BREAKING DOWN WALLS

A Liturgy of Songs, Stories and Prayers for Peace

Lord, tear down all that divides us!

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Art by Kristen Opalinski

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

As you plan your service of remembrance for the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, use this background document as your guide. You can commemorate this historic event as part of a Sunday service, or as a candlelight vigil or march in your community. Make copies of the liturgy (separate) for attendees to follow. You can select multiple people to read aloud the Scripture readings, three stories and three prayers found in this background document. Also included are an optional profession of faith and additional song selections. Your service can conclude with a candlelight procession inside your church building or around your neighborhood.

INTRODUCTION

On Nov. 9, 1989, after decades of separation between East and West Germany, the Berlin Wall began to come down. It was a moment that signified newfound freedoms for the people of East Germany and a reversal from years of division caused by the wall and an oppressive regime. The brave actions of the German people, who gathered by the tens of thousands in the streets of Leipzig in nonviolent protest, are often lost in our history and storytelling. Thirty years later, we gather to celebrate this "Peaceful Revolution" that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall – and the Lutheran roots of that revolution. This service of remembrance draws inspiration from those who peacefully helped end the divisions between East and West. As we commemorate and celebrate the opening of the Berlin Wall, we hold in our hearts and prayers those separated and oppressed by other walls – in Palestine, on the U.S.-Mexico border and in all the other places we build barriers, in our communities and in our hearts. Come, Holy Spirit, lead us to unity and peace!

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Galatians 3:23-29: [23]Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. [24]Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. [25]But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, [26]for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. [27]As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. [28]There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. [29]And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Luke 4:16-21: [16]When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, [17]and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: [18]'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, [19]to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' [20]And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. [21]Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'"

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STORIES

In the Shadow of the Berlin Wall: Two Reflections on Life During the Separation Between East and West

It was in the summer of 1961 that my request to visit my grandmother in Kiel had been rejected without justification – that was customary in the German Democratic Republic. The alternative was to visit my aunt in East Berlin and friends in West Berlin. Despite several checks and interviews, the police allowed us through, to leave the Federal Republic of Germany forever at a time when thousands of GDR citizens were travelling via Berlin to West Germany. I decided to stay where I felt at home. On the morning of Aug. 13, I was stunned to witness the start of construction of the "anti-fascist protective wall" – according to the official language. This cement-block separation of the allegedly democratic state of the German Democratic Republic lasted for 28 years. The wall affected and shaped my life, but it has not been able to limit the growing urge for human rights and freedom. Walls can separate bodies but never spirit and soul.

–Gisela Kallenbach, former member of the European Parliament and member of the Parliament of Saxony

A part of my family comes from Silesia, a historical region of Central Europe located mostly in modern-day Poland, with small parts in the Czech Republic and Germany. We were expelled to various German zones after the Second World War. We often received visitors – unfortunately always one-sided due to the inner-German border. I understood the reason why with a family trip to Berlin. From the landmark television tower in the eastern sector I could see the wall – and the world behind it. There were no limits to my eyes, yet this part of Germany seemed unreachable for us in the "East." In view of the massive border protection, crowds of people rose up who believed in the removal of the wall. Unimaginable at that time – individuals united into masses of people, who brought down the wall and thus an entire system. Even today it is almost unbelievable.

–Frank Schmidt, Leipzig, Germany

PRAYER TO ACCOMPANY THE STORY

Lord, just as you breathed a spirit of hope upon the people of East and West Germany – when a wall of separation stood tall, casting shadows of doubt and division – pour out that same spirit upon us now as we seek to topple the walls that separate us from each other. Amen.

2,000 Years of Harvest: Symbols of Strength in Palestine in the Midst of Occupation

Every olive tree in the grove has been intentionally planted. Among the many trees, nine large ones, planted over 2,000 years ago, stand out. Salameh Bishara, a Lutheran Palestinian, grew up under the strong branches of his family's trees near Bethlehem, cradled in the valley of Beit Jala known as Bir Ouna. Those trees now stand in the shadow of Israel's separation barrier.

Bishara's trees are rooted in Palestinian land that is under Israeli occupation. Though this valley where the olive grove is located is nestled far into the West Bank behind the 1949 Green Line, it has since been claimed by Israel as property of Jerusalem.

Part of Salameh's family land was confiscated by Israeli soldiers without negotiation or compensation. Building soon began on top of the farmland, covering the soil with apartment buildings for Israeli settlers. As the Gilo settlement grew, demolition orders surrounded the land around the nine large olive trees. But the trees continued to produce their sacred fruit, year after year, as if in an act of defiance that reflects the rootedness of the hands that continued to cultivate among their branches. Every year, the harvest fills the oil jars of the family. *"Zeit al fil couz"* goes the proverb: "If you have your floor and olive jar full, you don't need anything else in life."

The olive trees stand firm in the next season as more land is cleared, ever closer to the nine olive trees, this time for a wall. A wall that Israel builds for security – but rather than being built on Israeli land, the wall is built deep into Palestinian land. It separates Palestinians from each other and from land they own. Palestinian priests come and pray with the Christians of Beit Jala among the uprooted trees as bulldozers stand nearby.

Twenty-eight feet high, the wall towers over the nine large olive trees. They continue to bring forth good things, even in the daunting shade of the separation wall that casts a harrowing shadow over their future. And in that shadow families still celebrate. They give thanks for generational dedication to the land and for trees with roots as deep as their own that continue to bring forth blessings from the rockiest ground. Indeed, Salameh says, these trees have survived for over 2,000 years, and they will survive another 2,000.

–Calla Gilson, 2018-2019 ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission volunteer, Jerusalem/West Bank

PRAYER TO ACCOMPANY THE STORY

Lord, you who have created us all in your image, help us to see each other as part of one human family. Help us to tear down that which divides us so that we might look at each other as neighbors, not enemies. Help us to put down roots for peace and unity so that, like an olive tree, we might bear fruit together. Amen.

Friendship Park: Once a Symbol of Celebration, Now a Symbol of Separation

Friendship Park's name says it all. The park, straddling the U.S.-Mexico border, was born as a symbol of friendship between Mexico and the United States. When it was first inaugurated by First Lady Patricia Nixon, there was only a small barbwire fence between the two countries. Pictures show her shaking hands with people in Mexico who were also there to celebrate.

Although the border between Mexico and the United States was always marked, the connection between the communities was also evident. People in the United States met their families at the park for picnics regularly to share a meal together, celebrate important events or simply embrace their loved ones. There was a fence, but people could easily see that this was a single park with two different sides, one in the United States and one in Mexico.

The radical transformation of the park began in the 1990s – the open-weave metal fence was not pretty, but it still allowed family members to see each other face-to-face and community members to interact. These days the park is open only from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. In addition, the U.S. government announced more restrictions to entering the park in 2018. Only ten people are allowed to be in the park at one time. On the Mexican side, the park is open to anyone at any time.

If you go to the U.S. side of Friendship Park today, you won't see communities coming together to celebrate, worship or join in other activities as in years past. People who go there to visit their families might be able to look past the border agents and surveillance tower to get a glance of someone on the other side. They may even be able to get a finger through a small hole in the fortified fence to touch a loved one. The barrier now goes into the ocean and disappears.

The physical barrier is a continuous reminder that families who have been part of our communities for years will continue to be separated from their loved ones and that people seeking safety or better lives will risk everything, crossing increasingly dangerous terrain at the border. While Friendship Park was created as a celebration of the connection between Mexico and the United States, it has become a symbol of separation and brokenness.

–Alaide Vilchis Ibarra, Network Organizer, AMMPARO

PRAYER TO ACCOMPANY THE STORY

Lord, help us to reject all that divides us. Let us work to build communities of welcome so that all might find refuge and safety. Pour out your Spirit upon us so that we might name and reject the forces of bigotry, racism and dehumanization in our midst. Stir in us calls for justice and love without measure. Amen.

Ich Glaube Dir – *A profession of faith for living in danger, 1985*

I believe in God, the source, center and purpose of all life.
You call me to life among the living.
You have gifted me with the ability to sing and to love, to cry and to play, to think and to speak, to work and to rest, to change and to preserve.
You invite me into partnership with you in the middle of the world you've entrusted us with.
You've given me so much latitude – the freedom to put myself and my world on the line.
I believe in you, God, you are patient, gracious and full of goodness. For that reason, I do not despair when I look at the world that you have given into my hands. You hold it in your hands. That is my hope. Because of this alone, I do not drown in my fear.
I thank you for everything that you allow me to experience in this world.
I believe in you, the Son of Man, true man, man of God. Jesus from Nazareth. I believe you are peace. You embodied peace in the midst of conflict. You spared yourself nothing, and nothing was spared you. I look up to you, even though you do not wish to be above me. That is why I look up.
In you I see that gentleness is not weakness, humility is not subservience, peaceableness is not passivity.
I believe in you, the beginning of a life without domination.
I believe in you, the end of restrictions.
I believe in you, the retirement of vengeance.
I believe in you, the love of life without claim of possession.
I believe in you, nearness to the weak without the condescension of the strong.
I believe in you, the forgiveness of sin without a bitter aftertaste.
I believe in you, the life that has gone through death.
I believe in you, even when I am too indolent to live it.
I believe in you and the tears you cried over us when you looked at our city.
You show us what brings life. I am so happy that you are here.
I believe in you, renewing Spirit, Spirit of fellowship and justice, Spirit of truth and Spirit of freedom, Holy Spirit, blaze of life within us.
I believe in your present, from which a future grows for me, a future with room for all.
I believe in you, in the bread and the wine, broken, shared, given: a piece for everyone.
I believe in you, transforming Spirit. You point me into life's future.
When everything is going in circles, when I think I don't have a prayer, when death and hunger are closing in and I stare spellbound at the coming end, you remain my only hope.
Over and over, you begin again with me, with us, with everyone.
Creative Spirit, yesterday, today and tomorrow – your breath gives me life.
You let me set forth toward your kingdom.
You let me discover signs of life – and be them.
So come, Dove! Bring me the olive branch of hope.
God, Holy Spirit, who touches the ends of the earth, let me abide within the rainbow of your kindness.

From the book "Risking Peace" by Friedrich Schorlemmer.
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ADDITIONAL SONGS

- “Bring Peace to Earth Again” (ELW 700)
- “The People Walk” / “Un Pueblo Que Camina” (ELW 706)
- “Let Streams of Living Justice” (ELW 710)
- “In Christ There Is No East or West” (ELW 650)
- “The Church’s One Foundation” (ELW 654)
- “Blest Be the Tie That Binds” (ELW 656)
- “We Are All One in Christ” / “Somos Uno en Cristo” (ELW 643)