

Women Witnesses for Racial Justice:
“Say Her Name” Prayer Service

INTRODUCTORY RITES

Opening Song: *Diverse in Culture, Nation, Race* Ruth Duck

*Diverse in culture, nation, race,
we come together by Your grace.
God, let us be a meeting ground
where hope and healing love are found.*

*God, let us be a bridge of care
connecting people everywhere.
Help us confront all fear and hate
and lust for power that separate.*

*When chasms widen, storms arise,
O Holy Spirit, make us wise.
Let our resolve, like steel, be strong
to stand with those who suffer wrong.*

Sign of Cross & Greeting:

Leader: We gather in the name of *(making the sign of the cross)*
God, our loving Mother, in whose divine image we are all made;
of our Christ our Liberator, who leads us to fullness of life;
And of the Holy Spirit of courage and boldness,

All: Amen.

Leader: The unshakable peace of Jesus, the boundless love of God,
and the power of the Holy Spirit *is* with you,

All: And also with you.

Introductory Remarks:

Leader: As we gather tonight – this eve of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day –we recall the words
of Dr. King in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” addressed to fellow clergy:

...we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.

Women Witnesses for Racial Justice:
“Say Her Name” Prayer Service

We recall these words because tonight we gather to “Say Her Name”...to lift up the names some of the women whose lives were taken by the very police who swore an oath to protect them.

There are those who would ask us to remain silent. Those who would accuse us of “opening old wounds.” But, as Dr. King reminds us, their names must be spoken. They must be brought to and remain in our collective conscience/
as we work to end the violence against communities of color /
and heal the boil of racism that continues to wound and ail all of us.

And so, as we come together tonight, let us pray with the opening words of Amanda Gorman’s “New Day’s Lyric”: *(allow for a brief moment of silent centering)*

Opening Prayer:

Leader: May this be the day
We come together.
Mourning, we come to mend,
Withered, we come to weather,
Torn, we come to tend,
Battered, we come to better.
Tethered by this year of yearning,
We are learning
That though we weren't ready for this,
We have been readied by it.
We steadily vow that no matter
How we are weighed down,
We must always pave a way forward.

ALL: In Jesus’ name, we pray,
AMEN.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

1st Reading:

Reader: A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (62: 1-5)

For Zion’s sake I will not be silent,
for Jerusalem’s sake I will not keep still,
until her vindication shines out like a blazing light
and her salvation like a flaming torch.

Women Witnesses for Racial Justice:
“Say Her Name” Prayer Service

The nations shall see your vindication, daughter,
and all the monarchs your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
the the mouth of the living God will grant.

You, daughter, shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of God Most High
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Daughter, no more shall you be called Forsaken
And no more shall your land be called Devastated;
But you shall be called My Delight Is In Her
And your land, Married;
For the Faithful God delights in you,
And your land shall be married.

For as a young man married a virgin girl,
So shall your builder marry you daughter,
And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
So shall your God rejoice over you.

(From Wil Gafney’s Women’s Lectionary, Year W)

The Word of God,
ALL: Thanks be to God

Readings from the Victims’ Mothers

Sung Response: *Let Justice Roll Like a River* M. Haugen

Sung once before the readings begin and then after each

*Let justice roll like a river, and wash all oppression away;
Come, O God, and take us, move and shake us,
Come now and make us anew, that we might live justly like you.*

A reading from Kimberle Crenshaw, co-founder African American Policy Forum and creator of the #Say Her Name Campaign:

“Black girls as young as 7 and Black women in their 90s have been killed by the police, and for a long time nobody was talking about it. Anti-Black racism is experienced in gendered ways. Elevating this message is important to give a holistic view and expose that Black women and girls are not exempt from abusive policing practices.” ***Sung Response***

Women Witnesses for Racial Justice:
“Say Her Name” Prayer Service

A reading from Tamika Palmer, the mother of Breonna Taylor

Bossy. She was bossy. Breonna was bossy. She was so OCD. And she was one of them people who didn't talk about other people. If something was going on with you, she'd rather figure out a way to help you than talk about you. She was a hard worker. If she missed work, something was really wrong. She loved being in the hospital, she loved her job, and she loved the people she worked with. Clearly, they loved her. *Sung Response*

A reading from Fran Garrett, mother of Michelle Cusseaux who was killed just days after Mike Brown

Despite her schizophrenia, despite her slight stature, despite the fact that the police were there in response call for a medical assistance, Michelle never had the luxury of being seen as a damsel in distress because of the look on her face, because he interpreted her fear as aggression. Had she been a white woman...it's impossible to imagine the officer doing what he did. *Sung Response*

A reading from the words of Gina Best, the mother of India Kager

I hear this often. I can't even imagine ... You don't want to imagine but I need help. My daughter was murdered in front of her baby and the baby's screaming and crying, ripped away. And we are murdered every single day, even in the midst of fighting for our daughters, fighting for our loved ones. They still kill us. They still vilify us. They still paint the narrative that we deserved it, that India deserved it because she shouldn't have been where she ... Wrong place, wrong time, wrong person, where there's no right place for Black women here in the United States. Where? What's the right place for Black women? *Sung Response*

3rd Reading: *Excerpt from Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Reader: A Reading from Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.:

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment...as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality...We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity...Let us not wallow in the valley of despair. I say to you today my friends - so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

Reflection

Women Witnesses for Racial Justice:
“Say Her Name” Prayer Service

RITUAL

#SayHerName Litany:

Leader: Tonight we will not be silent as we read the names of just some of the Black women – our sisters – whose lives were violently ended by those sworn to protect them. Their names must be spoken. They must remain in our collective conscience as we work to end violence against communities of color:

Today, every day, let us speak their names:

Reader: **Korryn Gaines** (*bell chime*)
Korryn Gaines was killed by police in her home with her five-year-old son in her arms. They had arrived at her home with a failure-to-appear warrant from a traffic violation.

Atatiana Jefferson (*bell chime*)
Atatiana Jefferson was killed in her home while playing video games with her eight-year-old nephew. Police had entered her property concealed and unannounced on a wellness check.

Breonna Taylor (*bell chime*)
Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old emergency medical technician, was killed when police mistakenly entered her home in the middle of the night on a no-knock warrant while searching for a suspect who had already been detained.

India Kager (*bell chime*)
India Kager, a post office worker and Navy veteran, was killed by the police with her four-month-old child in the backseat.

Tanisha Anderson (*bell chime*)
Tanisha Anderson was killed after her family called for assistance when she was in a mental health crisis. A policeman performed a “takedown” move on her, placing his knee on her back and handcuffing her as she lay face-down on the pavement.

Michelle Cusseaux (*bell chime*)
Michelle Cusseaux was shot in the heart when police arrived at her house for a mental wellness check and saw her holding a hammer. She had been changing her locks.

Kayla Moore (*bell chime*)

Women Witnesses for Racial Justice:
“Say Her Name” Prayer Service

Kayla Moore was brutalized by police during a mental health crisis. Police suffocated her to death in her bedroom calling her transphobic slurs while refusing to perform CPR. Her last words were “I can’t breathe.”

Those whose names we do not know... *(bell chime)*

Those whose names we have since forgotten... *(bell chime)*

Those whose names we will sadly come to know... *(bell chime)*

Moment of Silence (3 minutes) *Gentle instrumental music*

Prayers of the Faithful

Leader: We lift up our prayers in confidence, assured of God’s love for us and knowing that we stand united with that great cloud of witnesses – all holy women and men– who intercede for us. Our response is...

“Heal us, O God”

For the Church, that we may truly live as One Family – united in Christ – and work together to rid ourselves of racism and white supremacy, and all forms of exclusion and discrimination, we pray: ...
Heal us, O God

For the citizens and leaders of the global community: that we may enact policies that uphold the dignity and equality of all people, that ensure a sustainable and equitable distribution of our resources, and advance the common good we pray:

For an end to systemic racism: that we may reform and rebuild all of our institutions – policing, education, healthcare, housing, politics, and economics - with justice and love as our guide. And for reconciliation and reparation for centuries of violence and oppression against People of Color, we pray.

For us gathered here: that we may honestly seek to understand ourselves and others as well as the ways we benefit from privilege and power, that we may be allies who confront bias and prejudice in ourselves and one other, we pray:

For marginalized Catholics and particularly Catholic women of color; that they may be stirred by the Holy Spirit to embrace their wholeness, to lift up their voices, and to claim their rightful place in our midst as they seek to respond faithfully to God’s call in their lives, we pray:

For all who are ill and for those who have died *(brief pause)*. For those most vulnerable to the coronavirus and for health care and essential workers. We pray:

Leader: Loving God of all, your family stands before you in need of your mercy and compassion. Come to our aid. Make haste to help us. We pray in the name of Christ, our Liberator, **AMEN**.

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“Say Her Name” Prayer Service

CLOSING RITES

Closing Prayer

Leader: Let us pray,

God of Justice,
Embolden us, as we go forth,
to continue to speak the names of your beloved children - our siblings -
whose earthly lives were taken by those sworn to protect them.

Help us as we strive to keep them alive
in our individual and collective consciences
That stirred to advocacy and action
We may cooperate with you
In bringing about the dream you dream
for all your beloved ones.

In Jesus' name we pray,
AMEN.

Closing Song

We Shall Overcome