

**A Call to Prayer and Self Examination for General Conference 2008
From the Central Texas Host Committee**

“To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.” Martin Luther King, Jr.

The United Methodist General Conference will be hosted here in Fort Worth April 23 –May 2, 2008. Since that is only a few months away, lots of people have been asking the question, “Are we ready yet?” Well the answer is, “Not yet.” And we need your help. We are asking you to pray with us.

Just as prayer is as essential to the Christian life as breath, so prayer is essential to our shared life together as we prepare for General Conference 2008. We on the General Conferencing Hosting Community Prayer Ministries Team invite all United Methodist to join us in forty days of prayer and self-examination as we prepare ourselves and our denomination to come together in Holy Conferencing.

The attached devotional guide, based on the prayer of St. Francis, includes Scripture and questions for meditation, journaling or self-examination. It is designed to be used over a forty day period, and is therefore suitable for Lent or the 40 days leading up to General Conference.

- Delegates- You have been preparing for months to come to the conference thoroughly grounded in information and concerns of the Church. Please accept this devotional guide as a gift to enable you to prepare yourself spiritually for the tasks ahead.
- Clergy-Accept this devotional guide as an opportunity to prepare your congregations as we move together as one body in Christ to plan for a future with hope.
- Lay persons- Every United Methodist is called to prayer if our denomination is to become the rich soil so desperately needed for growth in the Word. As we prepare ourselves individually, we open the doors for God’s Spirit to guide and strengthen our church. Our individual prayers prepare the way for General Conference 2008 to be a time of Holy Listening, Holy Conversations and Holy Conferencing.



**Forty Days of Preparation
for
General Conference 2008**

Day 39

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Mark 15:40-41

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. These used to follow him and provide for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

Stand with these women today as you ponder the mystery of the cross.

Day 40

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Romans 6:3-4

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Today, remember your baptism. Where do you most desire to walk in newness of life? Thank God for the opportunities that are before you.

Day 37

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

Luke 23: 34a

Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

Ponder these words of Jesus from the cross. Ask God to let them become your prayer also.

Day 38

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Matthew 19:16, 21-22

Then someone came to him and said, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?"...Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Dying to possessions...dying to self-interest...dying to being in charge...dying to having to have our own way... Like the young man, we would prefer to do a good deed and be on our way. Pray today for the courage to recognize and dispose of those things in your life that keep you from accepting Jesus' gracious invitation, "Come, follow me."

Forty Days of Preparation for General Conference 2008

Focusing on the Prayer of Saint Francis as we prepare for General Conference offers us daily opportunities for prayer and self-examination. A small portion of the St. Francis Prayer has been highlighted for each day. A scripture verse and thought for reflection or journaling have also been provided. May we find our journey blessed as we pray and reflect on the Prayer of St. Francis.



Day 1

*Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

Day 2

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace;

*Psalm 23:2-3a
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.*

What parts of your life are you willing to turn over to God for a makeover? What parts are you reluctant to relinquish to God?

Day 35

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

*Ephesians 4:32
And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.*

When we are tenderhearted, rather than hardhearted, we risk having our hearts broken. Take the risk of being tenderhearted today.

Day 36

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

*Psalm 103:10-11
He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him.*

Remember today, God's mercy and forgiveness extended to you. Live this day in the assurance of God's steadfast love for you.

Day 33

For it is in giving that we receive;

Matthew 6:3-4

But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

What anonymous act of charity can you perform today?

Day 34

For it is in giving that we receive;

Mark 12:42-44

A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them. "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

Ponder this story as you go about your daily routine. If you could meet this woman, what questions would you ask her?

Day 3

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace;

Psalm 150:3-5

Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with clanging cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

Envision yourself as part of God's symphony of harmony and peace. What instrument are you? What parts do you play?

Day 4

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace;

John 14: 27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

What is God's peace? How is it different from the world's peace?

Day 5

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Proverbs 6:16-19

There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that hurry to run to do evil, a lying witness who testifies falsely, and one who sows discord in a family.

Where do you see hatred, animosity, hostility, antagonism, opposition or unfriendliness in the world... in those around you... in yourself?

Day 6

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

I Corinthians 3:6

I planted, Apollo's watered, but God gave the growth.

What small seeds of love can you plant as you go through your life today? Remember, you are part of a much larger process. Plant the seeds you are able. Others will water, and God will give the growth.

Day 31

(Grant that I may not so much seek) to be loved, as to love;

I Corinthians 13:4-6

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

Choose one characteristic of love to focus on today. Ask God that you might be given opportunities to grow in this particular expression of love.

Day 32

For it is in giving that we receive;

James 1:17

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

If we give out of gratitude for the gifts God has given us, our hearts are often filled with love, joy and peace. If we give out of self-righteousness or guilt or in order to control, our hearts are often filled with resentment when the recipient does not appreciate our gift or use it wisely or in the way we anticipated. Examine your own motives for giving.

Day 29

(Grant that I may not so much seek) to be loved, as to love;

I John 4: 18-19

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us.

What fears keep you from loving unconditionally?

Day 30

(Grant that I may not so much seek) to be loved, as to love;

John 13:34-35

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Think of those with whom you share the Christian faith, your brothers and sisters in Christ. Think not only of those you agree with in the faith but also those with whom you disagree. How do you live out Jesus' commandment to love them?

Day 7

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Galatians 6:9

So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.

Sometimes we do not see the fruit that results from the seeds we plant. Often our reaching out in love is met with indifference or even hostility. Pray today to not lose heart as you continue to plant seeds of love.

Day 8

Where there is injury, (let me sow) pardon;

Psalms 51: 10

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

Who has injured you? Who is on your enemies list? Envision handing Jesus a list of all those who have injured you. What does he do with your list?

Day 9

Where there is injury, (let me sow) pardon;

Genesis 45:4-5

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.

We cannot pardon those who have injured others; we can only pardon those who have injured us. Today, pray for one person who has injured you.

Day 10

Where there is injury, (let me sow) pardon;

Matthew 6:14-15

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Sometimes we are unable to pardon those who have injured us. But God is able to do that which we cannot do. Today, ask God to forgive those you cannot forgive.

Day 27

(Grant that I may not so much seek) to be understood, as to understand;

Luke 10:29

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Be aware of your conversations today. How often are you seeking to understand? How often are you seeking to justify yourself?

Day 28

(Grant that I may not so much seek) to be understood, as to understand;

Matthew 13:14

With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: "You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive."

To whom are you willing to give your full attention in order to understand them, ...family...friends...business associates... neighbors...strangers...enemies?

Day 25

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;

Mark 6:34

As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

In the midst of his grief over the death of John the Baptist and the stress of larger and larger crowds of people demanding more and more of him, Jesus reaches out with compassion. Reflect today on how God might take the grief that you have known and the stress that you encounter and transform them into compassion for others.

Day 26

(Grant that I may not so much seek) to be understood, as to understand;

Psalms 139:1-2

O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

Pray Psalm 139 for yourself today. Rejoice in how intimately you are known and understood by God.

Day 11

Where there is doubt, (let me sow) faith;

Mark 9:22b-24

"..if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us." Jesus said to him, "If you are able! All things can be done for the one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

We all have doubts. To question our faith is to grow in our faith. What doubts do you bring to God?

Day 12

Where there is doubt, (let me sow) faith;

Romans 8:38

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Faith is trusting in God's promises. Where in your life have you known God's promises to be true? Hold these truths in remembrance today.

Day 13

Where there is doubt, (let me sow) faith;

John 13:15

For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

Our faith is shared not so much by what we say as by what we do. Be aware of what you do today. How are your actions a witness to what you believe?

Day 14

Where there is despair, (let me sow) hope;

Job 2:13

They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

Those in despair are not looking for someone to fix them. They are looking for someone to listen to them. Look for opportunities today to practice holy listening. Listen without judgment or the desire to contradict, enlighten or fix the other person.

Day 23

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;

II Corinthians 1:3-4

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.

Who has reached out to you in times of affliction or heartache? Give thanks for the consolation you have received.

Day 24

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

Philippians 2:1-2

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

One meaning of consolation is encouragement. Look for opportunities to encourage others today.

Day 21

And where there is sadness, (let me sow) joy.

Isaiah 55:12

For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

What things in your life bring you true joy? Start a joy list today. Thank God for the joy you have known, and pray for God to open your heart to even more joy in the future.

Day 22

And where there is sadness, (let me sow) joy.

James 5:13

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise.

With whom can you weep today? With whom can you rejoice today? Be present to those around you.

Day 15

Where there is despair, (let me sow) hope;

Romans 5:3-5

And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Our hope is often born out of times of despair and darkness. When, in the midst of suffering, have you found reason to hope? Thank God today for the hope that has been given you.

Day 16

Where there is despair, (let me sow) hope;

Psalms 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, LORD, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered. I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; My soul waits for the LORD more than those who wait for the morning, More than those who wait for the morning. O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Psalm 130 was written by someone in despair who continued to find hope in God's forgiveness, in God's steadfast love and in God's power to redeem. Pray this Psalm today for all those in despair, especially those who are not able to pray it for themselves.

Day 17

Where there is darkness, (let me sow) light;

John 3:19

And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

Ask today that the light of Christ illuminate all that you do and say. Be aware of times during the day when you might prefer to remain in darkness. Ask God for the desire to live all of your life in the light.

Day 18

Where there is darkness, (let me sow) light;

II Corinthians 3:18

And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Today, look for the light of Christ shining in the faces of those around you. Know that you too are reflecting this light to others.

Day 19

Where there is darkness, (let me sow) light;

I John 2:9

Whoever says, "I am in the light," while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness.

If we would sow light in the darkness, we must learn to love others as we love ourselves. We begin by loving those closest to us, but God constantly urges us to shed our love light in ever widening circles.

Day 20

And where there is sadness, (let me sow) joy.

Psalms 30: 5b

Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

Joy does not deny or make light of our own sadness or the sadness of another. Joy reminds us that our sadness is not the final word.