
N O V E N A

A nine-day period of prayer

leading up to the vote on the Ordination of Women

at General Synod

(N o v e m b e r 1992)



*T*raditionally, a *novena* is a nine-day period of intercession—so what are we praying for during these nine days? There's no single answer to that question: we shall be praying, individually and corporately, for all kinds of things. But what those of us who have prepared this material have had in the forefront of our minds is the acknowledgement that the forthcoming debate and decision in the General Synod about women's ordination to the priesthood will mean enormous change—whatever the final decision. We shall be in a different place, needing vision and energy for the future. Change is never easy, even when it's what we've worked for and longed for. The time immediately before the change is the most difficult: full of mixed feelings of anticipation and anxiety. It's rather like jumping a fence without knowing where you're going to land.

We hope that this novena will be used as an opportunity for preparing to make that jump. In these nine days we shall be gathering ourselves together to cross the threshold of change all-of-a-piece, with integrity, strength and vision. We have designed the material to be used either by individuals or by groups. If you are on your own, the opening questions and comments could be used to stimulate your own reflections; if in a group, they might prompt a discussion.

The biblical references and other passages are intended to offer further food for thought/prayer/discussion. Each day has a different prayer that can be used, as well as the prayer (adapted) said at a priest's ordination; we intend here for it to be said by everyone.

The material is offered only as a resource: individuals and groups are encouraged to shape their own reflection time; we certainly advise a good deal of silence and perhaps the marking of the beginning and end of each session with the lighting and blowing out of a candle.

Ulla Monberg, Hannah Ward, Jennifer Wild



REMEMBERING
WHO WE ARE

- **As individuals, made by God, and made too by those who have influenced us; as baptised Christians, each with our own faith history; as women and men in the Church; as members of MOW.**
 - **On one level we are weak and insignificant, on another united and strong in willingness to work together for the good of the whole—he it Church or society.**
 - **PAUSE to stand up inside ourselves before God, creator of all good.**
-

Exodus 19.5; 1 Peter 2.9

The human heart can go to the lengths of God.
Dark and cold we may be, but this
Is no winter now. The frozen misery
Of centuries breaks, cracks, begins to move;
The thunder is the thunder of the floes,
The thaw, the flood, the upstart Spring.
Thank God our time is now when wrong
Comes up to face us everywhere,
Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride of soul we ever took.
Affairs are now soul size.
The enterprise
Is exploration into God.

Christopher Fry

Dear God
who made us
and empowers us
to live and to love and to learn
by all we do and suffer;
stay with us, go with us, come to meet us
and bless us
always and in every place
through Jesus our companion, Amen. *Jennifer Wild*

Holy Spirit of God, you have given us the will to undertake
all manner of things. give us also the strength to perform
them; that you may complete the work you have begun in us,
through Jesus Christ, Amen. *ASB (adapted)*

REMEMBERING
WHERE WE'VE COME
FROM

- Those who have gone before us: the prophets and apostles, teachers and evangelists; known and unknown members of the communion of saints; especially women who have stood up to claim their true role; those who have been willing to cry out "whether they will hear or whether they will forbear". Think of MOW founders, and earlier workers.
 - What qualities have they given us or inspired in us?
-

Ezekiel 3.4-11

This feeling of being loved and supported by the Universe in general and by certain recognizable spirits in particular is bliss. No other state is remotely like it. And perhaps that is what Jesus tried so hard to teach: that the transformation required of us is not simply to be "like" Christ, but to *be* Christ.

The spirit of our helpers incarnates in us, making us more ourselves by extending us far beyond. And to that spirit there is no "beginning" as we know it (although we might finally "know" a historical figure who at one time expressed it) and no end. Always a hello, from the concerned spiritual ancestor you may not even have known you had—but this could strike at any time. Never a good-bye.

Alice Walker

Holy God, our friend and fellow traveller, we give you thanks for all the events and people of our past who have influenced us in our search for your peace and justice and love. We stand in awe at the courage and bravery of women and men who have led the way and birthed the future. We look forward in hope and anticipation at our part in the unfolding of your promise.

St Matthew's, Auckland (adapted)

Holy Spirit of God, you have given us the will to undertake all manner of things, give us also the strength to perform them; that you may complete the work you have begun in us, through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Day 3

REMEMBERING WHERE WE ARE GOING

- The particular vision—a whole priesthood.
- What is the broader vision that fuels us to work to fulfil this one?

Galatians 3.28

To be of use
The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing, well done
Has a shape that satisfies clear and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine and oil,
Hopi vases that held corn are put in museums.
But you know that they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries out for water to carry
And a person for work that is real.

Marge Piercy

Eternal God who travelled before our ancestors as a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day; may we lift up our eyes to catch a glimpse of your promise. May your spirit move amongst us encouraging us always, and empowering us for creative and lifegiving actions.

St Matthews, Auckland

Holy Spirit of God, you have given us the will to undertake all manner of things, give us also the strength to perform them; that you may complete the work begun in us, through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Day 4

FACING OUR FEARS OF FAILURE AND REJECTION

- **Fear of being totally sidelined—carried off into captivity like Jeremiah.**
 - **Fear of being left at the darkest moment with no sense of companionship.**
 - **Whose failure do we fear?**
 - **By whom do we most fear rejection?**
 - **How do we meet and begin to deal with these fears?**
-

L u k e 18. 1-5

I sometimes have dreams that convey important messages to me. There is one I have had all my life, or at least as long as I can remember. In it, I walk into a room full of familiar people. It is a living room, and they are sitting on comfortable chairs and sofas, in a semi-circle round a fire. I am standing in a doorway—they have not seen me yet. Some of these people are members of my family, others are old friends. It is a comfortable, cosy scene, with friendly talk going on. But I am going to say something that will change everything for ever. I do not know if the change will be for better or for worse. I walk forward, and some of them look up at me, unsuspecting. I open my mouth, but no words come.

Tracy Hansen

Creator God, You know what we need without our words. Hear our prayers and hear also our silence. Give us strength. Grant us those things we cannot or dare not voice. We make all our prayers through our brother Jesus. Amen.

Oxford Women's Liturgy Liz Campbell

Holy Spirit of God, you have given us the will to undertake all manner of things, give us also the strength to perform them; that you may complete the work you have begun in us, through Jesus Christ, Amen.

FACING OUR FEARS
OF DESPAIR

- All around us the processes of good are painfully slow or (apparently) non-existent. Why should we fare any better: “I am no better than my fathers”—an ironic truth?
- How do we avoid sinking into despair and giving up?

Not even a beginning has been made in breaking down the peculiarly loathsome superstitions which bar the sanctuary to women. It is true that many people neither understand this prohibition nor are aware of its existence. It remains a fact that it crystallizes a prejudice indescribably insulting to womanhood, and one which, when a young women first hears of it, fills her with a very deep (and honourable) sense of resentment.

Maude Royden

God our Mother and Father, Living Water, River of Mercy, Source of Life, in whom we live and move and have our being, who quenches our thirst, and refreshes our weariness, bathes and washes and cleanses our wounds; be for us always a fountain of life and for all the world a river of hope springing up in the midst of the deserts of despair. Honour and blessing, glory and praise to You for ever.

From a MOW service

Holy Spirit of God, you have given us the will to undertake all manner of things, give us also the strength to perform them; that you may complete the work you have begun in us, through Jesus Christ, Amen.

FACING OUR FEARS
OF OUR POWER

- **Can any good come of this? Power as corrupting and power as the energy of the Holy Spirit. Learning how to despise the one and receive and carry forward the other.**
 - **The ordination of women is a powerful issue; we are powerful people. We have individual and collective power: what does it feel like to recognise this? What do we fear about our power? How do we meet and begin to deal with those fears?**
-

Jeremiah 14-10

It is nonsense to say that women have never had any power in the churches: they have had immense power, but power in the form of influence, which is irresponsible power. Nobody can call to account the wife or mother who gets her way with husband or son and is known to be the real director of his opinion and vote. This is the form of power to which women, especially very able women, have been confined by their exclusion from responsible power. Wherever democratic ideals prevail in society, influence of all kinds is discredited. Open attempts are made to prevent pressure on political leaders and on those who make appointments, issue honours and privileges and make executive decisions in every walk of life. That influence is discredited is not to say that it is abolished. Women have wielded influence with very great skill over the centuries and many still prefer it to any form of responsibility which brings them out into the open. But the choice between influence and responsibility is one that women have to make, and Churches have to make in relation to women. *Kathleen Bliss*

Spirit of energy and change,
in whose power Jesus was anointed
to be the hope of the nations;
be poured out also upon us
without reserve or distinction,
that we may have confidence and strength
to plant your justice on the earth,
through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Janet Morley

Holy Spirit of God, you have given us the will to undertake all manner of things, give us also the strength to perform them; that you may complete the work you have begun in us, through Jesus Christ, Amen.

GATHERING OUR
STRENGTH AS PEOPLE
OF FAITH

- **What does it mean to be a person of faith?**
- **We are those who have heard a call that gives energy for all eventualities, an energy that is recharged in action.**
- **What do we need to nourish our faith and sustain our energy?**

L u k e 8 . 4 2 - 4 8

The "flesh" is the concrete person. The flesh is we who are present here—people just beginning to live, the vigorous adolescent, the old man nearing the end. The flesh is marked by time. The flesh is the actual human situation, human beings in sin, human beings in painful situations, the people of a nation that seems to have got into a blind alley. The flesh is all of us who live incarnate. The flesh, this frail flesh that has beginning and end, that sickens and dies, that becomes miserable or happy—that is what the Word became. The Word became flesh.

Oscar Romero

Loving Word of God,
you have shown us the fullness of your glory
in taking human flesh.
Fill us, in our bodily life,
with your grace and truth;
that our pleasure may be boundless,
and our integrity complete,
in your name, Amen.

Janet Morley

Holy Spirit of God, you have given us the will to undertake all manner of things, give us also the strength to perform them; that you may complete the work you have begun in us, through Jesus Christ, Amen.

GATHERING OUR
STRENGTH AS PEOPLE
IN COMMUNITY

- **We are people who know that true humanity grows in interdependence and interrelationship—between people, between people and the environment. We are the world's networkers.**
 - **Specifically, what are our faith communities? What does a sense of community give us? How is “community” nourished?**
-

R o m a n s 1 6 . 1 - 5

I believe that our world is on the verge of self-destruction and death because the society as a whole has so deeply neglected that which is most human and most valuable and the most basic of all the works of love—the work of human communication, of caring and nurturance, of tending the personal bonds of community. This activity has been seen as women's work and discounted as too mundane and undramatic, too distracting from the serious business of world rule. Those who have been taught to imagine themselves as world builders have been too busy with master plans to see that love's work is the deepening and extension of human relations. This urgent work of love is subtle but powerful. Through acts of love—what Nelle Morton has called “hearing each other to speech”—we literally build up the power of personhood in one another. It is within the power of human love to build up dignity and self-respect in each other or to tear each other down. We are better at the latter than the former. However, literally through acts of love directed to us, we become self-respecting and other-regarding persons, and we cannot be one without the other. If we lack self-respect we also become the sorts of people who can neither see nor hear each other.

Beverly Wildung Harrison

Go-between God: inweave the fabric of our common life, that the many-coloured beauty of your love may find expression in all our exchanges.

Jennifer Wild

Holy Spirit of God, you have given us the will to undertake all manner of things, give us also the strength to perform them; that you may complete the work you have begun in us, through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Day 9

GATHERING OUR STRENGTH AS PEOPLE OF VISION

- **What is the vision that sustains and energizes us?**
- **Draw it or write it down and keep it**

When our vision is clear, we can see the first steps we need to take. We cannot necessarily see how the ultimate transformation will take place. No revolution takes place as predicted, for change on the grand scale is a mystery, impossible to completely know or control. To open ourselves to that mystery should not make us passive, but eager to move forward, curious to see how events unfold. We move on as far as we can see the road; and from that vantage point a new horizon is revealed.

Our journey will necessarily encompass both resistance and renewal, acts that oppose the destruction and acts of creation.

Starhawk

God who is with us
at our beginning and ending,
be with us now,
help us to find you
in the chaos of our lives,
let your light shine in our darkness
so that we may be guided
to walk in your ways, all the days of our life. *Ulla Monberg*

Holy Spirit of God, you have given us the will to undertake all manner of things, give us also the strength to perform them; that you may complete the work you have begun in us, through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Isaiah 35.1-7a

I believe in God
who created woman and man in
the image of God
who created the world
and entrusted the care of the earth
to both sexes.

I believe in the totality
of the redeemer,
in whom there is neither Greek nor Jew
neither slave nor free, neither man nor woman,
for we are all one in redemption,

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the feminine Spirit of God
who gave us life like a mother bird,
and bore us
and covers us
with her wings.

Rachel Wahlberg

Acknowledgements::

—Day 1 *A Sleep of Prisoners. Selected Plays*, Christopher Fry. OUP.

—Day 2 *Living by the Word. Selected Writings*, Alice Walker. The Women's Press. 1988.

Inclusive liturgy held at St Matthew's, Auckland, New Zealand.

—Day 3 *Collected Poems* Marge Piercy. *Inclusive liturgy* held at St Matthew's, Auckland, New Zealand.

—Day 4 *Seven for a secret: healing the wounds of sexual abuse in childhood* Tracey Hansen. Triangle. 1991.

Celebrating Women ed Janet Morley and Hannah Ward. MOW & WIT. 1986.

—Day 5 *The Hidden Tradition: Women's spiritual writings rediscovered* ed Lavinia Byrne. SPCK. 1991.

Prayer written for a MOW service in Westminster Abbey. 1991.

—Day 6 *The Hidden Tradition: Women's spiritual writings rediscovered* ed Lavinia Byrne. SPCK. 1991.

All Desires Known Janet Morley. MOW & WIT. 1988.

—Day 7 *God with Us* ed Janet Morley. Christian Aid.

All Desires Known Janet Morley. MOW & WIT. 1988.

—Day 8 *Making connections: Essays in feminist social ethics* ed Carol S Robb. Beacon Press, Boston, USA. 1985.

—Day 9 *Truth or Dare, Encounters with power, authority and mystery* Starhawk. Harper Collins, New York, USA. 1987.

—Back cover *Creed* Rachel Wahlberg.