

SAVING MOTHER'S LIVES

Mother's Day is May 13, 2018. As we celebrate moms, we must also work to save mothers' lives.

Scripture tells us that motherhood is sacred. Motherhood is an identity based on relationships that are not defined by any one variable, including childbirth. However, as we prepare to celebrate Mother's Day, it is urgent that we recognize the perils that women and girls face as a result of pregnancy.

The facts are simple and devastating: **830 mothers die each day** from pregnancy-related complications, and many of these deaths are preventable. That number is decreasing globally, but there are 13 countries where that rate is actually increasing. The U.S. is one of those countries.

We hope that you'll use Mother's Day as a chance to celebrate all that moms contribute to our families and congregations. We also hope you'll use this opportunity to talk about the challenges women face in pregnancy and childbirth and encourage action to save moms' lives.

We've created several resources to help you in this task. This packet includes:

- A printable bulletin insert that features excerpts from the United Methodist Book of Resolutions.
- Preaching tips to help with the sermon-writing process.
- A maternal health values sheet: a one-page document that summarizes the values set by General Conference.

Both the bulletin insert and the values sheets can be shared easily with elected officials.

In addition to this packet, we are publishing several articles about saving mothers' lives on our website. Visit the [News & Stories](#) section of our website (www.umcjustice.org) for new articles every week.

Church and Society's general secretary, the Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, along with several bishops, also released a Mother's Day pastoral letter that focuses on saving mothers' lives. The letter is available on our our website at www.umcjustice.org/mothersdayletter.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Saving the Lives of Moms and Babies

"Every 90 seconds a woman dies somewhere in the world from complications during pregnancy or childbirth; for every woman who dies, another 20 suffer disability. The main causes of maternal mortality include infection, hemorrhaging, high blood pressure, and obstructed labor. **They are mostly preventable.**"

United Methodist Book of Resolutions, "Maternal Health: The Church's Role"

Motherhood is Sacred

United Methodists say that motherhood is sacred. "Mothers are important figures in our biblical tradition. Women like Eve, Hagar, Sarah, Elizabeth, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, are remembered for their role as bearers of new life. But within the sacred texts, stories also tell of maternal tragedy and loss. Both Rachel (Genesis 35:16-20) and the wife of Phinehas (1 Samuel 4:19-20) died after prolonged and difficult labors. Tragically, stories of maternal death are commonplace today."

United Methodist Book of Resolutions, "Maternal Health: The Church's Role"

Access to Quality Care

Jesus' commitment to healing the sick and John Wesley's vision for ensuring health and well-being teach us that the health of the community must not be neglected. "Providing the care needed to maintain health, prevent disease, and restore health after injury or illness is a responsibility each person owes others and government owes to all..."

United Methodist Social Principles, ¶162V

Good Stewardship of Resources

United Methodists call for health care that invests in low-cost, high impact strategies that prevent maternal and child deaths (e.g., contraceptives, high blood pressure screenings). "Health is a condition of physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being... Creating the personal, environmental and social conditions in which health can thrive is a joint responsibility — public and private. ... Health care is a basic human right."

United Methodist Social Principles, ¶162V

Motherhood is sacred.

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WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Mothers' Day preaching tips

Theological Task: Save Mothers' Lives.

Motherhood is sacred. Motherhood is an identity based on relationships that are not defined by any one variable, including childbirth. However, as we celebrate Mother's Day, it is essential that we recognize the perils women and girls face as a result of pregnancy.

Within sacred texts, women like Eve, Hagar, Sarah, Elizabeth, and Mary the mother of Jesus are remembered for their role as bearers of new life. There are also stories of maternal tragedy and loss. Both Rachel (Genesis 35:16-20) and the wife of Phinehas (1 Samuel 4:19-20) died after prolonged and difficult labors.

Women and girls become pregnant today for many of the same reasons we learn about in scripture: love and mutual intimacy (like Elizabeth and Sarah); rape, slavery and human trafficking (like Hagar).

Our responsibility as Christians is to prevent harm and promote the health of women and girls. We know how to do this. Now, let's be like the Syrophenician woman and use our voices to save lives of women and girls, even if it creates some discomfort.

Scripture:

Lectionary: John 17:6-19 — Thy will be done

The lectionary reading focuses on the middle portion of a prayer in which Jesus prays on behalf of his disciples.

Throughout the prayer — and throughout the gospels — Jesus repeatedly refers to God as father. Some interpret this to mean that God is literally a man, though, perhaps, not a human man, and at the least, a masculine deity. Others suggest that this doesn't mean that God *is* a father, but instead is a metaphor used to show the profound bonds between God and Jesus.

We often make use of this rhetorical device in our churches, calling our siblings in Christ brother or sister. This isn't to mean that someone is biologically my sister, but we use the metaphor to indicate our deep, familial relationship.

Given this is Mother's Day, you might find it edifying to explore God's maternal qualities. For example, Jesus uses the metaphor of a mother hen in Luke's gospel to describe his desire to protect his people.



WOMEN AND CHILDREN

That's because protecting chicks is serious business for a mother hen. She will puff her feathers up. She'll cluck a warning. She'll peck and chase off predators. Mother hens are not to be messed with.

And that's what Jesus is praying for here. He says that he has protected his followers, and he prays that God might continue to provide protection.

There are also some interesting connections to explore here between this prayer and another prayer Jesus offers, the Lord's prayer.

As Mark G. Vitalis Hoffman suggests at WorkingPreacher.com, John's prayer contains [echoes of the Lord's prayer](#). Hoffman points to a few things, including the prayer is addressed to "Holy Father," includes aspects of the importance of God's name and a petition for protection from evil (or the evil one). Also, the Greek word *hagiazō*, which is translated in these passages as sanctify, is the word found in the Lord's Prayer that is traditionally translated as hallowed.

In John's prayer, Jesus alludes to the fact that he's given the disciples the teaching upon which they can build a foundation and deepen their faith.

Indeed, Jesus equips us with many tools to guide us on our journey, including the Lord's Prayer. It encourages us to pay attention to the world around us and to examine our hearts and behaviors, so we can be sanctified as Christ was sanctified.

Try pairing "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world," from John with, "Thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven" from the Lord's Prayer.

Together, these passages create an expectation that we will do the work required to build the realm of God, the realm where heaven and earth are united, where all is sanctified and at one with God.

As we live out this expectation, we become aware that 830 women die each day due to pregnancy and childbirth-related complication. We become aware that women who have had a cesarean section may be more at risk for placenta accreta and their next pregnancy might be more complicated and life-threatening. We become aware that women who do not have information about and access to contraception to prevent pregnancy within 18 months of delivery are more likely to have pre-term labor putting them and their baby at higher risk of dying.



WOMEN AND CHILDREN

And as we live out this expectation, we must as put our faith into action to save mother's lives. Every woman and girl who becomes pregnant must have access to high-quality and affordable prenatal, birthing and postpartum care. Each woman and girl should have access to age-appropriate and comprehensive sexuality education and contraception. We can live out this call through individual action and collectively through our congregations, denomination and the powers of government.

Non-lectionary: Matthew 15:21-28 — Mothers advocating

The Syrophenician has listened to the teachings of Jesus. She risks alienation by challenging Jesus' authority in the midst of the disciples and others who want her to go away and quit bothering them. Her love for her daughter and her desperation for her life to be saved causes her to question Jesus' myopic response. Is Jesus there only to serve people who are Jewish? Her truth-telling reaches Jesus' core and he heals her daughter.

"Women are crying out for not only their own survival but also the survival of their families and communities. They deserve access to services and care that empower their personal decision-making. As a global church, we are called to eradicate systems of oppression and marginalization that inhibit women's well-being." (Book of Resolutions, "Maternal Health: The Church's Role")

Often in scripture, mothers are only noted as the bearers of children. The agency of women in the biblical stories is often not recorded. We hear the children have grown to be faithful and have developed into faithful stewards; however, the role of the mother in the educating, protecting, nurturing does not have import for the writers of the biblical narrative.

Yet, in this scripture, the gospel writer reminds readers that mothers are prophetic voices invested in the livelihoods of our children and the communities in which they are raised. We do not know if the Syrophenician woman gave birth to her daughter (there are many ways to become a mother), but we do know her persistence saved her daughter's life.

The Facts:

- With the commitment of foreign aid and the implementation of best practices, deaths of mothers and children under age 5 worldwide have been cut by more than half since 1990.¹
- Globally, 830 women die each day due to complications during pregnancy or childbirth. One-third of these deaths could be prevented with low-cost, high-impact interventions (sanitation, skilled birth attendants, contraception, addiction and rehabilitation services).¹
- If a woman waits 18 months to become pregnant after giving birth, she and her baby will be stronger and more likely to survive. Access to information and long-acting



WOMEN AND CHILDREN

contraception greatly reduces the chances that a woman will die as a result of childbirth.²

- Implementing state-wide protocols, California has brought its maternal mortality rate down to 7.3 per 100,000 live births – one-third of the national rate of 22.0 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births.³
- Black women are 243 times more likely to die from pregnancy or childbirth comparable to maternal mortality in Mexico and Uzbekistan.⁴
- Black college-educated women are more likely to suffer severe complications of pregnancy or childbirth than white women who never graduated from high school.⁴
- United Methodist health system, OhioHealth, is lowering barriers to care and has decreased the maternal mortality rate in “hot spots” in Columbus, OH to 5.2 infant deaths per 1,000 births. (Hot spots are areas with the highest lack of medical care and the highest infant mortality rates.)⁵

¹“Maternal Mortality.” World Health Organization, World Health Organization, Nov. 2016, www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs348/en/.

²Caba, Justin. “Pregnancy Spacing: Mothers Should Wait At Least 18 Months Between Pregnancies To Avoid Health Problems.” Medical Daily, Newsweek Media Group, 20 Apr. 2015, www.medicaldaily.com/pregnancy-spacing-mothers-should-wait-least-18-months-between-pregnancies-avoid-329932.

³Belluz, Julia. “California Decided It Was Tired of Women Bleeding to Death in Childbirth.” Vox, Vox, 29 June 2017, www.vox.com/science-and-health/2017/6/29/15830970/women-health-care-maternal-mortality-rate.

⁴Martin, Nina, and Renee Montagne. “Nothing Protects Black Women From Dying in Pregnancy and Childbirth.” ProPublica, Pro Publica Inc., 7 Dec. 2017, www.propublica.org/article/nothing-protects-black-women-from-dying-in-pregnancy-and-childbirth.

⁵“Wellness on Wheels Mobile Unit Helps to Reduce Infant Mortality in Franklin County.” OhioHealth, OhioHealth, 29 June 2016, newsroom.ohiohealth.com/wellness-on-wheels-mobile-unit-helps-to-reduce-infant-mortality-in-franklin-county/.



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United Methodist Book of Resolutions, “Maternal Health: The Church’s Role”

The Numbers

- **830 women** around the world die each day from complications during pregnancy and childbirth.
- **100,000 lives** could be saved with access to low-cost, high-impact interventions.
- **22 mothers** die in the U.S. for every 100,000 live births, the highest rate of any developed country.

What Works

- Long-acting contraceptives
- Spacing and timing pregnancies
- Prenatal, delivery and postnatal care
- Bias-free medical care
- Safe water and sanitation
- Smoking cessation and nutritional counseling
- Diagnosing and treating high blood pressure



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What You Can Do

The United Methodist Church calls upon local congregations to:

- 1 Support United Methodist projects around the world working on maternal health and family planning.
- 2 Advocate with policy makers at all levels to increase access to maternal health and family planning.
- 3 Support local health initiatives that expand access to information and services for women's health.

Write Your Members of Congress

The U.S. Congress is currently **Preventing Maternal Deaths** considering two bipartisan bills **Act** (H.R. 1318, S. 1112) to support that will work to stop mothers and babies from dying from during pregnancy, childbirth and childbirth.

Write your members of Congress and ask them to support and cosponsor these two vital bills. Share a personal story, if you have one, and tell them that as a United Methodist you believe motherhood is sacred.

“In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells the disciples that he came so that they could live life to the fullest. God desires that every mother, every child, and every family not only survive, but thrive. Tragically, survival is often a daily struggle for those who lack access to basic services and care. God calls us to respond to the suffering in the world, to love our neighbors throughout the world. As followers of Christ, we are members of the same body. The loss of one member is a loss for all.”

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