

One Voice

Your weekly
prayer resource

tearfund

Omicron: praying through the uncertainty

The reports of the new coronavirus variant, Omicron, will have triggered some difficult emotions in many of us. This is especially true as we're leading up to Christmas, where there is the excitement of being able to celebrate in-person with our loved ones. The good news is that we don't have to face this uncertainty alone.

Turn to God

The Bible is full of examples of people throughout history who are facing uncertainty and who are fearful.

In the psalms, we see how David does not hide his emotions from God. And we can be encouraged by his example to do the same. Jesus' disciple Peter also tells us to: 'Cast all your anxiety on him [God] because he cares for you.' (1 Peter: 5:7)

Perfect love casts out fear. And who is love? God (1 John 4:16-18).

Turn to your neighbour

The pandemic has shown us how interconnected we all are. While each of us have our individual struggles in relation to the virus, it is something that affects us all.

Therefore, we must look out for each other – those in our immediate community, but also those further afield. One of the ways we can do this is in prayer.

Many of the countries that Tearfund is working in are facing a devastating rise in coronavirus cases – such as in Afghanistan – and do not have the healthcare infrastructure to cope. This is before we even take into consideration the risks the new variant could pose.

In this Advent season, where we celebrate Immanuel – God with us – let us emulate God's love by uniting in prayer and support for our neighbours, wherever they live.

Pray with us

Dear God,

Please be close to us in this time of waiting and uncertainty. We cast our fears on you: comfort us, sustain us and guide us. Help us to look outside ourselves and draw strength from you to support others. We pray for protection for people around the world – especially those living in poverty – from coronavirus, and from this new strain, Omicron. As countries tighten restrictions to help slow the spread, we pray for provision of food, shelter and healthcare for people who do not have a safety net to fall back on.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

A note from...

'The more uncertain times get – and there have been so many uncertainties over the last two years – the more we need a solid rock to stand on. Let's cling to the truth that, even when we face the unknown: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8). And pray a way is made so that people who desperately need vaccines will get them.'

Peter Shaw, Editor of *Tear Times* and the *Prayer Diary*

Pray for the world



The drought in Kenya has led to chronic food shortages, putting people's health at risk. Animals are also dying due to lack of water. Pray for enough rainfall in the parts of Kenya that need it, as well as access to clean water and food for all those without. Pray that Tearfund's local partners will be able to reach and support those in need.



In November, more than 70 people were killed by armed groups in Burkina Faso. Other countries in the Sahel region have seen a similar spike in violence. Pray for people's protection, as well as wisdom for the leaders of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Chad in how to tackle this violence. Ask God to bring unity and peace in these countries.



Today (3 December) is International Day of Persons with Disabilities – a day to promote the rights of people with disabilities. Around 15 per cent of the world's population live with some form of disability; yet 80 per cent live in developing countries – where in many cases they are marginalised. Lift up the work Tearfund is doing with churches globally to end stigmatisation of people with disabilities.

Far from home, but never far from love

At Advent, we reflect on the perilous journeys made by Mary and Joseph before and after Jesus' birth. Such journeys are a reality for millions of people around the world today. The plight of the Rohingya people is a heartbreaking reminder of this. Sanjeev Bhanja leads Tearfund's disaster response work in Asia and has been working with the Rohingya refugees since 2017, seeing how support from Tearfund has been in helping these communities overcome such desperate circumstances.

Four years ago, almost 1 million Rohingya people fled extreme violence in Myanmar – half of them children. Many of their homes were torched and the journey to Bangladesh – often taken on foot – was dangerous. Survivors tell of being chased and attacked on the way, as well as being separated from their loved ones. There were also many that were killed during their escape.

Hope

Since the beginning of this humanitarian crisis, Tearfund and our partners have been supporting Rohingya people in the refugee camps. This includes improving access to clean water and safe sanitation by building shower blocks and toilets, as well as setting up solar lights around the camps to help keep people safe after dark. We are also running child-friendly spaces to enable children to learn, play and grow.

'More than 40,000 people have been served under different Tearfund programmes,' shares Sanjeev. 'We serve them with humility, we serve them with love. That to us, is the kingdom.'

'We are meeting their essential needs to give them hope and allow them to live a life of dignity and respect.'

The future

These families still have no prospect of returning back to their hometowns and continue to face an uncertain future in a foreign country.

'The need is still massive given the extent of the problem,' continues Sanjeev. 'So we are really grateful for the prayers and gifts of our supporters. Life is extremely difficult, but Tearfund is able to contribute to making an impact in small ways in the lives of individuals here.'

'Continue to pray for us, for our partners – that they will continue to have the resources they need to make an impact in people's lives.'

Pray with us

As you read through and encounter the nativity story this Advent – of Mary's and Joseph's struggle back to Bethlehem, the birth in the stable, and how Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus had to then flee for their lives to a new country, reflect on the struggles of people today who have been forced from their homes. Lift up your prayers for them to God; praying for their protection, provision and that they will be able to safely return home.

Breaking down barriers: how increasing inclusion is transforming communities

Poverty robs people of the chance to reach their God-given potential. But the global church is working to change that. In Sierra Leone, an exciting new project is reaching out to equip even more people to lift themselves out of poverty. And it's working...

Tearfund helps train church leaders in how they can lead their communities to overcome poverty. The leaders are empowered to set up group discussions, Bible studies and workshops where the community members decide on their goals and plan how they can reach them together.

But facilitators from local churches in Sierra Leone saw that some people in their groups were not able to join in with all the activities. Some were unable to read or write, while others were only able to contribute in their second or third language. So, what could be done?

Old traditions, new learning

'We were unintentionally excluding some people, so this was a serious issue that we wanted to address,' says Noorie Dudley-Sam, who oversees Tearfund's work in Sierra Leone and Liberia. 'We have now launched a new oral-based version of the training to make it more accessible for everyone.'

This approach uses a variety of techniques to enable everyone to be able to take part, with no reading or writing required. Some groups are using drama activities, drawing, or even singing.

Many African communities have been learning and passing on information through storytelling, songs and other oral traditions for generations, so these types of activities are both familiar and inclusive.

In each of the 13 churches in Sierra Leone where this has been trialled, church leaders are reporting back that everyone is benefitting.

Instead of text, pictures and symbols are used to communicate with people who can't read.

'People have previously really struggled to grasp... how we track our progress in becoming the church and community that we desire to be,' explains Rev Paul Conteh, who leads a community transformation group in his church.

'But [using] the symbols changes that, and makes it very simple. We can just look at the symbol for love, and ask, is love happening here?'

A bigger vision

As church leaders see the positive outcomes of this, they are looking for other ways to incorporate it into their wider church and community work.

'I am going to change our vision statement into symbols, because there are people in our church that cannot recite it because they cannot read,' says Aminata, a church leader. 'I am going to change it so that everyone can be involved.'

'Seeing the success of this is encouraging,' concludes Noorie. 'When more people are able to take an active role in community activities, then we will see even more lives transformed.'

'Please pray for our ongoing efforts to make our work with churches and communities as accessible and inclusive as possible.'

Pray with us

God's heart is for everyone to be able to get involved to help transform their communities for the better. But there are barriers that can stop people from being able to do this. This can be because of accessibility, mentioned above, but also be financial reasons too.

Spend time with God reflecting on the barriers that can stop people from taking part. Pray that these barriers will be removed and ask God what your role can be in helping to remove them.

As this story outlines, there are many different ways that people learn and communicate. Why not try expressing your prayer to God in a way that you wouldn't normally do? You could speak it out loud, draw it or express it through a song.

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