

**A Worship Resource for March 21:**  
*International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*

On March 21, 1960, police in Sharpeville, South Africa, opened fire on a peaceful group of young students demonstrating against the apartheid laws, killing 69 people. In 1966, the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed that date to be the “International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.”

In Canada, the Day has been recognized annually since 1989, supported by the Department of Canadian Heritage of the Government of Canada. The government of Canada has released an *Action Plan Against Racism* and participated, along with Canadian churches, in the United Nations’ World Conference Against Racism held in South Africa in 2001.

In proclaiming the Day, the United Nations condemned “all policies and practices of apartheid, racial discrimination and segregation, including the practices of discrimination inherent in colonialism.” It is good for Canadians to remember this as we acknowledge the ongoing impact of Canada’s heritage of colonialism. We invite Canadian churches to mark The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination by using this prayer and hymn on one of the Sundays close to March 21, 2008.

**A Four Directions Prayer of the People**

*Leader*     *There are gifts from each of the peoples in the four directions of the world. The winds of the different directions remind us of these gifts. We invite participants to stand and face the four directions, honouring the wholeness of humanity and God’s creation.*

*Leader*     Let us turn now to the **East**. We give thanks for the peoples of the East. This direction symbolizes new life on the earth and reminds us of our connectedness to each other and to creation. The sun rises in the east and each day is a gift. Life itself is a gift.

*All*         **Come Holy Spirit, come.**

*Leader*     And we offer our prayers for God’s church: May God open our eyes each morning to the gift of God’s reconciliation with us through Jesus, and the call to be ministers of reconciliation. We pray for our leaders and for renewal for all who nurture the church in Christ’s ministry of healing and transforming the world.

*Leader*     We turn to face **South**. We give thanks for the peoples of the South. The South represents warmth and growth. Give us your strength and courage to be open to new learning and to grow in our witness and care for the world, we pray.

*All*         **Come Holy Spirit, come.**

*Leader*     And we offer our prayers for God’s world, praying especially for those who suffer from the violence of racism, poverty and war; and from the legacies of colonialism and slavery. May God’s strength be with all who suffer and with all who work for justice, peace and the healing of relationships amongst peoples.

*Leader*     We turn to face **West**. We give thanks for the peoples of the West. The West represents the gift of rest, the passing of time and of those who have gone before.

Give us the wisdom and grace to use your gifts of time and leisure well; give comfort to those who mourn, and rest to those who have passed into your care, we pray.

*All*      **Come Holy Spirit, come.**

*Leader*      And we offer our prayers for all in need: May God's peace and healing presence be with all who suffer and those who are weary and in need of rest.

*Leader*      We turn to face **North**. We give thanks for the peoples of the North. A gift of this direction is clarity of vision and a sense of the strength we need to live each day. Help us to see more clearly your role for us, especially in the healing and care of Mother Earth, we pray.

*All*      **Come Holy Spirit, come.**

*Leader*      And we offer our prayers for the wisdom of discernment: May God open our hearts to the grace of God's holy presence with us and around us, that we might truly behold the earth and each other as beloved by God.

*Leader*      We turn to complete the circle and to look: to God who cleanses our Earth with snow, wind, fire and rain; to Jesus Christ who fills us with the wideness of mercy and lovingly embraces us all, And to the Holy Spirit who inspires us.

*All:*      **Amen.**

Adapted by CEARN from *For the Healing of the Land*, Rupert's Land Indigenous Council, 2003

### **Give heed to this day's urgent call**

*By Wenh-In Ng*

*To the tune Winchester New: 8888*

In Sharpeville streets this day in March  
Apartheid's evils to defy,  
Young blood was shed, young lives were lost  
A shame the world cannot deny.

O God of justice bid us cry  
No more shall be such sacrifice,  
No more shall humans thus oppress  
In this our land or anywhere.

Rise up then sisters, brothers, all  
Give heed to this day's urgent call  
To end all racial injustice,  
To march on in the light of God.

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*The Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network (CEARN) is under the umbrella of the Canadian Council of Churches. The network is an expression of Canadian churches working together to support anti-racism programs and educators who are working in member churches, sharing resources and learning, and supporting long-term change in Canadian churches and church organizations. For more information about CEARN or additional downloadable resources on anti-racism for congregational use, visit [www.ccc-cce.ca/english/justice/racism](http://www.ccc-cce.ca/english/justice/racism).*