

# Martin Luther King Jr. Day worship resources

## Calls to Worship

### Call to Worship

Sisters and brothers, rejoice.

We live sustained by God's presence and love.

**Thanks be to God.**

As we mourn the wounds of God's children,

**God weeps with us.**

As we give thanks for brothers and sisters who have lived in faith,

**God gives thanks with us.**

As we struggle for justice,

**God struggles with us.**

As we strive for peace,

**God strives with us.**

As we work to build the beloved community,

**God works with us.**

As we offer our gifts to all,

**God blesses us.**

Sisters and brothers, rejoice.

**Sustained by God's presence and love we worship God.**

### Call to Worship

God created all the races and nations of the world and willed that we live together in peace and harmony.

**We were made to be family.**

There is strife in the human family; injustice abounds as racism, classism, sexism, cultural imperialism and other isms. We are a divided people.

**We have been called to let justice roll down like waters.**

We must work passionately to bridge the gulf between us, overcome the injustices that oppress us, and restore community among us.

**We must be determined enough to change what we can. We must have the courage to accept what we cannot change. Above all, we must be wise enough to know the difference**

## **Call to Worship**

*(from Psalm 82 and Amos 5)*

**A VOICE:** God said: "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?"

**A VOICE:** God said: "Give justice to the weak and the parentless child; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute."

**A VOICE:** God said: "Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

**A VOICE:** God said: "I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Take away the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream."

**ALL: Rise up, O God, judge the earth; for all the nations belong to you!**

---

## **Prayers Of Confession**

### **Prayer Of Confession**

Most Holy and merciful God: we have condemned racial injustice in our pronouncement, yet we cling to the privileges derived from social inequities. All too often we are blind to our complicity in maintaining systems of oppression and deferring the hopes and dreams of the oppressed for freedom. Give us the courage to name our sin, give us the strength to claim responsibility for our actions. Give us the grace to pay the price for changing our behavior. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

### **Prayer Of Confession**

Most holy and merciful God: we acknowledge and confess our slowness to do good, our blindness to injustice, and our complicity in deferring the dreams and hopes of the oppressed. We have refused to heed your call to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with you, our God.

We condemn racial injustice in our pronouncements, yet we cling to the privileges derived from inequity. When we ought to be ashamed of our failures, we prefer to cling to private, selfish, imprisoning desires. We participate in our own oppression.

Help us to name our sin, to claim responsibility for our actions, and to change our behavior. In accordance with the commands of Jesus Christ our savior, shake us from our sleep with you imperative to do justice; move us to action with the compassion of your grace; and give us courage to pay the price, however painful or costly, that the justice you will, may be done, on earth as in heaven. Amen.

---

## **Litany of Thanksgiving And Praise**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
It is right to give God thanks and praise.

God of all races and nations,  
we praise you for all your faithful servants  
who have done justice, loved mercy,  
and walked humbly with their God.  
For apostles, martyrs, leaders, and saints,  
and for humble folk whose names were never in the news,  
but are recorded in your book of life,

**We give you thanks, O God.**

Especially this day we thank you for Martin Luther King Jr.,  
for his courage and conviction, for his passion for peace,  
and for his tireless quest of a nation that keeps faith with its promises,

**We give you thanks, O God.**

For Coretta Scott King and the King family; for the memory of Martin Luther King Sr. and Mrs. King; for Medgar Evers, Rosa Parks, James Meredith, Malcolm X, and countless others who stood in the front lines and marched, integrated schools and restaurants, or sat in buses and refused to move,

**We give you thanks, O God.**

For nameless multitudes who suffered the tortures of slavery and the tyranny of oppression, who were beaten, raped, and lynched; and for the nameless multitudes today whose lives are stunted and cut short by economic and social structures of brutality.

**We grieve and promise to work for justice, O God.**

And for children, women, and men of every race who are denied education, health care, jobs, housing, and hope in our land,

**We grieve and promise to work for justice, O God.**

In the name of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Amen.

---

## **Litany of Celebration**

**LEADER:** Martin King had a dream. The ideals of justice and freedom and the belief that all are created equal in the eyes of God are noble principles. But they are meaningless unless they become the personal possession of each one of us.

**ALL: For Zion's sake I will not keep silent. I will struggle with myself. I will not rest until the dream of justice and freedom becomes my personal dream. I must realize that I am not an innocent bystander. I can help realize the dream by my action, or delay it by inaction.**

**LEADER:** Martin's dream of a day when people from all races and nations, even the offsprings of slaves and former slave owners, can sit at a table as brothers and sisters and find ways of transforming their differences into assets. That was Martin's dream. What is your dream?

**ALL: My dream is that one day soon I will find a way to stop just celebrating the dream and start living it. It must become a part of my daily life; or nothing much will change.**

**LEADER:** The dream is not about an ideal world; it is about the real world. Martin King's poetic refrain, "I Have a Dream," is a call for us to remember the real world where injustice abounds.

**ALL: When I am in the shelter of my home I must remember the homeless. When I eat, I must remember the hungry. When I feel secure I must remember the insecure. When I see injustice I must remember that it will not stop unless I stop it.**

**LEADER:** I have a dream!

**ALL: I also have a dream. I have a dream that the Holy Spirit will arouse in me that very flame of righteousness that caused Martin King to become a living sacrifice for the freedom and liberation of all of God's Children. Then I will be able to resist racial injustice everywhere I see it, even within myself.**

---

## **Closing Prayer**

Gracious God, you create us and love us; you make us to live together in a community. We thank you for Martin Luther King, Jr. and all your children who have been filled with your vision for our lives and who have worked to make bring your vision into reality. Fill us with your vision. Guide us to live by your vision, working to build the beloved community where everyone is welcomed, all are valued, power is shared, privilege is no more, and all your children know wholeness and well-being. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

**A LITANY ON THE TRAGEDY OF GUN VIOLENCE**  
(Written for the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day 2010)

We celebrate and give thanks for the life and witness of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Who proclaimed a vision of all people living together,**

**And bore witness to the power of nonviolence,**

We gather, to remember his words, his commitment, his life

And to rededicate ourselves to addressing the evil of gun violence

**which claimed his life and which continues to plague our country and the world.**

Some 30,000 Americans die by guns each year in the United States.

**And we grieve.**

An average of eighty people is killed by guns every day, including eight children.

**And our hearts break.**

Guns kill some 1,000 people each day in the developing world.

**And we mourn.**

An American child is twelve times more likely to die by a gun than are the children who live in all twenty-five industrialized nations combined.

**And we weep.**

The annual economic cost of gun violence in America is estimated to at least \$100 billion. Medical costs, decimated families, the court system, our jails and prisons, and security measures in airports, schools, and public buildings all contribute to this sum.

**And sorrow sweeps over us.**

Since John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, more Americans have died by gun fire within our own country than American servicemen and women who were killed in all our wars of the 20th century.

**And we pray.**

Faced with gun violence,

**We grieve for those are killed and those whose lives are forever changed;**

**We seek to comfort for those who have lost loved ones;**

**We pray for a change of heart for those who resort to violence.**

Faced with gun violence, may we

**Educate;**

**Organize;**

**Advocate;**

**And in all the ways we can, work for that day when**

**Guns and weapons of destruction**

**Are transformed into instruments of healing.**

May it be so.

**May we so do.**

- The Rev. W. Mark Koenig  
Coordinator, Presbyterian Peacemaking Program

Presbyterian Peacemaking Program ■ Compassion, Peace and Justice ■ General Assembly Mission  
Council  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) ■ Louisville, KY

Martin Luther King Jr. Day worship resources

[www.pcusa.org/peacemaking](http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking)

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.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.

# Journeying Toward the Promised Land

*A chronology of the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement*

## January 15, 1929

Martin Luther King, Jr., is born in Atlanta, Georgia. In his late teens, King works a factory job alongside both Whites and Blacks.

## 1944-1948

King attends Morehouse College in Atlanta. His professors encourage a critical exploration of racial issues. King reads Thoreau's *Essay on Civil Disobedience* numerous times.

## February 1948

At age nineteen, King is ordained and becomes assistant pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta.

## 1948 – 1951

At Crozier Theological Seminary, King engages in "a serious intellectual quest for a method to eliminate social evil," digesting various philosophies on social transformation, including Rauschenbusch, Marx, Nietzsche, Reinhold Niebuhr, and A.J. Muste. He discovers the teachings of Ghandi, from which he develops a strong belief in nonviolent resistance.

## 1951

King begins graduate studies in systematic theology at Boston University where he is exposed to the philosophy of personalism, “the theory that the clue to the meaning of ultimate reality is found in personality.” He receives his doctorate in 1955.

## June 18, 1953

King marries Coretta Scott.

## September 1954

King begins a pastoral position with Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.

## December 1, 1955

In Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks refuses to vacate her bus seat for a White man and is arrested. Parks had attended training sessions in labor and civil-rights organizing.

## December 5, 1955

A bus boycott begins on the same day as Parks’s trial. Several thousand gather that evening, and the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) is formed with King as president.

## January 30, 1956

King's home is bombed. Addressing a crowd outside his home, King demands nonviolence.

## November 13, 1956

After a year-long boycott, the U.S. Supreme court declares Montgomery and Alabama bus segregation laws unconstitutional.

## January 10, 1957

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) is formed, with King as president. Montgomery is rocked by a series of bombings that night.

## March 1957

The Kings travel to West Africa to celebrate Ghana's independence from British colonial rule.

## May 17, 1957

King delivers his first national address, "Give Us the Ballot," in Washington, D.C.

## September 20, 1958

At a book signing in Harlem, King is stabbed by a mentally ill woman.

## February 1959

King travels to India for one month where he meets with many of Gandhi's followers.

## April 18, 1959

King meets with Kenyan leader Tom Mboya

## January 1960

The King family moves to Atlanta where King becomes co-pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church with his father, Martin Luther King, Sr.

## February 1, 1960

Four students in Greensboro, North Carolina, refuse to leave their seats at a lunch counter when they are denied service, sparking a sit-in movement throughout the South. On February 16, King addresses the student protestors in Durham, North Carolina, imploring them to follow the moral imperative of "jail, not bail," and encouraging them to consider economic boycott.



## April 17, 1960

Through the organizing efforts of Ella Baker, the longtime assistant director of SCLC, the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is established to unite the sit-in protestors.

## October 19, 1960

Student protestors recruit King for a sit-in demonstration in Atlanta, where he and thirty-five others are arrested.

## April 10, 1961

Under a compromise reached by business owners and the Black clergy, schools and businesses in Atlanta begin to desegregate.

## May 21, 1961

After suffering a series of violent attacks in Alabama, Freedom Riders on a campaign to desegregate interstate travel are addressed by King in a Montgomery church. With the church besieged by a White mob, King calls Attorney General Robert Kennedy for assistance. King begins pressuring the Kennedy's for federal civil-rights legislation.

## September 22, 1961

The Interstate Commerce Commission mandates that all interstate transportation be desegregated.

## October 16, 1961

King meets with President Kennedy and asks him to deliver a second Emancipation Proclamation.

## December 1961

King begins a lengthy campaign in Albany, Georgia, to challenge the city's refusal to comply with the integration order. The campaign is ultimately unsuccessful.

## April 1963

While in jail during a campaign to integrate Birmingham, Alabama, King writes "A Letter from Birmingham Jail" chastising liberal White clergy for their passive stance against segregation. For several months, the campaign in Birmingham includes massive civil disobedience and severe measures by city police against protestors, including high-pressure fire hoses, clubs, and dogs. Several bombings occur, including at the hotel where King had been staying.

























