

Rev. Carleen Gerber

The First Congregational Church of Old Lyme

Pastoral Prayer for August 16, 2026

In 2003, as we lay in the grip of a war declared against nations of this world that supposedly instigated the destruction of September 11th, 2001, Wendell Berry wrote these words:

“Come to the window and look out, and see...

The Lords of War sell the earth to buy fire

They sell the water and air of life to buy fire...

Their intention to destroy **any** place is solidly founded

Upon their willingness to destroy **every** place...

Leave your windows and go out, people of the world,

Go into the streets, go into the fields, go into the woods and along the streams. Go together, go alone.

Say no to the Lords of War which is Money, which is Fire.

Say no by saying yes

To the air, to the earth, to the trees,

Yes to the grasses, to the rivers, to the birds

And the animals and every living thing...

Yes to the children. Yes. *

Would you join me now in prayer,

God of all creation, whose beauty lies all around us, we gather in this place to be nurtured by Your presence, and by the gift of fellowship. For these are the resources that restore our souls: souls that are so often battered and bruised by the realities of a strife-torn world. Here we sit among others who seek to heal, to mend, to give and forgive. Here, in this place, our hearts can admit that we are vulnerable and sometimes afraid of whatever lies ahead on the path of life. Remind us, we pray that the beauty of the common roadside daylily is not only a gift to the eyes; it is a gift to our souls that long for beauty and peace. The fragile beauty of a flower that lives for only a day, helps to remind us that our lives, too, are fragile and delicate. The poet tells us

that the “World is saved by tenderness” and here, in this place, we trust in that tenderness and in the grace, you have birthed in our hearts. **

You call us to come to the window and go out into the world. You call us to be present to the world in all its brokenness, for You know we are tempted to hide within the shelter of our safe homes and refuse to see, refuse to feel, refuse to confront the fire raging in this strife-torn world. But we are citizens of this world, Gracious God, and it is one world. Those who suffer under the reign of fire are our brothers and sisters, for they are your children, just as we are your children. Send us out into the world to breathe the air and cherish the birds and the trees and all of life. And to work diligently to heal what is broken. For what is broken is indeed the cord of life that binds all of us to one another.

As we sit this morning in this place of peace and serenity, we pray for all those the world over who long for such a pause in the destruction they suffer; those who cower under the relentless threat of bombs and fire. What have we unleashed upon this world You so loved?

The world’s religions, in all their diversity, have the strength to heal and restore; just as they have held, over many years, the seeds of that which divides and separates us. Help us to come together, God of peace. Give us the wisdom and breadth of grace we need to seize upon all that unites us; all that sustains the tender but beautiful bonds of fellowship upon which this world so urgently depends. We pray for peace. We pray for courage. We pray for wisdom.

We come to the window and look out upon the children of the world. And we know we must go forth. So for the sake of the children of the world, we pledge our labor to work toward peace.

Hear this and all our prayers, in the name of Yahweh, the name of Allah, the name of Wakan Tanka and Unkulu, Unkulu, the name of Jesus the Christ. Amen

*Excerpt from the “Sabbath” collection of poems by Wendell Berry

**Wendell Berry, from poem IX, 2009