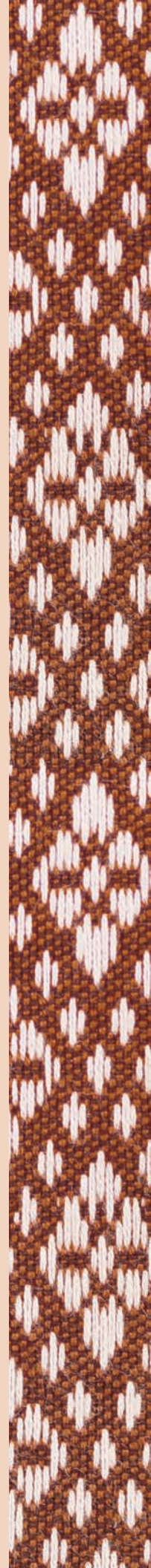




Prayer and Thanksgiving
for the Roma 2014





International Roma Day 2014

Roma or Romani people (formerly known pejoratively as “Gypsies”) need our prayers without ceasing. We especially encourage individual and corporate prayer on April 8, International Roma Day, and during the hot summer that will follow.

We join others around the world in prayers for Roma and for all who are marginalized, stereotyped or denied basic rights and freedoms. We pray for security, justice, peace and an end to racism, stigmatization, exploitation, hunger and poverty. Please share news of Romani realities (rarely published in U.S. news sources) in your church bulletin, on message boards or via other resources in your congregation and community.

Use this liturgy with your PW group or congregation, a group of justice and peace advocates, or adapt it for your own personal time of prayer and meditation.



Call to Our Season of Prayer for Roma: “The Silken Road”

In this poem, Canadian Roma poet Thais Barbieux challenges us to live out hope even in the face of hopelessness. The poem is Thais’s meditation on some of the injustices Roma suffered—camp burnings, forced marriages and the Holocaust.

One: This is a dance of hope,

**All: a dance for all my lost steps
away from the sorrowful bonfires
away from the melodies of anger.**

One: This is a road on which no one rolls,
on which my heart dances freely

**All: away from the prison of numbers
away from golden dowries.**

One: This is a road of silk

**All: a dance for my more innocent thoughts
away from ceaseless torment
away from a world no longer mine.**

One: This is a dance of hope. But hope for Roma is hard won in 2014. Throughout Europe, many Roma feel as if they have nowhere safe to lay

Written by Liz Searles, PC(USA) mission coworker

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All poems are from the collection *Like Water (Sar o Paj): A collection of poems by Romani women* edited by Hedina Tahirovic Sijercic (Amber Press, Brisbane, Australia, 2010). Used by permission of the editor.

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Music: Traditional Gaelic melody

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette has written numerous other hymns that may be appropriate for this prayer cycle.

A few suggestions are

- “God, May Your Justice Roll Down” (sung to “Praise Ye the Lord, the Almighty”)
- “God, We’ve Known Such Grief and Anger” (sung to “There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy”)
- “O God of Creation, We See All Around Us” (sung to “Let All Things Now Living”)
- “O God, You Call for Justice” (sung to “The Church’s One Foundation”)

For Carolyn’s full catalog and permission lines and additional information on each hymn, visit www.carolynshymns.com.

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their heads. Let us look for Christ in the faces of the poor and the wandering.

Scripture (Luke 9:57–58)

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”

Meditation

As we embark upon our dance of prayer, our “dance of hope on a road of silk,” we leave all our familiar anchors behind us. We welcome new learnings, both harsh and joyful. Perhaps the poem “Leaving” by Lynn Hutchinson, a Romanichal (Roma from an English-speaking part of the world) from Canada, will guide our departure. Please read with me:

One: The shore disappears

**All: they are pulled away by wind and currents
no vardo* no mirrors
nobody throwing stones
at Lizzie Lee and her children**

**they want to cast off their skins
in a new country
on a new road
wide and clear**

*a “vardo” is the horse-drawn wagon identified in some areas with Roma travels; traditional beliefs suggest mirrors on the vardo chase away evil spirits or the evil eye.



The long-held belief that one could begin afresh “in a new country on a new road, wide and clear” is less and less the reality—or even the hope—for most Roma.

Here is the context for our prayers for Roma people. Anti-tsiganism (anti-gypsyism) and xenophobia continue to spread in Europe, with calls for exclusion, deportation and even vigilante “justice” against Roma. Sometimes violence erupts in response to forced integration of schools or neighborhoods, or competition for services, or even anger at new programs seeking to educate or employ Romani people. Hate speech and violence repeat the most negative stereotypes, the most xenophobic fears, and the false stigmas and accusations.

Mainstream media and the majority of people accept anti-Roma feelings as a justifiable norm. Racism against Roma is rarely judged as being in bad taste, even among people of supposed good will. Age-old stereotypes about Gypsies’ and Travelers’ “bad blood” mean that Roma who suffer violence or forced migration commonly are blamed for these problems.

What once were the violent actions of narrow and angry fringe groups have become more mainstream. National governments, who should be protecting Roma among all their people, issue socio-political and economic decisions that marginalize the Roma, who have been citizens of Europe for between 500 and 1,000 years.

Roma people once could choose to be travelers. Now, after years of enforced settlement, they may be called “sedentary travelers.” Twenty-first century migrations are driven by poverty and the search for work, or by decisions of government bodies to exclude or segregate, or by the burning or destruction of homes or entire settlements. Even the well-settled who own their property must be ready to be put on the road. As their political and economic circumstances change, they may find themselves forcibly removed from the area they call home, seeking food, shelter and basic necessities. Sometimes their new home countries resettle them begrudgingly, offering land, but no medical or educational supports. The Roma may not even speak the language of their new home.

Early in the last century, the great Romani poet Bronislaw Wajs Papusza risked everything she had when she shared Roma experience in her poems, shattering strict cultural taboos about secrecy. She wrote:

The time of the wandering Gypsies
Has long passed.
But I see them,
They are bright,
Strong and clear like water.
You can hear it
Wandering when it wishes to speak.
But poor thing, it has no speech
Apart from silver splashing and sighing.

Only the horse, grazing the grass,
Listens and understands that sighing.
But the water does not look behind.
It flees, runs away further,
Where the eyes will not see her,
The water that wanders.

Wandering. Journeying. Suffering at the hands of strangers. These are important images and metaphors that resonate in the present season of Lent and Resurrection.

During Lent, we think of Jesus wandering and being tempted in the wilderness. Wilderness wandering or being “On the road” is a powerful biblical image of openness to transformation—Saul converted to Paul on the road to Damascus, Philip met the Ethiopian eunuch on the road, the Good Samaritan traveled on the Jericho road, disciples on the road to Capernaum discussed which of them was the greatest.

Jesus sent the disciples two by two, asking them to take nothing for the journey but a staff. Jesus traversed the road up to Jerusalem (when he tells his disciples he will be arrested and killed and is greeted by Palms), and the “road to Emmaus” (where he reveals himself to Cleopas and Luke). These are a small sampling, from the New Testament alone. Images of being “on the road” are interwoven with biblical images of the alien and the stranger. As a part of our “dance of hope on a road of silk,” let’s lift these up in song.

Please rise and join in singing “Abraham Journeyed to a New Country.”

Hymn: “Abraham Journeyed to a New Country”
(sung to “Morning Has Broken”)**

Abraham journeyed to a new country;
Sarah went with him, journeying too.
Slaves down in Egypt fled Pharaoh’s army;
Ruth left the home and people she knew.

Mary and Joseph feared Herod’s order;
Soldiers were coming! They had to flee.
Taking young Jesus, they crossed the border;
So was our Lord a young refugee.

Some heard the promise—God’s hand would
bless them!
Some fled from hunger, famine and pain.
Some left a place where others oppressed them;
All trusted God and started again.

Did they know hardship? Did they know danger?
Who shared a home or gave them some bread?
Who reached a hand to welcome the stranger?
Who saw their fear and gave hope instead?

God, our own families came here from far lands;
We have been strangers, “aliens” too.
May we reach out and offer a welcome
As we have all been welcomed by you.

We will lift up prayers of hope and thanksgiving
for Roma. As we prepare to take our separate
roads from this place, let us read “Roma Sisters,”
by Scots-Canadian Roma poet Julia Lovell as a
Litany of Love.

Litany of Love: “Roma Sisters”

One: Oh, Roma sisters,

**All: Sisters—How special is this word
My heart sings a song for you
I hope your hearts have heard . . .**



One: Your beautiful faces shining
Remind me of the moon
And those familiar smiles
Are like the sun in afternoons.

**All: Sisters, sweet Roma sisters,
Shine on . . .**

**This day I blow my love your way
For this and any other day**

One: Thoughts of you, thoughts so sweet
Drifting through the winds of my mind
This to let you know I am always here
For my Roma sisters, gentle and kind.

**All: God Bless you, and may love
fall upon your footsteps and on
those paths yet unknown.**

One: Sisters, sweet Roma sisters, shine on.

**All: We praise God for your lives, your spirit and
your courage, Amen and Amen.**

One: May we all travel safely and in peace

Resources

Presbyterian Women published prayer cycles for International Roma Day in 2011, 2012 and 2013. The resources and topics included in them are still timely and provide ways to expand your knowledge of, prayer for and advocacy on behalf of Roma people. The previous resources offered are available at www.presbyterianwomen.org/missionmatters.



Prayer

On the Road: A Journey Through the Bible for Migrants

A brochure published by the French Bible Society that provides biblical passages (and related points for discussion or contemplation) about the stages of migration and eventually settling in a new country www.la-bible.net/doc/donso8072.pdf

Materials developed to support United Methodist Women’s 2013 focus on Roma
<http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umw/roma/>

General Information

- An interactive, multimedia map that shares Roma experiences around the world; hosted by Roma and nonRoma who want Roma grassroots empowerment and inclusion www.romareact.org
- “5 Intriguing Facts About the Roma” (article) www.livescience.com/40652-facts-about-roma-romani-gypsies.html
- A concise 13-minute CNN documentary on the Roma community in Romania: www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGThWKIPRMc
- “The Roma: A thousand years of discrimination continues in Europe, advocates say” (article) <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/10/21/world/europe/roma-discrimination/>
- A beautiful photo essay about Roma in Serbia, Bulgaria and Macedonia http://kairosphotos.photoshelter.com/gallery/Roma-in-Serbia/G0000Wlwqaz8Q_do/
- A wealth of articles (still being added to) on Europe’s Roma population www.dw.de/top-stories/roma-in-europe/s-9818
- The European Commission’s web page for Roma integration and advocacy http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/index_en.htm
- An article on the negative perceptions of Roma in France and surrounding countries www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/roma—the-unwanted-europeans-8906382.html
- A blog post by a United Church of Christ pastor from South Dakota who visited Roma in Hungary and Ukraine <http://globalministries.org/mee/missionaries/reflections-on-mission-by.html>
- “The Plight of the Roma: Europe’s Unwanted People” www.spiegel.de/international/europe/europe-failing-to-protect-roma-from-discrimination-and-poverty-a-942057.html
- “Increased Hostility Against Jews And Roma In Hungary” (article) www.npr.org/blogs/codeswitch/2014/03/09/287342069/increased-hostility-against-jews-and-roma-in-hungary