

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Day Liturgical Reading for Chapel /Church Service

Select three readers; person A should be white, if possible; person B should be a person of African-American ethnicity, if possible; person C speaks directly to the church and can be of any race. Strive for different genders and ages to also be represented in the readers. Liturgy is to be read in a rhythmic, passionate fashion that alternates readers & conveys different points of view.

PERSON A: Today in our service, we honor the legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Some may ask, "Isn't MLK Day a black holiday?" We say no. We are here because it's an "us" holiday. We are not strangers to each other. Instead we are people who have chosen the risk of relationship and who want to share the gift and the task that is intrinsic to this "us" holiday.

PERSON C: We hope that what is shared today communicates something meaningful to each of us – maybe even something uncomfortable. Emotions, like shame – confusion – or anger, may stir in us. Just remember that we are all learning together. We can talk to God and to each other about how we feel. We are all attempting to respond to what God asks us to do in the face of a complex, serious issue. MLK Day is a day for all of us.

PERSON B: (Loudly) What is Martin Luther King Day about?

▶ ALL TOGETHER: Martin Luther King Day is about **hope**.

PERSON A: **Hope** because the life of Dr King reminds me that the "us" is worth it. The "us" is the gift. I have experienced a lot of transformation because of the gift of risk given by black women and men of God in relationship to me. These risk takers are reason for me to hope.

PERSON B: **Hope** that these conversations are still happening, hope that one day the vision that MLK had of children being judged by the content of their character, and not by the color of their skin, might still happen.

PERSON C: **Hope** that the church can continue to take steps toward this vision and the dream that defined Dr King's life, steps that will make us more like the kingdom of God.

▶ TOGETHER: But not just hope. MLK day also means a **challenge**.

PERSON A: On this day I am reminded that facing my own racism has not been and is not easy. The task of facing truth about one's self and one's entrenchment in white privilege never is. Books and relationships have challenged me to examine my white middle class state and have been tools of God to change me.

PERSON B: We are challenged to remain in the struggle, to take action and not just talk about this, and as people of any non-white culture, we are challenged not to become resentful or bitter during this fight.

PERSON C: I feel challenged to continue working on and struggling with overcoming racism. How can I change? How can I help others change? How do I help repair centuries of hate and pain and anger and separation/? How does my faith enter into this? And how can I make sure I don't just grow tired and follow the temptation to leave it all behind?

▶ TOGETHER: The reality of continuing MLK's fight involves both **joy** and **pain**

PERSON B: (Loudly) **Joy!**

PERSON A: **Joy** in relationship, joy in learning that enlarges my capacity to see my world more clearly.

PERSON B: **Joy** in the steps that have already been successful, in what God has already done with the diversity in our world.

PERSON C: **Joy** because I am learning about myself, and about the richness that is in another person who is different than me.

PERSON B: (Loudly) **Pain!**

PERSON A: **Pain**, a transformational pain, comes for me during intense conversations about deeply rooted racial issues and pain comes when I choose to put myself in a place where I can hear the truth and be confronted.

PERSON B: **Pain** because we have to be willing to let go of what is comfortable and easy. I do not expect anything different from the world anymore; but I expect more from the church. I expect that Christians will be able to hear this message, and even though they may feel the pain, they will still choose to change.

PERSON C: **Pain** because we still have so far to go, still have so many dark places left in our hearts and in our witness as a community of faith to the world.

▶ TOGETHER: Martin Luther King's words have impacted us.

PERSON A: White Americans can avoid having a relationship with someone black without even trying. And, when relationships get tough, we can leave them - maybe we have already left some. But we can also keep trying. I grow as a person because of this **choice** to engage, again and again, and I have seen God work powerfully in my life through others who engage with me, who confront me, who are honest. The words of Dr. King that remind me most of this choice and the challenge in it, are from his letter written from a Birmingham Jail to white pastors.

PERSON B:

"I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace, which is the absence of tension, to a positive peace, which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: 'I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action'; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a 'more convenient season.' Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection." (*quote from MLK's, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"*)

PERSON C: This statement might be difficult to digest. It highlights weaknesses and inconsistencies in us as individuals and in the church. But the church and the community of faith should be the *first* voices to respond to racism. We should respond, not because we are African-American or Anglo-American, Asian-American or Latino, male or female, clergy or laity - but because we are disciples of Christ. The church is the hands and the feet of Jesus here on earth - we are the witness that others see representing God. If we fail to responsibly and actively take part in finding the solution to racism, we are misrepresenting God. So how do we respond to the danger that MLK shared of being "lukewarm"? About the need for action? About the task left to complete for the white community?

▶ TOGETHER:
This is our HOPE.
This is our CHALLENGE.
This is our JOY.
This is our PAIN.

PERSON A: As individuals we must choose to continue to learn together.

PERSON B: As a group we must support each other and never give up.

PERSON C: As people of faith we must not neglect God's call to us to reconcile, to be righteous.

PERSON A: The Bible teaches us over and over that there is nothing that can't be prayed about. We would like to open this time up for prayer, so that either out loud or silently to ourselves, we can each meditate on what we have talked about, confess what has been stirred up in us, and let God speak to us about what He would have us do about reconciling with others. A pastoral prayer written by MLK will be read as the closing to our prayer time together.

PERSON C: (*begin prayer time*) Father, we now bring these vocal and silent thoughts about our hopes and challenges, our pain and our joy – to you in prayer.

(pause for of time of prayer)

PERSON B: (*read the follow prayer, or substitute another one to use in closing*)

A Pastoral Prayer, from Martin Luther King, Jr., 1956

We come to today, grateful that thou hast kept us through the long night of the past and ushered us into the challenge of the present and the bright hope of the future.

We are mindful, O God, that man cannot save himself, for man is not the measure of things and humanity is not God.

Bound by our chains of sin and finiteness, we know we need a Savior...

Help us never to let anybody or any condition pull us so low as to cause us to hate.

Give us strength to love our enemies and to do good to those who spitefully use us and persecute us.

We thank thee for thy Church, founded up on they Word, that challenges us to do more than sing and prayer, but go out and work as through the very answer to our prayers depended on us and not upon thee.

Then, finally, help us to realize that man was created to shine like the stars. And live on through all eternity.

Keep us, we pray, in perfect peace, help us to walk together, pray together, sing together, and live together until that day when all God's children, Black, White, Red, and Yellow will rejoice in one common band of humanity in the kingdom of our Lord and of God, we pray.

Amen.

(referenced in "Conversations with God," p.190)

-Written by Heidi Griep, Jerome Nelson, and Liz Mosbo VerHage

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