</i> 2. <i>Romans 8:31-32 - ...If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-how will he not also, along with him graciously give us all things.</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have you ever thought what it means to poke God in his eyes? Who dares to do such an unimaginable act? 2. Have you reflected on the fact that what you are experiencing now is the beginning of God's bountifulness in the Son and the future is much more bounteous than the present? 3. In this Advent Season, the season of Emmanuel, praise the Lord for the fact that he is with us, in us, around you. Nothing can touch you without going through God!
Monday, December 14	Brokenness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>John 15:5 - "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.</i> 2. <i>2 Cor. 9:8 - And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reflect on the fact that this verse of Jesus recorded by John is one of the most disarming verses - we cannot do anything of eternal value without the presence of God. 2. Reflect on one of the favorite words of Paul - all - and see how it is observed/active in your life. 3. Pray that as you recognize your weakness, you will experience the fullness of God's grace and one of hymns says He giveth more grace.
Monday, December 21	Racial Reconciliation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Amos 9:7 - "Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?" declares the Lord. "Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor (Crete) and the Arameans from Kir?"</i> 2. <i>Acts 17:26 - From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Israelites considered the Philistines their mortal enemies. Yet God tells them that he brought the Israelites from Egypt and the Philistines from Crete and settled them so that they will be neighbors. 2. Paul mentioned to the Greeks who considered other peoples barbarians that they are of the same blood/lineage - created by God and now through Jesus Christ they are called to be redeemed. 3. Have you considered that God had something to do with the person who became your neighbor? Maybe your neighborhood is changing and instead of seeing only real estate estimates, can you see God's plan in placing someone to be loved by you? Maybe through this pandemic God is called the church to greater unity and bringing so many more in His Kingdom.

<p>Monday, December 28</p> <p>(Zoom time together</p>	<p>A call to the church to be a holy people</p>	<p>1. Malachi 3:16-17 - Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name. "On the day when I act," says the Lord Almighty, "they will be my treasured possession..."</p>	<p>1. Reflect - When we started this four month prayer Monday session, we had no idea who would join. However, God knew and he recorded our gathering.</p> <p>2. Reflect - God makes the future by what we do in the present. It is from our getting together in prayer and praise that God creates his precious possessions.</p> <p>3. Praise God for the certainty that whether we live or die we belong to the Lord. We are forever precious in His sight.</p>
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