

CALL TO PRAYER AND SELF-DENIAL 2025

Bold Women Transforming Communities

INTRODUCTION

In 2025, the Call to Prayer and Self-Denial offering will support economic development and microenterprise projects, vocational training, life skills, and livelihood training internationally. Specifically, funds will support the work of United Methodist conference women's teams that design and lead projects that make a direct impact on improving the lives of their families and community members. Funds raised will also support the work of the conference women's desk coordinators and Regional Missionaries who partner in this work.

Before leading this service, take some time to consider the concepts of "hand-made" and "handheld." Imagine lifting our hands, spreading our fingers, and holding our hands to our hearts are ways of calling upon God to bless our lives and those in our world. How awesome! While we are appreciative of all the good that our hands do, we are also aware of all that needs to still be done—in our world and our communities.

United Women in Faith is a **hand to hold** as we venture into the world—making an impact through our beloved community. For this Call to Prayer Service, we will hold hands with our sisters in Peru, learning about their history and work.

United Women in Faith has grown exponentially in Peru through our gifts. This service is an opportunity to continue the energy and growth of women internationally through our Call to Prayer giving.

PREPARATION

Volunteers

You will need three additional volunteers for the service. **Volunteer 1** is an inquisitive participant and asks clarifying questions. **Volunteers 2 and 3** will be needed in the history portion of the service. Be sure to share the full worship service script with them before the service so they can prepare and have enough copies of the service for all of those participating.

Optional: In the history section, you may invite women to enact the spoken words. You may also choose to do some additional research and create a slideshow presentation to illustrate this brief history. Please use copyright-free images for this presentation, such as unsplash.com, or use images for which you have obtained permission from the owner.

Music

You'll also need a piano and pianist or pre-recorded music and hymnals or song sheets for the music portion of this service. We will be sharing two hymns from *The United Methodist Hymnal*: "Here I Am, Lord," #593, and "On Eagle's Wings," #143. You will also need music from Peru to play during the offering.

Room Setup

Set up the room with chairs in a circle. In the center, create a worship and focus center with two baskets: one to collect the handmade hands and another to collect the offering. In the center of the focus table, gather artifacts from Peru such as a map of Peru, Incan art, or corn.



Materials

You will need construction paper of many colors, markers, and scissors. Consider how much of each will be needed for each person to trace and cut out their hands for the activity.

ORDER OF SERVICE

- Opening Prayer
- Reflection
- Prayer of Intercession
- Song
- Reflection
- About the Call to Prayer & Self-Denial
- History & Training Projects in Peru
- Activity: Making Handprints
- Offering
- Closing Song
- Sending Forth

To simplify the service: Skip Learning About the Call to Prayer and History & Training Projects in Peru. End the program after the Offering.

To hold the service virtually: Ask participants before the service to have construction paper, scissors, and markers on hand near their devices. When the service calls for sharing their hands, ask participants to hold their hands, one at a time, to their camera. Give folks time to explain their creative handprints.

WORSHIP & PROGRAM



OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Loving and Merciful Creator, we gather here today as sisters in faith, full of love and compassion. We open our hearts and our hands, seeking understanding of your work and in gratitude for our hands. May we use them as your hands in this world.

Volunteer 1: Guide us in our reflections, empower us to serve as instruments of your peace and justice, lifting the gifts, graces, and leadership of our international sisters. Today, we especially celebrate and learn from the growing faith and work of our Peruvian sisters.

Volunteer 2: “Every day I call upon you, O LORD; I spread out my hands to you” (Psalm 88:9).
(*spread hands*)

Volunteer 3: “Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the LORD” (Psalm 134:2).
(*lift hands*)



REFLECTION

Leader: Let’s turn to Isaiah 6:8: “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”

“Whom shall I send?” Like the prophet Isaiah, may we respond with open hearts, ready spirits, and open hands to answer the call to serve, give, and receive from our sisters in Peru and beyond. I ask you to lift your hands.

(*Leader demonstrates.*)

Volunteer 1: I ask you now to listen to these next words with your hand to your heart.
(*Volunteer demonstrates, putting both hands to her chest.*) We are mindful of the challenges faced by women in Peru and other places in the world and the opportunities we have to make a difference.

As United Women in Faith’s executive for international work Tatiana Dwyer says: “Even though these projects are small, they have a big impact. They feed families, send kids to school, and empower women to become leaders. Don’t underestimate what they can do!”



PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Leader: God of Justice and Compassion, we now lift our hands to our Peruvian sisters who face challenges in their daily lives. We pray for all who are marginalized and oppressed, that they may find strength and resilience in your presence.

All: **Grant us and our sisters the courage to speak out against injustice and advocate for their rights.**

Volunteer 1: May we, as sisters in faith, stand in solidarity, amplify voices, and work together to create a more just and equitable society.

All: **Use our hands, O God, to become agents of your change, working for your kin-dom on earth. Create a world where all are treated with dignity and respect. Amen.**

SONG: "HERE I AM, LORD," *THE UNITED METHODIST HYMNAL*, #593

As we sing "Here I Am, Lord," feel free to move your hands as you feel inspired. You may raise your hands, move your hands into a prayer position, or return your hands to your heart. You may close your eyes if you are comfortable. If you feel emotion, even a tear in your eye, know this is God's love moving through you. And that you are not alone.



REFLECTION

Volunteer 1: Let us take a moment of silence to reflect on how we can embody the message of the song "Here I Am, Lord." As we listened to the lyrics, how did you feel yourself responding to God's call with courage and humility? Did you feel ready to serve where needed? How is God readying our hands to give?

(Allow a time of silence for reflection.)

ABOUT THE CALL TO PRAYER & SELF-DENIAL

Leader: Each year, the Call to Prayer and Self-Denial Offering supports a United Women in Faith program. Our gifts in 2025 support international economic development and microenterprise, job training, and life skills projects by our United Women in Faith sisters around the world.

We will hear one example of projects funded, designed, and led by the women of Peru. This illustrates the kind of work that will happen because of our giving to the 2025 Call to Prayer and Self-Denial for the United Women in Faith international mission.

Volunteer 1: Wait. What is the United Women in Faith international mission?

Leader: This year, our sacrificial gifts will support small seed grants that create economic opportunities, even in the most vulnerable rural communities.

Volunteer 1: And . . . our funds underwrite Women's Desk Coordinators who care for women's ministries in Central Conferences. Also, international funds support the work of our worldwide United Women in Faith and United Methodist Women's country teams. These teams design and lead projects that make a direct impact on improving the lives of women, children, families, and community members in need.

Leader: In countries connected to our United Women in Faith sisterhood, projects happen through country teams, comprised of intergenerational leaders and are led by our Regional Missionaries.

Volunteer 1: Wait. Who are the Regional Missionaries?

Leader: They are women who serve in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, uplifting women who determine for themselves how to empower one another. We underwrite the work of these faithful women. The mission work we learn about today is from Regional Missionary Andrea Reily Rocha Soares. She is celebrating 10 years of missionary service in Latin America in 2025.

Volunteer 1: In 2025, the Call to Prayer celebrates and funds . . . Wait. What exactly is the Call to Prayer and Self-Denial?

Leader: The Call to Prayer and Self-Denial began more than 125 years ago as a prayerful way to study, pray, and then give sacrificially to better the lives of others. The Call to Prayer and Self-Denial observance focuses on a different theme every year and the projects that are funded relate to that theme.

Volunteer 1: What is the 2025 theme?

Leader: "Bold Women Transforming Communities." Our gifts will go around the world to support bold women uplifting and empowering one another. For example, in Peru, according to Regional Missionary in Latin America, Andrea Reily Rocha Soares, one of the most important historic fights from our bold United Women in Faith foremothers was to educate women and girls.

HISTORY & TRAINING PROJECTS

At this point in the program, you may invite women to mime the proceedings, for example, cross arms in front of you to mimic rejection and then arms outstretched to show welcome. Alternatively, you may choose to do some additional research and create a presentation to add images to illustrate this brief history. See the Preparation section for more information.

Volunteer 2: Until the end of the 19th century, women in Peru were only allowed to study up to the third grade. Thanks to women such as Elvira García y García, María Jesús Alvarado, and Teresa Gonzales de Fanning who demanded education for all, this was changed. They rebelled, determined to end the status quo. They did. Schools and universities opened their hands, doors, and hearts to welcome women and girl students.

Volunteer 3: And did the missionaries join with the grassroots women?



Elsie Wood, missionary, educator, and founder of the María Alvarado School. Photo courtesy of Boston University School of Theology.

Volunteer 2: They did. One example is Elsie Wood, daughter of a Methodist Episcopal missionary pastor and later missionary in her own right. From her early years, Wood saw the need for increased educational opportunities and pursued higher education in the United States with this goal in mind. When she returned to Peru, Wood planned a school system and later Lima High School for Women in 1906, working alongside Peruvian women already engaged in the cause.¹

Volunteer 3: Methodist schools promoted education for girls in Peru by opening all subjects to all people—from their first year of education to their last. This was done in Callao High School (currently known as Colegio America) in 1891, the Andean Institute in Junín (currently, Colegio Andino) in 1913, and the Anglo-American School of La Victoria (today, Colegio America de La Victoria) in 1915.

Volunteer 2: However, the concern and challenge to educate girls in Peru remained. By the 1960s, educational gaps remained, such as a very high rate of female illiteracy. In response to this social demand, the Methodist Women's Federation of Peru offered literacy classes to the women of Vitarte (Lima) in 1968.

Volunteer 3: This official and unofficial education of women and girls continues to this day. Besides enabling schools, women and girls teach and learn handicraft skills, financial literacy, and small business skills from and with one another.

Volunteer 2: Handicrafts are always part of meetings. When the Methodist women meet, they often work with their hands as they gather and discuss the topic.

Volunteer 3: According to Maria Rosa Ribeiro, first president of the Methodist Women's Federation of Peru, the ladies of the Women's Society of Callao met every Wednesday and twice a month "for sewing clothes to be donated to the poor."

Volunteer 2: In 1930, Methodist women organized a "bazaar" in which they sold clothes they made to raise funds for a student's trip to Buenos Aires to study.

Volunteer 3: The fact that women are still engaged in handicrafts is not a coincidence. Gender studies reveal that women at home, engaged in child-rearing and housework, perform clothing construction, such as sewing and weaving. The massive entry of women into the labor market began to change this panorama in the 1960s.

Volunteer 2: Over the years, the Methodist Women's Federation of Peru, in partnership with United Women in Faith's predecessor organizations, supported projects through training on sewing machines, and dressmaking skills to develop independence by and for women. This offered women choices to change their lives and the lives of their communities and families for the good.

Volunteer 1: Wait. What are the Methodist women of Peru doing now?

Volunteer 3: Today, Methodist women's groups in Peru continue to work with their hands. The destiny of these handicrafts has changed over time: from being made for family use, nowadays, they have a productive purpose.

Leader: They have started a new project in alliance with United Women in Faith.

Volunteer 1: Let us hear from Annie Solís, president of the Methodist Women's Federation of Peru:

Volunteer 2: "The hands of women are wonderful, they can transform everything, always for the common good. We are promoting the Transformative Development Project with great hope, expecting that the experience of walking together will also help us to continue the legacy of our older sisters."

Volunteer 3: This legacy includes development projects with training on business plans, accounting, marketing and sales strategies, and access to capital, among other actions.



Methodist women knitting at Comas Methodist Church. Photo by Annie Solís.

Volunteer 2: The Transformational Development Training was organized in October 2023, and similar workshops conducted in the district women's associations "seek to identify initiatives," says Solis, "based on their realities, that promote entrepreneurship and dignity of life to women, their families, and communities."

Leader: So, for our Call to Prayer and Self Denial offering, you may consider committing to giving in units of \$25 for the year 2025 to support the International Mission of United Women in Faith and empower women and girls around the world.

Volunteer 1: But I don't have that much to give. What shall I give?

Leader: All Call to Prayer and Self-Denial gifts of any amount are welcome and make a difference.

ACTIVITY & OFFERING

Leader: I am passing around paper, markers, and scissors.
(Put on quiet Andean or Peruvian music to play in the background.)

Step 1: Trace your hands with the marker.
(Wait while the women trace their fingers.)

Step 2: Pass the tracing of your hands to another, giving the paper to the person on your left.
(Wait as they pass.)

Step 3: On the hand you have received, write and create images of our prayers for women in Peru and girls worldwide who need our hands to lift them into places of education and self-reliance.
(Wait as they write.)

Step 4: When you have finished writing or drawing your prayers on one side of the hand, pass it to the person to your left.
(Wait as they pass.)

Step 5: Now, we will cut out the image of the hand and then pass it to your left again.
(Put on Peruvian music as they cut and complete their hands.)

Step 6: When you have finished cutting and receive a new hand, take time to prayerfully write your commitment to support this year's Call to Prayer and Self-Denial. How much will you give?

Step 7: As we listen to the Peruvian music and finish our work, I will pass around two offering baskets. One will receive our hands with prayers and commitments. The other will receive your offerings.

Volunteer 1: When your handiwork is complete, you may repeat the hand movements we made earlier—lifting our hands or putting our hands to our hearts as you listen to the music

You or your local group can make your gift today by visiting bit.ly/CallToPrayerGift or sending a check to:

United Women in Faith
Church Center for the United Nations
777 United Nations Plaza, 11th Floor
New York, NY 10017
Attn: Call to Prayer 2025

SENDING FORTH

Leader: Gracious and Loving God, as we prepare to depart from this sacred space, we carry with us the call to be your hands in the world. May we go forth with hearts full of compassion and minds open to your guiding spirit. Strengthen us in our resolve to stand up for justice and advocate for those who are marginalized and oppressed.

Bless our Peruvian sisters and sisters around the world with your grace and peace, and may we continue to work alongside them in solidarity and love. Amen.



CLOSING SONG

Sing "On Eagle's Wings." *The United Methodist Hymnal*, #143

ADDITIONAL HYMN SUGGESTIONS FROM *THE UNITED METHODIST HYMNAL*

"Jesus' Hands Were Kind Hands," #273

"Tú Has Venido a la Orilla (Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore)," #344

"Pues Si Vivimos (When We Are Living)," #356

"Sois la Semilla (You Are the Seed)," #583

Sources for the historical information in this service are from:

Woman's Missionary Friend, Vol 28 (Boston: The Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1896–1897) books.google.com/books/about/Woman_s_Missionary_Friend.html?id=E6bNAAAAMAAJ.

Additional information was provided by Tatiana Dwyer, United Women in Faith Executive for International Ministries, and Andrea Reily Rocha Soares, United Women in Faith Regional Missionary in Latin America.

Mary Beth Coudal is a writer, teacher, and mother of three awesome young adults. She has a passion for international friendship, women's rights, education, creativity, and coffee.

Endnote

1. "Wood, Elsie (1868-1954)," Boston University School of Theology, March 20, 2020, bu.edu/missiology/2020/03/20/wood-elsie-1868-1954.