

Preparation Notes

The following symbols can be used on the altar space for the worship service:

- **Colourful African Fabric**
The vibrant textiles embody the rich tapestry of Nigerian cultures, each pattern and colour telling a story of heritage and identity. They represent the resilience and creativity of Nigerian people, who weave beauty and meaning into everyday life. Like these interwoven threads, we are reminded of how our diverse stories come together in the fabric of our shared humanity and faith.
- **Green and White Colours**
The green and white of Nigeria's flag symbolise unity in diversity and hope for the future. Green represents the lush land and agricultural wealth, while white signifies peace and unity. These colours remind us of our call to be stewards of God's creation and peacemakers in our communities, working together for a future where all can flourish.
- **Mourning Cloth**
Mourning cloths vary in colour and design from region to region. In the service we suggest a piece of black cloth which represents the burden of marginalisation that is described in the story of Beatrice, a Nigerian widow.
- **Backpack or Schoolbooks**
A backpack or stack of schoolbooks represent the burden of religious persecution that some children face, particularly described in the story of Jato, a mother in northern Nigeria.
- **Grains of Rice**
The grains of rice symbolise the interconnected burdens of poverty and despair, highlighting the relationship between economic hardship and mental health struggles, as described in the story of Blessing, a woman living in Lagos.
- **Rocks or Stones**
The rocks or stones represent the heavy burdens people carry, symbolising struggles like poverty, oppression and injustice. They also remind us of Nigeria's rich mineral resources that have been both a blessing and a challenge. As Christ promised to lighten our loads, these rocks call us to consider how we can transform burdens into opportunities for growth and positive change.
- **Cooking Oil in a Glass Jar or Bottle**
The oil symbolises Nigeria's complex history with crude oil, reflecting both potential for prosperity and the weight of global exploitation. It represents the challenging

balance between economic development and environmental stewardship, reminding us to pray for global equity and for innovative solutions that allow all nations to thrive sustainably.

- **Candles**
The candles symbolise hope in the face of despair, and the light at the end of the tunnel that many Nigerians hold onto in difficult times.

- **Calabash Bowl**
The wooden or gourd calabash bowl is associated with women farmers in Nigeria who often use it to gather and sell crops. It symbolises how God provides sustenance, nourishment and respite amidst the struggles of life. It can be filled with fruits and vegetables common to Nigeria, such as mango, pineapple, banana, citrus, onion, tomato, pepper, carrot, plantain.

Before the Service

- Cover a table or altar at the front of the worship space with fabric: green and white symbolising Nigeria's flag, black as a mourning cloth and a colourful and patterned fabric to represent the diversity of Nigerian culture.
- On top of the fabric place a glass bowl filled with rice, a glass jar of cooking oil, space for small stones and a wooden bowl filled with fruit and vegetables common to Nigeria.
- Place a Bible on the altar/table opened at Matthew 11:28.
- Place an unlit candle either side of the Bible. These will be lit at the beginning of the service.
- Everyone apart from the Leaders should be seated ready for the worship service to begin.
- At the beginning of the service Leaders 1, 2 and 3 process to the front of the worship space as Give Him Thanks is played. Leader 1 lights the two candles, Leader 2 places stones on the table/altar and Leader 3 brings up a backpack or schoolbooks. They then take their position for the service to begin.
- The service proceeds unannounced, with congregational responses given in bold.
- Please invite the congregation to remain seated or stand as they are able for the hymns as is customary in your churches.
- If there is no offering taken during the service, please ensure that you have receptacles for it at the exits. You may also wish to remind those present that they can donate via text, through the website or through the QR code on page 33. Please don't forget to mention Gift Aid.

Hymn Tune Sources

Give Him Thanks (Keleya)

Traditional Igbo Song
English paraphrase © 2025, Chisom R. Chukwumerije. Used with permission.
Music sheet provided.

Irregular

All Are Welcome

Mary Haugen
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Ancient and Modern 365, Hymns Old and New 432 (Rev. and Enl.), Singing the Faith 409

Irregular

Come Unto Me

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Tune: Calon Lân – John Hughes. Public domain.
Available online and music sheet provided.

8.7.8.7. D

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

Joseph Medlicott Scriven
Public domain.
Tune: Converse – Charles C. Converse. Public domain.
Common Praise 532, Complete Mission Praise 746, Singing the Faith 531

8.7.8.7. D

In Christ Alone

Keith Getty and Stuart Townend
© 2001 Thankyou Music (Adm. by CapitaolCMGPublishing.com excl. UK & Europe, adm. At IntegrityRights.com) All Rights reserved. Used by permission.
Ancient and Modern 678, Hymns Old and New (Rev. and Enl.) 352, Singing the Faith 351

8.8.8.8. D

God of the Poor

Graham Kendrick
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Ancient and Modern 557, Hymns Old and New (Rev. and Enl.) 67, Complete Mission Praise 806, Singing the Faith 693

Irregular

The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, is Ended

John Ellerton
Public domain.
Tune: St Clement – Rev Clement C. Scholefield. Public domain.
Ancient and Modern 24, Hymns Old and New (Rev. and Enl.) 704, Common Praise 22, Complete Mission Praise 641, Singing the Faith 147

9.8.9.8

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The sun that bids us rest is waking
our friends beneath the western sky,
and hour by hour fresh lips are making
thy wondrous doings heard on high.

So be it, Lord; thy throne shall never,
like earth's proud empires, pass away;
thy kingdom stands and grows for ever
till all thy creatures own thy sway.

BENEDICTION

Leader 2: And now, with you God, we look towards the future, trusting in your presence through the changing days. We pray that, as we love and serve our neighbours, the earth will ring with faith's increasing praise.

All Leaders, the four women, Narrator, Reader:
May we go forth with the strength of Christ.

All: We go with faith, hope and love, to be your light in the world.
Amen.

CALL TO ACTION

- Leader 3:** Let us affirm our commitment to be Christ's hands and feet in a world longing for hope and rest.
Where do we find our hope in a burdened world?
- All:** **In Christ, who bears all our burdens.**
- Leader 3:** How do we respond to overwhelming situations?
- All:** **We remain resilient, believing that the storm will pass.**
- Leader 3:** Where do we place our trust in uncertain times?
- All:** **In God, the Giver of life and Sustainer of all.**
- Leader 3:** What should we do when those around us are weary and heavy-laden?
- All:** **Bear one another's burdens, as Christ bears ours.**
- Leader 3:** As we go forth, what is our call to action?
- All:** **To live out our informed prayers through prayerful action.**

CLOSING SONG: *The Day Thou Gavest*

The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended,
the darkness falls at thy behest;
to thee our morning hymns ascended,
thy praise shall sanctify our rest.

We thank thee that thy Church unsleeping,
while earth rolls onward into light,
through all the world her watch is keeping
and rests not now by day or night.

As o'er each continent and island
the dawn leads on another day,
the voice of prayer is never silent,
nor dies the strain of praise away.

Background information on Nigeria

Land, Climate and Natural Resources

Nigeria is located on the west coast of Africa, boasting a diverse geography that spans over 900,000 km² of land and over 850 km of coastline. The country's climate ranges from equatorial in the south to arid in the north, with a tropical climate in the central regions. Nigeria experiences two major seasons, dry and rainy, which contribute to its rich agricultural potential.

The nation's landscape is abundant, offering ample space for agricultural, industrial and commercial activities. Nigeria's natural resources are vast and varied, including oil, natural gas and a wealth of solid minerals. These resources have played a significant role in shaping the country's economy and development.

Ethnic Groups, Foods and Occupations

Nigeria's population of over 200 million makes it the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous in the world. This demographic tapestry is woven from over 250 ethnic groups, each contributing unique cultural threads to the nation's identity.

The three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria are the Hausa - Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. The Hausa - Fulani predominantly reside in the northern region, the Yoruba are concentrated in the southwestern region and the Igbo occupy the southeastern part of Nigeria. Beyond these major ethnic groups, Nigeria is a mosaic of various other ethnic communities spread across different regions. These include the Ijaw, Tiv, Kanuri, Nupe, Itsekiri, Efik and many more, each with its own distinct cultural practices, languages and social structures.

This diversity is reflected in Nigeria's linguistic landscape, which boasts over 500 indigenous languages, while English serves as the official language, bridging communication across the nation. Nigeria's diverse geography and regional variations have influenced the cultivation

and consumption of different staple foods across the country. In the northern regions of Nigeria, particularly the Sahel savanna, millet and sorghum are widely cultivated and serve as primary staple crops. In the southeastern part of Nigeria, cassava and yams are the primary staple foods. In the Niger Delta region, where agriculture and fishing are prominent, seafood plays a significant role in the local cuisine. The consumption of these staple foods not only sustains the Nigerian population but also reflects the cultural diversity and culinary traditions across different regions of the country.

Traditionally, Nigerians have been known as skilled agriculturists and traders, with these occupations forming the backbone of many communities. The country's agricultural practices vary by region, influenced by local climates and traditions.

Economy

Nigeria is the largest economy in Africa, with a gross domestic product (GDP) of nearly 450 billion US dollars. The nation's economic pulse is driven by a diverse range of sectors, with oil and gas playing a significant role, accounting for about 10% of its GDP. However, Nigeria's economy is not solely reliant on oil; the agricultural sector is a major source of employment, contributing about 20% to the GDP.

The service sector including telecommunications, financial services and trade is rapidly growing and is expected to significantly contribute to Nigeria's economic future. The country possesses significant natural resources and a large, growing population. Despite these strengths, the country faces economic challenges, including high unemployment rates and infrastructure deficits in transport and power supply.

Ancient and Colonial History

Nigeria's history has been shaped by ancient civilisations, diverse migrations

and colonial influences. Long before the country's modern boundaries

were drawn, the region was home to sophisticated societies that left indelible marks on Nigeria's cultural landscape.

One of the earliest known civilisations in the area was the Nok culture, which flourished between 1000 BC and 500 AD. The Nok people, renowned for their terracotta sculptures, laid the foundation for iron smelting in West Africa. Their legacy can still be seen in the artistic traditions of modern Nigeria.

In the southwest, the Ife civilisation emerged around the eleventh century. Known for its naturalistic bronze and terracotta sculptures, Ife became a major centre of politics, spirituality and artistry. The Yoruba people, descendants of the Ife, established several city-states, the most prominent being the Oyo Empire, which at its peak controlled a vast territory.

The north saw the rise of powerful Islamic empires. The Kanem-Bornu Empire, dating back to the ninth century, became a centre of Islamic learning and commerce. The Hausa city-states and, later, the Sokoto Caliphate further shaped the region's political and cultural landscape. In the southeast, the Igbo people developed a unique, decentralised system of governance. Their society, characterised by village democracies, stood in contrast to the more hierarchical structures of their neighbours.

European colonisation further influenced the settlement patterns in Nigeria, as colonial powers established their presence and administered different regions.

The transatlantic slave trade significantly impacted Nigeria's population composition. Millions of individuals from various ethnic groups were forcibly taken from Nigeria and transported to different parts of the Americas, resulting in the African diaspora. The return of some descendants of these slaves, commonly known as Afro-Brazilians, Afro-Cubans and Afro-Trinidadians, among others, has

contributed to the cultural diversity in Nigeria.

The pivotal year of 1914 saw the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by British Colonial Administrator Lord Frederick Lugard, creating the entity known as Nigeria. This artificial creation brought together diverse peoples with distinct histories, cultures and political systems under a single administration, setting the stage for the complex dynamics of modern Nigeria.

Political Activism and Independence

Prior to independence, Nigeria experienced a complex history of regionalism, colonial administration and ethnic tensions. The country was divided into three major regions: Northern, Western and Eastern, each with its own distinctive political, economic and cultural characteristics.

Nigeria's political landscape has evolved significantly since gaining its independence from British colonial rule on 1st October 1960. The road to independence was paved by nationalist movements and political activism led by prominent figures such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo and Ahmadu Bello.

The first President of Nigeria was Nnamdi Azikiwe, who assumed office on 1 October 1963, following the country's transition to a republican constitution. Azikiwe was a key figure in the struggle for independence and was associated with the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), a political party that championed the interests of the Nigerian people.

Birth of a Nation

On 1 October 1960, after a three-year transition period, the country emerged from British colonial rule. This period was marked by hope and optimism for the newly sovereign nation. Key figures including Nnamdi Azikiwe, who became the first President in 1963, led the country into this new era. The national anthem, 'Nigeria, we hail thee,' echoed the spirit

POST-OFFERTORY SONG: *God of the Poor*

Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,
Lord, in your suff'ring world this is our prayer.
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,
Sunrise to sunset your kingdom increase!

Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,
Work for all people, trade for their skills,
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,
Voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak.

God of the poor, friend of the weak,

Give us compassion we pray:

Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain;

Come, change our love from a spark to a flame.

Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,
Cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share,

Peace to the killing-fields, scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness, his cross for the pain.

Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams
plundered and poisoned, our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed,
Make us content with the things that we need

God of the poor, friend of the weak,

Give us compassion we pray:

Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain;

Come, change our love from a spark to a flame.

Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame
Until your justice burns brightly again,
Until the nations learn of your ways,
Seek your salvation and bring you their praise

God of the poor, friend of the weak,

Give us compassion we pray:

Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain;

Come, change our love from a spark to a flame.

Leader 3: Holy Spirit, be our Comforter in times of distress. Grant us the faith to keep moving forward even when the path seems impossible. When we cannot see a way forward, be our guide.

All: Help us to be a light to others, sharing hope and extending a helping hand where we can. We trust in your promise that you will never leave us or forsake us. Amen.

Chiomra, Beatrice, Jato and Blessing together:

This is our testimony: that even in our struggles, we see evidence of God's faithfulness. We may be burdened, but we are not broken. We continue to work, to hope, to pray for the Nigeria we know is possible.

All: This is our testimony: that even in our struggles, we see evidence of God's faithfulness. We may be burdened, but we are not broken. We continue to work, to hope, to pray for the world we know is possible.

OFFERING

Leader 1: Offering time is a blessed time! In Nigerian churches it's customary for people to dance their offerings forward, expressing joy in giving and celebrating God's provision. This act of dancing is a reminder that giving is not a burden but a joyful response to God's grace. As we give today, let us bring our offerings with that same spirit of joy and thanksgiving.

Your generous gifts will support the ministry of World Day of Prayer and help address some of the burdens we've prayed about today. Whether you dance, walk or remain seated as you give, let your offering be a symbol of your commitment to lightening the loads of others. May our gifts, like our prayers, be a tangible expression of God's love in the world.

During the offering, play Nigerian music or Come Unto Us.

of unity and pride in the fledgling nation. The 1970s brought a summer of economic boom, primarily driven by the oil sector. This period saw rapid development in infrastructure and a burgeoning middle class. Culturally, Nigeria experienced a renaissance, with the rise of Afrobeat pioneered by Fela Kuti, and the emergence of globally recognised literature from authors including Chinua Achebe. A new national anthem, 'Arise, O compatriots,' adopted in 1978, reflected the nation's growing confidence and call to service.

Overcoming Adversity

The following decades brought challenges. Nigeria grappled with political instability, including periods of military rule. The Biafran War (1967-1970) left deep scars on the national psyche. Economic challenges emerged with fluctuating oil prices and the need for diversification. Social issues like ethnic tensions, corruption and inequality came to the forefront. However, this period also saw the rise of civil society movements and a growing call for democratic governance.

The country returned to democratic rule in 1999, facing the challenge of rebuilding institutions and fostering national unity. Despite obstacles such as the Boko Haram insurgency and economic recessions, Nigeria showed remarkable resilience. This period saw significant strides in areas like shipping, telecommunications, technology start-ups and entertainment with the rise of the Nollywood film industry.

Nigeria Today

Today, Nigeria stands in a cycle of continuous renewal and hope. The country faces ongoing challenges such as climate change, economic diversification and social inequality. However, it also boasts a young, dynamic population driving innovation in technology, arts and business. The revival of the original national anthem in 2024 symbolised a

reconnection with the foundational values of unity in diversity.

As Nigeria navigates its present challenges, it draws strength from its rich history, diverse cultures and the indomitable spirit of its people. The nation continues to evolve, striving to fulfill its potential as a leader in Africa and on the global stage. Through each season of its journey, Nigeria has demonstrated an enduring capacity for renewal, adapting to new realities while holding onto the dream of a united, prosperous and peaceful nation.

National Anthems

Nigeria's national anthems serve as powerful symbols of the country's evolving identity and aspirations. Since independence, the nation has had two anthems, each reflecting the spirit of its time and the country's changing self-perception.

First National Anthem

1960-1978, reinstated in 2024:

*Nigeria, we hail thee,
Our own dear native land,
Though tribe and tongue may differ,
In brotherhood we stand,
Nigerians all, and proud to serve
Our sovereign Motherland.*

*Our flag shall be a symbol
That truth and justice reign,
In peace or battle honoured,
And this we count as gain,
To hand on to our children
A banner without stain.*

*O God of all creation,
Grant this our one request,
Help us to build a nation
Where no man is oppressed,
And so with peace and plenty
Nigeria may be blessed.*

This anthem, used from 1960 to 1978, emphasises unity in diversity, pride in the

nation and a prayer for a just and peaceful Nigeria. Its lyrics highlight the country's commitment to 'brotherhood' despite differences in 'tribe and tongue'.

Second National Anthem 1978 – 2023

*Arise, O compatriots,
Nigeria's call obey,
To serve our fatherland
With love and strength and faith.
The labour of our heroes' past
Shall never be in vain,
To serve with heart and might
One nation bound in freedom, peace and unity.*

*O God of creation,
Direct our noble cause
Guide our leaders right
Help our youth the truth to know
In love and honesty to grow
And living just and true
Great lofty heights attain
To build a nation where peace and justice
shall reign.*

The second anthem calls Nigerians to service, patriotism and nation-building, highlighting the sacrifices of past heroes and the aspiration for a country guided by truth and justice.

In 2024, under the leadership of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Nigeria made the decision to revert to the first anthem. Both anthems continue to play crucial roles in Nigerian national life, sung in schools, at official functions and during national celebrations. They serve as daily reminders of the country's history, diversity and shared goals, aiming to foster a sense of unity and purpose among Nigerians, despite the challenges of nation-building in a complex, multicultural society.

The National Pledge

Composed in 1976 by Professor Felicia Adebola Adeboyin, a respected Nigerian academic and linguist, the National

Pledge reflects Nigeria's post-civil war aspirations for unity and patriotism.

The pledge reads:

*I pledge to Nigeria my country,
To be faithful, loyal and honest,
To serve Nigeria with all my strength,
To defend her unity,
And uphold her honour and glory,
So help me God.*

Recited daily in schools and at national ceremonies, this pledge serves as a unifying force, providing common values that transcend ethnic, religious and regional differences. Its enduring relevance speaks to its success in capturing fundamental national aspirations and fostering a shared sense of commitment to Nigeria's welfare.

Climate Change

Nigeria faces significant environmental challenges due to climate change. Rising temperatures and erratic rainfall patterns affect agriculture and water resources, while rising sea levels threaten coastal communities. In the north, advancing desertification leads to loss of arable land and increased competition for resources.

In response, Nigeria has developed comprehensive strategies, including ratifying the Paris Agreement in 2017 and implementing a National Climate Change Policy. The country focuses on renewable energy development and participates in the Great Green Wall project to combat desertification. Through these initiatives and climate-resilient agricultural practices, Nigeria works to protect its environment and ensure food security for future generations.

Global Markets

Nigeria, while maintaining Africa's largest economy, faces complex economic challenges. Though oil exports have traditionally driven growth, this dependence has created vulnerability

Others turn to crime out of desperation, including kidnapping, banditry or prostitution. Poverty affects mental health, and poor mental health makes it hard to escape poverty. It's a vicious cycle.

Blessing:

I've seen Nigeria change over the years but not in the way we all hoped. We dreamed of progress, of a better life for our children, but instead we have watched our nation slide deeper into poverty and despair. The government seems focused on itself, not on us. We're a nation rich in resources but poor in leadership and hope.

Every day, I see the toll this takes on our minds and our spirits. It's like we're all trapped in a cycle of disappointment. We've been let down so many times that, even when good things come our way, we're afraid to believe in them. That's Nigeria now – we've stopped believing that things can get better.

But even in the midst of this despair, I see glimmers of light. I think of my neighbour, Grace. She lost her job and her husband the same year. She had every reason to give up, but instead, she started a small soap-making business. It's not much, but it keeps food on her table and her children in school.

Grace often tells me, 'Blessing, we are not just coping, we are living by faith.' Her words remind me that the Bible says that those who are cast down will be lifted up. (Job 22:29) So, we keep moving, keep believing that one day the storm will pass.

PRAYERS

Leader 1: God of the poor, we cry out to you to help families who are struggling to meet their basic needs. We give thanks and praise for the persistence of Blessing and Grace and all those who keep moving forward despite even the most difficult circumstances.

All: **God, Giver of Life, continue to strengthen and comfort all who are weary from the burdens of life and direct the hearts of those who can help.**

Leader 1: Loving Jesus, compassionate healer, we lift up those who live with poor mental health, often made worse by poverty, stress and daily life. Walk with them and show them that their lives have immeasurable value. Help us to create societies that respect and care for all.

All: **Loving Jesus, you called us to come with all the burdens that weigh us down. Here we are! Help us to cast our cares on you and lighten these loads.**

All: *Loving Jesus, renew our minds and hearts, guiding us in righteousness, that we may honour you and bless others. We trust in your power to transform.*

Leader 3: Holy Spirit, we cry out for those displaced by violence, forced to flee their homes and become refugees in unfamiliar lands. In the face of persecution, let us not simply await rescue; instead encourage us to actively live out our faith, knowing that each act of love and forgiveness is a testament to Christ's enduring power in our lives.

All: *Holy Spirit, shelter under your wings all who are displaced, providing for their needs and guiding them toward safety and new beginnings. Amen.*

SONG: *In Christ Alone*

In Christ alone, my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.
No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from his hand:
Till he returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

BLESSING'S STORY: The Burdens of Poverty and Despair

Narrator: Let me introduce you to Blessing, who has lived in Lagos all her life. In Nigeria, a select few earn fortunes, but for most people their salaries aren't enough to live on. A bag of rice, a staple food, is now a luxury for many families. Young people, bright and full of potential, can't find work. Some fall into despair and too many take their own lives.

to global price fluctuations. The nation actively works to diversify its economy through agriculture, services and manufacturing, while addressing significant infrastructure deficits in transportation and power supply.

Despite economic potential, widespread poverty and youth unemployment remain pressing concerns. These challenges call for continued focus on sustainable development and job creation to ensure Nigeria's economic growth benefits all its citizens.

Religion

Religion plays a significant role in shaping the cultural and social fabric of Nigeria. The country is known for its religious diversity, with various religions coexisting and influencing the lives of its people. The major religions in Nigeria include Christianity, Islam, traditional African religions and a small percentage of adherents to other faiths.

Christianity, introduced through European missionaries during the colonial era, has grown to become a major religious influence across Nigeria. The impact of Christianity extends beyond spiritual practices, playing a vital role in the development of education and healthcare infrastructure through missionary schools and hospitals.

Christian values have also influenced societal norms, family structures and moral frameworks in many Nigerian communities. The Christian community in Nigeria has a diverse range of practices and expressions, incorporating elements of indigenous culture and traditions.

For example, in some regions, forms of Christianity have emerged which blend Christian beliefs with traditional African religious practices.

Islam, particularly prevalent in the northern regions of Nigeria, was introduced through trade and cultural interactions with Arab and North African merchants.

In addition to these major religions,

Nigeria is home to a small but significant number of adherents to other faiths. These include followers of African traditional religions specific to certain ethnic groups, such as the Yoruba religion (Ifa), the Igbo religion (Odinani) and the Efik religion (Abasi Ibom).

Furthermore, Nigeria is also home to small communities of other traditions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Judaism. While numerically smaller, these religious communities contribute to the religious diversity of Nigeria. They are primarily composed of expatriates, foreign residents or Nigerians who have embraced these faiths through conversion or marriage.

Religious coexistence and tolerance aim to be essential aspects of Nigerian society, as the country strives to maintain peace and harmony among its diverse population. Interfaith dialogue, religious organisations and government initiatives have been instrumental in fostering understanding, promoting religious tolerance and mitigating religious conflicts.

Education

Education plays a vital role in shaping Nigeria's social landscape. Nigeria has made progress in increasing access to education, with efforts focussed on achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of providing inclusive and equitable education for all. The World Population Review recorded an adult literacy rate of 86% for women and over 90% for men.

The National Policy on Education (2013) states that from 2004, compulsory education has taken place from the age of six. After six years in primary school, pupils move on for another six years: three years of lower secondary and three of higher secondary education. However, challenges remain, particularly in remote and marginalised areas. In 2023 UNICEF recorded that in some areas just over 60% of children regularly attended primary

school and that classrooms had been destroyed or damaged through the action of dissident groups.

There are many national and international universities, often tied to Nigeria's different faiths and some vocational higher education institutions – for example for police and armed services.

Health

The Nigerian government has made efforts to improve healthcare infrastructure, expand access to healthcare services and address health challenges facing the population. Life expectancy is currently around 56 (World Health Organisation). The National Health Act of 2014 established a framework for universal health coverage and outlined the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in the healthcare system.

In Nigeria, several health issues require political attention and action. One of the primary concerns is the high burden of communicable diseases including malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. Another area of concern involves non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and cancer. Maternal and child health is another significant area where political commitment is crucial. Nigeria has one of the highest child mortality rates (over 4%) globally. Nigeria's 40 million women of childbearing age (between 15 and 49 years) suffer a disproportionately high level of health issues surrounding birth. While the country represents 2.4% of the world's population, it currently contributes 10% of global deaths for pregnant mothers.

Nigeria has made efforts to expand health insurance schemes to provide financial protection and improve access to healthcare services. Transparent and accountable governance systems can help curb corruption, ensure the efficient use of healthcare resources and foster public trust in the healthcare system.

Cultural Expression

Nigeria's creative scene has been shaped by the traditions of over 250 ethnic groups across the country. This diversity is reflected in Nigeria's music, dance, visual art and theatre, which have evolved over centuries and continue to influence global culture today.

In music, each group contributes unique styles and instruments: the Yoruba are known for their talking drums, the Hausa and Fulani for the goje lute and the Igbo for the ekwe wooden slit drum. Other traditional instruments include flutes, xylophones and percussion instruments, all playing crucial roles in storytelling and cultural preservation. Contemporary Nigerian music evolved from 1920s palm-wine music and highlife, blending traditional and Western influences.

Dance in Nigeria is closely tied to music and often serves ritualistic or ceremonial purposes. Each ethnic group has its own traditional dances such as the Yoruba Bata dance, the Hausa Koroso or the Igbo Aladinma. These dances often tell stories, celebrate harvests or mark important life events.

Visual arts have a long and rich history in Nigeria. The country is renowned for its bronze and terracotta sculptures, particularly those from the ancient kingdom of Benin, dating back to the thirteenth century. The Nok culture produced some of Africa's oldest known terracotta sculptures. Nigerian visual arts also include vibrant textile traditions, such as Adire (indigo-dyed cloth) among the Yoruba, and elaborately decorated calabashes (gourds). In the twentieth century, artists such as Ben Enwonwu and Bruce Onobrakpaya gained international recognition for their paintings and prints that blended traditional African aesthetics with modern techniques.

Theatre and storytelling have always been integral to Nigerian culture. Traditional forms include elements of dance, music and drama.

a young girl, steadfast in her faith, refusing to deny Christ even in the face of captivity. Every time I look at Amina, I can't help thinking, 'What if it had been her?'

When we pray together each morning before she goes to school, I remind her of Jesus' words: 'In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.' (John 16:33) Our strength doesn't come from an expectation of an easy life. Instead, it's rooted in the knowledge that Christ walks with us through every hardship.

Leah's story reminds me of the cost of my faith. But it also shows me its power. In Damaturu, a small Christian community still gathers to pray for Leah's return. Their hope, their persistent faith, inspires me to keep believing, to keep loving, to keep living alongside all my neighbours – Muslim and Christian alike.

As I watch Amina leave for school each day, I pray not only for her safety but also for her heart. I pray that she, like Leah, will have the strength to stand firm in her faith. But I also pray that she will have the love to see the image of God in everyone she meets, regardless of their faith.

This is how we find rest in God – not by harbouring hatred or intolerance, but by letting Christ's love flow through us, even in the face of persecution. It's a daily choice, a daily surrender. But in making this choice, we find that our burdens truly do become light, and, in God, we find our rest.

PRAYERS

Leader 1: God of the persecuted and protector of the faithful, we come before you with heavy hearts and confess the sins that tear at the fabric of our society: the intolerance that breeds fear, the hatred that fuels violence and the indifference that allows injustice to persist. Comfort those who live with the fear of losing loved ones, and change the hearts of the perpetrators, guiding them toward reconciliation.

All: **God of Justice, we cry out against extremism which spreads fear and violence. Break every chain that binds us and separates us from our neighbours. Touch the hearts of all, showing them the value of human life and the path to peace.**

Leader 2: Loving Jesus, you too faced persecution. We lift up Leah Sharibu and all who suffer for their beliefs. Grant them strength and comfort in their darkest hours, inspiring us to stand strong in the face of adversity. Help us take up your yoke of love and forgiveness.

SONG: *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!
Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Are we weak and heavy laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge--
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield you;
you will find a solace there.

JATO'S STORY: The Burden of Religious Persecution

Narrator: Let me introduce you to Jato, a Christian mother living in northern Nigeria. In some parts of the country, Christians and Muslims live together like family, but in northern Nigeria they live under the shadow of religious persecution. Some Christians are killed simply for their faith and, beginning in 2009, Christians have been regularly kidnapped and killed by Boko Haram. In February 2018, they took 110 girls from a secondary school in Dapchi. After a month of federal negotiations, all were released except for Leah Sharibu who refused to convert.

Jato: *Every day when I send my 14-year-old daughter, Amina, to school, my heart tightens with worry. You see, Amina is the same age as Leah was when she was taken, just a few hours from here. Leah's story haunts me.*

In the mid-twentieth century, playwrights such as Wole Soyinka (who later won the Nobel Prize in Literature) and Ola Rotimi developed a distinctly Nigerian theatrical tradition that often addressed social and political issues.

Contemporary Nigerian arts continue to evolve, with artists across all mediums gaining international recognition. The film industry, popularly known as Nollywood, has become the second largest in the world in terms of annual film production.

Nigerian literature, from the works of Chinua Achebe to contemporary authors such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, has significantly impacted world literature.

Women in Nigeria

Women and girls in Nigeria face numerous challenges that stem from deeply rooted gender discrimination and inequality. Despite progress in some areas, cultural norms, traditional practices and societal expectations continue to hinder the full realisation of their rights and potential.

Gender discrimination affects education, employment and political representation. Girls often receive fewer educational opportunities than boys, leading to lower literacy rates and limited career prospects.

In the workplace, women face discrimination in hiring, promotion and pay, despite laws prohibiting such practices. As more women become primary breadwinners for their families, they bear the double burden of managing both household responsibilities and income generation without corresponding changes in societal attitudes.

Early marriage, particularly in rural and northern areas, forces girls as young as 12 or 13 into marriages that cut short their education and expose them to health risks. Marital violence and rape often go unreported due to cultural stigma and inadequate legal protections, while the absence of comprehensive domestic

violence legislation in some states compounds these issues.

Widows in Nigeria face particularly challenging circumstances. Many are subjected to cruel and degrading traditional practices upon their husbands' deaths, including drinking the water used to clean their husband's corpse to 'prove' their innocence. Property rights are frequently violated, with in-laws forcefully taking assets that rightfully belong to the widow and her children.

Some widows are even 'inherited' by their late husband's male relatives, a practice that disregards their autonomy and right to choose. During burial ceremonies, they may be forced to sleep on the floor, have their heads shaved or wear specific mourning clothes for extended periods.

Addressing these challenges requires an approach that includes legal reforms, education, economic empowerment and changing societal attitudes. Progress depends on both government action and grassroots initiatives, with men serving as active allies in the fight for gender equality. Only through comprehensive, sustained effort can Nigeria create a more equitable society for all its citizens.

Prominent Nigerian Women

Recognising the achievements of prominent Nigerian women acknowledges their invaluable contributions to society, both within Nigeria and globally. Their successes serve as powerful testimonies to women's potential, breaking down stereotypes and challenging traditional gender roles. By highlighting these accomplishments, we provide role models for younger generations and promote gender equality across all sectors.

Women have served in politics and governance, business and entrepreneurship, literature and art, science and technology, sport, social activism and philanthropy, faith and religion.

World Day of Prayer in Nigeria

The World Day of Prayer (WDP) movement in Nigeria stands as a powerful testament to the unity and strength of Nigerian women. Introduced in 1961, the movement has grown to encompass women from various Christian denominations across the country, fostering ecumenical cooperation and spiritual solidarity. Since its inception, WDP has provided a platform for addressing social, political, religious and economic issues affecting families and communities.

The World Day of Prayer movement in Nigeria was introduced by Lady Eudora Olayinka Akanu-Ibiam of the Presbyterian Church. It was initially embraced by member churches of the Christian Council of Nigeria, including Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist and others.

In 1962, the Interdenominational Christian Women (ICW) organisation was formed in Lagos, which later became known as the Interdenominational Christian Women Association (ICWA). This organisation played a crucial role in the early development of the WDP movement in Nigeria. The movement spread gradually across Nigeria, reaching different states and regions throughout the decades that followed.

The Writing Committee

In August 2017, at the WDPIC International Meeting in Brazil, WDP Nigeria was selected to be the Writing Committee for 2026, with the theme, *I will give you rest, come* (Matthew 11:28).

In May 2019, under the leadership of Mrs. Adejoke Backo (Mama Backo), a national committee for WDP Nigeria was formed. On 28 May 2019, representatives from various Christian denominations gathered to elect national officers, with Evang. Dame Florence Nnema Uche elected as the first National Chairperson. Shortly after this hopeful beginning, the world entered a period of lockdowns and restrictions due to the pandemic.

For nearly two years, WDP Nigeria's activities were severely limited, with celebrations held quietly and in small groups. However, as the pandemic restrictions eased, the movement began to regain momentum and grow stronger. As the time came to start the writing process, WDPIC provided crucial support through the Executive Director.

Since then, WDP Nigeria has continued to grow as an organisation by establishing zones across the country. The movement has gained significant ground, with celebrations now occurring at national, state and local church levels across Nigeria.

Nigeria as a Country

Nigeria's diverse ethnic, religious and cultural landscape creates both challenges and opportunities for social cohesion. The nation continues to work towards fostering unity among its diverse population while addressing critical needs in education, healthcare and infrastructure. Efforts to promote gender equality and increase women's participation across all sectors of society remain crucial to this evolution. The rapid growth of urban areas strains existing resources, while security concerns, particularly in the northeast, impact social stability and development.

Yet Nigeria demonstrates remarkable resilience. With Africa's largest youth population, abundant natural resources and vibrant growth in technology and entertainment sectors, the country shows great promise. Through continued focus on good governance, economic diversification and social inclusion - including women's empowerment - Nigeria moves steadily toward realising its potential as a more prosperous and unified nation.

solace in knowing Jesus as our Burden Bearer. I've seen young widows with small children serving tirelessly in the church, their faith unshaken by their circumstances.

One widow in our community started a programme to support other widows. She encouraged people to donate clothes, rice and money to help us. Her actions inspired me to do the same. Now, I use what little resources I have to support other widows, and together we're stronger.

Through it all, we remain loyal to our families and the memory of our husbands. While bereaved men often remarry quickly, we focus on raising our children and keeping our families together. It's not an easy path but, with faith and community, we find the strength to carry on. Our burden is heavy, but we are learning to lay it at Jesus' feet, finding rest in his promise.

PRAYERS

Leader 1: God of the marginalised, we know that you see us. You see the discrimination faced by so many: those who are overworked; those exploited in factories, fields and homes; and those who cannot find work to feed their families. Thank you, Gracious God, for the resilience and resourcefulness of all who remain faithful amidst difficult circumstances. Inspire us by their example and move us to build a better world.

All: **God of the marginalised, intervene for us all.**

Leader 2: Loving Jesus, you welcomed the oppressed and lifted up the downtrodden. Today we see injustice everywhere and many suffer under oppressive systems. Speak to the hearts of all leaders, that they may govern with fairness and compassion. Move the hearts of communities to change their attitudes and actions towards all who are marginalised.

All: **Loving Jesus, give us strength to keep trusting you, even when the burdens seem too heavy to bear.**

Leader 3: Holy Spirit, fill us anew. Let your power overflow in our communities. Use us to be a blessing to others. May we be inspired by those who use their own struggles to bless those around them. Thank you for hearing our cries and bearing our burdens.

All: **Holy Spirit, we trust in your unfailing love and your mighty power to transform. Amen.**

THEME SONG: *Come Unto Me*

Are you down and feeling lonely,
are you weary and oppressed,
you don't have to be discouraged,
Jesus says, 'Come unto me.'

*Come to me, all you weary,
And I will give you rest.*

*Come to me, all you burdened,
and I will give you rest.*

Tell your brother and your sister
that the Saviour is a friend.
He offers you his shoulder,
lean on him and you'll find rest.

*Come to me, all you weary,
And I will give you rest.*

*Come to me, all you burdened,
and I will give you rest.*

BEATRICE'S STORY: The Burden of Marginalisation

Narrator: Let me introduce you to Beatrice, who became a widow at the age of 28 when her husband was killed in communal violence. The struggles widows face in Nigeria are overwhelming, especially poverty, as they lose their main source of income and find it hard to obtain work as single mothers. Rather than supporting the young family, in-laws often treat them with suspicion and try to take away the property the husbands leave behind.

Beatrice: *The day I lost my husband, I lost more than just my partner. I lost my place in society. Suddenly, I was alone with three young children, facing a world that seemed to have turned its back on me. There were days I didn't know how I'd feed my children or pay their school fees.*

But in my darkest moments, I found strength in my faith and in the community of other widows. A support programme organised by my local church expected fifty widows to attend, but hundreds showed up. That day, I realised I was not alone in my struggles.

What has inspired me most is the resilience and faith of my fellow widows. Despite our hardships, many of us remain committed to Christ, finding

Bible Reflection

I will give you rest, come Mathew 11:28-30

INTENTION

In response to this year's theme 'I will give you rest, come' the 2025 writing committee reflected together from their experiences as Nigerian Christian women, saying:

'Trusting God, who bears our burdens, we become one body in Christ, united in prayer and yoked together in love through Jesus' message of fresh hope and rest'.

This Bible Reflection can be undertaken in a group and will also be beneficial as a personal quiet time.

NB: the writing committee have chosen to use the updated edition of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSVue) of the Bible for their references.

Before starting this Bible Reflection, encourage participants to read the stories of Beatrice, Jato and Blessing in the service booklet.

For the optional active responses, you will also need:

- a large stone or pebble for each participant
- a small backpack to initially contain all the pebbles
- access to a cross – portable or part of your church infrastructure
- a large lit votive candle
- a tealight for each participant; consider your own risk assessment for using real candles or opt for battery powered ones
- printed biblical affirmations

INTRODUCTION

'Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light'.
*Mathew 11:28-30*NRSVue

These words of Jesus come after a series of teachings and miracles in Galilee. Despite facing questions and doubts from various groups, Jesus steadfastly invites people to understand God's kingdom in a new way. His call to come and find rest is not just a momentary relief but an invitation to a new way of living in relationship with God.

The Nigerian Christian women describe feeling weighed down by shame or low self-esteem, marginalisation, religious persecution, poverty and the despair this brings.

Can we relate to one another's burdens simply because we are all women? Have you been made to feel 'less than' because of your gender, appearance, career choice or whether you have chosen to marry and have children?

The concept of a 'yoke' was common in Jewish teachings, often symbolising the weight of law or religious obligations. Jesus offers a different kind of yoke – one that brings rest. With Jesus as the senior partner in this 'yoked' union, sharing our burdens and holding us together, we are given strength and support.

In this scripture, Jesus also gifts us with a solution: a relief from the weight we carry. He says 'you will find rest for your souls', giving us a breath of fresh air and solace from the deepest struggles of our time. Our Nigerian sisters can find freedom from the burdens that crush them, their families and their wider communities and so can we.

As you prepare for this time of reflection take a moment to consider what the idea of 'rest' means to you in your current life situation.

Prayer

Loving God, as we begin this time of reflection, open our hearts and minds to your Word. Help us to hear your invitation to rest in a new way. Guide our understanding, discussions and actions that we might draw closer to you and find the rest our souls need. In Jesus' name, Amen.

FIND REST FOR EVERY BURDEN

Exploring burdens shared through the stories of our Nigerian sisters in the worship service, we will begin to share the weight of their suffering and experience transformation through the rest that God offers.

Shame or Insecurity

So many people carry the heavy burden of shame. Modern culture can judge harshly, telling us we are not good enough. Feelings of shame can weigh us down, making it hard to find the rest that we crave and that our souls long for.

The Bible reminds us that in the beginning, God looked at all of creation, including humanity, and called it 'very good' (Genesis 1:31).

Our worth comes from the love of our Creator. When we come to Jesus and take up his easy yoke, we can shed the shame that might have haunted us, freeing us to embrace our identity as children of God, unconditionally loved and cherished by him.

Optional Active Response: Pass the backpack around the group and take a stone from it. As you feel the weight of the stone, reflect on a moment in your own life when you felt shame or have not felt valued. When you are ready place the stone at the foot of the cross, and acknowledge Jesus' love for you, affirming that you are 'very good' and accepting his offer of rest.

Marginalisation

It can seem impossible to find true rest and freedom when being exploited and oppressed by unjust social, economic and political structures. Marginalised and oppressed people are robbed of their dignity, their ability to take action or chose how to act and of opportunities to flourish.

Scripture strongly emphasises the call to treat everyone with fairness, care for the vulnerable, advocate for justice and challenge oppressive systems in our communities. This might seem overwhelming, but by accepting the invitation to 'come and find rest' and then learn from Jesus, we join the collective work of building a fairer world where everyone can truly rest.

Reflect and Share:

1. What scripture especially comes to mind as you focus on challenging oppression?
2. Share experiences where you have

Things did begin to change. Teachers came alongside and helped me where I was failing. A light went on and it wasn't long before I caught up.

Do you know, I have used that prayer often in my life when I was struggling and shared it with others. How wonderful that even children can help bear one another's burdens and build each other's faith in Jesus.

PRAYERS

Leader 2: Compassionate God, we hear your invitation to come and find rest for our souls.

We often shy away from your call, knowing that we have added to people's burdens by our selfish words or actions. Whatever our age, hurtful words and selfish actions can undermine people's confidence and lead to insecurity, injustice and hatred.

We are sorry for not living your best way for us. Grant forgiveness when we go astray and bring healing to those we have hurt. As we draw closer to you, fill our hearts with love for you, our neighbours and ourselves.

All: **Thank you for your assurance of forgiveness. Help us to walk your way, giving hope and encouragement to others and bringing you glory.**

Leader 1: God of the insecure, open our ears to hear, our hearts to feel and our minds to understand. You are the one who invites us to come and find rest.

Loving Jesus, you walked this earth and know what it is to be a child. Be with all children who struggle today, at home, in school and in situations beyond their control.

Holy Spirit, enable us to provide safe and secure environments for children to grow and flourish. Bring healing for all our hurtful memories.

All: **Stir us to powerful, faithful prayer and unite us across continents in compassion and hope. Amen.**

Leader 3: The words of *Come Unto Me* were written especially for this World Day of Prayer service. Let us sing together and hear this call from the heart of God.

Leader 1: God will give you rest.

All: God will give us rest.

Leader 1: Take on the yoke that Jesus offers.

All: We receive his yoke.

Leader 1: Learn from the one who is gentle and humble in heart.

All: We are here to learn.

Leader 1: You will find rest for your souls.

All: Thanks be to God.

CHIOMA'S STORY: The burden of insecurity

Narrator: We have heard Jesus inviting us to come, to bring our burdens and to find rest for our souls. We open our hearts to listen to four stories from our Nigerian sisters. These testimonies reflect their experiences and mirror the struggles faced by many around the world. As one Nigerian proverb says, 'The pain of one is the pain of all'. As we hear these stories, let us remember that what affects each of these women also affects us. These stories show how God truly gives rest even in the most difficult situations. May the Holy Spirit speak through these testimonies, inspiring us to lift our voices in prayer with all who carry heavy burdens worldwide. We are one body in Christ. When one part suffers, we all suffer. But when one finds rest in Jesus, we can all rejoice!

Chioma: My name is Chioma. Looking back, my early school days were not a happy time. I had loved nursery but once I got to big school I began to fall behind. My teachers said I wasn't good at anything and made me repeat a year. I felt so ashamed, and some so-called friends were cruel in their taunting. I worried that I would have to leave school as I knew my father would not keep paying my school fees if I wasn't learning – girls' education wasn't worth it he said. I was so unhappy I didn't know what to do.

Then my friends reminded me of Jesus and how prayer could help. One taught me a prayer that went like this 'God, I am your child, I am smart, I can learn and grow. Amen.' I started to use that prayer, and I knew my friends were also praying for me.

engaged with people on the margins in your communities. Encourage and affirm one another.

Religious Persecution

The words of Jesus in Matthew 5:44 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' speak to the heavy burden carried by all who face persecution, whether for their faith, ethnicity or any other aspect of their identity. In a world that often marginalises and oppresses those who appear to be 'different', Jesus' teachings offer a radical call to respond with compassion rather than retaliation.

Jesus' attitude of love provides spiritual strength to those facing hostility and rejection. In the face of persecution, we can find rest in God, not by harbouring hatred or intolerance, but by letting Christ's love flow through us. It is not easy, but in making this choice, our burdens truly do become light and, in God, we find our rest.

Reflect and Share:

1. Spend a moment thinking about your own experiences of feeling persecuted.
2. How has Jesus' message to 'love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' inspired and empowered you when facing persecution?
3. How might you use that experience to inspire and empower others to have compassion for their enemies and oppressors?

Poverty and Despair

The Bible is full of God's provision and concern for the poor, offering hope against poverty and despair. Psalm 23's imagery of being led to 'green pastures' and 'still waters' suggests

that God desires abundant life for all. This hopeful vision of abundance and peace resonates with so many in our communities who struggle to make ends meet and find themselves overwhelmed by hopelessness. Maybe it resonates with you?

In Job 22:29 we receive the promise that those who are 'cast down' will be lifted up. In the face of daunting economic hardship, rather than simply coping we are invited to live by faith. We keep our eyes fixed on the truth that God will create new opportunities and make a way where there seems to be no way.

Though the journey may be tricky to navigate, our faith provides strength and vision to keep us hopeful and working towards a brighter future. We may be burdened but we need not be broken, for we serve a God who wants to fill our lives with abundance.

Reflect and Share:

1. With the knowledge of God's care for the poor and scripture's call to persevere in faith even in the face of economic hardship, how might we encourage one another to understand, engage with or even begin to tackle the root causes of poverty and despair within our communities?
2. Take some time to pray about this now.

Optional Active Response: Take a tea-light and, lighting it from the main candle if you have chosen that option, spend a moment rededicating your servant heart back to God.

Place your lit tea-light with the main candle and rest in the knowledge that you do not serve alone but are partnered with Jesus in this ministry.

Jesus Redefines Rest

The following passage shows how Jesus redefines rest: not as a list of rules, but as a gift of mercy that helps us thrive.

Jesus, being the 'Lord of the Sabbath', has the authority to invite us to see rest as something that meets our needs rather than just following strict religious rules.

This helps us understand that Jesus' 'easy yoke' means the rest he offers is freeing, not restricting.

One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him,

'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?' And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food, how he entered the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for

any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions?' Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath, so the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'
Mark 2:23-28

Reflect and Share:

1. How might Jesus' statement that 'the Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath' illustrate what he means by his yoke being easy and his burden being light?
2. What does this look or feel like for you?

During the Bible Reflection we have journeyed together, exploring and applying this year's theme scripture to our own experiences.

As you share the following prayer

with one another, visualise the Nigerian Christian women that you have come to know through this reflection praying these words with you:

Gracious God, who cares for our burdens, we come before your throne of grace, hearts full of thanksgiving even in our weariness.

You see your children carrying heavy loads: the burden of shame that makes us forget your proclamation of goodness, the oppression that crushes our families and communities, the persecution that tests our faith daily and the poverty that leads so many to despair.

Mighty God, you who created rest as a gift for all people, we praise you for your wisdom that leads us to peaceful paths. We rejoice that Jesus shows us true rest, not in heavy rules, but in justice, mercy and kindness.

Loving Father, give us the boldness to bring our burdens to you, the humility to learn from Jesus, our gentle teacher, and the strength to help others find rest. Make us vessels of your peace.

We trust you, for you are the same yesterday, today and forever. Lead us beside quiet waters, O Shepherd of our souls. Restore our hope and guide us in right paths, that we might find rest for our journey.

In the mighty name of Jesus, who calls us to come and find rest. Amen.

Optional Active Response using Biblical

Affirmations: As you end your time

of reflection together, celebrate your identity as God's 'very good' creation, 'ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven'. Choose an affirmation that assures you of experiencing the rest that Jesus offers.

We commit this time of worship to you.
As we open our hearts to the Spirit fill us with your presence, united in the Spirit

to saturate the world with a wave of prayer and praise. In the name of Jesus, we pray:

All:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power

and the glory are yours,
now and for ever.

Amen.

SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 11:28-30 (NRSV)

Reader: Let us now turn our hearts and minds to the words of Jesus found in the Gospel of Matthew. Let us hear these words as a gracious invitation from the very heart of God.

'Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

Leader 1: We are now invited to respond to Jesus' words:
Come to Jesus, all who are weary.

All: **We come.**

Leader 1: Come to Jesus, all who are carrying heavy burdens.

All: **We come.**

WORDS OF WELCOME

Leader 2: Welcome, dear friends, to this gathering of people from communities across the globe. We come together on this day to lift our collective voices, united in prayer and action.

Our theme, *I will give you rest, come*, draws inspiration from Matthew 11:28. It serves as a heartfelt invitation from Jesus to all who are burdened and heavy-laden. And so, we are invited to come just as we are. Bring all that weighs us down so that we may find rest.

Christian women from Nigeria are calling out to us, wherever we are in the world, beckoning us to come and find rest for our souls. As we worship together, may we share each other's burdens and find renewed strength in our unity. May each of us find a sense of belonging here, as we are united in the embrace of Christ's love.

OPENING SONG: *All Are Welcome* (cont.)

Let us build a house where all are named,
their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed
as words within the Word.

Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace;
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

*All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*

OPENING PRAYER

Leader 3: Let us pray.

Loving God,
you welcome us here.

We meet, trusting in your promise

that you are present wherever two or three are gathered in your name.

You are the Alpha and Omega,
the beginning and the end,

the ground of our being,

the one who bears our burdens and transforms us,

the one to whom we bring our thanks, our adoration and our praise.

Future Themes

2027	WDP International Committee	<i>United in Prayer for Justice and Peace</i>
2028	Costa Rica	<i>Leading the way in grace</i>
2029	Italy	<i>Compassion brings healing</i>
2030	Nepal	<i>As the earth rests, people can eat</i>
2031	Jamaica	<i>A sign of faith</i>

If you would like to support the ongoing work of World Day of Prayer in England, Wales & Northern Ireland there is an envelope provided in this Order of Service.



Alternatively, a donation can be made via text message: text WDPENI followed by your donation amount (minimum £1) to 70085.

If you would prefer to donate by Apple Pay, Google Pay or by credit/debit card, please scan this QR code on your phone.

Thank you.

The extra monies raised from your kind donations will help the work of World Day of Prayer in England, Wales & Northern Ireland and projects run by Christian charities around the world.

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Grants Given 2024

DEVELOPMENT GRANTS	
Embrace The Middle East (2020-2024): NECC Antenatal Clinics, Gaza	5,000
SAMS Ireland (2022-2026): Resources in Paraguay	5,000
The Big House (2023-2028): Pastoral programmes for teenage girls, N. Ireland	5,000
Y-Pray? (2024-2028)	5,000
Zambuko Rajehova (2023-2028): Initiatives in Zimbabwe	5,000
PROJECT GRANTS	
BMS World Mission: Eco-Stoves for women in Northern Peru	3,000
British and Foreign Bible society: Literacy for young women, Gambia	2,500
Christian Blind Mission UK: Maternal healthcare in Nigeria	2,000
COMPASS-Ghana: Palliative care to Ashanti Mission in Ghana	2,000
Dumi International Aid Eco-Harvest: Sustainable water, Zimbabwe	2,000
EduSpots: Improve literacy for children in rural Ghana	500
Fountain of Peace Children's Foundation: Mothers Matter, Uganda	1,000
Global Care International: Hope centre school Clubs in Damascus	2,000
Imara-Uganda Education Fund: Computer skills, students with vision loss	1,000
Jacaranda UK Foundation: Drought Malawi Response	2,500
John Aves Education Project (JAEP): Young Palestinians, Bethlehem	2,000
Kids Alive International: Sunday School for slum children, Africa	1,000
Kids Club Kampala: Encouraging Education project	1,000
London City Mission: Operation Forgiveness	2,000
Mike Campbell Foundation: Practical agriculture training in Zimbabwe	2,000
Off The Fence: Prayer Spaces, Brighton and Hove	1,000
Parish Nursing Ministries UK: Support new Parish Nursing services	3,000
Pioneers UK Ministries: Healthy births for Maasai mums in Tanzania	3,500
Project Harar: Pre-surgery nutrition, in Ethiopia	1,000
Pro-Vision International UK: Care for abandoned babies in S. Africa	3,000
Quakers in Britain: Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPP)	3,000
Ripple Effect International: Empowering people in Wonchi	2,000
ROCK UK Adventure Centres Ltd: Christian team building activities, UK	1,000
Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen: Outreach programme	1,500
St James Church Piccadilly: Supplies for the FEAST outreach programme	2,000
The Bible Society in Northern Ireland: Palestinian Youth Group Outreach	5,000
The Leprosy Mission Great Britain: Free specialist treatment in Nepal	1,000
Wycliffe Bible Translators: Bringing Hope: Sharing God's Word, Abirona	1,000
Zambia Orphans Aid UK: Training for young women, Zambia	3,000
Zimkids: Hope for the Future	2,000

All: Kele Jisus nobueze,

Leader 1: Jisus I di nma.

All: Jisus I di nma.

All: Give him thanks, he is King,
Give him thanks, he is King,
Thank you Jesus, you are King,
Jesus, you are good.

OPENING SONG: All Are Welcome

Let us build a house where love can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:
All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where prophets speak,
and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:
All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where hands will reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and reach,
and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;
Let us bring an end to fear and danger:
All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.

Worship Service

I Will Give You Rest, Come

Detailed notes to help in the preparation of this service can be found on pages 18 and 19 of this booklet.

giftaid it
If you are a UK tax payer and wish to Gift Aid your offering, please use the Gift Aid envelope provided and be sure to fill in all the details. For other ways of giving see page 33.

AS THE SERVICE BEGINS

Give Him Thanks' is played as Leaders 1, 2 and 3 process/enter.

Leader 1 lights two candles, Leader 2 places stones on the table/altar and Leader 3 brings up a backpack or schoolbooks. They then take their position for the service to begin.

WELCOME PRAISE

Leader 1: Let us start by singing a traditional Igbo song, Give Him Thanks. We will sing it twice.

Give him thanks, He is King, Give him thanks, He is King.
Thank you Je - sus, you are King, Je - sus, you are Good.

Leader 1: Let us say it together in the Igbo language. Keleya, keleya nobueze,

All: Keleya, keleya nobueze,

Leader 1: Keleya keleya nobueze,

All: Keleya keleya nobueze,

Leader 1: Kele Jisus nobueze,

INTERNATIONAL DONATIONS

WDPIC	15,936.97
Writing Country - Palestine	10,000
European Fund	3,187.39
WDP Workshop, Albania	2,508.50

OTHER DONATIONS

RNIB for our Braille Order of Service	£ 4,000
WDP Welsh Committee	11,000
Salvation Army	2,000
WDP Northern Ireland	500

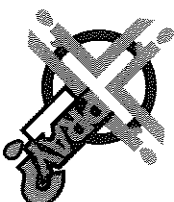
GRANTS ALLOCATED BY THE COMMITTEE

FOR WELSH SPEAKING CHURCHES

Y Gwylledydd: The Methodist Church - Cymru Circuit	£ 450
CRISTON: Interdenominational publication	750
CYTUN: Churches Together in Wales	400
Cyhoeddiadau'r Gair: Publications	850
Sunday School Council	850
Gymdeithas y Gymod (Fellowship of Reconciliation)	850
Cyfundeb Annibynwyr Ceredigion	400
Cyfundeb Annibynwyr Gorllewin Caerfyrddin	900
Gofalaeth Caerfyrddin a Bancyfelin	650
Ysgol Sul Capel y Bedyddwyr Noddfa, Llanbedr Pont Steffan	278.99
Capel Gad, Cilcain, Sir y Fflint	450

Y-Pray? is an annual event which brings together women from all over the country, and further afield, for a time of fellowship, worship, Bible teaching and prayer. There is also opportunity to explore creative prayer.

We would love you to join us and WDP friends from around the world so please do check out our website www.wwdp.org for the latest information regarding next year's event.



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Chairperson Louise Bowes
Vice Chair Elaine Barnett
Appointed officers Liz Hall, Charity Madenyka, Jane Weedon

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Registered Charity No. 233242

Introduction

Welcome to the 2026 World Day of Prayer service, prepared by an ecumenical group of Christian women from Nigeria. The World Day of Prayer was introduced to Nigeria in 1961 by Lady Eudora Olayinka Akanu-Ifiam of the Presbyterian Church and was embraced by member churches of the Christian Council of Nigeria.

As we take part in this service, we join a great wave of prayer which encircles the globe, beginning in Samoa and ending, 146 countries later, in American Samoa, all praying with and for the country and people of Nigeria.

In the service, our Nigerian sisters call us to come closer to God and find rest in him. When we totally trust and have faith in God our burdens become light and we find rest. Written in response to the theme *I will give you rest, come* (Matthew 11:28-30), the service shares the stories of four Nigerian women who inspire us to work towards a world without injustice, insecurity, marginalisation, religious persecution, poverty and despair. As we trust in God, our Burden Bearer, we become one body in Christ, receiving and bringing rest to the world.

We give thanks to the Christian women of Nigeria for this service and pray that their stories will encourage and inspire women throughout the world to unite as one people in both prayer and action.



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About the artwork for 2026

The front cover artwork was designed by Gift Amarachi Ottah, a student at the Alex Ekwueme Federal University in Ndufu-Alike Ikwo in Ebony State.

Her artwork depicts the daily reality of rural Nigerian women whose lives are marked by endless labour from sunrise to sunset. These women traverse treacherous paths to their farms, often carrying both their harvest and their children – a toddler strapped to their back, a heavy load balanced on their head while guiding other children along unmaintained roads through thick bush.

The design also shows three women sitting together, their different traditional attire representing Nigeria's diverse cultures. Though they come from different ethnic groups, their shared experiences unite them. To meet their basic survival needs, these women carry burdens and traumas that are physical, emotional and spiritual. Yet these burdens become bearable when we respond to Jesus' invitation to come and find rest in him. When we bring our weariness to Christ and support one another in community, we find rest and strength to continue our journey.



Together in Prayer Magazine

Together in Prayer magazine No. 43 contains further information on Nigeria, a prayer resource, plus other articles. For availability and further details please contact the WDP office – 01892 541411.

To order *Together in Prayer* No. 44, WDP International Committee, available from September 2026, please use the form below:

Order Form for Together in Prayer Magazine No.44

To: World Day of Prayer, Commercial Road,
TUNBRIDGE WELLS, Kent TN1 2RR

Please send me copies of *Together in Prayer* No.44 **2027**
at £4.00 each (plus 20% of total costs towards postage and packing for UK orders;
postage for overseas please contact WDP office)

NB: Magazine not available until September 2026.

Amount enclosed £ Cheques made payable to WDP.

Alternatively, please visit our online shop at www.wwdp.org.uk

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A WOMEN-LED, GLOBAL, ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT



WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

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FRIDAY 6 MARCH 2026

I will give you rest, come

PREPARED BY CHRISTIAN WOMEN FROM NIGERIA

