

Participation-September 2017

September 1—World Day of Prayer for Creation



Pope Francis has urged people the world over to join the Orthodox church in a world day of prayer for creation. The orthodox church has celebrated this day yearly since 1989. This year, it is the day that will start Pope Francis' "Season of Creation", from September 1-October 4, the feast of St Francis the Patron Saint of Ecology. This World Day of Prayer for Creation is a time to praise God for the wonder of creation, to remember our responsibility to protect and respect creation, and to marvel at the abundance of divine grace made manifest to us through creation. It is also a day to seek forgiveness for the many ways we have contributed to the destruction and degradation of creation and to reflect on how we can change our lives in order to protect creation for future generations.

God, we thank you for the divine majesty and beauty that you share with us through the wonders of creation. We know that we have often taken these gifts for granted and have contributed in many ways to pollution and climate change which threatens Earth, our common home. Today, we ask you to awaken within us a renewed awareness of all that is—that all is a precious gift. Bless us with a renewed commitment to care for creation and to take time each day to reflect on the power, wonder and beauty of the heavens and Earth.

September 8—World Literacy Day

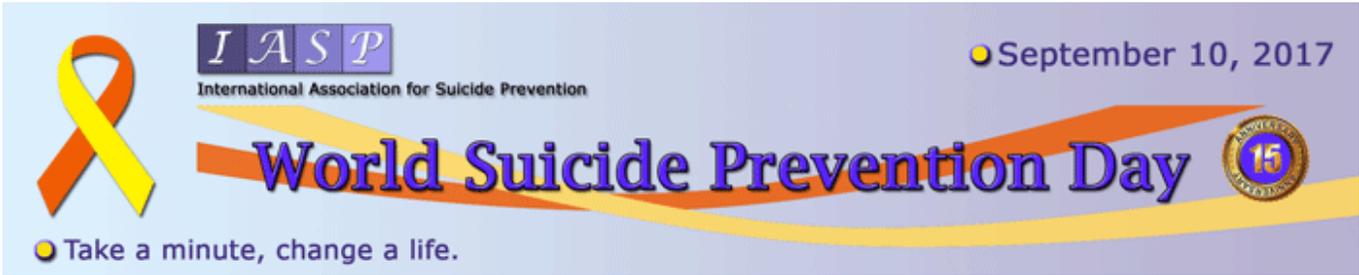


The theme of World Literacy Day 2017 is "World Literacy in a Digital World". Although many countries offer "free" public education, many poor children cannot access education because of their inability to afford books, uniforms, shoes, etc. In many parts of the world, education is only offered to boys—girls are excluded. Some countries do not offer free education, thus making education only accessible to the fortunate few who can afford it. The 2015 the UN Sustainable Development Goal #4 called for universal primary and secondary education for all children worldwide, regardless of religion, gender, economic status or nationality. By including this goal, the world community recognized that education is essential to lifting individuals, communities and countries out of poverty. This year's theme further recognizes that literacy is a fundamental tool needed to function in today's digital world. As digital communications across cultures and continents increase, participation in the global community depends on literacy. This year's theme also recognizes that digital technology can be used in the promotion of literacy, even in remote areas. Technology brings global expert teachers to many remote locations simultaneously,

thus making sharing of knowledge more rapid and integrated. Literacy is a first step in unleashing this marvelous potential for all human beings to contribute to our global future together.

We praise you, God, for all the wonders with which you fill the earth. We thank you for our ability to read, study and expand our knowledge. Literacy also allows us to share our thoughts and reflections with one another over great distances and across cultures. Help us as we work to ensure that each child has an opportunity to study and to learn so that every human being can reach his or her full potential and contribute to raising our global consciousness.

September 10—World Suicide Prevention Day



This day focuses on a worldwide effort to prevent suicide. Each year, over 800,000 people commit suicide and over 25 times as many attempt suicide. This has become a worldwide epidemic! Each person lost to suicide results in grief and suffering for family, friends, communities, schoolmates and colleagues. Many people who have survived suicide attempts say that if someone had asked them “How are you today?” and had listened to their answer, they would have poured out their anguish and perhaps not made the attempt. This is a day to raise awareness of depression, loneliness and despair and to reach out to those in need of a helping hand and listening ear. The first step is to remove the stigma associated with seeking psychological and psychiatric care. Many people who are feeling suicidal do not seek help because of the stigma attached to “mental illness.” If anyone you know seems to need help, reach out to them. Ask them how they are and listen to their response and to what they are feeling. Let them know that you love them and will support them in whatever way you can. Encourage them to seek professional help.

Holy One, we pray for all those who feel alone, afraid, desperate or depressed. Open our hearts to recognize these situations and to respond with love and compassion. Help us to support mental health professionals as they try to assist those in need.

September 16—International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer

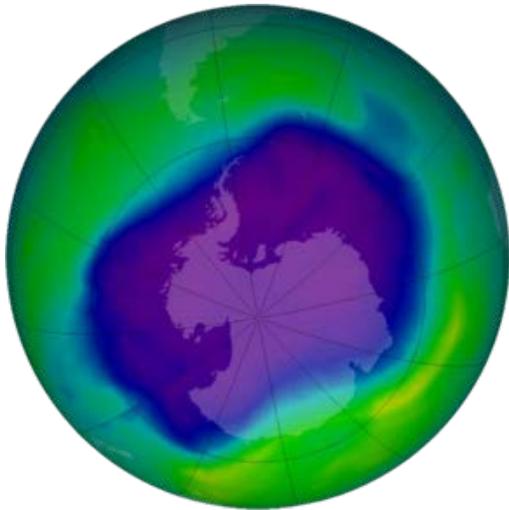


Image of the largest Antarctic ozone hole ever recorded (September 2006), over the Southern pole.

This year marks the **30th anniversary of the Montreal Protocol**. The protocol is an international treaty designed to protect the ozone layer by phasing out the production of numerous substances that are responsible for ozone depletion. It was agreed on 16 September 1987, and entered into force on 1 January 1989. Due to its widespread adoption and implementation, it has been hailed as an example of exceptional international co-operation.

The main cause of ozone depletion and the ozone hole is human-made chemicals, in particular halocarbon refrigerants, solvents, propellants, and foam-blowing agents (chlorofluorocarbon (CFC's), freons, halons), referred to as **ozone-depleting substances (ODS)**. Ozone depletion and the ozone hole generated worldwide concern over increased cancer risks and other negative effects. The ozone layer prevents most harmful UVB wavelengths (280–315 nm) of ultraviolet light from

passing through the Earth's atmosphere. These wavelengths cause skin cancer, sunburn, and cataracts, which were projected to increase dramatically as a result of thinning ozone, as well as harming plants and animals. These concerns led to adoption in 1987 of the Montreal Protocol, which bans the production of CFCs, halons, and other ODS. The Montreal Protocol succeeded: after the ban came into effect in 1989, ozone levels stabilized (in the mid-1990s), and have since started to recover (in the 2000s). Recovery is projected to continue over the next century, and the ozone hole is expected to reach pre-1980 levels by around 2075. This success is celebrated today and reminds us of the success that can be accomplished when nations work together to protect our

environment. This is a particularly poignant reminder as we begin working to fulfill the Paris Climate Agreement of 2016.

We pray for our world and for all human beings that share this magnificent planet with us. We recommit ourselves to continue to find ways to modify our lifestyles so that we can continue to heal our planet and ourselves. God, we count on your Spirit to lead us into our future.

September 21—International Day of Peace



The children of the world proclaim universal peace!

This very special day is a time to remember that peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice. Established in 1981 by a unanimous United Nations resolution, Peace Day provides a globally shared date for all humanity to commit to Peace above all differences and to contribute to building a Culture of Peace. Creating a culture of peace means treating each other with respect, as brothers and sisters. The theme for 2017 is *Together for Peace: Respect, Dignity and Safety for All*. “In times of insecurity, communities that look different become convenient scapegoats,” said United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres. “We must resist cynical efforts to divide communities and portray neighbors as ‘the other’. Discrimination diminishes

us all. It prevents people — and societies — from achieving their full potential.” He added, “Together, let us stand up against bigotry and for human rights. Together, let us build bridges. Together, let us transform fear into hope.”

This year, the International Day of Peace will focus on engaging and mobilizing people throughout the world to show support for refugees and migrants. Its messages will be shared with communities hosting refugees and migrants. The Day will highlight solidarity with refugees and migrants and showcase the shared benefits of migration to economies and nations, while also acknowledging legitimate concerns of host communities. Ultimately, it will be about bringing people together and reminding them of their common humanity.

On 15 September 2017, from 9:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m., the Secretary-General will celebrate the Day in the Peace Garden at United Nations Headquarters by ringing the Peace Bell and observing a minute of silence. United Nations Messengers of Peace will participate in the ceremony.

God, we pray for peace around the world, and for justice that makes peace possible. We pray for all those refugees and migrants who have been forced to flee their homes and their countries in desperate search for safety. May we welcome those in need, support them through the traumas they have suffered and surround each other with respect and love.

September 25—United Nations 2nd Anniversary of the Sustainable Development Goals



Adopted on September 25, 2015, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) outline 17 goals that must be achieved in order to eradicate extreme poverty, address inequalities, and reduce climate change worldwide by 2030. The Paris Climate Agreement of April 2016 was one international step toward achieving the SDG's. Heads of state have also come together at the UN to try to establish a coordinated approach in response to the global refugee crisis. All of this, however, is impossible to achieve without diplomatic solutions to global and international crises so that armed conflict will cease. Everyone recognizes that war does not serve the cause of peace and sustainable global development.

God, we ask for forgiveness for our trust in weapons of war, rather than the power of love, to protect us. We ask you to open our hearts to know each other as brothers and sisters. Change our weapons into dust and create from that dust instruments of peace and goodness and hope. Help us to dedicate our lives to establishing justice on earth so that all people can share equally in the blessings of creation.