

Excerpts from the 13th Annual
Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration
January 10, 2007
Presbyterian Center Atrium
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, Kentucky 40202

Call to Worship

One: We gather to worship God,
All: **Who creates us and loves us;**
One: Who gifts us with diversity and makes us for community;
All: **Who gives Jesus Christ to show us how to live;**
One: Who inspires children, youth, young adults, and people of all ages,
All: **To seek justice, share power, and live together in love and equality;**
One: Who invites us to join the struggle for wholeness and wellbeing for all,
All: **And whose presence, grace, and love sustain us in our living.**
One: We gather to worship God.
All: **To God be all glory, honor, and praise!**

Purpose

Tiffany Gonzales, Racial Justice and Advocacy

We gather today to celebrate and reflect on the work of youth and young adults who have lived lives in the service of others and in the hope of a more just world for all in it. We acknowledge that the opportunity to celebrate the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. comes to us through the work of Coretta Scott King, then his wife, who fought for justice along with him as a young adult, and continued the legacy until her death. We celebrate in the spirit of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who dedicated his life to working for justice and peace for those in his community and well beyond it. And, we acknowledge that Dr. King was still a young man when he was called to this work.

At the age of 26, he was elected the president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, making him the official spokesperson for the bus boycott.

At the age of 28, he formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to fight segregation and work for civil rights.

At the age of 34, he was arrested for leading a peaceful march which violated a court injunction against public demonstrations. He was jailed for eleven days.

At the age of 38, he developed the Poor People's Campaign to work for jobs and economic justice for poor persons of all races.

And, at the age of 39, he was killed in Memphis, Tennessee.

At the age of 39, Dr. King was still a young adult by Presbyterian standards.

And so, we gather to recognize the contributions of the youth and young adults who have worked in the past, and who work at present to bring about justice for those who live in the realities of oppression, discrimination and inequality. We gather to be encouraged and inspired, as we know that the work for justice is not yet finished, that there is much left to do.

Prayer of Illumination

Katie Anderson, Racial Ethnic Young Women Together/
National Network of Presbyterian College Women

Gracious One – Giver of Life for *us all*...

You have created us to love; you have created us to be a community – a beloved community. You have created us to love and to value one another; to bring fairness and justice into all of what we do, into all of who we are. Thank you for young prophets, I might even call them *extremists*, for Coretta Scott King, for Dr. King, for Judy Richardson and other SNCC activists, for those young prophets today, in our world and in this church – who spoke and continue to speak truth about your vision for our lives – who speak truth about privilege and injustice – who speak truth about hate and complacency – and who do something about it. God, we have all that we need to change the Church, to change this world. Awaken the prophetic call inside each of us to be advocates and activists for *all human rights* – empower the young people to, indeed, become “the soul of this nation.”* Thank you for grace, and goodness, and strength, and life and thank you for this day and this time, to be in community with one another.

Amen.

*Coretta Scott King

Youth, Young Adults and the Civil Rights Movement: A Responsive Reading

One: We have come a long way on the journey to justice for all people, but a hard journey still remains. We give thanks for the children, youth and young adults who have helped challenge and guide us thus far on the way.

All: **The journey continues, and their examples and voices inspire us in the struggle. We remember and give thanks:**

One: For Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King, whose public roles in the struggle for justice and equality began in Montgomery when Martin was 26 and Coretta was 28;

All: **For John Lewis, Diane Nash, James Bevel, Stokely Carmichael and the youth and young adults of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee who participated in Freedom Rides, the March on Washington and campaigns for voting rights in Mississippi;**

One: For Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and the youth and young adults of the Black Panther Party, who emphasized the need for self-defense, and instituted community programs to address poverty and to provide health care in communities of need;

All: **For Alice Nishi, Dave Sugiuchi, Dan Ogata, and the youth and young adults who endured internment during World War II; for Gordon Kiyoshi Hirabayashi, Fred Korematsu and all who supported legal challenges to the internment policies;**

One: For Dolores Huerta and Caesar Chavez who founded the National Farm Workers Association; for the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and all the youth and young adults engaged in efforts to achieve justice for farmworkers and all workers;

- All:** For Dennis Banks, Wilma Mankiller, Russell Means and the youth and young adults involved in the Trail of Broken Treaties protest and other campaigns seeking civil rights for indigenous people;
- One:** For Autherine Juanita Lucy at the University of Alabama, James Meredith at the University of Mississippi, Ernest Green, Elizabeth Eckford, Jefferson Thomas, Terrence Roberts, Carlotta Walls Lanier, Minnijean Brown-Trickey, Gloria Ray Karlmark, Thelma Mothershed-Wair, Melba Pattillo Beals at Little Rock Central High, and the youth and young adults who integrated schools and colleges;
- All:** For the children, youth, and young adults who filled the jails of Birmingham;
- One:** For Lynn Domingo, Sharon Maeda, Velma Veloria, and all the youth and young adults who worked for justice within educational systems and in unions;
- All:** For Ezell Blair, Jr., David Richmond, Joseph McNeil, and Franklin McCain who sat at a segregated lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, and the youth and young adults who participated in sit-ins and other nonviolent direct actions;
- One:** For Rodolfo Gonzales and Reies Tijerina and the youth and young adults involved in the Chicano Movement;
- All:** For Shanti Sellz and Daniel Strauss and the youth and young adults who care for migrants entering the United States and who seek comprehensive reform of U.S. border and immigration policies;
- One:** For Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley who were murdered in the bombing of the 16th Avenue Baptist Church in Birmingham; for James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner who were murdered in Mississippi; for Annie Mae Aquash who was murdered on the Pine Ridge Reservation; and all the youth and young adults who gave their lives in the struggle.
- All:** We thank you for our sisters and brothers who have participated in the struggle for justice and equality in the past and who engage in that struggle today. As we give thanks for their witness, we “rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter—but beautiful—struggle for a new world.” This is our calling as God’s children. Our sisters and brothers await our response.¹

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence,” *The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, James Melvin Washington, ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 243. Last two sentences adapted.

Roll Call Prayer

God, we give you thanks for the youth and young adults whom we name aloud or in the silence of our hearts.

The community is invited to say the names of youth and young adults who have participated in the struggle for justice and equality in the past and those who are engaged in that struggle today.

God, we give you thanks for youth and young adults who have engaged in the struggle for justice and equality but whose names we do not know or do not remember.

Closing Prayer

Robert Klouw, Information and Planning

Just and loving God, you call us to live in community. We know that you grant us the opportunities and the strength to be the “headlights not the taillights of society.” Yet, in our sinfulness, we become separated from one another through the wrongs we commit or allow to happen. Through your forgiveness and grace, we ask that you empower us to work toward restoring justice for all people as shown to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We pray in the name of the one that came that we might have life abundant. Amen.

Charge and Benediction

Bridgett A. Green, Racial Ethnic Young Women Together

Let us celebrate the work and legacy of the youth and young adults whose lives contributed to the civil rights of all people.

Let us encourage the creativity, energy, passion, gifts, and skills of the youth and young adults who surround us.

Let us pray for wisdom and peace as *we* pursue justice, hope, and love for all people.

And what does God require of us, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God?

May the grace of Jesus Christ, the love God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.