



CHRISTMAS DAY



Thank you for journeying with us through Advent. On Christmas Day we arrive at our destination which is but a door into a new world of hope and possibility. As we open the stable door today, let us encounter the baby Jesus, a lifeline to our world. Happy Christmas!

CALL TO WORSHIP

In joy we celebrate the birth of the Christ Child

The One who is the lifeline of hope,



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A shining star on the horizon,
A door to a world transformed by love.

We make this journey together

Listening to the wisdom of the ages,

Confronting our doubts and fears,

Seeking inspiration and courage.

We give thanks - Jesus Christ is with us

OPENING RESPONSES

The world has turned.

The new day has begun.

The story has been heard.

The stable door has been opened.

Today we celebrate the hope of Christmas:

We share the peace that will end violence and abuse.

We find the joy that comes when we share our lives with others.

We reach out with the love that says I stand with you.

We discover the Christ child who gives life to the world.

The journey is complete. Christmas is here.



Read the Partner Story from Haiti: For Reduced Inequalities

The hills are steep in Haiti. Most people in rural areas live on what they grow. They work hard for everything they have – knowing a hurricane or earthquake may destroy their homes and livelihoods. To own a donkey is a luxury – more often the people have to carry crops and food themselves. Like many of the world's 475 million small farmers, they know life could be easier. For now, they want their children to go to school. There is no government in their hills, so ICKL is the lifeline that supports the community to pay salaries and the running costs of their local schools. They are determined their children will have a fair go in life. **Be the Lifeline to people who do not want to be left behind.**

Lighting the Christ Candle

For those who are dismissive of babies and children and pregnant women,
For those who look for a saviour in all the wrong places,
For those who sit in darkness, longing for light,
We light the Christ candle.

Light the candle.

You, Lord Jesus, are our Saviour, and the Saviour of the world.

May this light signal a breakthrough, a brighter future,

A new order and a better way.

THE READINGS

Isaiah 52:7-10: With these beautiful words, Isaiah offers the exiles in Babylon the redemption for which they long. God is very much involved in their story – our story. God's salvation is for the whole earth (v. 10). Peace is on its way.

Psalms 98: The promise of a world transformed lies deep within these familiar words from the psalmist. God is portrayed as the victor who enjoys good music, but also one that treats people with equity (v. 9). On Christmas Day, let us make a joyful noise (v. 4).

Hebrews 1: 1 - 4 (5 - 12): The writer of Hebrews begins by affirming the position of God's son as God's spokesperson. Writing in a time of persecution and fear, he wants the reader to feel confident that the followers have direct access to God.

John 1:1 - 14: From the outset John writes for the believer, portraying Jesus as the cosmic Messiah who illuminates the world. Throughout the gospel, John uses the interplay of light and

darkness as a mechanism to understand faith and when necessary draw lines. For John the word is light and life. God is not for distant but involved or more strongly, incarnate in the world. Faith is more than personal – it belongs to the world. Nothing can be hidden from God who is light.

SERMON NOTES

On Christmas Day, the mood is celebration. As we sing the familiar carols and hear the words of Scripture, let us remember those around the world who will share in that joy. People of all faiths and none will mark this day. Rather than worry if people are doing it right, let us widen our understanding in keeping with the readings – Christmas is for the whole world. Through this celebration we can build links of solidarity and love to those people who are living in places of brutality and exploitation. The Christmas Appeal invites us to join the lifeline that will transform the world.

Christmas is at once a family and a global celebration. In this celebration, is the promise of a world that can be different.

- Where does the light shine for us this Christmas?
- Who is in need of a lifeline?
- How can we overcome our fears and stand alongside those who need new hope?
- How can we make peace the way?

FOR PEOPLE WANTING A FAIR SHARE

The people who live on the island of La Gonâve in Haiti are sometimes forgotten even when disasters strike. They work hard for everything they have. Many cannot grow enough food to feed their families on their tiny plots of land. Overfishing has robbed the ocean of fish and sea life. Making charcoal is a common source of income. With few trees left, topsoil washes into the sea and moisture evaporates. Over the years, people have used up many of the island's resources – some have left.

Haiti's capital city Port-au-Prince is teeming with life. Decades of exploitation, violence and bad government have forced tens of thousands of Haitians into the city desperate for work and opportunity. Nothing comes easy and the people have to be ever more resourceful to survive. When a magnitude 7 earthquake hit in 2010, many lost everything. Some returned home to La Gonâve putting more pressure on their families - few relief supplies arrived on the island.

Earthquakes and poverty are not the only destructive forces in Haiti. Two years ago, Hurricane Matthew swept across the island, destroying homes and crops. Fallen trees and flooding caused more damage. The people were left dazed and in shock after three days of frightening weather.

On La Gonâve, Aimee (not her real name) and her family survived the storm. They salvaged what they could, finding a little food and some fallen timber that would help provide shelter. They shared what they had with neighbours but there was seldom enough.

The local member of ACT Alliance (Action by Churches Together) was their lifeline, distributing tools and seeds, and offering agricultural training in their community. Aimee's family received a donkey, enabling them to collect water from a faraway stream much more quickly than on foot.

In rural Haiti, a donkey or horse is a sign of prosperity. Without one or the money to hire such transport, a man or woman must carry everything up the country's rugged hills on their backs. Something the very wealthy would never do.

Haiti may be poor, but it also one of the most unequal countries on the planet. Nearly 60% of the population lives on less than US\$2 a day. A small number of people and transnational corporations dominate the local economy. Giving rural families the support they need to improve livelihoods and send their children to school can be the first step to a fairer society. We will leave no one behind.

Be the Lifeline to people without food, education and opportunity.



ACT ALLIANCE HAITI AND ICKL

When there is a natural disaster, CWS works through local partners first and/or through ACT Alliance. There are times when CWS sends funding through both organisations as happened after the 2010 Haiti earthquake. Our partner the Institut Culturel Karl Lévêque (ICKL) lost its building in the quake and staff had their own families to look after in the first few weeks. Thanks to your generous donations, CWS could give funding to help those affected through ACT Alliance and ICKL.

ICKL is a proudly Haitian organisation working alongside other Haitian groups to create a future where the local people come first. They have the skills and deep knowledge to help communities achieve their own priorities where no government assistance is available. ICKL is

the cornerstone of a network of Haitian run organisations helping each other to improve their lives. In a country made dependent on outside aid, ICKL strengthens local Haitians to do the work they know needs to be done. No matter whether natural disaster or political turmoil, they offer rural Haitians a hope that is their own.

ICKL plays a facilitating role, bringing communities together to work out their common needs and finding ways forward. Their work is driven by the communities and includes:

- Income generation
- Education through four schools involving payment for school teachers, classroom furniture and supplies, books for students, teacher training and securing an income to meet running costs through community bakeries and grain mills (pictured below)
- Disaster response by addressing the needs of affected communities and finding the best way to help with very limited funds.
- Advocacy for Haitians and on peasant issues, including community based social analysis and promotion of better government
- Community education
- Training for other Haitian groups through the annual popular university.



SDG 10: REDUCED INEQUALITIES



The 2018 Appeal puts the spotlight on our responsibilities to each other and the planet our home. In 2015, the United Nations agreed to a new agenda for sustainable development made up of 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Goal 10 recognises the need for fairer access to the world's resources to achieve the core commitment to 'leave no one behind'. Already there are some worrying trends: world hunger has been increasing for the last three years and the number of refugees and displaced people is rising. Last year, Oxfam [reported](#) eight men owned the same wealth as 3.6 billion people, half the world's population. Large

disparities between people's ability to access healthcare, education and basic human rights undermine efforts to achieve all the SDGs.

This goal [aims](#) to improve incomes for the bottom 40% in a population, stop discrimination and provide equal opportunities, and increase Official Development Assistance (ODA) and financial flows to the poorest countries. It covers fair and well-managed migration flows and to cut the cost of remittances. Without meeting this goal, millions of people will continue to be left behind.



PRAYERS FOR OUR PARTNERS

Living God, Sustainer of life, our systems are skewed
so that what you have provided abundantly, is distributed unevenly.
The poorest of countries are mired in debt they can never hope to clear.
Strong nations plunder the resources of weaker nations.
Favoured areas are well looked after and have government resources
While neglected areas are left to their own devices.

Our wants are simple – to have a home, to live at peace,
To see our children happy and growing and learning,
To go to sleep at night with a family that has been fed and is contented.

We pray for the villagers of Haiti in their struggle to survive,
We pray that their basic wants will be met.
We pray that students from ICKL supported schools will have opportunities for further training,

And that they will use their skills and knowledge in life enhancing, creative ways.
We pray that they will be part of a generation that helps their country to become more resilient,
A generation that helps to raise the standard of living in struggling communities,
A generation of hope.

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This is our prayer in the name of Jesus – who declared that he came to bring good news to the poor.

SENDING FORTH

God is with us.

Go in faith and in hope – in the certainty that the Christ Child leads us onward.

Be a lifeline to the world.

We go in peace.

We go in gentleness.

We go in love.

We go to make sure no one is left behind.

Amen.

NOTES

Special thanks to Rev Clare Lind and the people of Tawa Union for the candelighting, prayers for partners, and the Hope banner. Under the leadership of Roy Bridge who has a background in emergency management and response, the people created the banner. The backdrop is a baby blanket, the primary symbol of new birth, new light, the baby, the Saviour. They also remind us of baby blankets given for developing nations, especially after disaster. The yellow rope becomes brighter and is transformed into the Christ Candle on Christmas Day.

Join the Lifeline so all people have food, water, dignity and lives free of violence. Leave no one behind. Support the [Christmas Appeal](#).

Photos: CWS and ACT Alliance/Paul Jeffrey