



NEW JERSEY ADVOCACY NETWORK TO END HOMELESSNESS

AN INTER-FAITH RESOURCE FOR OBSERVING HOMELESS MEMORIAL DAY

(Readings from Hebrew and Christian Scripture are listed below, as well as suggested prayers following each. A congregation or an interfaith gathering might use or adapt this format as part of a Homeless Sabbath service of worship and remembrance.)

Reader: Tulin Ozdeger, a civil rights attorney at the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty has observed that "When cities pass laws that target homeless people, they send a message to their communities that the homeless are not as valuable in the public eye as those with homes." As we gather now to remember and reflect as a community of people of faith, let us pause in silence to remember the pain and loss that accompany homelessness, and remember as well that all are made in the Divine image, making each person worthy of justice, dignity and concern.

(A brief moment of silence)

Leader: Lord, just as you remained faithful to your homeless people Israel as they wandered in the wilderness, we know that you continue to be with our homeless brothers and sisters. As Jesus and his family wandered as homeless refugees following his birth, so walk with and safely guide those who seek shelter and protection in this time. And, just as you established a house for Israel, and your servant David, let us, your people remember your steadfast love, and work to end homelessness within our own communities. Amen

Reader: A reading from Deuteronomy chapter 15, verses 7-11:

⁷"If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, ⁸but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. ⁹Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say, 'The seventh year, the year of release is near,' and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against you, and you be guilty of sin. ¹⁰You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. ¹¹For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'

ALL: Lord, In this time together, as we gather to remember your homeless children who died this past year, we ask that you forgive us for the ways, known and unknown, in which we forget or transgress your command to care for the needy and the poor. Lord, renew our spirits, so that we might leave this place with greater resolve to care for our homeless brothers and sisters in ways that might reflect your love and faithfulness. Amen

Reader: A reading from Ezekial, chapter 34, verses 20-31;

²⁰ " 'Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, ²² I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will

judge between one sheep and another. ²³ I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.

²⁵ " 'I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of wild beasts so that they may live in the desert and sleep in the forests in safety. ²⁶ I will bless them and the places surrounding my hill. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing. ²⁷ The trees of the field will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land. They will know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them. ²⁸ They will no longer be plundered by the nations, nor will wild animals devour them. They will live in safety, and no one will make them afraid. ²⁹ I will provide for them a land renowned for its crops, and they will no longer be victims of famine in the land or bear the scorn of the nations. ³⁰ Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Sovereign LORD. ³¹ You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD.' "

All: Compassionate God, as we gather today, to remember and mourn our homeless brothers and sisters, help us to find hope in your promises given in Scripture. We ask you to shepherd your people and provide safety, blessing, deliverance, and security to all your needy children. And we ask that you help and prepare us to mirror your care and steadfast love, so that we might better serve all of your people. Amen.

Reader: A reading from Luke, chapter 2, verses 4 - 7:

4. Joseph went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵. to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶. And while they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

ALL: O God, as we face the year's darkest and longest night, we ask that you remember those of your children who are without home or shelter. As the infant Jesus ended his first night asleep in a manger, when there was no other place for him, we pray that you would bring safety and shelter to those who find no room in our communities. We give you thanks for those who offer support and help so that some an move out of homelessness. We pray that we may advocate and work for a society that truly protects and cares for all. Amen.

Benediction

Leader: God of peace, in whom all find shelter, comfort and protect your children this night. Grant us courage and strength as your servants to show your love in caring for our homeless brothers and sisters. We hope and pray for the day in which all will find shelter. Amen