NEW SPIRIT LUTHERAN CHURCH
FAITH FOR REAL LIFE

Pray Without Ceasing

Wednesday, November 4, 2026

Welcome and gathering | 2 minutes

Leader: Welcome to Pray Without Ceasing. Some of us enter this day full of gratitude. Some are carrying grief. Some are wondering what our neighbors, our church, or our nation will face next. We do not need to hide any of those things from God. We gather not because we have perfect words, but because God meets us with grace before we know what to say.

Leader: On All Saints Sunday, Pastor Hartman reminded us that the saints are not only those who have died. We are surrounded by living saints—ordinary, imperfect people called to love their neighbors. Today we bring those who came before us, the needs around us, and our own unfinished stories into the presence of God.

Leader: Let us pray. God of all generations, receive our gratitude and our weariness. Remind us that the love revealed in Jesus Christ has no asterisks or fine print. Keep us near your promise of resurrection, and make our lives open to your Spirit. Amen.

Scripture and listening | 3 minutes

Leader: Hear the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter five, verses one through twelve: the Beatitudes. Listen for who Jesus calls blessed, especially those the world might overlook.

[Read Matthew 5:1–12 slowly from the NRSVUE Bible. Pause briefly between the blessings.]

Reflection: still living the story | 5–6 minutes

There is a special kind of silence when someone we love is no longer sitting at the table. We may still remember how they laughed, what they ordered at a restaurant, or the way they would have reacted to a family story. Sometimes we hold gratitude and deep sadness at once. Sometimes the memories are complicated. We can miss people who hurt us. We can love someone and still carry words we wish we had said. All Saints gives us room to tell the truth about all of that.

Pastor Hartman sometimes says something at funerals that catches people off guard: “This sucks.” He says it because the absence hurts. Faith is not a demand that we dress up pain or pretend it went away. We have the promise of resurrection, but that promise does not make an empty chair feel full. God meets us in the grief itself.

The promise begins with grace. We do not have to earn God's attention by being remarkable. In baptism, God gives us a sure and gracious promise of union with Christ. The church can trust this gift without pretending that human beings can draw the outer limits of divine mercy. Pastor Hartman proclaimed his conviction that the cross witnesses to God's love for all humanity: no asterisks, no parentheses, no footnotes. We speak that hope boldly, while acknowledging the mystery of what comes after death and the different ways Christians understand salvation.

And then comes a surprising turn: All Saints is also about us. In Lutheran language, we are saints and sinners at the same time. We remain people who make mistakes, need forgiveness, and sometimes fail to notice the neighbor in front of us. Yet God calls us beloved. Sainthood is not a medal for getting everything right. It is life held in grace and opened toward others.

Pastor Hartman told a family story about an ancestor standing in a food line in Detroit. A man cut in front of him. He pointed the man toward the back of the line. According to the story, the man was Al Capone, who apologized and moved. We cannot verify every detail of a story passed down through a family, but we can hear the question it carries. What does ordinary courage look like? When is a small act of fairness a way of honoring another person's dignity?

We live in a world where we can be tired of difficult headlines and divided opinions. It is tempting either to shout past one another or to retreat into silence. The Beatitudes offer another way. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness. Blessed are the merciful and the peacemakers. Jesus does not say that suffering is good. He promises God's nearness to people in the middle of it and calls us to a life shaped by mercy and peace.

At the end of the sermon, we were asked to think about the dash between the dates on a gravestone. We do not know how many days the dash contains. We do know that we are living in it now. We cannot repair every hurt in a single week, and God has not asked us to save the world by ourselves. But we can speak one truthful word. We can make room for a grieving neighbor. We can share food, seek justice, forgive a wrong, or help someone feel seen. We can continue a story of love that did not begin with us and will not end with us.

So we pray today with both open hands and open eyes. We remember those who are gone. We trust God's grace. We ask for a nation and a church that seek the common good. And we ask for the courage to do the next faithful thing, here and now.

First guided silence: remember | 2 minutes

Leader: Call to mind someone whose life shaped yours. Perhaps you learned tenderness from them, or persistence, or the courage to say that something is not right. Name that person before God. What gift from their life might you carry forward?

[Keep 90 seconds of genuine silence.]

Leader: God of memory, receive every name and every story, including those we cannot speak aloud. Hold those who grieve in your resurrection hope. Amen.

Candle and prayer invitation | 2 minutes

Leader: As a sign of the light of Christ, you are invited to come forward and light a candle or place a prayer card in the basket. Those joining online may light a candle safely at home or simply open their hands. You may also remain seated. Every response is welcome.

[lighting of candles]

Leader: Christ our light, shine into our grief and our uncertainty. Make your mercy visible in the way we care for one another. Amen.

Prayers of intercession | 9–10 minutes

Leader: For seven of these prayers, we follow the daily themes of the ELCA Prayer Ventures for November 4 through 10. We also pray for our nation following yesterday's election, our community and congregation, and people who have no one to pray for them. After each petition, please respond: "God of mercy, hear our prayer."

God, our enduring refuge

God of refuge, when fear, guilt, despair, or suffering weigh on us, shelter us in your steady love. Strengthen those facing difficult choices, unseen struggles, and pain beyond their control. Give us faith to take the next step, even when we cannot see the whole road. God of mercy, hear our prayer.

Living faithfully today

Christ our hope, keep us from spending so much energy guessing when you will come again that we forget how to follow you today. Make our worship honest, our words good news, and our care for neighbors real. Stir joy in those who are weary and hope in those who feel forgotten. God of mercy, hear our prayer.

Lutheran partners in Central Europe

God of the whole church, bless the ELCA Leadership Circle and the partners they encounter in Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia. Sustain Lutheran communities working for justice, peace, compassion, and the formation of faithful leaders. Make global partnerships relationships of mutual learning and generous service, not simply transactions of resources. God of mercy, hear our prayer.

Freedom from resentment

Merciful God, you know the anger and old wounds we sometimes carry for years. Forgive us and loosen the grudges that keep us from seeing others as people worthy of care. Give

us wisdom to seek reconciliation where it is safe and possible, and courage to set healthy boundaries where harm continues. God of mercy, hear our prayer.

A church known by its service

Spirit of life, renew your church when we are tempted to measure faithfulness only by attendance, budgets, or buildings. Teach us to notice the neighbors we serve, the relationships we build, and the mercy we practice. Let our choices show a living commitment to God and to those who need companionship, justice, and hope. God of mercy, hear our prayer.

Lutheran Outdoor Ministries

Creator God, accompany leaders gathering for the Lutheran Outdoor Ministries conference in Giddings, Texas. Renew their energy, strengthen their friendships, and equip them for ministry with people of different ages, abilities, and backgrounds. Let camp and outdoor ministries continue to be places of belonging, wonder, and growth in faith. God of mercy, hear our prayer.

Let justice roll down

God of righteousness, your prophet Amos calls us to let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Open our eyes to unfair systems and to neighbors whose voices are too easily ignored. Give us perseverance to pursue what is just in daily choices, community life, and public decisions. God of mercy, hear our prayer.

For our nation after election night

God of all people, as this nation moves past election night, guide those who have been elected to seek the common good. Help our leaders work together for the well-being of all people, especially those whose needs and voices are easily overlooked. As our nation moves forward, move each of us beyond division and toward a shared commitment to what is just, merciful, and good for all our neighbors. God of mercy, hear our prayer.

For those who mourn

God of resurrection, hold those whose homes and hearts have an empty place today. Surround them with patient friends who will listen without trying to hurry their grief. Let memories become sources of gratitude when they can, and be near even when remembering is painful. God of mercy, hear our prayer.

For hungry children and neighbors

God who provides, remember children who depend on weekend food and families stretched thin by the cost of basic needs. Bless those assembling Blessings in a Backpack food and preparing Second Saturday Blessings, and help New Spirit listen well to what

local schools say they need. Let every act of support honor the dignity of the person receiving it. God of mercy, hear our prayer.

For students, educators, and safety

God of peace, protect students, teachers, staff, and families as they learn, work, and travel. Give wise judgment to those entrusted with safety and compassionate attention to those who feel afraid. Shape our schools into places where every child can belong and flourish. God of mercy, hear our prayer.

For New Spirit and the ministry ahead

Generous God, thank you for the people whose faith and generosity have sustained New Spirit across generations. Guide our stewardship decisions, our worship and music transition, and our work of welcoming neighbors into community. Keep guilt and fear from leading us; let grace, sustainability, and love guide our shared future. God of mercy, hear our prayer.

For those without someone to pray for them

Jesus, friend of those left out, we pray for those without someone to pray for them. Remember the isolated, the unhoused, the forgotten, and those whose suffering is hidden from others. Move someone—including us—to notice, to call, to visit, to advocate, or simply to stay beside a neighbor in need. God of mercy, hear our prayer.

Second silence and prayers of the people | 2 minutes

Leader: We have named many needs, and still there are names and circumstances only you know. In this silence, offer a prayer aloud, silently, or by writing it down. No one is required to speak.

[Keep at least 90 seconds of silence.]

Leader: God, receive what we have spoken and what we have kept within our hearts. Where we are powerless, sustain us. Where we can act, lead us. Amen.

Blessing and sending | 2 minutes

Leader: The saints are still here. We are still in the middle of the story, not because we have done everything well, but because the grace of Christ has not let us go. May the God of resurrection hold you in grief, keep you in hope, and send you in courageous love. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Leader: Go in peace. Continue the story through one act of love or courage this week. Thanks be to God.