



# GOD WITH US

*"...And they will call him Immanuel"  
(which means 'God with us')."*

—Matthew 1:23

## Introduction to the 40-Day Prayer Guide

In forty days Synod 2024 will begin, and it looks like this will be another challenging year for us as we meet together. As we look ahead to Synod 2024, let's join with others across North America in prayer. The theme for these prayers is "Immanuel: God with Us."

These prayers are presented to help guide us in remembering the truth of God's promise of his presence in all of life's situations. In this time of uncertainty in the CRC, being reminded of the truth that God is with us—in our fear, in peace, in our anxiety, in trust, in community, in joy, in doubt, in our mission, in the unknown, in all of life—should be foundational for us.

These prayers are written by CRC members, missionaries, pastors, and staff. They are written by young and old. They are written in many languages, with English translations for all, reflecting the beautiful diversity of the CRC.

The authors of these prayers hope that you find them to offer a gracious, generous, loving, and longing perspective, that we may be reminded that we belong to God and that he is always with us.

—Jon Hoekema

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SUNDAY, MAY 5, 2024 - DAY 1

# God With Us

Suggested Bible Reading: Psalm 139:7-12

Where can I go from your Spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there;

if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

If I rise on the wings of the dawn,

if I settle on the far side of the sea,

even there your hand will guide me,

your right hand will hold me fast.

If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me

and the light become night around me,"

even the darkness will not be dark to you;

the night will shine like the day,

for darkness is as light to you.

## Prayer

*By Jon Hoekema, CRC prayer shepherd and pastor of Horizon Community Church, Downers Grove, Illinois*

Lord Jesus, Immanuel—God with us,

We praise and thank you that you are with us. We praise you that you did not leave us to ourselves, that you did not leave us to our sin, but that "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14).

We thank you that wherever we go, you are there. Thank you that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God.

Forgive us when we want to flee from your Spirit, when we hide from your presence and try to run away from you. Forgive us when we would rather be in the dark than be in the light. Give us a longing and desire to be with you.

We pray as we enter these forty days before our synod gathering, the realization that you are always with us, that you will never leave us or forsake us, may give us rest. May the truth that God is with us give us the assurance that we are not alone but belong to him.

Help us to trust that your hand will guide us, even when we don't see it;  
to trust that your right hand will hold us fast, even when we falter;  
and that your presence will bring us light, even when we find ourselves in the darkness.  
Amen.

## Questions for Reflection and/or Conversation

- The psalmist wrestled with fear that the darkness would hide him and that the light would become night around him. Do you ever wrestle with that fear?
- What are some ways in which you've experienced God's light entering dark spaces?



# GOD WITH US

*"...And they will call him Emmanuel"  
(which means 'God with us')."*

—Matthew 1:23

MONDAY, MAY 6, 2024 - DAY 2

## God With Us

Suggested Bible Reading: John 14:16-17

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."

## Prayer

*Spanish*

Por Samantha Sebastia, miembro de la Iglesia Carismah en Katy, Texas. Ella dice: "El año pasado, tuve el privilegio de servir como representante de jóvenes adultos para el sínodo, y es a través de esta experiencia que me siento honrada de tener la oportunidad de contribuir al Sínodo 2024 a través de la oración."

Querido Padre Celestial, Al embarcarnos en los 40 Días de Oración para el Sínodo de este año, venimos ante ti buscando tu guía y sabiduría. En Juan 14:16-17, prometes enviar otro defensor, el Espíritu de verdad, para estar con nosotros para siempre. Oramos fervientemente por la presencia de tu Espíritu Santo para dirigir y guiar las decisiones tomadas durante el Sínodo 2024. Que tu Espíritu habite entre nosotros, iluminando nuestras mentes y corazones con tu discernimiento. Concédenos, Señor, la humildad para escuchar atentamente a tu Espíritu, incluso cuando desafían nuestra manera de pensar. Que nuestras discusiones estén marcadas por la gracia, el amor y la unidad, mientras buscamos discernir tu voluntad para nuestra iglesia y comunidad. Levantamos ante ti a todos aquellos que se verán afectados por las decisiones tomadas durante el Sínodo 2024. Que encuentren consuelo y seguridad al saber que tu Espíritu está obrando en y a través de nosotros. En todo lo que hagamos, que tu nombre sea glorificado mientras entregamos

nuestras voluntades a la tuya, confiando en tu soberanía y bondad. En el nombre de Jesús, oramos. Amén.

### *English*

By Samantha Sebastia, a member of Carismah Church in Katy, Texas. She says, “Last year I had the privilege of serving as a young adult representative for synod, and it is through this experience that I feel honored to have the opportunity to contribute to Synod 2024 through prayer.”

Dear Heavenly Father,

As we embark on the 40 Days of Prayer for this year’s synod, we come before you seeking your guidance and wisdom. In John 14:16-17 you promise to send an advocate, the Spirit of truth, to be with us forever. We pray fervently for the presence of your Holy Spirit to lead and guide the decisions made during Synod 2024. May your Spirit dwell among us, illuminating our minds and hearts with your insights and discernment. Grant us, Lord, the humility to listen attentively to your Spirit, even when our preconceptions and preferences are challenged. May our discussions be marked by grace, love, and unity as we seek to discern your will for our church and community. We lift up to you all who will be affected by the decisions made during Synod 2024. May they find comfort and assurance in knowing that your Spirit is at work in and through us, shaping all of us as siblings in Christ. In all things, may your name be glorified as we surrender our wills to yours, trusting in your sovereignty and goodness. In Jesus’ name we pray.

Amen.

## Questions for Reflection and/or Conversation

- In what ways have you seen God’s Spirit of truth at work, challenging and correcting some of our false understandings?
- Jesus reminds us that the Spirit of truth lives *with* and *in* the body of Christ. How might God be calling you to trust his Spirit’s presence and work in the body?



# GOD WITH US

*"...And they will call him Immanuel"  
(which means 'God with us')."*

—Matthew 1:23

TUESDAY, MAY 7, 2024 - DAY 3

## God With Us: In Fear

**Suggested Bible Reading:** Isaiah 41:10

"So do not fear, for I am with you;  
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you and help you;  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

### Prayer

*By Tim Rietkerk, who leads chaplaincy ministry in the CRCNA. He lives in San Diego, California, and has served over 30 years as a chaplain in the U.S. Army, Veterans Affairs Healthcare, and hospice.*

Lord,

It seems to us that we are living in a time of chaos. We look at your creation and wonder about the things we have done inadvertently and deliberately to fail in our responsibility, given by you, to be good stewards.

In our communities we often fail to see our neighbors who might look different to us as fellow imagebearers of the divine. We are quick in temper and judgment as we seek righteous certainty. We often avert our eyes and close our ears to persons in distress.

Even with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ we find ourselves in disagreements and treat each other in ways that contradict your desire for us to be united and to be in service to each other as a living witness to your grace and forgiveness.

All of this leads to fears and anxieties, and in the chaos we cry out to you. Help us to trust in you and to listen to the Spirit. May we hear your promise and live in a way that shows we trust you when you say to us, “But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:8-10).

Lord, hear our prayer.

## Questions for Reflection and/or Conversation

- Where in your own life are you experiencing chaos and fear? Spend a few moments in honest reflection before God.
- Reflect on the God-active verbs in the passage above. God promises to strengthen, to help, to uphold. Choose one of these and spend time praying, asking God to help you remember his promises in your life today.

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(which means 'God with us')."*

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WEDNESDAY, MAY 8, 2024 - DAY 4

## God With Us: In Fear

**Suggested Bible Reading:** Isaiah 43:1-3

恐れるな。わたしはあなたを贖う（イザヤ書43章1-3前半）

But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior" (ESV).

ヤコブよ、あなたを創造された主は / イスラエルよ、あなたを造られた主は / 今、こう言われる。恐れるな、わたしはあなたを贖う。あなたはわたしのもの。わたしはあなたの名を呼ぶ。水の中を通るときも、わたしはあなたと共にいる。大河の中を通っても、あなたは押し流されない。火の中を歩いて、焼かれず / 炎はあなたに燃えつかない。わたしは主、あなたの神 / イスラエルの聖なる神、あなたの救い主。(新共同訳)

## Prayer

*By Lawrence K. Spalink, Resonate Global Mission senior missionary to Japan*

*Japanese*

天地万物を造り、今も支配し導いておられる全能の主なる神様、どんな時にもご自分の民を見守り、助けて、救ってくださる主でおられることを感謝いたします。恐ろしい火災があり、大地震があり、すべてを流し、滅ぼしてしまう巨大な津波が起こってきます。でも、そのような時にもあなたは、「恐れるな。わたしは共にいる。」聖なる救い主としてご自身を表してください。インマヌエルが常に私たちの救いの岩です。世世の主の民も経験したように、弱くて困り果て



た時があっても、私たちをお守りください。あなたの平安を与え、あなたの示す道を歩ませてくださいますように。私たちも弱さがあります。私たちがどうなってしまうのかの不安に覆われることがあり、大きな苦しみを余儀なくされていることがおられます。遠いところにいるものもいれば、私たちのすぐ近くの隣人もいます。私たちの愛している教会についても煩わしい思いがあります。あなたのみことばに忠実にしたがいながら、愛の一致を保ち、世の人々に私たちがあなたの弟子であることを立証できるだろうかと心配します。いずれの場合もどうか主よ、私たちの不安を取り去り、あなたの御霊によって私たちを導き、困っている方々に手を差し伸べて、あなたに寄り頼むことに伴う安心へと導きさせてください。主イエス・キリストのみ名によってお祈りいたします。アーメン。

### English

Lord God Almighty, Creator of all things, who rules over and guides them today too, we thank you that even now you reveal yourself as the Lord who watches over, helps, and delivers your people. We may experience terrible fires, powerful earthquakes, and gigantic tsunami waves that can easily destroy everything! But even when these may occur, you say to us, "Do not be afraid; I am with you!" You reveal yourself as our Holy Savior. You are Immanuel, our Rock of salvation. Though we are weak and may be at the end of our rope, watch over us as you have done for your people of all ages. Grant us your peace, and please cause us to walk in the ways you direct us.

We do have many weaknesses. At times, feelings of anxiety may overwhelm us, and we may wonder what will become of us. There are folks who are facing great suffering with no way to escape. Some of them are far away, and some of them are our nearby neighbors. We are anxious too about our beloved church, wondering if we can faithfully follow your Word and also keep unity in love for one another, proving to the world that we are your disciples. Lord, no matter what our circumstances, in our seasons of worry, take away our fears, lead us by your Spirit, and help us to extend our hands to our perplexed neighbors so that we may guide them to the peace of mind that comes to all who place their faith in you. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

## Questions for Reflection and/or Conversation

- Look at your hands. In what situations have anxiety and fear made you clench your hands tight?
- Read God's promises again in Isaiah 43. How might God be calling you to extend your hands—open to receive and ready to seek peace?



# GOD WITH US

*"...And they will call him Immanuel"  
(which means 'God with us')."*

—Matthew 1:23

THURSDAY, MAY 9, 2024 - DAY 5

## God With Us: In Fear

**Suggested Bible Reading:** Psalm 23:4

Even though I walk  
through the darkest valley,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.

### Prayer

*By Hannah Admiral, a member of Calvin CRC in Ottawa, Ontario, and a student at Redeemer University. She currently attends Meadowlands CRC in Ancaster, Ontario, while away from home.*

God, you are with me no matter where I go or what I do. Whether my days are joyful and fulfilling, or fearful and feeling empty, your presence is my comfort and joy. Even in the darkest valley you are by my side, leading me in your light toward everlasting comfort and peace.

Lord, when we fear, we can feel as if you are infinitely far away. Help us remember that you are always with us, dwelling in our hearts through all turmoil and every trial. Help us not to fear but to instead delight in your presence, knowing that you have conquered our every enemy.

I pray for all your people who will gather at Synod 2024. This is a time when changes are near. Lord, we don't know what the future holds, and many of your people are afraid. Remind all your people that you are here in this uncertain space with us and that every decision made is guided by you.

Lord, I thank you that your Spirit is here with us, and that you are ever-present in the internal struggles of your church as well as in every struggle happening internationally. I pray that your people may find peace in your presence and in the knowledge that we need not fear evil, for you are with us always. Please conquer our fear in order to make room in our hearts for the blessings of love and wisdom that you shower on us.

I thank you for sending your Son to die for us so that evil has no power and we can be free from fear.

In his glorious name, Amen.

## Questions for Reflection and/or Conversation

- Where have you experienced God's comfort recently? Thank him for it.
- Where might you still feel as if you are walking in the shadow? Ask God to lift your head to see his staff as he leads you through.

# GOD WITH US

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(which means 'God with us')."*

—Matthew 1:23

FRIDAY, MAY 10, 2024 - DAY 6

## God With Us: In Peace/Shalom

Suggested Bible Reading: John 16:33

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

### Prayer

*By Ralph Koops, a retired CRC pastor and a member of Hope CRC in Brantford, Ontario, who continues to preach a fair bit*

*Dutch*

"Niet ons, o Here, niet ons, maar U naam komt eer toe" (Psalm 115:1).

U bent de God van het verbond. God met ons. U houdt trouw tot in eeuwigheid.

Met het oog op de komende synode van onze kerk belyden wy, zoals wy dat vaak doen in een kerkdienst, dat onze hulp en onze verwachting is in de naam van de drieënige God, de God van vrede. Wy zyn wel eens bezorgd over onze kerk, dat toch U kerk is. Wy zyn maar een kleine schare in de ene algemene Christelyke kerk. Geef dat op de komende synode, al de afgevaardigden vervult mogen zyn met U, o Heilige Geest.

Heer, wy leven en belyden in een wereld en in een maatschappy waar U vroeger een uitroepeten was en tegenwoordig alleen maar een vraagteken. Wy weten echter dat wy te doen hebben met een God die alles regeert en bestuurd. En de engelen by Jezus' geboorte spraken van vrede. In dat vertrouwen gaan we ook verder, de komende synode inclusief, wetende dat Jezus Christus Zyn kerk in stand houdt. U, Heer Jezus, hebt toch gezegd dat alle macht in hemel en op aarde aan U gegeven is. En U vrede dringt tot de hele schepping door.

Er is zoveel gebeden voor onze kerk, vooral wanneer de synode vergadert. Wil, om Jezus wil, al die gebeden horen. En geef ons vrede. U zegt zoveel in Uw woord en voegd daaraan toe, "Dit heb Ik tot u gesproken, opdat gy in my vrede hebt." (Johannes 16:33) Die vrede beslaat toch het hele leven. Geef dat wy in Uw kerk en ook op de komende synode die vrede mogen ervaren. Wy vragen dit alles in de naam van Uw Zoon, Jezus Christus. Amen.

### *English*

"Not to us, LORD, not to us, but to your name be the glory" (Ps.115:1).  
You are the God of the covenant, God with us. You are faithful into all eternity.

With respect to the upcoming synod of our church, we confess, as we do in a church service, that our help and our expectation is in the name of the triune God, the God of peace.

Sometimes we are worried about our church, which is really your church. We are only a small crowd in the one universal Christian church. Grant that at the coming synod, all the delegates may be filled with you, O Holy Spirit.

Lord, we live and confess in a world and in a society where you used to be an exclamation mark but presently are only a question mark. However, we know that we are dealing with the God who rules and leads everything. At Jesus' birth, the angels spoke of peace. In that assurance we go on, including, at the coming synod, knowing that Jesus Christ will maintain his church. You, Lord Jesus, have said that all power in heaven and on earth has been given to you. And your peace establishes itself in your entire creation.

There has been much prayer for our church, especially when synod meets. Lord, hear all those prayers for Jesus' sake. And give us peace. You say so much in your Word, and then you add, "I have told you these things, so that you may have peace" (John 16:33). That peace touches all of life. Grant that we in your church and also at the upcoming synod may experience that peace. We ask all this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Questions for Reflection and/or Conversation

- Take some time to reflect on God's faithfulness in your life, in your congregation, and in the CRC.
- Pray for all who will gather at synod, that they may have the space to remember God's faithfulness and the time to discern where his Spirit is leading them.



# GOD WITH US

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(which means 'God with us')."*

—Matthew 1:23

**SATURDAY, MAY 11, 2024 - DAY 7**

## God With Us: In Peace/Shalom

**Suggested Bible Reading: John 14:27**

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

### Prayer

*By Julia Gho, a second year M.Div. student at Calvin Theological Seminary. She grew up in the CRC tradition, and her parents are missionaries for Resonate Global Mission*

Dear Father in heaven,

We know that you have given us peace. As it is written in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

However, as we come before you from a variety of contexts and circumstances, we see the chaos and confusion in our lives and in the world. And we come before you with a plethora of things that are on our hearts and minds. Some of us come with heavy hearts and unspoken fears and worries. Oh, how we long to break free from these negative thoughts that hold power over us. There is no one we can turn to but you, Father, for true peace.

As we come together for Synod 2024, we pray for your peace in all of us. Guide us to find peace within ourselves and among one another even when we struggle and face trials that are beyond our understanding. Help us to rest in your presence. Rejuvenate our weary souls. And remind us to use the gifts that you have given us, to pass along your love, peace, and mercy.

Father, we invite you to continually transform our thoughts and behaviors. Strengthen us with the Holy Spirit, free us from our worries and fears, and lead us to desire what is pleasing and acceptable to you. Make us into a light for others.

As your Word says in Colossians 3:15, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace."

In your name we pray. Amen.

## Questions for Reflection and/or Conversation

- Where do you need to experience the peace that "transcends all understanding" (Philippians 4:7)?
- Where can you serve as a shalom bringer?