



## Windy City Gaza Ceasefire Pilgrimage

### Welcome & Preparation for Pilgrimage

In March, 2024 a group of Christians, Jews, and Muslims [gathered in Chicago to pray](#) for peace and mercy in Gaza. The liturgies they used were the result of their broad collaboration. In August, 2024, new prayers were written and added. Special thanks to Rev. Tiana Coleman, Adam Gottlieb, Aisha Subhan, John Trott, Sarah Sullivan, Karen and Zach Savella Stallard, and Brent Bailey, Rabbi Brant Rosen, Priscilla Read, Anne Koerber, and Newland Smith for their contributions of prayers, texts, poems, and visual art.

- *Ben Norquist, editor, Windy City Gaza Ceasefire Pilgrimage*

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We imagine ourselves at home, getting ready for this pilgrimage to Gaza. Every pilgrimage begins and ends where you live. Attending to your own roots and the places and people they connect you to is an essential part of the pilgrimage. The journey will reconfigure your connection to people and land and expand your world. It will create new affections, kinships, and duties.

### Pilgrimage

A pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred place in search of new insight or transformation, or to pray for the soul of a loved one. This pilgrimage is all of these and more. Gaza is a sacred place and we seek to become steadfast in our care for others and to pray for the souls of loved ones in Gaza.

Every pilgrimage starts and ends where you live. This place is an essential aspect of your pilgrimage--the journey should expand your understanding of the world and bring Gaza closer to home. Gaza will no longer be "foreign" but will be part of your community.

### Faith Motivated

This pilgrimage is a protest, but it is a unique protest--it is a devotional protest, a reverent march, a spiritual cry. This cry is shared across faith communities, so you will be joining Christians, Muslims, Jews, and others who are moved by faith to prayer and action.

### Land Acknowledgement

As inhabitants of Northern Illinois, live on the traditional homelands of the Council of Three Fires: the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa. This land has also nurtured Menominee, HoChunk, Illiniwek, Miami, Sauk, and Fox nations among countless unnamed and unknown nations who came before. Most recently,

this ground was home to the Potawatomi, who built villages along the Illinois River and its tributaries, and hunted, fished, and traded right here. Depleted by war and hungry from the orchestrated loss of natural resources and crops, Potawatomi groups ceded their lands, including the ground we stand on this morning, to the United States in treaties in the 1820s and 30s. Soon thereafter, the United States evicted the Potawatomi to Missouri, Iowa, Northern Wisconsin, and Oklahoma where small communities continue living today.

Consider learning more about North American Indigenous experiences and hearing from Indigenous people directly. Consider reading [An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz](#) or [Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants by Robin Wall Kimmerer](#); you can also connect with the Midwest SOARRING Foundation, a regional Native cultural center based in the Western suburbs.

### **Parallels to Palestine**

American Indians were severed from their land. We are standing against a very similar kind of removal taking place in Palestine. It should cause us to pray and press for justice with humility and determination.

### **Opening Prayers**

#### **Lo Yisa Goy (Nation Shall Not)...**

*Submitted by Adam Gottlieb*

לֹא-יִשָּׂא גּוֹי אֶל-גּוֹי חֶרֶב וְלֹא-יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה

Lo yisa goy el goy cherev, Lo yil'm'du od milchama.

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they ever again train for war.

Isaiah 2:4

Shalom

Salaam

Shalom

Salaam

Lo yisa goy el goy cherev

Lo yil'm'du od milchama.

Lo yisa goy el goy cherev

Lo yil'm'du od milchama.

Shalom

Salaam

Shalom

Salaam

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation

They shall study for war no more

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation

They shall study for war no more

Shalom

Salaam

Shalom

Salaam

### **Opening Prayers**

*Submitted by Aisha Subhan*

Bismillah Ar-Rahman Ar-Raheem,

In the name of God, the most Compassionate, the most Merciful. The first chapter of the Quran, al-Fatiha, translated often as the opener, or she that opens, guides us to follow the straight path. This call for opening is one that should also break open our hearts. At this moment, our hearts break over and over again. In this breaking, we must become softer, more steadfast, and more attune to suffering. I imagine that this walk we will tread together, in prayerful solidarity, mirrors the straight path.

Let us embark on this path with moral clarity and open hearts. As we look out to the lakefront, let us remember the sea in Gaza that can no longer drown out the sound of the bombs; as we settle into our bodies, let us remember the one's lost and dismembered; as we engage in prayer, let us remember the divine mercy that we seek; as we take these steps together, let us remember solidarity is both sentiment and practice. This is the straight path.

### **Opening Prayer**

*Submitted by Rev. Tianna Coleman*

We come with heavy hearts. From afar we have witnessed the devastation, the suffering, and the continual cry for help that goes unanswered. We have seen things that we cannot unsee, that we should not unsee. As we begin this pilgrimage like David we ask quietly in our hearts, and sometimes aloud as we look to heaven "How long, O Lord?!"

As we begin this pilgrimage we hope and we trust and we pray for relief, for change, for ceasefire, because like Peter we know the answer to the question "Lord to whom shall we go?" So, God, we come to you hoping and trusting that You will see and act. As we begin this pilgrimage we remember that it is not about us. It is about being in solidarity with our sisters and brothers in Gaza. It is about acknowledging their humanity. That they are made in the image of God. That they, too, should know and experience love, wholeness, and peace.

And now we begin.

## Station 1



### Entering In

We are at the Eretz Crossing from Israel at the Northern end of Gaza. The crossing is heavily militarized. You can hear bombs exploding and smell the chemicals of war as you cross into Gaza. You feel the gaze of the soldiers as you pass.

Closed since October. The international community has been pressuring Israel to open this and other crossings for humanitarian aid trucks, allowing aid to go directly to Northern Gaza, but this has not happened to date—that's one of the reasons some countries are trying other methods of delivering supplies. Erez has been progressively tightened over the last decade as Israel has restricted more Gazans from using this crossing.

We think of all of the other ways that people and goods could possibly enter and exit Gaza. The Rafah crossing is 26 miles away along the border with Egypt. There are several other crossings with Israel, but they have been closed for a long time and only used in limited circumstances. Gaza's seaport has been under an Israel blockade for years, and Gaza's airport was bombed in a previous war and is inoperable. You are starting to see why some have described Gaza as an open air prison.

### Jabalya

As we move into Gaza, we soon come to Jabalya Refugee Camp. The largest refugee camp in the Palestinian Territories, Jabalya has over 100,000 registered residents. The United Nations established the camp in 1948 for the Palestinian refugees coming from areas that are now inside Israel. This camp has been bombed on at least 32 different days in October, November, December, January, and February and many times since then.

### Prayers

God is with those who suffer. As we pause to pray here at Jabalya Camp, our spiritual posture should be one of humble and reverent entry, like Moses who took off his sandals because he was in the presence of God. We are not only entering someone else's homeland, we are stepping onto holy ground.

### So Much Gone

*Submitted by Ben Norquist*

The home is already gone,  
 The world already razed,  
 The people already asleep,  
 So many already buried.

The trees are already felled,  
 The limbs already amputated,  
 The generations already severed,  
 So many already orphaned.

Will You let the earth swallow Jabalya?  
 Will You let Shati slide into the Sea?  
 Where is Your salvation, Oh Lord?

### **For Gaza: Psalm 13**

*From Jewish Prayers for Gaza, prayersforgaza.com*

How much longer  
 will we look away?  
 How much longer  
 will we hide our faces?  
 How much longer  
 will we shut off our souls  
 to this sorrow and injustice?

Answer us with the courage  
 to see what must be seen,  
 to speak the words  
 that too many dare not  
 say out loud.

Awaken us from our slumber,  
 this terrifying sleep of the dead,  
 let your light shine upon truths  
 that must no longer be denied.

Save us from trauma and despair,  
 let us trust forever in your compassion,  
 let our hearts sing without shame  
 for the justice that is not yet lost  
 from your world.

### **Du'a for Comfort in the Face of Injustice**

[From Duas for Palestine](#)

O Allah, I seek refuge in You from the oppression of the tyrant, from the injustice of the worshiper, from the trials of the world, and the torment of the grave.”

## Station 2

### Bearing Witness

We have arrived at Dar al-Shifa ("House of Healing") Hospital in Gaza City. It was the largest medical complex in Gaza, housing a range of modern facilities, equipment, and expertise.

Several chiefs of medical departments died in various bombings around the hospital in November. Israel raided the hospital on November 15. Shifa was trashed and equipment totaled after these raids and has not been operational since then.

Being here reminds us of the many other hospitals that have been bombed, raided, and destroyed, patients kicked out, supplies blocked, and medical personnel targeted. Places of healing transmogrified into death traps.

We are also mindful of the other institutions and infrastructures whose purposes are health and healing. The Abdul Salam Yassin Water Company is a Palestinian company providing clean water—one of their major facilities burned to the ground in November, they are now operating at a fraction of their capacity in a small foothold in Rafah.

As we pause to pray in the shadows of al Shifa, our job is to bear witness, pushing away the media narratives, the ideological tropes, and the stereotypes to open our eyes afresh to what we see before us.



### A Visual Cry

Take a few moments to contemplate Anne Koerber's piece of art as you read the words of Ahmed Abu Artema from [his article in Middle East Eye](#).

When you look at people wandering aimlessly in the streets of Gaza, you can see their exhaustion...

Most people remain silent, lost in distant thoughts...

They fight daily battles to fill a gallon jug of water...

They return to tents and throw themselves inside...

Some of these exhausted people will never wake up...

## Prayers

### Simple Needs

Lord, we see...

Most of the hospitals are empty shells.

the result of our nation's shells.

White-wrapped bodies, with crimson plumes.

A child thrown on a lifeless body, weeping, kissing the face of mom or dad or brother or sister now gone,  
 A doctor, covered in dust from the bomb that removed a hospital wall, using what is available to remove a  
 girl's leg. There is no anesthetic.  
 Healing itself is being destroyed.

The camera lens is not a sufficient witness. We will bear witness, speak the pain, tell the cruelty, see the  
 world that should be there.

We bring our bodies here as public reminder to ourselves that Gaza has a right to our attention.  
 We bring our bodies to remind one another, if no one else sees, that these things are so. And we bring our  
 bodies before you, Lord, along with our grief, and plead with you to break down walls of resistance to the  
 simple needs of human beings. Medicine. Food. Water. With this mustard seed of faith we ask you to  
 move the mountain of indifference and vicious nationalism to allow your children even the basics of life.  
 Please, God. Please.

*We are grateful to John Trott for writing this liturgy and being the first to offer it as a prayer.*

### [Pray for the flour massacre](#)

From Sabeel Wave of Prayer, March 8, 2024.

Lord, you tell us that you are the "Bread of Life" (John 6:35). We come before you, shocked, disgusted,  
 and lost. We plead that you provide the people of Gaza their daily bread while so many are starving. Lord,  
 intervene and stop these atrocities which kill people even as they wait for aid.

*On February 28, Israeli soldiers fired on crowds of hungry Palestinians gathered around aid trucks waiting  
 for flour. 118 Palestinians were killed.*

### [El Male Rachamim for Gaza \(excerpts\)](#)

From Jewish Prayers for Gaza, [prayersforgaza.com](http://prayersforgaza.com)

Oh, God filled with compassion,  
 whose loving presence ever surrounds us  
 bring perfect rest to those  
 who have been killed without pity in Gaza,

Receive their souls with the fullness of your mercy.  
 bind them to the souls of their ancestors  
 whose lives were unjustly taken  
 during the dispossession of the Nakba –  
 an injustice that continues  
 even as we call out to you now.

Remind us that no one is forgotten in your sight,  
 that all are welcome at your side,  
 that each and every one of their lives  
 is a story of sacred worth and meaning  
 that can never be lost.  
 And let us say,  
 Amen.

## Station 3

### Solidarity

We arrive before an ancient olive tree in central Gaza. The tree is surrounded by scenes of Palestinian mourning, but also of resilience. To the far south, you spot a tent city—a refugee camp for decades, it is now also hosting tens of thousands of newly displaced people from northern and central Gaza. If you listen carefully, you might hear the sounds of a children’s program—resourceful young people by the hundreds are leading ad hoc programs for the younger children in these camps with singing, dancing, and face painting. They hope beyond hope to help the children cope with the hellish world around them and to blunt the trauma.

You look down the street and see a large crowd gathered around a makeshift water desalination unit. They’ve come with their jugs, buckets, and bowls to get a little water for their families.

Another direction and you see rows of tree stumps. Without electricity and fuel, people are [cutting down the trees of Gaza](#) for firewood. It is all they have to boil the water they need for sanitizing and cooking.

Everywhere you look, you see evidence of devastating war, but also Palestinian determination to survive and to stay rooted to their homeland. Palestinians call this determination sumud. Like this tree that has survived the bombs and the axes, firmly rooted for centuries in this ground. Palestinians are committed to the ground in which they are rooted.

As we pause to pray amidst these scenes of sumud, let us take a posture of solidarity with all who suffer and struggle. We wish to uphold Palestinians in their sumud.

## Prayers

### Psalm 61:1-3

Hear my cry, O Lord; attend unto my prayer.

From the end of the earth will I cry out to thee,

and when my heart is overwhelmed: Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, that is higher than I.



Image submitted by Anne Koerber



Take a few moments to contemplate Anne Koerber's piece of art as you read the following prayer.

### **Sumud**

Eternal God, we come before you now broken over what is occurring in Gaza. From the depths of our hearts, we cry out in lament for your mercy in Gaza. As Hagar said, you are the God who sees. You see the death raining down on Gaza today, and our country's complicity, supporting, participating in, and some even glorying in. Yet somehow the people Gaza of are still standing, standing in your strength, standing through their faith.

How many horrific scenes have we witnessed where through their tears of anguish they cry out to you, giving glory to you, acknowledging your steadfastness and love.

Children trapped under the rubble of their home reminding their siblings to pray,

Mothers clinging to the body of their lost babies, wailing to the world their faith in you.

Fathers clawing at the rubble, a tomb for their family, sobbing that the only thing they have left is you.

Be comfort and strengthen for them, God, while all they see is darkness and death.

As they seek to find shelter, only to hear the bombs begin again and having to move once more,

As they seek to find food and water, waiting for hours only to be told there is none, or to be met with bullets instead of bread.

As they document the horrific horrors, not allowing the world to turn a blind eye to the living tragedy that is their daily life, leaving not one with the excuse, "I didn't know".

Sumud, a word that means steadfast, determined, resolved.

They are determined to survive, determined to stay in their homeland.

So let us also hold onto our faith, standing before you in similar determination, to not grow weary of speaking out, to not grow weary of standing in protest, to not grow weary.

And God we pray for an end to this genocidal slaughter, and for a true, and lasting ceasefire.

For you to break through the hardened hearts of our leaders and their commitment to supplying the weapons and bombs to Israel no matter the cost.

For your justice to put an end to the occupation, an end to the illegal settlements, and to provide true structural change for all Palestinians so they too can live in freedom and peace.

Hear our cry, Oh Lord.

Amen

*We are grateful to Sarah Sullivan for writing this prayer and being the first to offer it as a prayer.*

—  
*Refaat Alareer, 1979 - 2023*

*Professor, poet, and activist, Refaat Alareer wrote the following poem soon before his death. He was killed with his family in an air strike in Gaza on December 6, 2023.*

### **If I Must Die**

by Refaat Alareer

If I must die,

you must live

to tell my story

to sell my things  
 to buy a piece of cloth  
 and some strings,  
 (make it white with a long tail)  
 so that a child, somewhere in Gaza  
 while looking heaven in the eye  
 awaiting his dad who left in a blaze—  
 and bid no one farewell  
 not even to his flesh  
 not even to himself—  
 sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up above  
 and thinks for a moment an angel is there  
 bringing back love  
 If I must die  
 let it bring hope  
 let it be a tale  
 For Gaza: Psalm 46 (excerpts)  
 From Jewish Prayers for Gaza, [prayersforgaza.com](http://prayersforgaza.com)

For the people of Gaza, a song:  
 We will not look away  
 we see you everywhere  
 even as the bombs rain down  
 even as the earth gives way beneath you,  
 even as they drive you from your homes.

There is a river whose streams  
 will one day bring rejoicing back  
 to your land,  
 morning will dawn and light  
 will come streaming in to every home.

I will bring you into the stillness  
 of my embrace  
 and you will know that I am with you  
 I will lift you up among the nations  
 I will return you in dignity and in love.

## Station 4

### Responding

We now enter the old city in northern Gaza. We look one way and see St. Porphyrius Orthodox Church and look another and see the Grand Omari Mosque, both now in rubble. Being here brings to mind other holy places: The Holy Family Catholic Church, Gaza Baptist Church, the many mosques throughout Gaza and the Synagogues beyond the border, at their best, places of devotion, worship, and hope.

### **St. Porphyrius**

Saint Porphyrius is said to be the third oldest church in the world. Around 2,000 people sheltered at the church during the 2014 war. The church is being used in the same way now. However, on October 19th, two halls collapsed in a nearby [Israeli airstrike](#), killing 18 of the refugees sheltering at the church. Watch this [short overview](#) of the church in the last few decades.

### **Grand Omari Mosque**

The Grand Omari Mosque (also known as the Grand Mosque of Gaza) was the largest and oldest mosque in Gaza. There is a legend that this is the site where the Philistine temple stood toppled by Sampson and that Sampson is buried underneath this mosque. Israel struck the mosque in December, reducing most of the building to rubble. Only the minaret still stands, reminding us of what was once there.

Although these buildings have been desecrated by the violence of war, they remain monuments to the centuries of holy devotion offered in them. As we pause to pray here, our spiritual posture should be one of responding to what we have seen, lamenting, praying, and deciding to act.

## **Prayers**

### **For Gaza: Psalm 64 (excerpts)**

*From Jewish Prayers for Gaza, prayersforgaza.com*

Hear our voices when we cry out  
for life, for ceasefire,  
for an end to this endless night  
of terror.

Keep us from those who equivocate  
with their apologetics, those  
who would calmly rationalize away  
horrors that can never be justified.

One day the world  
will hang its head in shame  
for looking away  
from such cruelty as this.  
Until then we will continue  
to cry out for justice,  
unleashing our song of liberation  
throughout the land...  
Have Mercy on Us/Them  
Adapted from "The Litany", Common Worship

Holy Blessed One,  
Have mercy on us.

From all evil, pride, envy, hatred, malice, and from all evil intent,  
Good Lord, deliver us.

From famine and disaster;

From violence, murder, and dying unprepared,  
Good Lord, deliver them.

In times of sorrow and times of joy;  
In the hour of death and the day of judgment,  
Good Lord, deliver them.

This war and oppression is not your desire for humanity. Guide the leaders of the nations into the ways of peace and justice, that there may be a ceasefire in Gaza that gives space for making things right.  
Hear us, good Lord.

Bring an end to bombing, to occupation, to dependence on military might, to restriction of movement and work, and to fear of the other.  
Hear us, good Lord.

Help and comfort the lonely, bereaved, and oppressed. Bear the burden of the deaths and pain your people carry.  
Hear us, good Lord.

Provide for those who have been displaced, those who go hungry, and those who flee violence. Preserve the lives of those who are injured and vulnerable.  
Hear us, good Lord.

Give us true repentance.  
Forgive us our sins of negligence and ignorance.

Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit to amend our lives, to see our family in Gaza, and to mourn with those who mourn.  
Holy God, have mercy upon us.

*Thank you Karen and Zach Savella Stallard for writing and praying elements of this liturgy first.*

### **Du'a for Anxiety (excerpts)**

[From Duas for Palestine](#)

To You we complain of our weakness, our failure, our shame before the people. O Most Merciful! You are the Lord of the weak and oppressed.

May Allah **سُبْحٰنَهُ وَتَعَالٰى** rectify the affairs of the Palestinians, may He shower them with His mercy, pour upon them patience, make them steadfast, and grant them victory over their oppressors. May He elevate their ranks and reunite them with their loved ones.

That They May Not Grow Weary

Prayer from Holy Week with Gaza (excerpts)

From Sabeel, Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, <https://sabeel.org/>

Gracious and Loving God, We gather in Your presence with hearts full of gratitude.

Bless, O Lord, each person who has chosen to stand up against oppression, to speak out against wrongdoing, and to lend their voice to the voiceless. May their actions reflect Your love and bring hope to those who have been marginalized and disenfranchised.

We pray for Your continued guidance and support for these champions of justice, that they may not grow weary in their endeavors. May their efforts bear fruit in creating a more just, compassionate, and equitable world, where every person can live in peace and with dignity.

Inspire us all to join in this sacred work, recognizing our shared humanity and the interconnectedness of our lives. Grant us the wisdom to understand the ways we can contribute to healing and change and give us the courage to act upon that understanding. May our collective actions serve as a testament to Your boundless love and mercy, and may we never forget the power of solidarity in bringing about transformation and renewal. In Your Holy Name, we pray, Amen.

## Station 5



### Going with Gaza

We have arrived in Rafah. It is a small city overflowing with the refugees of Gaza. [More than half of all Gazans are in the streets of Rafah.](#)

The infrastructure here cannot support so many. The streets are host to all of life, to the children, the old, the dead; to latrines and aid; to playing and weeping. Take a moment to imagine what you see and hear among these tents.

It is an onslaught of humanity and noise. Imagine now what you smell. And the taste of the air. And how you feel. As we depart Gaza, Rafah is hard to leave. There are so many people here and no one knows what their lives will hold.

What do you pray at this moment of departure?

Now we have returned to Chicago, and you are back home. But home can never be the same. We now see Gaza is part of our homes and our homes are part of Gaza. From now on, we can never completely rest without thinking about our concern for Gaza.

## Prayers

### [Before Candle Lighting: A Blessing for Gaza](#)

*From Jewish Prayers for Gaza, prayersforgaza.com*

Blessed is the light  
that illumines the path to Olam Haba  
the World to Come:

where bombs falling from above  
have long since melted into the spreading calm  
of a distant horizon;  
where the dispossessed and expelled  
have no other memories than  
the softness of arms reaching out  
to welcome them home.

Blessed is the light  
that shows us the way forward –  
and blessed is Shabbat,  
this moment filling us endlessly  
with the vision of a world liberated,  
inspiring us with the strength  
to make it so.

### **Lord, Make Us Steadfast**

God, we are a changed people.

Throughout the stories of Scriptures, people encounter you, and they are changed. They have new names; their faces are shining; they walk with a different bearing.

We cannot forget what we have witnessed in Gaza. We cannot forget because what is at stake is the very dignity, well being, and lives of precious humans created in your image. We cannot forget because the psalmist says you are "close to the brokenhearted." We cannot forget because, as we have learned from the preacher, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

And yet we know ourselves, and we know how easily we can forget.

We know how easily we become concerned with the mundane matters of our lives. We know how easily we get tired and turn our eyes away from suffering, and devastation, and injustice, and violence. We know how easily we grow overwhelmed with our own real suffering, the burdens of health and relationships and losses we carry on our own shoulders. God, forgive us for our forgetfulness!

Turn our eyes, and our ears, and our hearts toward all the grace, and beauty, and loss, and agony of your children in Gaza!

As we return to our ordinary circumstances, please change our vision. May we see our comfortable homes and be reminded of so many houses and buildings that have been destroyed. May we notice our local infrastructure, as invisible as it often is, and be conscious of those who struggle to access necessities like water, food, medication, shelter, electricity, transportation, communication, and movement. May we see the people we love, and may we recognize in their eyes so very many people who have died, or are dying, or do not know what tomorrow will bring.

You love the people of Gaza; not only her people but her places, too, her waters and trees. You love them and grieve over their suffering. The psalmist also says you save "those who are crushed in spirit." Save them, we pray! And make us agents of your saving work in the world, wherever we have influence and power and means to affect change, however large or small. Increase our capacity to love people who are so far away from us. Help us to recognize how close they really are.

We ask that we would never be the same. We ask that our communities would never be the same. Make us steadfast in bearing witness, praying, and advocating. Amen.

*Thank you Brent Bailey for writing and praying elements of this liturgy first.*