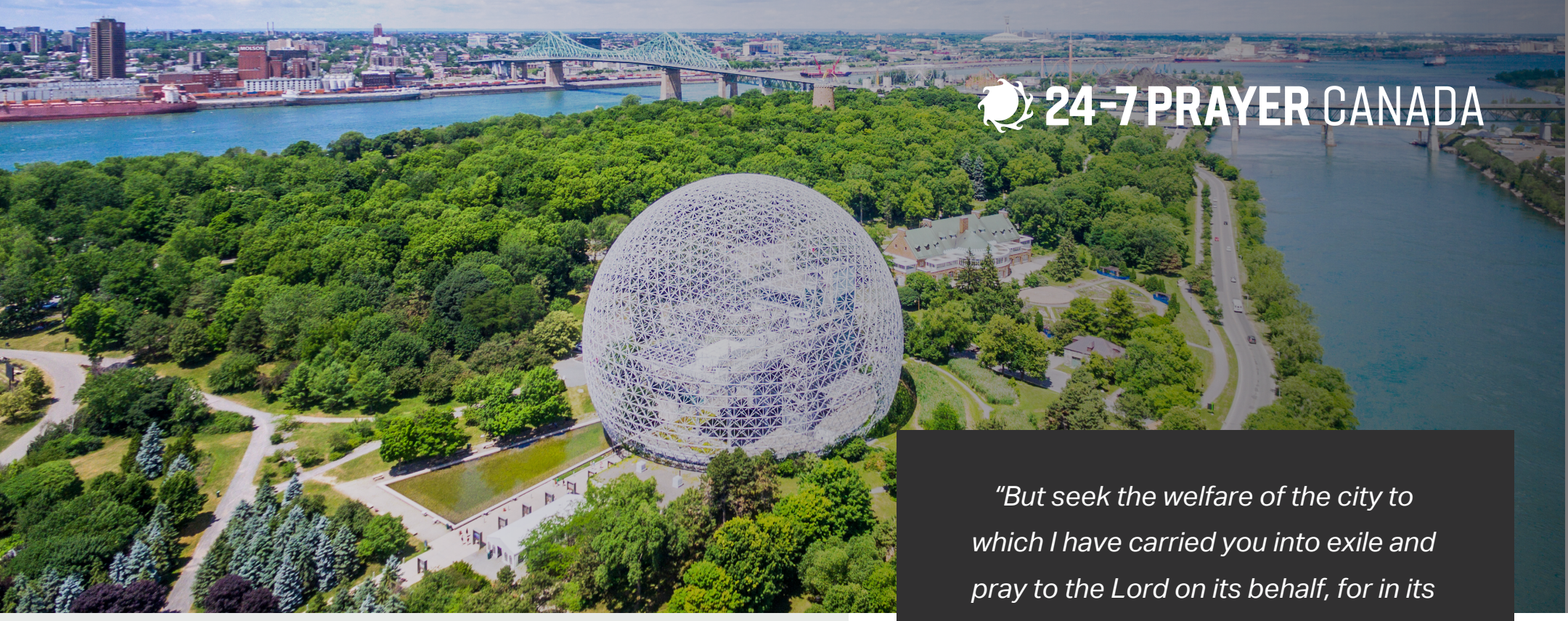


"But seek the welfare of the city to which I have carried you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare, you shall find your welfare."

Jeremiah 29:7

Reflection

Why does place matter?

Scripture is full of stories of God blessing, redeeming and engaging with place: sending Jonah to save the city of Nineveh, Jesus praying over Jerusalem through his tears, Paul finding Lydia on the shores of Philippi. The spirit of God hovers over neighbourhoods, cities and geography, loving its land and people. Place shapes us. It is the reason that a fisherman from L'Anse-au-Griffon, Québec and a fisherman from Combarro, Spain will have two entirely different worldviews, even though they both work on the same ocean.

If God tells so many stories about place, if place truly shapes people, if through the ages people have put creativity, energy and intelligence into building neighbourhoods, cities and geography, then we must pay attention to our neighbourhoods and engage with them through prayer. For as Jeremiah writes to the exiles in Babylon, seek the well-being of your neighbourhood. It is a sacred mission.

Action

1. Take a walk around your neighbourhood, or print a map of it and trace out places or points of interest that you would like to visit and pray at this month.
2. Pray alone or in a small group and ask yourself the following question: What does the welfare of this neighbourhood look like? Create a poster in the prayer room so people can add their answers.
3. Find out on what traditional territory or which Indigenous nations stewarded the land that your neighbourhood is located on. Write the land acknowledgement and hang it in the prayer room.

Daily Closing Prayer

God of place, you who sent your Son to walk the roads of villages and towns, you who breathe life into the dwellers of cities, you whose Spirit is the artist of community, inspire us to love our neighbourhood. Help us to love as you love. Amen.

Praying for Our Neighbourhoods

Reflection

Loving our neighbours is one of the central tenets to our Christian faith. Notice how Jesus never says "Love the neighbour you agree with" or "Only love the neighbour who loves you." My house in Verdun overlooks an alleyway shared with about 200 neighbours, typical of Montreal urban life ("La ruelle"). Ours is a total mosaïc of life stories, experiences and backgrounds. Some apartment units are inhabited by students, others are low-income housing for newcomers to Canada. One apartment block is a halfway house. Some of us are homeowners. Some of us love to garden and have greened the alleyway over several seasons. Others use their backyards as storage for scrap metal and old tires. Some are quiet, others begin cranking the sound systems as soon as the snow melts.

I am called to love them all. When Jesus commanded love of thy neighbour, he may very well have been giving us a road map towards the great journey of diversity, inclusion and nuance. I am enriched by my Lord's commandment to pay attention to the Other, the neighbour who is different.

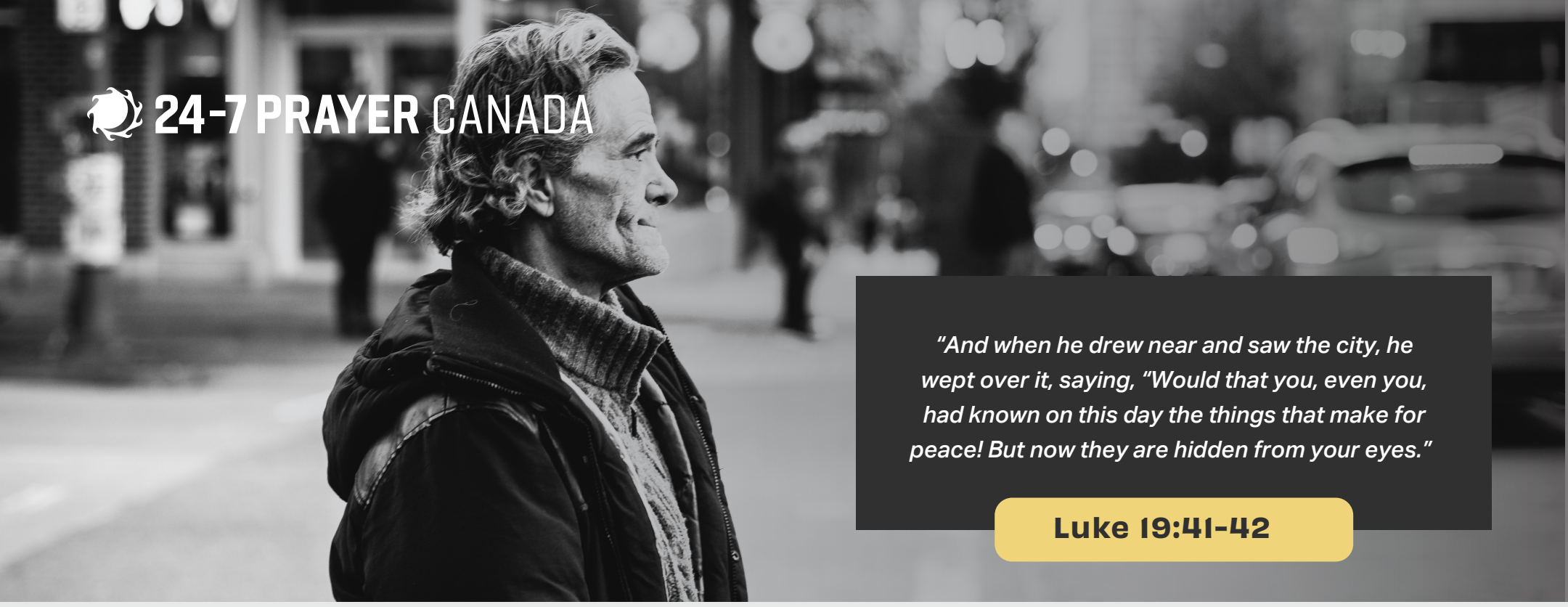
Action

- Create a prayer jar in which people can place the names of their neighbours
- Hold a conversation with some prayer partners on the following topic: "Who is my neighbour?" Try and find the least likely answer.
- Meet a stakeholder or knowledge-bearer in your neighbourhood: a teacher, a grandmother, a farmer, or a taxi driver, for instance. Ask them about their memories of living in this neighbourhood: ask them to tell their stories, the good or bad ones, the funny ones, moments that stuck with them.

Daily Closing Prayer

God who sees us, Who responds wholeheartedly when his people call out to him;
Help us to act in love when you respond, So that we may find our place in the redemption of our neighbourhood and behold our neighbors as you behold them.
In the name of the one who is the response, the act, and love. Amen.

Praying for Our Neighbour



Reflection

The wounds of our neighbourhoods are not always so austere. But lament is a valid and valuable prayer practice. Grief is an extension of love. If we did not love our neighbourhoods and our neighbours, then injustice, pollution, exploitation and exclusion would simply leave us indifferent or apathetic. The wounds of our neighbourhoods should be identified, mourned, and prayed over.

Action

- Host a neighbourhood walk. Try and identify areas of woundedness - they can be obvious, such as a place where an assault or homicide took place. But they can be subtle as well, such as places where addiction, consumerism or unethical behaviours are accepted. Pray over these places, quietly or in groups of two or three.
- Organize actions of blessing in areas that are seemingly hurting (clean up an alleyway, plant a rosebush, volunteer at a day centre for unhoused neighbours, hold a food drive)
- Create a wailing wall outside, open to the whole community.
- Read the Psalms of lament, such as Psalm 74 or 80.

Daily Closing Prayer

You who weep with those who weep,
Like you did as you approached Lazarus' tomb;
Restore life to those whose hearts are weary and bring comfort,
So that we all may move toward fullness in all of creation.
In the name of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, Amen.

Praying over the wounds of the Neighbourhood

Reflection

On this prayer day, we must try to adopt a new way of seeing and begin seeking out signs of hope in our geography. Each community expresses its hope uniquely and it deserves to be seen, up close for what it is. The challenge here is that the most revealing signs of hope are not always the most obvious. A sign of hope can be as small as a community garden or as big as affordable housing. To the trained eye, there are signs of hope everywhere that are declaring the real presence of a loving God acting in partnership with humanity.

The poet Denise Levertov writes, "I see paradise in the dust of the streets." Often, the greatest signs of hope are found in the most vulnerable of circumstances: in the dusty church basement where an AA meeting is held, in friendship extended to refugees. This is Holy Spirit work: to find signs of sacred hope, and respond to it through his prompts. Missiologist Joel Kiekintveld asks, "What will you do to move your neighbourhood in the direction of your hopes?"

Action

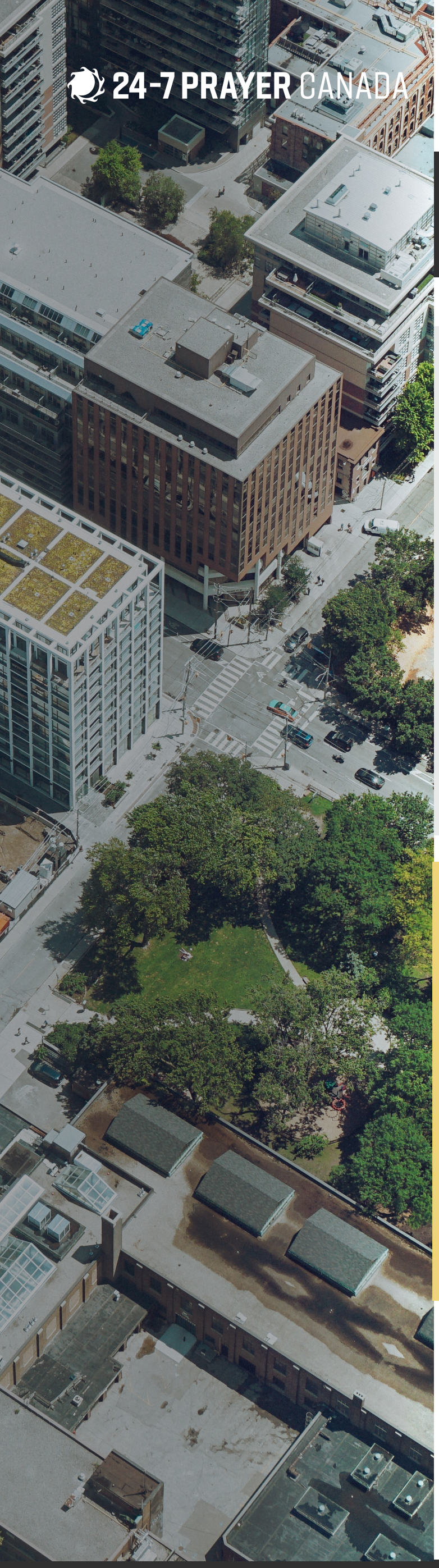
In your prayer room, create an interactive poster board with the following question: "What will you do to move the neighbourhood in the direction of your hopes?"

- In your prayer room, create an interactive poster board with the following question: "What will you do to move the neighbourhood in the direction of your hopes?"
- Plant a tree.

Daily Closing Prayer

Prepare the Way of the Lord. Make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, every mountain made low. The crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth. Every neighbourhood shall be places of peace and mercy. And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Praying over the Hope of the Neighbourhood



"You are the salt of the earth."

Matthew 5:13

Reflection

Our posture in cities and neighbourhoods often tends towards the following question: "What can I get out of the city?" For some, that's all a city is... a place to find work, schools, services, or entertainment. Others do the same outside the city (i.e. the city no longer offers me what I need, so I'll move out of the city). Less often do we ponder, "what can I contribute to this place?" or "How can I help shape this neighbourhood to reflect the Kingdom of God?" If a neighbourhood is its people, then you can leave your fingerprints on your community. What do you want those imprints to be? Will you be Christ to your neighbour? Will you be, as Saint Francis prays, "An artisan of peace"?

Action

1. Try the following exercise with your small group or church:
   a. Imagine your city in 20 years as a city of peace for all people, where everyone belongs, especially the most vulnerable.
   b. Describe it.
   c. What role does the church play in actualizing your vision? What's its reputation?
   d. How does that vision impact your local congregation?
2. Host a block party.
3. Sit on a park bench and say this breath prayer : "Your will be done."

Daily Closing Prayer

May we all be midwives to the holy and seek the peace of the cities in which we serve. We gladly participate in the ongoing act of creation, expressing your lavish beauty in our daily work and play. Gracious God, we ask for one more grace: to do and to will your good pleasure.

Praying to be Christ's presence in our Communities.

24-7 PRAYER CANADA

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation and the news that the God of Israel reigns!"

Isaiah 52:7

Reflection

Violaine is an ordained sister with the Congregation de Notre Dame (founded by Marguerite Bourgeois in 1658) which means she lives near those she ministers to, in the impoverished east-end neighbourhood of Hochelaga. She spends her days praying and advocating for the needs of her neighbourhood. She regularly visits low-income and elderly neighbours, taking note of those whose living conditions are inadequate and mobilising local services to come to their aid.

Violaine and the women of her order draw inspiration from the story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth in their work. She says, "we must, like Mary, try to bring Christ within us to all whom we visit." What would our faith communities look like if we all tried to incarnate this principle? There are so many unsung heroes in our midst: the friendly neighbour, the nurse, the local pastor, the addictions counsellor. Do you pray for the ambulance driver every time you hear a siren go by? Do you pray for the priest when the noon bell tolls? Try it. These siblings in Christ who are his hands and feet and without whom our communities would indeed suffer.

Action

Go volunteer in a local non-profit organization and offer to buy the staff lunch or gift cards to a local coffee shop.

1. Pray for one church or community worker during the entire summer, every day.
2. Do a prayer walk in your neighbourhood with the labourers as the single prayer focus.

Daily Closing Prayer

Lord, we give you praise and thanks for the people who proclaim peace, who walk in your ways, who bring Christ in word and deed to all our neighbours. Bless the mother, comfort the nurse. Grant patience to the teacher, heal the hands of the farmer. Give courage to the politician, uplift the counsellor. Bestow your sweet rest upon every worker who labours in your love.

Praying for the hands and feet of Jesus in the Neighbourhood

24-7 PRAYER CANADA

"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God."

Matthew 5:9

Reflection

It should come as no surprise that in our age of polarization, the culture of cancelling, othering, finger-pointing and accusations transgress our very front porches and walkways. Communities, sadly, falsely unite to scapegoat and reject the Other. A deeply spiritual antidote to this is in the person Jesus, "the ultimate rejected stone and scapegoat who holds the world together, but in a whole new way. He is the scapegoat who forgives those who reject him and shows us how to create genuine unity that is not over and against anyone, but with and for everyone."

Action

- Pray for someone with whom you strongly disagree.
- Host a conversation with friends, neighbours or fellow church members on this question: "How can we unplug from the violence of rivalry and exclusion?"

Daily Closing Prayer

God of reconciliation, let me never forget that when I carry Christ within me, I carry peace itself.

Praying for Reconciliation in the Neighbourhood