

UN INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE
Local Rally: 20 September 2018

The UN Sustainable Goals came into effect in 2016 and will inform programming and funding choices of the UN through 2030. Goal #16 is about Peace. It says: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. In speaking about the International Day of Peace, Secretary General António Guterres observed that the UN Declaration of Human Rights does not say that "Peace is a right," but instead offers a vision of peace that "takes root when people are free from hunger, poverty and oppression and can thrive and prosper" or in short, puts Sustainable Goal #16 into full effect. Guterres concludes by saying: "I encourage you to speak up. For gender equality. For inclusive societies. For climate action. Do your part at school, at work, at home. Every step counts."

In my experience, the UN Declaration of Human Rights is one of the most inspiring texts I've ever read. Like the Gospels of Jesus, it turns power structures upside down:

People are entitled to food, water, shelter, basic medical care, education, safety, and liberty—just because they are people.

No nationality or legal status or monetary wealth outplays humanity.

Like the teaching of the Buddha, it understands there are many possible paths to meaning:

No particular system must be used, no educational content is mandated—

but people must test things out and settle on what works in their region or area.

Like the Amsterdam Declaration of 2002, it expects humans to take time to be reasonable and ethical:

The basis of its framework is that we are equal in dignity and rights

so we should not bow to bullies nor let our consciences atrophy.

We should listen to each other's stories and hearts and then reason together to find a way to meet the basic needs of all humanity.

What a sweeping and powerful vision! This is justice! And then there's the daily news.

I want the children in my church and neighborhood to grow up in a world guided by that vision
a world that is just where peace is acknowledged as a right.

I want the children in the city and the county to grow up in that world—not be a news story.

In fact, I want the children we've been withholding from their parents to grow up in that world
with their parents who have risked everything to find peace for them.

I want that world and so I'm here tonight—listening to other voices offering pieces of the vision,
singing with people committed in hope to justice,
and now praying for conversion of our hearts to the openness necessary to realize it.

Every step counts—including prayer.

Last year, I asked you to come close for this closing prayer and I ask that again.

If you are comfortable holding a neighbor's hand, please do so.

But if that's not comfortable for you, please simply hold your hands open to others.

Let us pray: Spirit of Life breathing in us,
be with us as we breathe together in silence for a few moments.

Help us to settle ourselves by breathing with You, breathing in peace and breathing out love.

Spirit of Life,

as big as the Energy stirring the waters of Creation and as close as our own breath:

Sometimes peace feels flimsy because we can't hold it any more than the air we breathe.

And our daily lives are disrupted by troubles and illness, news and violence, fear and brokenness.

We see the discord; we hear the reports of yet another shooting—today in Maryland;

we feel the pain; we know the rancor in the world

and peace seems both beyond reach and repair.

Too often we catch and hold our breath; frozen in time;

barely able to pray to hold on one more moment.

Tonight we have remembered together:

This is not how we want to be or live.

We join each other so that we might change that.

So we pray together:

Awaken in us Your natural rhythm obscured by all the "carrying-on" in society.

Help us shake off fear and begin breathing again,

breathing in peace and breathing out love

so that we are always breathing *with* You.

As we head home to rest the night, may we carry the goodwill and refreshment of this Rally with us

As well as the good company, the stories, and the music.

Then may we arise tomorrow ready to serve the causes of justice and peace.

May the lives we live tomorrow and the day after and the day after,

be the true benediction of our gathering.

Breathe peace into us that we may breathe peace into our homes, friendships, communities, and society.

In peace we pray: Amen!