



Students as Pilgrims of JUSTICE

UNIVERSAL DAY
OF PRAYER FOR
STUDENTS 2026

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Students as Pilgrims of Justice



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1 INTRODUCTION FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

Since 1898, the Universal Day of Prayer for Students has gathered Christian students across continents in a shared act of faith and responsibility. In every generation, students have prayed not apart from history, but within it (the history?)— in times of conflict, decolonization, repression, social transformation, and fragile peace.

UDPS gather us in 2026 in a world marked by uncertainty and tension. Many students experience this reality directly: in polarized campuses, in shrinking civic spaces, in economic instability, and in communities shaped by fear and division. The global order is under strain. Institutions designed to protect human dignity are challenged. Narratives of exclusion grow louder. In such a context, prayer is not withdrawal. It is discernment.

The theme for UDPS 2026, **“Students as Pilgrims of Justice”**, invites us to see ourselves not as passive observers of crisis but as participants in shaping a more just and peaceful world.

We do not walk alone. We walk within history — aware of its wounds, aware of its responsibilities.

Since launching our global campaign Reclaiming Otherness last December, WSCF has strengthened its peacebuilding engagement across regions. In the Middle East and beyond, in Africa, Europe, Asia Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean, students have reminded us that peace begins where dignity is restored and difference is not treated as threat.

Peacebuilding, for our Federation, is not simply a project. We cannot speak of reconciliation while tolerating exclusion. We cannot pray for peace while ignoring injustice.

Students today are not only preparing for leadership in the future. They are shaping the moral and political climate of their societies now — in classrooms, movements, churches, and digital spaces.

To be a pilgrim is to keep moving, even when the road is uncertain. It is to refuse both domination and despair. It is to believe that justice is not optional for faith, and that peace cannot grow without it.

May this Universal Day of Prayer renew our courage. May our pilgrimage become visible in the way we build peace.

Marcelo Leites
General Secretary
World Student Christian Federation

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Universal Day of Prayer for Students (UDPS) was first observed in 1898 as a global expression of Christian student solidarity. From its inception, it has embodied a central conviction of the World Student Christian Federation: that faith must engage the realities of the world. Throughout its history, the UDPS has been observed during world wars, movements for decolonization, struggles against apartheid, campaigns for civil rights, periods of dictatorship, and ongoing conflicts. In each generation, students gathered not only to pray, but to discern their responsibility within history.

WSCF has never understood prayer as withdrawal from political reality. Rather, prayer has been a space of collective discernment, spiritual courage, and renewed commitment to justice.

As a global ecumenical movement rooted in diverse traditions and contexts, WSCF affirms that Christian faith is inseparable from public responsibility, that unity does not require uniformity, that peace requires justice, and that solidarity transcends borders.

In 2026, the UDPS invites students worldwide to embody justice not as abstraction, but as pilgrimage – sustained, communal, and transformative.

3 THEME AND BIBLICAL REFLECTION

Micah 6:6-8

As indicated in Micah 1:1, Micah spoke in the 8th century BCE during the reign of King Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. This was a time of political instability and economic injustice in Israel and Judah. Wealth was concentrated among elites, while rural communities were exploited. Legal systems were manipulated to protect privilege. Religious practice continued, but ethical accountability was weakened.

In this context, Micah reframed the central question of faith: *What does God truly require?*

The answer was not ritual excess, but moral clarity:

- “To act justly” refers to establishing fairness in public life and right relationships within society.
- “To love mercy” speaks of steadfast compassion, covenantal loyalty, and the refusal to abandon the vulnerable.
- “To walk humbly with your God” suggests a continuous posture of responsibility – a way of living grounded in awareness of both history and hope.

Micah rejects performative religion and centers justice as the authentic expression of faith.

For students today, this prophetic call remains urgent. Worship without justice becomes hollow. Faith without structural awareness becomes fragile.

Justice as the Foundation of Peace

Many of the dynamics Micah confronted remain visible today: concentration of power, widening inequality, manipulation of fear, and the misuse of religious language for political purposes.

Colonial expansion reshaped economies, hierarchies, and global relationships. Many postcolonial realities

continue to carry the weight of dispossession, inequality, and fragile institutions.

Violence rarely begins suddenly. It develops where dehumanization is normalized and accountability is weakened.

Genocide and collective violence are extreme manifestations of systems that rank human worth.

Peace cannot be separated from justice. Peace without transformation risks stabilizing inequality. Peace without truth endangers memory.

WSCF understands peacebuilding as the long-term cultivation of dignity, dialogue, equity, and accountability. Peacebuilding is not merely conflict management; it is the transformation of relationships and structures that harm life.

Reclaiming Otherness

Since launching the global campaign Reclaiming Otherness, WSCF has strengthened its peacebuilding focus across regions. The campaign affirms that otherness is not deviation, and difference is not deficiency.

Exclusion is produced by systems of fear and domination. To reclaim otherness is to restore dignity, voice, and participation to those made invisible.

Peace cannot be built by erasing difference. It must be built by transforming the conditions that weaponize difference.

Students as Pilgrims of Justice embody this commitment in their campuses and communities.

4 SUGGESTED PREPARATIONS FOR UDPS 2026

Organizing the Service: Appointing Leaders and Readers

A well-organized service requires thoughtful preparation and shared responsibility. The planning process itself can reflect justice, participation, and accountability – values at the heart of this year's theme.

The following roles are suggested:

- **Service Leader (or Worship Coordinator):** Oversees the entire UDPS service and ensures that the liturgical order is followed. The leader introduces the theme: "Students as Pilgrims for Justice." They frame the gathering around Micah 6:6–8, inviting participants to reflect on what it means today to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God. The leader helps create an atmosphere of prayer, reflection, and shared commitment.
- **Readers for Biblical Passages:** Select individuals to read scripture passages connected to justice, mercy, humility, and peacebuilding. Encourage diversity in gender, denomination, culture, and social background. This visibly embodies the commitment to reclaiming dignity and participation for all.
- **Prayer Leaders:** Guide the Prayers of Intercession and allow moments for silence, lament, and collective reflection. Invite participants to offer spontaneous prayers related to injustice, inequality, exclusion, violence, and fragile institutions in their contexts. Encourage prayers that name both suffering and hope.
- **Music Team:** Lead songs and hymns that reflect justice, solidarity, compassion, and pilgrimage. Where possible, include music from different cultures and Christian traditions to strengthen the ecumenical and global character of WSCF.
- **Symbolic Actions Coordinator (Optional):** Organizes participatory elements such as candle lighting, testimonies, or rituals of commitment. Ensure that symbols are culturally meaningful and clearly connected to the theme of pilgrimage and justice.

Adapting the Liturgy to Local Contexts and Traditions

As a global and ecumenical movement, WSCF celebrates UDPS in diverse cultural, political, and denominational realities. Local movements are encouraged to adapt the liturgy so that it speaks directly to their context while remaining faithful to the shared call to justice.

Ways to Adapt the Liturgy:

- **Use Local Languages:** Read scripture, prayers, and responses in the languages spoken by participants to ensure inclusion and accessibility.
- **Incorporate Local Worship Styles:** Whether through Orthodox chants, Protestant hymns, Catholic liturgical responses, or contextual spiritual expressions, choose elements that resonate with local traditions.
- **Reflect the Social Context:** Encourage testimonies or reflections related to economic injustice, discrimination, migration, environmental crisis, political instability, or postcolonial realities. Pilgrimage is not abstract – it begins in lived experience.
- **Ensure Inclusive Participation:** Make intentional space for those who are often marginalized. Accessibility, gender sensitivity, and cultural respect should guide all preparation.
- **Consider Different Worship Settings:** UDPS may take place in churches, university halls, dormitories, community centers, outdoor spaces, or online platforms. Pilgrimage can be embodied in movement – for example, through a prayer walk on campus or between symbolic stations during the service.





Creative and Symbolic Acts to Highlight the Theme

To embody the theme Students as Pilgrims for Justice, consider participatory and symbolic actions that reflect movement, commitment, and transformation.

Recommended Symbolic Actions:

- **Lighting Candles for Justice:** Invite participants to light candles as symbols of truth, memory, and hope. Each candle may represent communities affected by injustice or areas where students are called to act.
- **Pilgrimage Walk or Procession:** Create a short symbolic walk during the service. Participants may move between stations representing justice, mercy, humility, and peace. This physically embodies the call to “walk humbly with God.”
- **Carrying Stones and Planting Seeds:** Participants may hold a stone representing injustice, exclusion, or burden. At the end of the service, they exchange the stone for a seed, symbolizing transformation and long-term peacebuilding.
- **Act of Humble Service (Inspired by Gospel of John 13:14–15):** A ritual such as washing hands or offering a gesture of blessing can symbolize humility and shared responsibility. Adapt according to context.
- **Prayer Wall or Tree of Commitment:** Invite students to write prayers or commitments on paper or fabric strips and place them on a cross, tree, or designated space. This creates a visible sign of collective pilgrimage.
- **Circle of Commitment:** Conclude by standing in a circle and affirming together a commitment to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly in campus life and society.

5 ORDER OF LITURGY

Gathering:

Leader: *We gather as students from different histories and contexts.*

All: *We gather as pilgrims of justice.*

Leader: *We gather in a world longing for peace.*

All: *We gather as builders of peace.*

Opening Prayer:

God of justice and mercy,
You call us not to empty ritual but to faithful responsibility.
In a world marked by inequality and conflict,
teach us to walk humbly with You.
Give us courage to confront injustice
and compassion to restore dignity.
Amen.

Scripture Reading – Micah 6:6–8

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly,
to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your God.
(Silence)

Reflection (suggested areas to cover, according to context and regional insights)

Justice is what makes peace possible.
Colonial histories reshaped relationships and economies. Postcolonial realities
continue to carry instability and inequality.
Violence grows where dehumanization is tolerated.
Genocide grows where human worth is ranked.
Peace without justice risks repetition.
To walk humbly with God is to move through history aware of both suffering and
responsibility.
To do justice is to challenge systems that harm life.
To love mercy is to protect dignity wherever it is threatened.
Students as Pilgrims of Justice walk not to preserve unjust systems, but to
transform them.

Symbolic Act – Step of Commitment

Leader: *We remember that histories of domination and violence have shaped our world.
Justice requires memory.*

*Peace requires transformation. If you commit yourself to resist dehumanization and
build peace rooted in dignity, take one step forward.
(All step forward)*

Leader: *May this step honor memory and protect life.*

Intercessions

Response: *God of justice, make us builders of peace.*
For communities who have endured genocide and collective violence...
For societies healing from histories of domination and division...
For nations navigating inequality and fragile institutions...
God of justice, make us builders of peace.

For students facing repression and polarization...
For those made “other” in our societies...
God of justice, make us builders of peace.
For global systems and leaders entrusted with responsibility...
That power may serve life and cooperation strengthen justice...
God of justice, make us builders of peace.

Sending

Go as students who do justice.
Go as pilgrims who love mercy.
Go as peacemakers who walk humbly with God.

May God strengthen your courage.
May Christ accompany your steps.
May the Spirit make you builders of peace.

Amen.

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6 SUGGESTED MUSIC

Gathering Songs:

- **“The Summons (Will You Come and Follow Me)”** – **John Bell**. A powerful call to discipleship and courageous following.
- **“Here I Am, Lord”** – **Dan Schutte**. A song of availability and commitment to serve.
- **“Siyahamba (We Are Marching in the Light of God)”** – **South African traditional hymn**. Embodies pilgrimage, movement, and justice in action.
- **“We Are Called”** – **David Haas**. Directly echoes Micah 6:8: “to act with justice, love tenderly, walk humbly with God.”

After Scripture / Reflection:

- **“O Lord, Hear My Prayer”** – **Taizé Community**. Simple, repetitive, and contemplative.
- **“Nada Te Turbe”** – **Teresa of Ávila (Taizé adaptation)**. Reflects humility and trust in God amid instability.
- **“Let There Be Peace on Earth”** – **Jill Jackson**. Emphasizes personal responsibility for peace.
- **“Make Me a Channel of Your Peace” (Prayer of St. Francis hymn)**. Connects mercy, humility, and transformation.

Symbolic Act – Step of Commitment

- **“We Shall Overcome”** – traditional freedom song. Connects faith and resistance to injustice.
- **“Canticle of the Turning”** – based on the Magnificat. A strong justice hymn proclaiming the reversal of unjust systems.
- **“God of Justice”** – Tim Hughes. Explicitly names the cry for justice in today’s world.
- **“El Pueblo Unido Jamás Será Vencido”** – Latin American solidarity song (context-dependent use). May be appropriate in regions where justice struggles are central to student life.

Intercessions

- **“Kyrie Eleison”** – Taizé Community. A prayerful refrain between petitions.
- **“Peace, Salaam, Shalom”** – Emma's Revolution. Intercultural and interreligious resonance.

Simple sung response:

“God of justice, make us builders of peace.” (Can be composed locally.)

Sending Songs:

- **“Go to the World!”** – Sylvia Dunstan. A strong ecumenical sending hymn.
- **“Somos el Cuerpo de Cristo”** – Bob Hurd. Excellent for multicultural gatherings.
- **“Sent Forth by God’s Blessing”** – traditional hymn. Formal and appropriate for church settings.
- **“I, the Lord of Sea and Sky”** – Dan Schutte. Reinforces the call to serve and respond.



UDPS 2026 CREDITS:

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