Outline of a prayer service on maternal health

Prepared for Monday morning service at the chapel of the Ecumenical Centre, Geneva, 7 November 2011 by Dr Manoj Kurian, WCC programme executive for Health and Healing

Words of welcome

Call to worship

(stand)

In the beginning the Spirit God danced over the void.
It was a dance of creation, of joy, of freedom, of wholeness, of power...
And God, knowing that all that is good is shared, held the Earth tenderly and yearned for relationship.

And humanity was born in the yearning of God.
We are born to share with the earth.
Alleluia Amen!
(Adapted from: Blessing the Earth, Carter Heyward, USA)

Introduction

(remain standing)
Maternal health refers to the health of women during pregnancy, childbirth and the period after the birth of a child, that extends for about six weeks. Maternal death, or maternal mortality, is the death of a mother during or shortly after a pregnancy. While motherhood is often a positive and fulfilling experience, for many women it is associated with suffering, ill-health and even death. Each year over 350,000 women die from preventable complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. Almost all of these deaths occur in developing countries, and most can be prevented. While maternal death is higher in rural areas and among poorer and less educated communities, adolescents face a higher risk of complications and death as a result of pregnancy than older women. The risk of maternal death is highest for adolescent girls under 15 years old. Complications in pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among adolescent girls in most developing countries. Death is just one of many devastating outcomes mothers face. For the thousand mothers who will die today in pregnancy, childbirth and related situations, twenty thousand mothers will face serious long-term physical, psychological, social and economic consequences. The chronic ill-health of a mother puts surviving children, who depend on their mothers for food, care and emotional support, at great risk. Mothers face many devastating complications such as obstetric fistula, anaemia, infertility, damaged pelvic structure, chronic infection, depression and impaired productivity. These problems, in turn, may lead to others, including marital strife, household dissolution, social isolation, shortened life spans and suicide. Costs of medical care and lost productivity often drive women and their families into poverty.
(Adapted from WCC resources for the 2nd week of the Month for Health and Healing Nov.2011)

Let us pray: (stand)

Answer us when we call you O God!
You gave us room when we were in distress.
Be gracious to us, and hear our prayer.
How long, you people, shall our honour suffer shame?
How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies?
But know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for himself;
The Lord hears when we call to him.
There are many who say, ‘O that we might see some good!
Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord!’
You have put gladness in our heart
More than when grain and wine abound.
We will lie down and sleep in peace;
For you alone, O Lord, keeps us safe.
(Adapted from Psalm 4)

Song: Nada te turbe (Taizé)
**Reading**

Exodus 1: 15-21  
*(Read in Maori - be seated)*

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, "When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?"

The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive."

So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

**Gospel reading**

Matthew 1:18-25  
*(Read in Shona – stand)*

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. “She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,” which translated means, “GOD WITH US.” 24And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

**Reflections**

*(be seated)*

**Magnificat**

*(Luke 1:46-55)*

“My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me –  
holy is his name.

His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
his has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.”

**Intercessions**

*(be seated)*

**Feuilles - O (Kyrie)**

*With gentle, lifting syncopation*

This week in the Ecumenical prayer cycle we pray for the Republic of Congo, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe.

We pray for an end to violence and instability in the region. We pray that all leaders use their power justly in service to all of the people, and to refrain from corrupt practices. We remember and uphold those who work with people living with HIV and AIDS and who are searching for ways to overcome the disease. We pray for those involved in subsistence agriculture, that their crops may be plentiful and they have enough food to eat and clean water to drink. We pray for societal transformation that justice is served for all women, who bear the brunt of poverty and receive less education and fewer opportunities than men. We also pray for justice, respect and opportunities for indigenous tribes of the rainforests such as the Baka and Bambenga people. We thank you for the great tropical forest with its many forms of life it upholds. We pray that the world will contribute to efforts to put an end to deforestation and desertification, and for the sustainable and responsible use of natural resources.

We pray that there is just sharing of natural resources, particularly oil, in these countries. May all the people reap the benefits of what God has given, and not just those in power. We also pray for greater accountability and transparency of both the national leaders and transnational corporations who manage the wealth of these rich lands where most people are still poor and whose basic needs still not met.

*(Adapted from the prayers for week 46 - In God’s Hands Common Prayer for the World’)*

**Sing: Haitian Kyrie**

We pray for the wellbeing and health all women:

At home- that mothers, young women and girls receive the information, health services, the safe space, support and resources, to lead healthy lives. That we can take steps to make motherhood less vulnerable.

We pray that our congregation are inclusive and supportive of parents, young families and single mothers. We pray that the worshipping community is friendly and responsive to their special need and reflect and appreciate the gifts that women continually offer in the context of our faith.

We pray that in our communities, all pregnant women receive adequate antenatal care and services during pregnancy and childbirth. We pray that we reflect and act on factors that prevent women from receiving it, be it poverty, distance, lack of information, inadequate or unfriendly services or cultural practices. We pray that we can bring about positive change in our communities.
We pray that our church and denominations exercises our assets, resources and influence to work together, holding ourselves and each other accountable to love and take care of each other, the wider community and creation.
(Adapted from WCC resources for the 2nd week of the Month for Health and Healing Nov.2011)

**Sing: Haitian Kyrie**

**Prayer for healing**

(stand)

To the triune God, the source of all love and all life, let us offer our prayers.
God, our creator, your will for us and for all your people is health and salvation:
Lord of life, hear our prayer.

Jesus Christ, Son of God, you came that we might have life and have it in abundance:
Lord of life, hear our prayer.

Holy Spirit, dwelling within us, you make us temples of your presence:
Lord of life, hear our prayer.

For all who are in need of healing:
Lord of life, hear our prayer.

For all who are suffering from injury or illness:
Lord of life, hear our prayer.

For all who are troubled by confusion or pain:
Lord of life, hear our prayer.

For all who are weary and burdened:
Lord of life, hear our prayer.

**Song: Healing River** (Fred Hellerman/Fran Minkoff)

We greet each other with a sign of peace, healing and salvation.

**Benediction and blessing:**

We lift up our eyes to the hills— from where will our help come?

Our help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

The Lord will not let your foot slip; The one who keeps you will not slumber.

The Lord who watches over you will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is your keeper;
The Lord is your shade at your right hand.

The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil; The Lord will watch your life.

The Lord will watch your coming and going Both now and forevermore.

(Adapted from Psalm 121)

*Bible verses are quoted in the translation of the New International Version, © International Bible Society / Biblica.*