



## **St. Luke's East Hampton Reflections from Fr. Ben**

March 1, 2026

In times like this, it can be hard to know what to say or how to pray. I offer to you a series of reflections and letters to help. These come from the Military Chaplains of the Diocese of Long Island (including me), from an Episcopal Priest who is a military mom, from the Bishop of San Diego, from the Presiding Bishop, and from the Archbishop of Jerusalem and the Middle East (whose diocese includes the Episcopal churches in Iran.) I am having dinner with the Episcopal Bishop of the Armed forces and other chaplains at the end of this week and will keep you up to date as things develop. In the mean time, the common theme in all of these communications is an invitation to pray, which I encourage you to do. - Father Ben

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### **From the Military Chaplains of the Diocese of Long Island**

Grace and peace to you.

In the wake of recent U.S. military strikes against Iran, we write to you as the Armed Forces Chaplains of the Diocese of Long Island—pastors who walk daily alongside service members, veterans, and families, and who also stand with you in prayer as members of the Body of Christ.

Moments like this often arrive through an unrelenting stream of alerts, images, commentary, and speculation. The pace itself can become its own source of distress. We invite you, first of all, to pause. To take a breath. To pray.

Prayer in a time of war is not escape. It is grounding. It steadies us when fear seeks to scatter us. It reminds us that behind every uniform and every border are human beings—beloved children of God—on all sides of conflict. It calls us back to our deepest identity before any other name claims us.

We also encourage a gentle attentiveness to how we take in the news. Consider limiting your intake. Choose trusted, measured sources rather than endless scrolling or reactive commentary. Ask yourself why you are checking the news in a given moment: Is it to stay responsibly informed, or is it feeding anxiety, anger, or helplessness? Information has its place. So does restraint. Wisdom often lies in knowing when to turn toward the light of prayer rather than the noise of speculation.

As chaplains, we are reminded daily that readiness is not only a matter of strength or preparedness. It is spiritual. It is the quiet, faithful work of tending the inner life so that anxiety does not isolate us, grief does not harden us, and fear does not eclipse compassion. Return to the practices that root you: prayer, scripture, silence, honest conversation, time with those you love.

Be gentle with one another. Many around you may be carrying unspoken worry. Reach out. Stay connected. Listen deeply. These small acts are not small at all. They are how peace is practiced.

For Christians, prayer in times of war is also an act of faithful resistance. We follow Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, whose life reveals that love is stronger than violence and mercy deeper than fear. To pray for peace is not naïve. It is courageous. It is to align our hearts with God's future even when the present feels uncertain.

We invite you to pray:

For all who live under the shadow of violence.

For those who serve, and for those who wait and worry at home.

For leaders, that wisdom, restraint, and humility may guide their decisions.

For the wounded in body, mind, and spirit.

For a world aching for peace, and for the grace to be instruments of it.

If this moment stirs deep anxiety or distress, please do not carry it alone. Reach out to your clergy. If you are clergy, reach out to a colleague or your spiritual director. Reach out to trusted friends. Seek help when you need it. Caring for our spiritual and emotional well-being is an act of faithfulness.

In this season of Lent:

May the God who brings light out of chaos breathe calm into troubled hearts.

May the Christ who stretched out his arms in love hold all who suffer.

May the Spirit who hovers over the waters guide us in the way of peace.

With prayer and solidarity,

The Armed Forces Chaplains of the Diocese of Long Island

The Rev. Canon Landon Moore, USN

The Rev. Jenn Pilat, USN

The Rev. James Reiss, USN

The Rev. Dr. Benjamin Shambaugh, USCG (AUX)

The Very Rev. Dr. Michael Sniffen, USN

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### **From a Priest who is a Military Mom**

Beloved,

As news unfolds of escalating military action between the United States, Israel, and Iran, I write to you with a heart that is layered and tender. I am speaking not only as a priest, but as a military mother.

Those two vocations live inside me at the same time.

As a priest, I am bound to the Gospel of peace, to the sacred dignity of every human being, to the hard and holy work of truth telling. As a military mom, I know the particular ache of watching world events through the lens of children who wear the uniform of this nation. I know the sound of fear that hums quietly beneath headlines. I know the pride, the loyalty, the moral complexity, and the vulnerability that military families carry.

Many of you are holding similar layers.

Today, I want to speak first to the civilians who will be caught in the crossfire of decisions they did not make. To the mothers in Tehran and Tel Aviv. To the fathers in villages and cities. To children who do not understand geopolitics but will understand the sound of sirens. To the elderly who have already survived too many conflicts.

God sees you.

Every human being bears the image of God. The image of God does not carry a passport. It does not salute a flag. It does not belong to one nation more than another. Every civilian life is sacred. Every loss tears at the fabric of our shared humanity.

We grieve in advance for suffering that did not need to happen.

And to our military, and especially to our military families, I speak from a place that is personal.

To the soldiers who stand ready because they swore an oath. To the parents who scan the news with a tightening chest. To the spouses who hold down households while holding back tears. To the children who try to be brave because they think they must.

You are not invisible to God.

You are not pawns in heaven's eyes.

You are beloved.

The burden you carry is heavy. The moral weight is real. It is possible to love one's country and still wrestle with its decisions. It is possible to honor service and still question the wisdom of those who deploy it. Those tensions are not signs of disloyalty. They are signs of conscience.

As people of faith, we must hold two truths at once. We pray fiercely for protection over those in uniform. And we pray just as fiercely for wisdom, restraint, and repentance among leaders who wield power. We refuse to baptize violence as righteousness simply because it flies our flag.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem. He did not celebrate its destruction. He lamented the blindness that led to it.

We must allow ourselves to lament.

There is a temptation in wartime to harden our hearts, to narrow compassion only to those who look like us or live within our borders. That is not the way of Christ. The Cross stands at the center of our faith, a reminder of what happens when empire and fear collide with innocence.

Our calling is not to cheer destruction. Our calling is to remain human.

To military families who feel the quiet dread rising in your bodies, hear this clearly. Your worry is holy. Your sleepless nights are a form of love. The Church must surround you with practical support, consistent prayer, and tangible presence. If you need help, ask. If you are angry, say it. If you are afraid, you are not weak.

To civilians abroad who will bear the brunt of this conflict, we pray for your safety, your protection, your dignity. We reject any narrative that makes your suffering collateral or acceptable.

War may be declared by governments. It is endured by ordinary people.

And finally, to our nation, we must speak a hard truth. When fear, pride, and political ambition go unchecked, the cost is paid in blood and trauma. Democracy requires moral courage. Responsibility does not end once ballots are cast. We are accountable for the systems we uphold and the leaders we empower.

Yet even now, grace is not absent.

God does not abandon us in the aftermath of our collective failures. God moves in hospital rooms and military barracks. God sits beside anxious parents and frightened children. God weeps in refugee camps and stands vigil in command centers. God works through peacemakers, diplomats, chaplains, medics, and quiet saints who refuse to surrender compassion.

So we pray.

We pray for de escalation.

We pray for protection of civilians.

We pray for the safety and moral clarity of our soldiers.

We pray for leaders to choose wisdom over ego.

We pray for peace rooted in justice, not domination.

And as a priest and as a mother, I commit to standing in that tension, to loving fiercely, to telling the truth, and to refusing to let war steal our humanity.

May the God of mercy hold every trembling heart.

May Christ, who knows violence from the inside, stand with every soldier and every civilian.

May the Spirit guard minds, steady hands, and soften what hatred would harden.

And may peace, real and costly peace, find its way to us.

Rev. Allison Burns-LaGreca

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**From the Bishop of San Diego**

Beloved in Christ,

Like many of you, I awoke this morning to the news that the United States and Israel had launched military strikes against Iran.

Amidst deep concern about the possibility of a wider conflict in the Middle East, I ask for prayers for all those affected by the current conflict: innocent civilians in several countries who are at risk of harm; members of the military who have been deployed to the area to support the strikes (including the crew of the San Diego-based aircraft carrier the USS Abraham Lincoln); and also a group of pilgrims to the Holy Land from the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut who are reportedly sheltering at St. George's College in Jerusalem while missile alarms go off around them.

Archbishop Hosam Naoum, the Primate of the Anglican Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East, asked for "urgent, unceasing prayer" in a pastoral letter today, and called for Christians to "let our message be the unchanging promise of Christ's peace: to build each other up (1 Cor. 8:1)," and for Christians to be bridge builders and reconcilers in this conflict. Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe wrote today to ask the church for prayers especially for the people of the Diocese of Iran and for all of the Iranian people, saying, "In recent weeks, we have mourned as the regime in Iran has killed peaceful protesters, and watched with alarm at both its increasing repression of the Iranian people and the escalating response of the US government."

I ask all our congregations and people to pray for a quick end to this conflict and for protection of all innocent people who are in harm's way. I join you in prayer that the conflict may not widen to encompass other countries and peoples. I offer this prayer, which was sent out this morning by the Rev. David Madsen and the Rev. Michael Plekon, the priests at St. Barnabas, Borrego Springs:

Heavenly Father,

You call us to be people of peace—steadfast, courageous, and grounded in your love.

Even as we seek to walk the way of peace, our hearts are heavy for all who live in danger today.

We pray for the people of Iran and the people of Israel.

We pray for the service women and men of the United States.

And we pray for every person, in every land, who finds themselves in harm's way, whether by conflict, fear, or circumstance beyond their control.

Hold them in your light.  
Guard their lives.

Guide the leaders of nations toward wisdom, restraint, and compassion.

And make us instruments of your peace—steadfast in hope, generous in mercy, and committed to the flourishing of all your children. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

In Christ,  
The Rt. Rev. Susan Brown Snook

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### **From the Presiding Bishop**

Dear people of God in The Episcopal Church,

Here in the United States, we awoke this morning with alarm to the news that the United States and Israel have launched a large military strike on Iran. This violent attack comes despite weeks of negotiations that many of us had hoped would prevent armed conflict in this fragile region, which is home to so many religious traditions and faithful people.

Bishop Jeffrey Mello of Connecticut and a group of pilgrims from that diocese are in the Holy Land now, and when we spoke this morning, he let me know that they are safe at St. George's College in Jerusalem. I ask you to pray fervently for them and their safe return.

Pray, too, for all the people of the Holy Land, and especially for the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East and its leader, Archbishop Hosam Naoum. I had planned to be with Hosam today and tomorrow when he made a long-planned visit to our church. Many Episcopalians who had hoped to see him and assure him of our support will feel his absence keenly in the coming days. I commend to you the [letter that he has sent to the people of his diocese this morning](#).

As news reports tell us of fear and panic in Iran, I ask you to pray especially for the people of the Diocese of Iran and for all of the Iranian people. In recent weeks, we have mourned as the regime in Iran has killed peaceful protesters, and watched with alarm at both its increasing repression of the Iranian people and the escalating response of the U.S. government. As Christians who follow a Prince of Peace, we mourn that today's attacks will surely mean further hardship for the most vulnerable Iranians and, as retaliation inevitably follows, suffering that will spread across the entire region.

Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad your Spirit, that all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince of Peace, as children of one Father; to whom be dominion and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

The Most Rev. Sean Rowe  
Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church

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### **From the Archbishop of Jerusalem and the Middle East**

Dear Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As you are all now painfully aware, in the early hours of this morning, February 28th, a coordinated and massive military assault was launched by the United States

and Israel against numerous cities and installations within Iran. This operation, described by the leaders of the two nations as a ‘pre-emptive’ attack, has brought fire and destruction to the heart of Tehran, Isfahan, and beyond, striking at the very centers of governance and civilian life. Moreover, just prior to these events, Israel had also ‘pre-emptively’ attacked various targets in southern Lebanon, where the number of casualties has yet to be determined.

Tragically, the cycle of violence has expanded with terrifying speed. In the hours following, Iran launched a widespread reprisal, with missiles and drones targeting Israel and U.S. military assets across the Gulf—striking installations in Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Kurdistan-Iraq, Jordan, and Qatar. Sirens also blared across the Holy Land, warning of incoming missiles from Iran. Suddenly, our people from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf find themselves once again huddled in shelters, fearing for their lives as the shadow of a total regional war looms over us.

These developments strike at the very soul of our Province of Jerusalem & the Middle East. Every single nation now engaged in this combat, and those bearing the brunt of the retaliatory strikes, resides within our ecclesiastical boundaries. Our brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Iran are currently enduring the terror of aerial bombardment; our members in the Diocese of Cyprus & the Gulf are witnessing the arrival of war at their doorsteps; and our faithful in the Diocese of Jerusalem—extending across Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria—face an unprecedented threat of military escalation.

In the face of such overwhelming force, we recall the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God’ (Matt 5:9). Today, that calling feels heavier than ever before. When the ‘spirit of fear’ threatens to consume our hearts, we must anchor ourselves in the ‘spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind’ (2 Tim 1:7).

First, I call upon the global Church to join us in urgent, unceasing prayer. We implore God to protect the innocent—the mothers, the children, and the elderly—who are caught in the crossfire of this ‘Operation Epic Fury’ and the subsequent ‘crushing responses.’ We pray specifically for a ‘sound mind’ for the leaders of the United States, Israel, and Iran, that they might recognize the futility of this bloodshed and turn back from the precipice of a global catastrophe.

Second, we must offer each other the sanctuary of Christian love. I therefore urge our clergy and laity to be beacons of comfort. In a time of ‘regime change’ rhetoric and military ultimatums, let our message be the unchanging promise of Christ’s peace: to build each other up (1 Cor 8:1), for our hope is not in the strength of armadas or missile shields, but in the Prince of Peace.

Finally, we must remain ‘Bridge Builders.’ Even as diplomatic windows seem to slam shut, the Church must keep the doors of reconciliation open. We refuse to see our neighbors as enemies, whether they be in Tehran, Tel Aviv, or the military bases of the Gulf. I extend an urgent invitation to the wider Anglican Communion and all people of goodwill: Intercede for us now. The hour is late, and the danger is great. We remain “battered and bruised, but not defeated.” May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

In Christ,  
The Most Reverend Dr Hosam E. Naoum  
Primate and President Bishop  
The Province of Jerusalem & the Middle East

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