

28 Prayers

A time of prayer to end
human trafficking



Since at least 2005, Women of the ELCA participants have been actively working to end human trafficking.

Some work on education and awareness. Others provide support to agencies helping women to leave or who have left human trafficking. Others still are working to change laws that criminalize the victims of trafficking. January is observed as Human Trafficking Awareness Month. Many resources are available online, found with a simple search in a web browser. They include the federal Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking In Persons, The Polaris Project, and the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

At the Eleventh Triennial Convention (2021), the voting members adopted a resolution setting the four weeks prior to the annual NFL Super Bowl as a time of prayer to end human trafficking and called on women of this organization engage in prayer. Here are 28 prayers to use in the four weeks leading up to the Super Bowl. They can be prayed individually or in group settings. Use them at circle meetings or other any gathering of people of faith. May they inspire you and others to engage in the difficult work on ending human trafficking.

Day 28

God of the journey, to be your followers on our stretch of Gospel road cries out for us to pay attention to those with whom we share

this road. There are those near and far, of all genders and age, trafficked for greed. Little ones are crushed. Young and old are bled dry of their spirits to survive. May our journey include being open to hear the stories of the dead and the survivors, to feel their fear and pain. Help us not to turn away. It is a step toward tenderizing our hearts and preparing to act so that we might realize the power of compassion pulled through our souls. Teach us how to listen. Amen.

Day 27

Creator of all living beings, they say you hold us close to your heart in our darkest hours. Desperate to find our way, we seek out your light. Please show us the solutions that exist and need to be imagined to end the exploitation of the vulnerable. Your spirit nudges us to address the root causes of human trafficking. Grant us knowledge even if we do not always understand the reasons. You command us to love; let us reach out in support of victims and survivors of human trafficking in love so we can be instruments of your peace and a catalyst for the liberation of the exploited and enslaved. Let it be so, Lord, let it be so.

Day 26

Loving God, you give us gifts of mercy and call us to justice. You gift us with energy so that we may do your work. There are so many things taking our attention away from

the issue of human trafficking which is about power, vulnerability, and profit. Renew our energy and focus so that we may do the hard work of supporting the most vulnerable and at risk for trafficking, especially people of color and who identify as LBGTQIA+. Help us to move beyond prayers to action in supporting victims of every type of human trafficking. Help us to have the courage to learn more about it in our communities and bolster our commitment to work alongside organizations that are working to end human trafficking. Forgive us for the times we have turned away from our siblings in Christ who needed our support. Help us steady ourselves and continue to do the work we are called to do as your children. Amen.

Day 25

God of the sparrow, you are the one we believe feels the wind of feathers and the weight of a fallen bird, the beauty and the brevity of a single life. How tenderly you attend to every creature. You delight at our freedom's flight, and you grieve when we fall. We need your help today, God. We need to have the courage to feel the pain of those born human in our time, robbed of their dignity, and forced into service. If you can feel a sparrow fall, teach us how to scrape off our layers of naivete to face the truth of slavery happening today. Amen.

Day 24

God of the enslaved, we know human slavery is not a relic of the past; it continues to exist right here and right now. As much of the nation focuses on the lavish spectacle that is the Super Bowl, help us keep our focus on January as National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month. May we shine a light on those who lurk in the darkness, abusing others for their own



profit and selfish desires. As we do what we can to set the victims free, help us also to change the culture, so that no one is allowed to subjugate another person. As we face our shortcomings, may we see that acknowledging what is wrong, and working to fix it, is not a sign of weakness, but of strength. Gift us all with a spirit of compassion, fairness, and empathy. With your help, loving God, may every kind of human slavery vanish from America, and from the face of the earth. Amen.

Day 23

Comforter of souls, I don't always know how to pray when celebration turns into sorrow. What do I do when large crowds and cheers are turned into smoke screens to steal loved ones away? What do I do when the obsession of the masses becomes a guise to move souls, use bodies, and garner a profit? In my ignorance, I can only pray for those who know what to do, the seekers and aid workers who know the signs and step in when others won't. I pray they remain strong

and that others will rise too so that the weary can continue and the struggle is carried and shared. Until the day comes when I am no longer afraid, and my silence is broken until the day comes when we are all set free. Let it be so, Lord, let it be so.

Day 22

God of Light, you coax us out of our hiding with your grace. Make us children of light who reveal the dark corners of our deepest weaknesses. Though we may squint at the brightness and hide our eyes, give us the boldness to see what we have been afraid to see, to confront the demons of our nature, and find a new way to live with one another. Though our justice may be flawed, we ask you to bless our efforts to bring advocacy and accountability to human trafficking in our time. We trust your grace, above all, to shine on and through us. Amen.

Day 21

Sustaining God, your love for us and the world you made is eternal. As we try to right wrongs on so many fronts, we get so tired and discouraged. Some problems seem impossible to solve. In spite of all the hurtful things people do and say, even when we turn our backs on you, you never give up on humanity. You never stop giving us glimmers of hope, and abundant gifts of grace. As children we learned about the Kingdom of Heaven, and imagined a beautiful, shining, perfect place where we will someday live with you. Now that we are grown, we're coming to have another vision of your Heavenly Kingdom, a state of being that embraces us in all of our messiness and loves us into holiness. A place we don't have to wait to inhabit because it's within us. God, help us honor the promise you make to us. Help us make our world a fitting

dwelling place for you. Give us strength to keep fighting for good. May we extend your promise of joy and love to everyone we meet, especially your children in distress--a promise that can change their lives, and this world, forever. Amen.

Day 20

O heavenly One, we come before you with heavy hearts to submit our petitions and lift our prayers like an incense for those who are victims of human trafficking. Loving God, we seek your protection for all those who are exploited and forced into sexual slavery. Gently heal the scars in their lives. Surround them with your comforting presence. Give strength and courage to people who investigate and seek justice for the victims. We also pray as you taught us for the oppressors to open their hearts and eyes and sin no more. We claim the promise from Isaiah 61:8, "For I the Lord love justice; I hate robbery and wrong; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them." We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our savior and Lord who lives and reigns with you one God now and forever. Amen.

Day 19

God of the brokenhearted, you know their names, the light that you put in their eyes now veiled in tears. We push past the numbers of victims of sexual abuse and exploitation to see what you see, to use our minds and hands to hold faces robbed of the dance of childhood. We lift to you those who were called by names before they were used as things. Surround them who are exposed to abuse today with a will to live. Ease the suffering of those wounded for a lifetime with scars hidden in their flesh. Give

us the wisdom to fight for those broken and breaking in the shadows in our midst. Amen.

Day 18

Jesus, protector of children, you know and love them: the runaways, the abandoned, the forgotten. The teenagers who live on the streets, fighting hunger, fear, addiction. They are prime targets of human traffickers, all year long. We give thanks for the wonderful people who reach out to these lost young ones, who get them off the streets and into safe places. Who give them another chance at life. When families break, the children suffer most. Many are kicked out of their own homes; others leave to escape violence and abuse at the hands of those who should be loving and caring for them. These kids come to trust traffickers because the traffickers promise them money, food, a place to live, and a sense of belonging. By the time the lie is discovered, it is often too late. May all of us care for these young people, advocating for them and keeping them from harm. May we provide a wide and welcoming safety net, so that those who would exploit teens lose their power to entrap them. Jesus, you love the little—and big—children. May we follow your example and keep our vulnerable ones safe. Amen.

Day 17

Dear Lord, your commandment says thou shall not kill, and yet women, men, and children around the world die a thousand deaths when they become cogs in a giant machine that feeds off the world's greed. So many celebrated the end of slavery only to be fooled as it took on new subtle forms. I feel so small when I think of the enormity of human trafficking. It makes me wish for so much, like a cure for poverty. So that people won't have to make the difficult decision to

leave home looking for a better life only to fall prey to abusers who spin shiny lies of possibility. But I know prayer doesn't work that way. There are no magic words that poof good into existence. And yet I pray that the grief in my heart will have a place to go and be transformed into a life force breathed into hope. A hope that one day can turn to kindness and hospitality. A hospitality that in itself begins to change the world through the power of care and welcome. Let it be so, Lord, let it be so.

Day 16

At a time when the excitement of travel is reignited after years of uncertainty, we pray for those individuals who work in the hotel industry; from the managers, front desk staff, bartenders, and concessions staff, to housekeeping, maintenance and beyond. We ask that the excitement of meeting room night numbers does not overshadow the need to be self-aware. That the hospitality that is extended goes far beyond the "welcome." That throughout their day, all hotel staff are intentional in maintaining a watchful eye and are mindful to the trafficking signs, providing a new meaning to the words "how can I help you?" In the name of the one who welcomed all, we pray. Amen.

Day 15

God of Mary, through the songs of mothers, your heart for children embeds the music of lullabies into infant memories. You never let us forget that we were all children. We were all vulnerable and with unfinished stories. The benchmark for our humanity is measured in how we treat our children. The cracks our children are falling through are wide. The cracks are caused by our cruelty and pathology. Forgive us and in the same

breath, O Lord, empower us again to rise up, speak out, and protect every child from violence. Heal their wounds and grant them stories that sing memories of life beyond their scars. Swaddle us all in clothes of a tender mother with a strong song. Amen.

Day 14

God of the sex workers, when you lived in the world with us as Jesus, you showed only love and compassion to prostitutes. You understood the life circumstances driving their choices, and you never condemned them. Rather, you offered them respect, a helping hand up, and options for a better life. As we think about the sex industry in this country, let us separate those being trafficked against their will, from those who have chosen to do this kind of work, for whatever their reasons. May we as a nation do better by these sex workers, offering them different employment possibilities and other resources without judgement, so that no one has to turn to selling their body in order to eat or to have a roof over their head. Instead of giving these workers jail time, let us offer them hope. Let us concentrate on bringing those who use and abuse them to justice, as we pray for a world where everyone can live and work with dignity and pride. Amen.

Day 13

God of grace and mercy, we offer our prayers of protection and guidance for the women and girls that are held by human trafficking. Help them to know they are worthy of your love and grace. May they feel your presence that they are not forgotten and there are many working on their behalf to find ways to end this tragedy. We pray for families and organizations that are working tirelessly to bring awareness to trafficking



of our loved ones, sisters, and friends. Encourage us to continue the fight for the women and girls that are captured by this abusive system of human trafficking. Provide strength and courage to those trafficked as they seek a way of escape. Amen.

Day 12

Mother, Father God. Your teachings tell us life is sacred and that our time with each other is precious. But more importantly, you teach us that as we seek to have enough food, water, and shelter, there needs to be room to love and be loved. Lord, we pray that all should have enough. We pray for the end of human trafficking so that all who were taken can return to a place where they are loved and truly cared for. So that all who disappeared can be found, and the long road to healing and becoming whole again can begin. Let it be so, Lord, let it be so.

Day 11

God of power, you of all understand the goodness of power than creates, ignites imagination, expands the reach of compassion and grace. You created us in your image with a measure of your power. We don't always use it wisely or well. Your power is needed to surround those who this day are abusing other human beings with their evil use of power for selfish gain. Contain their evil, mute their manipulative influence, shutter their ability to crush the vulnerable. Help us to recognize this evil in our midst. Send champions who have the position to wall the abusers away from causing more harm. Help us to support all the resources of law and wisdom to strip them of their influence over your children. Amen.



Day 10

Please, Lord. They were just little girls once before they were stolen. Made to believe lies that anchored their hearts and bodies to

the horrors of their captivity. Kyrie eleison, save them, eleison. Even though they became women in these places, the little girl that lives inside is still there, wanting to go home to escape their captors. They do not want to be sold; they want to be seen and told we have come to help. Kyrie eleison, save them, eleison. Hold fast little girls. Help us see the truth, Lord; help us know compassion and courage to act when we do. Let it be so, Lord, let it be so.

Day 9

God of right priorities, athletes have become our modern heroes, worshipped for their (often fleeting) talents. The superstars are paid astronomical sums, which go along with exorbitant ticket prices and the high cost of television ads. Our values are skewed, compensating those who play a game much better than those who teach our kids, who protect us from criminals, who work the thankless jobs that keep society going. In this upside-down world, we fill the stadiums and cheer, turning a blind eye to the injustice happening all around us. God, set us straight. Bring us into balance. Help us to refocus on Jesus' call to love our neighbors. You love the least among us just as much as the richest and most famous. On this Super Bowl Sunday, as the cameras pan the wealthy crowd and follow the plays of the gifted athletes, let us remember to think about the viewers at home, especially our children. We pray for your wisdom and guidance, Lord. Amen.

Day 8

El Roi, we thank you for seeing us. And for reminding us of Hagar the first to call you El Roi, "the One who sees me," as we try to make sense of the thousands of women and girls who like her will be invisible to the

users of their bodies. Give us eyes, One who sees us, laser focused to see through our own biases and judgements about victims of human trafficking and to the “boys will be boys” culture that renders us helpless to do anything but close our eyes. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Day 7

Loving God, help us value others. In this time of terrible polarization, it is all too common to demonize and be demonized for our appearance, our opinions, our station in life. We huddle together in a bubble of like-minded people and judge those outside of it. Because of this, it is easy to imagine criminals as those who don’t look or act like us, to think the worst of those who appear different. Once we start down this path, it is a short step to de-valuing all outsiders, to thinking of them as less than us, even less than human. Human traffickers can, and often do, appear to be “just like us,” blending into society so that their crimes go unnoticed and unreported. And their victims often learn to stop caring about themselves, and to attach themselves to those who are mistreating them. Loving God, open my eyes to reality. Alert me to subtle signs of those in danger. Above all, remind me that we all have equal value, and the person who seems least like me, also has your face. Amen.

Day 6

God of righteous anger and holy healing, we offer thanks for all in Women of the ELCA who work tirelessly to end human trafficking. For the advocates seeking to change laws. For the givers who donate in-kind resources for those in need. For the educators who train salespeople, hotel clerks, teachers, and bus drivers. For those who work

collaboratively with others in their community to end trafficking. Sustain them all in this difficult work. Inspire the rest of us to support and nurture them, to walk beside them. In the loving name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Day 5

Spirit of fire and love, you revealed yourself at the right time as Pentecost fire, breaker of language barriers, and power that descended like a bird. You continue to reveal yourself in the advocates who walk with victims of abuse. Organizations such as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, The Polaris Project, and Coalition of Immokalee Workers, focus their help on the most vulnerable who need your protective presence revealed in human compassion. These advocates themselves have often been the victims of abuse. Their compassion for others is born of fire from a body of scars. You bless these advocates with tenderness and unbowed perseverance. Send us to aid in their efforts with our resources. May our generosity fuel the flame of your presence and light the darkness with your hope. Amen.

Day 4

The road to a just world is long. We ask, loving God, that you strengthen those who investigate and prosecute traffickers. Surround them with a community that will encourage them when they are weary. We were created to be in a community, but the pandemic has left many of us isolated. As we find our way back to each other, let us be a community that surrounds survivors of human trafficking. At the same time, let us support them as they build up the courage to testify against their former captors. Let us be a community where survivors of trafficking can cast away any shame or fear they might have around coming back to us. Let us be

a community where people feel they can start a new with hope and joy. When we stutter, Lord, help us speak up for modern-day slaves around the world. Please allow us to speak justice, and may the actions of our faith help in the efforts to bring an end to human trafficking. Let it be so, Lord, let it be so.

Day 3

Empowering One, there are so many painful situations in the world. It is easy to give our energy only to those in plain sight. Even then, we often hesitate to step up, worried about our own well-being and that of our loved ones. Are we afraid to help our neighbor being abused by her partner? It is much easier to err on the safe side and look away, hoping someone else will get involved. But Lord, you know where our hearts are. You know we really do care about injustice, and wish we were stronger in the face of it. As we look at the statistics about human trafficking, we realize how much work there is to be done to protect the victims, and to close down the avenues of exploitation. The Super Bowl this year will be in Arizona, a state with a human trafficking problem, even without the crowds gathering for the big game. We pray for the people of Arizona, that they might support local organizations making a difference. More than that, we pray for all cities and states, because this crime knows no boundaries. Show us opportunities to become part of the solution, and then give us courage to act. Amen.

Day 2

God of all, and I do mean all, even my least favorite things and people, praying for one's enemies is tough. But here I am doing it anyway because that is what you call us to do, Lord. So, amid the efforts for

justice and rescue, I pray for the people who are traffickers. I pray that you will free them from the bondage that leads them to be traffickers in the first place. I pray for whatever reason, they have internalized, leading them down the path of an oppressor. Whether hunger, poverty, or worldview, only you know what is in their hearts. I pray that you open their eyes to the harm they are causing in a way that will move them to compassion and repentance. I pray that they can seek and find forgiveness through such a transformation. I pray they seek to right the wrongs they have done. Let it be so, Lord, let it be so.

Day 1

Open our eyes, loving God, to recognize women and girls, and all who are victims of human trafficking in the large crowds of fans and predators. Help us to spot the 'something that's just not quite right' in the blank stares and hopeless looks, not just at the Super Bowl but days and months after in our neighborhoods. Give us eyes, El Roi, that during this Super Bowl we see ourselves brave and bold enough to stand up interrupting the traffic, so we can see each other. In Jesus' name. Amen.

These prayers have been written by the following.

Linda Post Bushkofsky

Bushkofsky, executive director of Women of the ELCA since 2002, loves to quilt, and her scones are legendary. She's a creative and versatile strategist with 30 years of non-profit leadership following a successful legal career. When asked to describe herself, however, she always starts with "writer," because she processes the world through her writing.

Gabriela Contreras

With over 27 years of her professional career within the ELCA, Contreras returned to the Women of the ELCA as director for meeting planning. Born and raised in Chicago, she lives in Franklin Park with her family. She has two daughters (Victoria, 26 years old; and Valentina, 7 years old).

Kristina Diaz

Diaz has a long career as a portrait photographer that has expanded to video and podcast editing/production in the past four years. She is a fresh voice from Dorado, Puerto Rico who is currently working on her first novel and a collection of short stories.

Dinah Dutta

Dutta, a former member of the churchwide executive board and an ELCA pastor, serves as supply at Cross of Glory Lutheran Church (Derby, Kan.) and is an oncology chaplain fellow in the University of Kansas Health System.

Deb Grant

Grant is currently a writer and artist after having served 37 years as an ELCA pastor in parish and campus ministry. Her words and art can be found at jazzwater.com

Elizabeth McBride

McBride has been with the organization as the director for Intergenerational programs, editor for *Boldcafe.org* and is currently the Director for Digital Engagement for Women of the ELCA. She loves connecting across generations and inventing new ways to create and sustain

community. She lives on the northwest side of Chicago with her husband, Aaron, and spirited and active daughter, Ellis.

Elise Seyfried

Seyfried is the author of four books of essays and writes for many publications, including *Living Lutheran*, *Gather*, and *The Word in Season*. She recently retired after 20 years as Director of Spiritual Formation at Christ's Lutheran Church in Oreland, PA.

Valora K Starr

Starr is director for programs with Women of the ELCA and has been with the organization since its inception in 1988. As a lifelong community organizer and advocate for the empowerment of women and girls, she has developed programs focused on the girl child, faith, and community. Valora is a member of Bethel Lutheran Church on Chicago's west side.

Eva James Yeo

Yeo is director for membership with Women of the ELCA. She loves designing unique and creative clothing and environments that create positive energy. She is inspired by nature, textures, music, and women that have overcome obstacles in their lives. Her passion centers on justice, peace, hospitality, and using her organizational skills in the nonprofit and business communities.

Copyright © 2023 Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. All rights reserved. Edited by Linda Post Bushkofsky. May be reproduced for use in Women of the ELCA units, clusters/ conferences, and synodical women's organizations, provided each copy is reproduced in its entirety, unless otherwise indicated by the material, and carries this copyright notice. Please direct all other requests for permission to reproduce to women.elca@elca.org.