

## Prayer Service in Honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



### Call to Prayer:

*Note: The italicized sections below are stanzas of the Civil Rights hymn, "We Shall Overcome." You might consider singing them.*

**Leader:** We gather once again, God our Justice, to remember the legacy, leadership, and vision of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebrating

and honoring his life has special significance for us as we become increasingly aware of the many ways racism has shaped and distorted our societies, our churches, and our lives. We thank you, God, for Martin's leadership and vision in the struggle to dismantle racism, and for his tireless work to promote justice and peace for all human beings. Help us listen with our hearts to his words. Help us sing out with conviction that, with your grace, we will help overcome the structures of racism and sin that separate us today.

Let us take a moment and invoke Martin's spirit to be with us...

**Reader:** "I am convinced that love is the most durable power in the world. It is not an expression of impractical idealism, but of practical realism. Far from being the pious injunction of a utopian dreamer, love is an absolute necessity for the survival of our civilization. To return hate for hate does nothing but intensify the existence of evil in the universe. Someone must have sense enough and religion enough to cut off the chain of hate and evil, and this can only be done through love."

Sing /All: The Lord will see us through  
 The Lord will see us through  
 The Lord will see us through some day  
 Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe  
 The Lord will see us through some day.

**Reader:** "I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant."

**Reader:** "This faith can give us courage to face the uncertainties of the future. It will give our tired feet new strength as we continue our forward stride toward the city of freedom. When our days become dreary with low hovering clouds, and our nights become darker than a

thousand midnights, we will know that we are living in the creative turmoil of a genuine civilization struggling to be born."

All: The truth shall make us free  
 The truth shall make us free  
 The truth shall make us free some day  
 Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe  
 The truth shall make us free some day.

**Reader:** "It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. We are made to live together because of the interrelated structure of reality."

**Reader:** "I choose to identify with the underprivileged. I choose to identify with the poor. I choose to give my life for the hungry. I choose to give my life for those who have been left out of the sunlight of opportunity. I choose to live for and with those who find themselves seeing life as a long and desolate corridor with no exit sign. This is the way I'm going. If it means suffering a little bit, I'm going that way. If it means sacrificing, I'm going that way. If it means dying for them, I'm going that way, because I heard a voice saying, 'Do something for others.'"



All: We'll walk hand in hand  
 We'll walk hand in hand  
 We'll walk hand in hand some day  
 Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe  
 We'll walk hand in hand some day.

**Reader** "Let us rise up tonight with a greater readiness. Let us stand with a greater determination. And let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge to make America what it ought to be. We have an opportunity to make America a better nation."

All: We will live in Faith  
 We will live in Faith  
 We will live in Faith today  
 Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe  
 We will live in Faith today.

**Reader** "Now let me say that the next thing we must be concerned about if we are to have peace on earth and good will toward (all) is the nonviolent affirmation of the sacredness of all

human life. Every person is somebody because they are a child of God. And when we truly believe in the sacredness of human personality, we won't exploit people, we won't trample people with the iron feet of oppression, we won't kill anybody."

All: We shall live in peace  
 We shall live in peace  
 We shall lie in peace some day  
 Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe  
 We shall live in peace some day.

**Leader:** Let us take a moment, to hold Dr. King's words in our hearts. Let them stir up in us a renewed commitment to promote peace and work for justice.

**All:** O God, grant us the courage and strength to live out our commitment to create a world in which peace flourishes and "justice rolls down like water and righteousness."



**Reading:** While Dr. King consistently captured the profound violation of the past and continued humiliation and indignities, he strived to walk together down that pathway to equity and equality as he so eloquently said in his speech, "*I Have a Dream.*"

Today I believe he would say we have lost our way. We are a nation so divided that the threat to our democracy is real as is evidenced by the attack on the United States Capitol and the prevalence of systemic social injustices in our communities. Our dynamics are toxic, disrespectful, and violently rooted in pent up anger. And, with advances in technology, we now have the power to fuel hate, spread lies and inaccuracies and give ill-intentioned people a voice at a fever pitch sometimes with few facts to back their position.

I also believe that Dr. King would inspire and provide guidance to get us back on track to equity and equality for all. He would emphasize how vital it is to have a conversation at our kitchen tables with friends and family. He would stress the importance of demonstrating dignity and respect in all of our communities. I do not believe he would ever condone violence despite his violent death.

He would challenge the progress our education system has made to improve the dialogue in our classrooms. He understood the threat of an uneducated society and said it so powerfully in his writing, *“The Purpose of Education”* (Morehouse College, January 1, 1947):

*“The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society. The most dangerous criminal may be the man gifted with reason, but with no morals.”*

And from where I sit, those dangerous criminals are lurking. Social media used with self-interest and ill-intent enables people to fuel ignorance and misinformation and to manipulate and mobilize factions to create chaos which is the very real threat to our democracy and society.

*May we get back on  
the pathway he  
paved to a better  
place in America  
and around the  
world.*

Dr. King would inspire us to make it a priority to reverse toxic dynamics with a community groundswell and a top-down restoration of dignity and respect by our government leaders. He would discourage violent factions to put aside self-interest and lean in to the “greater good.” He would demand that the private and public sectors not only espouse their commitment to diversity and inclusion but validate it.

I believe Dr. King would say, “We cannot walk alone, but today it seems we are walking backwards at a fast pace.” I do optimistically believe he would be hopeful we can walk together.

Today we honor Dr. King for his wisdom and guidance. May we get back on the pathway he paved to a better place in America and around the world. Susan J. Reilly, President and Founder of *Reilly Connect*

**Reflection/Conversation:** What words, phrases or themes of this prayer are resounding in you? What meaning do they hold for you? For us?

**VOICES FROM THE STRUGGLE  
A LITANY FOR MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY  
CELEBRATING THE WOMEN OF THE MOVEMENT**

We have come a long way on the journey to justice for all people; a hard journey still remains. We give thanks for the women who have helped challenge and guide us thus far on the way.

The struggle continues and their examples and voices sustain us.

- ∅ Whatever glory belongs to the race for a development unprecedented in history for the given length of time, a full share belongs to the womanhood of the race. (Mary McLeod Bethune)

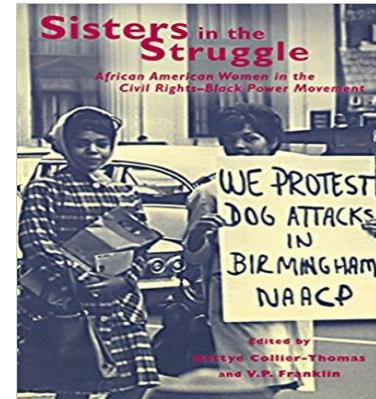
**R. We pray to live by this truth.**

- ∅ Nobody's free until everybody's free. (Fannie Lou Hamer)

**R. We pray to live by this truth.**

- ∅ Mass movements always come as the product of long years of mundane work by unsung heroes, but no one can predict when the upsurge will crystallize. We cannot predict today when it will happen again. But as surely as I know that dawn will come tomorrow morning, I am convinced that it will happen. (Anne Braden)

**R. We pray to live by this truth.**



- ∅ The struggle is eternal. The tribe increases. Somebody else carries on. (Ella J. Baker)

**R. We pray to live by this truth.**

- ∅ Today's clouds can never deny yesterday's beautiful sunset. The inconvenience of today's storms can never turn us from tomorrow's harvest. We plant, we reap, we try because we are human. We hope. We continue. Our soul is rested, but it will have to get up in the morning and start again. (Nikki Giovanni)

**R. We pray to live by this truth**

- ∅ Change will come. As always, it is just a matter of who determines what that change will be. (Winona LaDuke)

**R. We pray to live by this truth**

- ∅ If we want to change society, we must begin by transforming ourselves; learning from one another about one another's history, culture, dreams, hopes, personal experiences. We must become one, for the future of humanity. (Yuri Kochiyama)

**R. We pray to live by this truth**

- ∅ I have learned over the years that when one's mind is made up, this diminishes fear; knowing what must be done does away with fear. (Rosa Parks)

**R. We pray to live by this truth**

- ∅ There is one thing you have got to learn about our movement. Three people are better than no people. (Fannie Lou Hamer)

**R. We pray to live by this truth**

- ∅ Giving kids clothes and food is one thing, but it's much more important to teach them that other people besides themselves are important, and that the best thing they can do with their lives is to use them in the service of other people. (**Dolores Huerta**)

**R. We pray to live by this truth**

- ∅ Faith is the first factor in a life devoted to service. Without it, nothing is possible. With it, nothing is impossible. (**Mary McLeod Bethune**)

**R. We pray to live by this truth**

**Closing Prayer:** God, our Justice, as we celebrate the life of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, we ask that you stir up his spirit within us and around our world. Grant us the courage and strength to live out our commitment to create a world in which peace flourishes and “justice rolls down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.”

Do in us, what we cannot do for ourselves, Amen.

