

Resources for March 21:

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Origin of the day: On March 21, 1960, police in Sharpeville, South Africa, opened fire on a peaceful group of young students demonstrating against the apartheid laws, killing 69 people. In 1966, the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed that date to be the "International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination." In proclaiming the Day, the United Nations condemned "all policies and practices of apartheid, racial discrimination and segregation, including the practices of discrimination inherent in colonialism."

Canadian involvement: In Canada, the Day has been recognized annually since 1989, supported by the federal Department of Canadian Heritage. The government of Canada has released an Action Plan Against Racism and participated, along with Canadian churches, in the United Nations' World Conference Against Racism held in Durban, South Africa, in 2001. A follow-up world conference, Durban II, is being planned this year (2009) to review the actions governments put in place then. It is good for Canadians to remember this as we acknowledge the ongoing impact of Canada's heritage of colonialism.

Invitation: We invite Canadian churches everywhere to mark March 21 by making use of (a) the following prayer and hymn on one of the Sundays close to March 21, this year, and (b) the theological principles for engaging in anti-racism work in your own community and ministry context. The prayer is especially appropriate as 2009 has been designated "Year of Indigenous Peoples" by the United Nations.

A Four Directions Prayer of the People

Leader *There are gifts from each of the peoples in the four directions of the world. The winds of the different directions remind us of these gifts. We invite participants to stand and face the four directions, honouring the wholeness of humanity and God's creation.*

Leader Let us turn now to the **East**. We give thanks for the peoples of the East. This direction symbolizes new life on the earth and reminds us of our connectedness to each other and to creation. The sun rises in the east and each day is a gift. Life itself is a gift.

All **Come Holy Spirit, come.**

Leader And we offer our prayers for God's church: May God open our eyes each morning to the gift of God's reconciliation with us through Jesus, and the call to be ministers of reconciliation. We pray for our leaders and for renewal for all who nurture the church in Christ's ministry of healing and transforming the world.

Leader We turn to face **South**. We give thanks for the peoples of the South. The South represents warmth and growth. Give us your strength and courage to be open to new learning and to grow in our witness and care for the world, we pray.

All **Come Holy Spirit, come.**

Leader And we offer our prayers for God's world, praying especially for those who suffer from the violence of racism, poverty and war; and from the legacies of colonialism and slavery. May God's strength be with all who suffer and with all who work for justice, peace and the healing of relationships amongst peoples.

Leader We turn to face **West**. We give thanks for the peoples of the West. The West represents the gift of rest, the passing of time and of those who have gone before. Give us the wisdom and grace to use your gifts of time and leisure well; give comfort to those who mourn, and rest to those who have passed into your care, we pray.

All **Come Holy Spirit, come.**

Leader *And we offer our prayers for all in need: May God's peace and healing presence be with all who suffer and those who are weary and in need of rest.*

Leader We turn to face **North**. We give thanks for the peoples of the North. A gift of this direction is clarity of vision and a sense of the strength we need to live each day. Help us to see more clearly your role for us, especially in the healing and care of Mother Earth, we pray.

All **Come Holy Spirit, come.**

Leader *And we offer our prayers for the wisdom of discernment: May God open our hearts to the grace of God's holy presence with us and around us, that we might truly behold the earth and each other as beloved by God.*

Leader We turn to complete the circle and to look: to God who cleanses our Earth with snow, wind, fire and rain; to Jesus Christ who fills us with the wideness of mercy and lovingly embraces us all, And to the Holy Spirit who inspires us.

All **Amen.**

Hymn: Give heed to this day's urgent call

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1. In Sharpeville streets this day in March apartheid's evils to defy, young blood was shed, young lives were lost a shame the world cannot deny.
2. O God of justice bid us cry "No more shall be such sacrifice: no more shall humans thus oppress in this our land or anywhere."
3. Rise up then sisters, brothers, all give heed to this day's urgent call to end all racial injustice, to march on in the light of God.

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The Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network (CEARN) is under the umbrella of the Canadian Council of Churches. The network is an expression of Canadian churches working together to support anti-racism programs and educators who are working in member churches, sharing resources and learning, and supporting long-term change in Canadian churches and church organizations. For more information about CEARN or additional downloadable resources on anti-racism for congregational use, visit www.ccc-ccc.ca/english/justice/racism.