



Resources for Martin Luther King Jr. Day

These materials were developed for use in services at the national offices of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

CALL TO WORSHIP (Option One)

With what shall we come before the Holy One,
and bow ourselves before God on high?

God has shown us what is good.

What does the Holy One require of us?

**To do justice,
and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with our God.**

In that spirit,
we worship God.

Based on Micah 6

CALL TO WORSHIP (Option Two)

Adapted from “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963, and Psalm 46

Come, believers,
God-beloved,
Christ-redeemed,
Spirit-infused!
What is our call?

We are called to stand against injustice, inequality, and oppression,
as our Lord and Savior did,
for injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

We are called to examine the actions of our nation:
its military might, economic relations, political institutions, and cultural patterns,
for whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.

We are called to be weavers of the kingdom, makers of peace,
**for we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality,
tied in a single garment of destiny.**

Come, believers, come to worship God—
**The God of heaven and earth is with us.
The God of peace is our refuge.**

CALL TO WORSHIP (Option Three)

Based on the Confession of Belhar

We believe that God has entrusted the church
with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ.
**Therefore, we reject the sin of racism—
which dishonors the image of God,**

**undermines our witness to the gospel,
and corrupts the mission of the church.**

OPENING LITANY (Option One)

Adapted from "Letter from Birmingham Jail"
Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963

Was not Jesus an extremist in love?
**"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you,
pray for them that despitefully use you."**

Was not Amos an extremist for justice?
**"Let justice roll down like waters
and righteousness like a mighty stream."**

Was not Paul an extremist for the Gospel of Jesus Christ?
"I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

Was not Martin Luther an extremist?
"Here I stand; I can do no other, so help me God."

Was not John Bunyan an extremist?
**"I will stay in jail to the end of my days
before I make a mockery of my conscience."**

Was not Abraham Lincoln an extremist?
"This nation cannot survive half slave and half free."

Was not Thomas Jefferson an extremist?
**"We hold these truths to be self-evident,
that all [people] are created equal."**

So the question is not whether we will be extremist,
but what kind of extremists we will be.
**Will we be extremists for hate,
or will we be extremists for love?
Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice,
or will we be extremists for the cause of justice?**

OPENING LITANY (Option Two)

Based on Ephesians 4

We share one faith,
have one calling,
are of one soul and one mind;
have one God and Creator,
are filled with one Spirit,
are baptized with one baptism,
eat of one bread and drink of one cup,
confess one Name,

are obedient to one Lord,
work for one cause, and share one hope.

Together we come to know the height
and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ;
are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity;

know and bear one another's burdens,
thereby fulfilling the law of Christ
that we need one another and up build one another,

admonishing and comforting one another;
that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness.

Together we pray;
together we serve God in this world.
In the name of Jesus, who calls us
to unity, reconciliation, and justice. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman

Lord, open unto me.
Open unto me – **light for my darkness.**
Open unto me – **courage for my fear.**
Open unto me – **hope for my despair.**
Open unto me – **peace for my turmoil.**
Open unto me – **joy for my sorrow.**
Open unto me – **strength for my weakness.**
Open unto me – **wisdom for my confusion.**
Open unto me – **forgiveness for my sins.**
Open unto me – **love for my hates.**
Open unto me – **thy Self for my self.**
Lord, Lord, open unto me! **Amen.**

LITANY OF CONFESSION

Rev. Shanea D. Leonard, 2021
*This prayer is not to be used
without attribution to the author.*

As a church and as a body of believers,
let us now confess our sins before a merciful and loving God:

Worshippers may respond to each confession by saying: **Lord, have mercy.**

We confess that we have allowed racism, white supremacy, and white privilege
to often dictate how we exist.

We confess that we have robbed the Native people of Turtle Island
of their land, resources, and provision.

We confess that we have ignored the hundreds of trans women that go missing and murdered every year and forget to say their names.

We confess that we have not treated the people of Puerto Rico with the dignity and equality they deserve.

We confess that we were complicit in slavery and often the vehicle used to perpetuate it.

We confess that we have not dealt justly with the scars of why we split and the wounds of reunification.

We confess that we have made people of color the object of mission and not partners in the work of ministry for God.

We confess that we have made women wait for equality and LGBTQIA siblings fight for rights and privileges that others have long enjoyed.

We confess that we have not always welcomed the stranger, the immigrant, the foreigner, the woman, the queer, nor the ones in need of love.

We confess that we have helped to perpetuate division among people of color and keep them in unnecessary feelings of competition and bias toward one another.

We confess that even some of us in this room have closed our eyes and turned our backs on the pain and suffering of our other marginalized siblings.

We confess that we have far too often fallen short of being the beloved, healing, reconciling, welcoming, inclusive and life-giving community that Christ has called us to, that God ordained, and that the Holy Spirit has sanctioned.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Gracious God,
in Jesus Christ you teach us to love our neighbors,
but we build dividing walls of hostility.
You show us how to love one another as sisters and brothers
but we hide ourselves from our own human family.
You ask us to seek out the stranger and welcome the guest,
but we lock ourselves up inside our own fear.
You want us to share your abundant gifts with the poor,
but we cling tightly to our possessions and our privilege.
You call us to proclaim good news to all people,
but we waste our words and hide our light.**

**Have mercy on us, loving God.
Forgive our sin, open our hearts, and change our lives.**

**By your Spirit, make us holy and whole—
one people, united in faith, hope, and love;
through Jesus Christ, our reconciler and redeemer.**

LITANY OF CONFESSION AND LAMENT

Adapted from the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity,
Grey Moor Ecumenical and Interreligious Institute, 2017

Leader 1: The church is continually called to deeper conversion to Jesus Christ. This calling compels us to examine how we have been separated from each other, building walls of division, suffering, and sin.

Let us confess and lament these sins, praying for forgiveness and healing for the wounds that have resulted from our divisions.

Gracious God, we bring before you now the stones that form our walls of division, and we pray for your forgiveness and healing.

Stone bearers come forward as indicated, assembling the stones into a wall.

*Stone Bearer 1: **One stone in our wall is “division.”***

Leader 1: God of love and grace, we confess and lament that we are divided from one another and stray from our common calling for the healing of all creation.

*Stone Bearer 2: **One stone in our wall is “hate and contempt.”***

Leader 1: Our communities are torn apart by hate, contempt, violence and apathy to the suffering of others.

*Stone Bearer 3: **One stone in our wall is “false accusation.”***

Leader 1: We denounce and falsely accuse one another, living in fear instead of charity and love.

A song of repentance (such as “Lord, have mercy”) may be sung.

*Stone Bearer 4: **One stone in our wall is “othering.”***

Leader 2: God of love and grace, we confess and lament that we unconsciously dismiss those who are different from us as being in some way less human or worthy of respect and dignity.

*Stone Bearer 5: **One stone in our wall is “broken communion.”***

Leader 2: We put up with and perpetuate the brokenness among our churches and in our world.

*Stone Bearer 6: **One stone in our wall is “discrimination.”***

Leader 2: We fail to recognize that each of us is made in your image, and discriminate against one another based on the very characteristics that you joyfully created.

*Stone Bearer 7: **One stone in our wall is “intolerance.”***

Leader 2: We fail to foster spaces in our society that are safe, open, and welcoming to all.

A song of repentance (such as “Lord, have mercy”) may be sung.

*Stone Bearer 8: **One stone in our wall is “abuse of power.”***

*Leader 3: God of love and grace, we confess and lament
the abuses of power in the church and in the world,
and our failure to seek reconciliation.*

*Stone Bearer 9: **One stone in our wall is “systemic racism.”***

*Leader 3: We tolerate systems and structures that reinforce disadvantages
experienced by members of our community.*

*Stone Bearer 10: **One stone in our wall is “privilege.”***

*Leader 3: We have allowed privilege to keep us comfortable and secure
at the expense of our neighbors.*

A song of repentance (such as “Lord, have mercy”) may be sung.

*Leader 1: Lord, our God, look upon this wall
that separates us from you and from one another.
Forgive us our sins. Heal us.
Help us to overcome all walls of division
and make us one in you. **Amen.***

*Leader 2: These walls do not reflect God’s desire for our lives.
Were we left to rely on our own efforts and intentions,
this wall would be impenetrable.
But with boundless grace, God takes apart our walls—stone by stone—
and restores us to righteousness, justice, and peace.*

Stone bearers turn stones around as indicated, reassembling the stones into a cross.

Leader 3: Instead of division,

*Stone Bearer 1: **unity.***

Leader 1: Instead of hate and contempt,

*Stone Bearer 2: **love.***

Leader 2: Instead of false accusation,

*Stone Bearer 3: **truth.***

Leader 3: Instead of othering,

*Stone Bearer 4: **mutual respect.***

Leader 1: Instead of broken communion,

*Stone Bearer 5: **wholeness.***

Leader 2: Instead of discrimination,

*Stone Bearer 6: **impartiality.***

Leader 3: Instead of intolerance,

*Stone Bearer 7: **acceptance.***

Leader 1: Instead of abuse of power,

*Stone Bearer 8: **equality.***

Leader 2: Instead of systemic racism,

*Stone Bearer 9: **justice.***

Leader 2: Instead of privilege,

*Stone Bearer 10: **interdependence.***

*Leader 1: On the cross of Jesus Christ,
our sins are laid bare and wiped away.*

*Friends, believe the good news:
In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!
Thanks be to God.*

CALL TO REPENTANCE AND NEW LIFE

Adapted from the Confession of Belhar

We believe that the church is called
to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Therefore, we reject the sin of racism.

We believe that the church is called blessed
because it is a peacemaker.

Therefore, we reject the sin of racism.

We believe that the church is witness both by word and by deed
to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Therefore, we reject the sin of racism.

We believe that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit
has conquered the powers of sin and death,
and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity.

Therefore, we reject the sin of racism.

We believe that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit
will enable the church to live in a new obedience
which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world.

**Therefore, we reject the sin of racism—
which dishonors the image of God,
undermines our witness to the gospel,
and corrupts the mission of the church.**

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Adapted from the Confession of Belhar

We believe ...
**that God wishes to teach the church
what is good and to seek the right.**

We believe ...
**that the church must therefore
stand by people in any form of suffering and need,
which implies, among other things,
that the church must witness against
and strive against any form of injustice,
so that justice may roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.**

We believe ...
**that the church as the possession of God
must stand where the Lord stands,
namely against injustice and with the wronged.**

We believe ...
that in following Christ

**the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged
who selfishly seek their own interests
and thus control and harm others.**

Therefore ...
**we reject any ideology
which would legitimate forms of injustice
and any doctrine which is unwilling
to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.**

PRAYER OF RESPONSE

**Yes, Jesus,
I want to be on your right side
or your left side,
not for any selfish reason.
I want to be on your right or your best side,
not in terms of some political kingdom or ambition,
but I just want to be there
in love and in justice and in truth
and in commitment to others,
so we can make of this old world a new world.**

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

PRAYER OF COMMITMENT

Adapted from writings of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Gracious God, we believe that you have called us
to justice, righteousness, and peace.
We refuse to believe that we are unable
to influence the events around us.
We refuse to believe we are bound
by racism, war, and injustice.
We believe those around us are our brothers and sisters.
We believe in dignity every day
and that our brokenness can be healed.
We believe we can overcome oppression and violence,
without resorting to it.
This means we seek to reject revenge and retaliation
as we prayerfully remember,
“Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can.”
In the love of Jesus Christ we pray. **Amen.**

RECOMMITMENT TO JUSTICE

Adapted from “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence”
Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1967

“Now let us begin. Now let us rededicate ourselves
to the long and bitter—but beautiful—struggle for a new world.

This is the calling of the children of God,
and our family waits eagerly for our response.

Shall we say the odds are too great?
Shall we tell them the struggle is too hard?
Will our message be that the forces of life
militate against their arrival to the fullness of life
and we send our deepest regrets?

Or will there be another message, of longing, of hope,
of solidarity with their yearnings,
of commitment to their cause, whatever the cost?

The choice is ours, and though we might prefer it otherwise
we must choose in this crucial moment of human history.”

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

GTG = Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal (WJKP, 2013)

PH = The Presbyterian Hymnal: Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs (WJKP, 1990)

Come Now, O Prince of Peace (GTG 103)

Freedom Is Coming (GTG 359)

Goodness Is Stronger than Evil (GTG 750)

Heaven Shall Not Wait (GTG 773)

I'm Gonna Eat at the Welcome Table (GTG 770)

Lift Every Voice and Sing (GTG 339, PH 563)

O for a World (GTG 372, PH 386)

O God, We Bear the Imprint of Your Face (GTG 759)

Praise Ye the Lord (GTG 633, PH 258)

Precious Lord, Take My Hand (GTG 834, PH 404)

Somos el cuerpo de Cristo (GTG 768)

We Shall Overcome (GTG 379)